# The Church in Mission

## Perspectives of Global Mennonite Brethren on Mission in the 21st Century

Edited by Victor Wiens
Foreword by Elmer A. Martens

# The
# Church
## in Mission

## Perspectives of Global Mennonite Brethren
## on Mission in the 21st Century

# The
# Church
# in Mission

## Perspectives of Global Mennonite Brethren on Mission in the 21st Century

**Edited by Victor Wiens**
**Foreword by Elmer A. Martens**

# Contents

## C. Cultural Perspectives

## D. Strategic Perspectives

# Foreword

The claim has been made, perhaps presumptuously, that part of the Mennonite Brethren make-up (their DNA) is mission. Soon after the spiritual renewal movement in the Ukraine which birthed the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church in 1860, there was a desire to obey the Great Commission by sharing the gospel. The mission activity of this group over the decades is documented in this volume and elsewhere.

This note is written in India where I am currently assisting in the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College, a school that is celebrating its 25th anniversary of training Christian workers in English medium. Earlier training in Telugu medium generated scores of Church Extension Workers (CEWs) who pioneered in village evangelism. By the Lord's grace the Indian conference of churches is now the largest in the denomination.

Within the last months, a Mission Board of MB Churches of India has been established under the auspices of the Governing Council. A. J. Yesu, a pastor in Hyderabad with advanced training in New Testament (India and USA), is the executive director. In addressing a pastors' seminar in February, Yesu announced plans for the first missionary couple under the new organization to be on the field in Myanmar by June 1, 2015. Thankfully the Holy Spirit's impulse for missionary outreach continues.

But while documentation of missionary advances is laudable, and God-glorifying, the hard work of reflecting and assessing the strategies, the theological understandings, and the motivations for Christian mission is ongoing. Churches and mission personnel have a need to ensure that God's directives are heard and followed.

This volume is both a mirror and a map. With a careful reading both of Scripture and history under the Spirit's guidance there can emerge a map showing what paths might best be taken.

The earlier volume by a similar title also served as mirror and map. The visionary leadership of its editor, A. J. Klassen, needs to be celebrated. And so does the vision and effort of Victor Wiens, editor of the current volume. Here is both information and inspiration. The Mennonite Brethren conference, not to mention the wider evangelical circle, is in their debt. Thanks be to God!

Elmer A. Martens
President Emeritus, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
(now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary)

# Editor's Preface

The seed for this compilation was planted at the 150-year anniversary gathering of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) church leaders in Lemgo, Germany, 2010. In his final report, Victor Wall, outgoing Executive Secretary of ICOMB, mentioned some pending assignments. Among these were to strengthen the mission capacities of MB conferences worldwide, and shortly after, a comment about literature that caught my eye. Victor indicated that we had worked hard at developing the ICOMB Confession of Faith and later its study guide, and just that year the historical volume was being released. Now, noted Victor, "We need a new missiology text!"

Of course, many excellent missiological texts had been written and published by MBs in the last forty years. However, not since A.J. Klassen's *The Church in Mission* (1967) had a multi-perspective, multi-authored compilation been gathered and published. Converging with that duly-noted thought, was the recent release (2009) of the fourth edition of Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne's mammoth reader *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. This particular volume in its previous editions had an enormously positive impact on evangelicals in general and MBs in particular. The editor recalls an adjunct teaching assignment at Fresno Pacific University back in 1988 using this reader as his main text. The stated need and the useful model converged into a proposal that was presented and approved by both MB Mission and ICOMB.

The rationale offered for this text is summarized as follows: 1) To provide a common missiological base for global MBs in this new era of "mission from everywhere to everywhere," 2) to offer a uniquely Anabaptist/MB contribution of recent missiology to the larger Christian community, 3) to update with 21st century and global perspectives the previous text of a similar nature, now 48 years old (A.J. Klassen, ed., *The Church in Mission*, 1967), and 4) to respond to ICOMB's suggestion for a missiology text, offering the same from the perspective of an MB agency that has global credibility and is actively engaged in global mission

(albeit inviting other contributions from schools, churches, professionals, etc.). The nature of the compilation is that of a textbook, and the target audience is the university-level reader.

Similar to the original volume with the same primary title, the perspectives are aligned (biblical, historical, cultural and strategic). The writers come from the church, the academy, the mission agency and the mission field. In contrast to the original text, the present volume has become larger than originally intended, in part due to a larger number of contributions in the cultural and especially the strategic sections. Also in contrast, while the 1967 text was one of the first (if not the first) attempts by MBs to compile missiological reflections into one reader, over the ensuing decades the MB family has been graced with some outstanding missiologists and prolific writers (George W. Peters, Jacob A. Loewen, Paul Hiebert, and Hans Kasdorf, among others). The ministry of missiological reflection has developed well over recent decades.

A final contrast refers to the origins of the writers, then entirely North American, and today a "dream team" selection of writers from east and west, north and south. This kind of selection naturally leads to a diversity of writing styles. This is by design and without apology. Some contributions are more academic while others more practical. Some are more conceptual while others are more experiential. Some have written in English, while others were translated and (we hope) retain some of that flavor. Our one lament is the limited number of female writers. At least five more were invited to contribute, however for a variety of legitimate reasons, were unable to accept.

## Acknowledgments

The directors and staff of the two sponsors, MB Mission and ICOMB, have been both generous and supportive. Their moral and monetary sponsorship has been essential to complete this task.

Early on in the project, an editorial council was formed composed of David Wiebe, Elmer Martens, Abe Dueck and the editor. Each has provided encouragement, counsel and editorial expertise along the journey. Randy Friesen and Ray Harms-Wiebe (MB Mission) have provided consultation and encouragement, in addition to contributing excellent chapters.

My sincerest gratitude is again expressed to each of the forty living writers. In addition to your ministry and academic qualifications, your love for the church

and its mission comes through in each page of your contributions. Moreover, it was expressed in accepting this assignment on top of numerous other assignments and schedule demands.

Editorial assistance with eagle eyes was graciously offered by Robert and Anne Thiessen, David Wiebe, David Thiessen, Greg Ouellette and Mark Klassen. Ernst Thielman provided German-English translation services. Darcy Scholes, in addition to developing an attractive cover, selected many of the photographs from MB Mission collections and improved the quality of others. Bud Webb selected continental maps and shaded in countries of current MB missional engagement.

To work with Elenore Doerksen and Kate Regier at Kindred Productions has brought both re-assurance and professional expertise to this project—my sincere appreciation.

A final word of appreciation is entirely in order and necessary for Marty, my companion in life and mission, for her encouragement, her understanding, and her patience with an often absent husband during the final stages of preparation.

# Introduction

Victor Wiens

"We live in the most amazing time in the history of humanity when it comes to fulfilling Christ's Commission to make disciples of all nations!" That's quite a statement—is it true?

Consider: … never before has our missionary God used so many resources through so many Christ-followers from so many churches in so many lands! The resources available today for global mission—such as well-informed intercession, multiple technologies, facility of travel, and global wealth—are simply unprecedented. The number of those who consider themselves followers of Jesus (some may not use the term "Christian") is also unprecedented; however, what really is amazing is the outstanding growth of those committed to obeying the Great Commission, spreading the evangel, and making disciples. Some call these Great Commission Christians, others call them born-again believers, and still others simply evangelicals.[1] The promise Jesus made to his disciples, "I will build my church …" is more fulfilled today than ever before, yet his church is built with a creativity of styles and structures heretofore unknown. From secret cells of believers in small Chinese homes, to fully functional church

---

Victor Wiens (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Ph.D. Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary) with his wife Marty, served as a missionary in Brazil for 25 years. He was active in church planting, leadership development, and MB conference mission ministries. Since 2009 he serves as Mission Capacity Building coordinator for MB Mission in Abbotsford, Canada. He has taught young church and mission leaders in most MB conferences, in both formal and non-formal settings.

assemblies within Paraguayan prison walls, to singing congregations under African trees, to storefront meetings in Western cities—these too are the church of Christ in the twenty-first century.  In years past there were efforts to list denominations, at least by country.  In our day, that would be a useless effort in many countries, since by the time the census was finished, a dozen more Churches will have emerged. Furthermore, these resources, Christ-followers and churches are present in all lands. "There is no country without a Christian witness or fellowship of indigenous believers (although in a very few cases, they must remain secretive)."[2] Indeed, this is an amazing time to be alive and active in mission.

Yet before we drift toward a false triumphalism, we do well to consider some other sobering realities. While we can be confident that Christ is indeed building his church, we can also be sure that "the night is coming" and "the days are evil." The paradox of generations past is also the paradox of our generation: While it is "sunrise in world mission,"[3] there are storm clouds on the horizon! The wars and rumors of war appear to be not only endless, but increasing. International terrorism, usually hostile to Christians, occupies our daily news. Thirty million people, mostly women and children, live in slavery. One in six people lacks access to safe drinking water. Within the larger Christian community, historical convictions such as the uniqueness of Christ for salvation and the authority of Scripture are being debated, if not denied. While some used to speak of nominal Catholics and Protestants, we must now also speak of nominal evangelicals (a chapter is devoted to this matter).[4]

As to our mandate to make disciples of all nations, we also dare not relax into an immobilizing triumphalism. Nearly one in four people on this planet has not had the good news of Jesus presented to them in a way that they could truly comprehend and respond to (almost two billion people). World religions, especially Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, are growing as fast as or faster than general Christianity. Roughly forty percent (6,645 in 2010) of the known ethno-linguistic people groups are considered unreached, that is, there is no viable indigenous community of Christians able to evangelize their own people without outside assistance.[5] Truly our task is unfinished.

Within this paradox of mission realities the global Mennonite Brethren Church seeks to be faithful, to enter God's open doors, and to join with all true believers in completing the unfinished task. The Mennonite Brethren are a renewal movement with origins in the Anabaptist renewal of sixteenth-century Europe. One tributary of the Anabaptist river, the Mennonites, by the nineteenth century found themselves spread far and wide from North America to Russia, even while a substantial population remained in western Europe. Not unlike the dispersion of Acts 8, the Mennonites relocated due to religious persecution. As is usually the case with renewal movements, over time the temperature cools, institutionalism becomes the norm, and

mission turns to maintenance. In the case of the Mennonites, they became known as "the quiet in the land." This was also the story of the Russian Mennonites who began immigration to Russia from Prussia (modern Poland) in 1789 upon Empress Catherine the Great's invitation to them. The generous invitation was offered to the Mennonites (and other German-speaking peoples) so they would develop farmland recently regained in the Russo-Turkish War in the region northwest of the Sea of Azov near the Dnieper River (modern Ukraine).

By the mid-nineteenth century the Russian Mennonites enjoyed a relatively peaceful and prosperous existence. Yet overall their spiritual condition was at a low ebb. At this time winds of spiritual renewal were blowing elsewhere in Europe. Especially influential among German populations in southern Russia, including some Mennonites, was German Pietism. Elements of Pietism, such as personal conversion, a sincere discipleship, holy living, prayer, Bible reading, evangelism and even foreign mission festivals were highly attractive to some Mennonites desirous of renewal. For a time, the renewed Mennonites attempted to remain in fellowship with the "old church." Upon being denied in their request of an elder to have separate and more frequent commemorations of the Lord's Supper, they went ahead and conducted this ceremony on their own. Although their intentions were pure and without intent to rebel, their understanding of the implications of this act was limited. They were forced to leave the old church and on January 6, 1860 eighteen family heads drew up a "document of secession"[6] and at once formally left the old church and began a new one which came to be called Mennonite Brethren.[7] In it they declared their loyalty to God, to Scripture, Anabaptist principles, and to Menno Simons.

A new Anabaptist stream had emerged, one characterized by renewal and mission. Over the last 150 years these "personality traits" have been evidenced time and again (albeit imperfectly to be sure), but also have been the focus of self-examination and reflection.[8] Given the missiological nature of this volume, we shall focus hereafter more on the Mennonite Brethren (MB) as a missionary movement.

Evidences of the outworking of this inner DNA were soon noted. In Russia, already in 1862, some MB leaders were called before Russian courts facing charges of attempting to convert their Russian laborers. Their motto became "every MB a witness." In 1872, at their first conference assembly, a main concern was mission (i.e. the selection, support and sending of itinerant preachers). By 1889, after continuously supporting local mission workers and workers in foreign lands through other agencies, the small 1,800-member MB Church sent their first foreign missionary to India (see the section on India in the Asia chapter). Similar evidences came through in North America following a wave of immigration in the 1870s. In their first assembly (1879), specific resolutions were passed to express their commitment to missions (i.e. weekly offerings, missions committees, itinerant evangelists). At the 1882 conference

assembly in Kansas, one third of the love offering was designated for missions in India. When the conference was legally registered in 1900, it was called the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union – the rallying point was worldwide missions.[9]

Further evidences came forth on other continents. In the direst circumstances in the Paraguayan Chaco, within five years of their arrival, MB and other Mennonite immigrants had organized a mission structure to bring the love of Christ and the message of salvation to their indigenous neighbors (see Paraguay section in the Latin America chapter). Similarly in Brazil, within seventeen years after their arrival the MBs in Brazil were working with North American missionaries to begin an orphanage to reach out to their Latin neighbors. Many church plants would soon follow. In Africa, early setbacks tested both the missionaries' and their sending churches' missionary resolve. Of the first team that went to Cameroons, three of four died within two years on the field—the fourth had already left. The first MB missionary husband to the Belgian Congo, Aaron Janzen, buried his only two children and his first wife, Ernestina, on the mission field. Their service began in 1912; however, their support was irregular, thus requiring them to often be self-sustaining (the MB Conference finally adopted this field in 1943). Janzen once declared: "It is necessary for us to go; it is not necessary for us to come back."[10]

In light of these evidences and many other stories that follow in this anthology, not a few have reflected on the MB Church as a missionary movement. Among these are:

- J.B. Toews: "The Mennonite Brethren Church was especially called into existence, from among the larger Mennonite community, as a missionary church."[11]
- Paul Hiebert: "To be sure, matters of theology, church polity, education and publications have united the churches in concerted action, but none of these has so encapsuled the vision and the energies of the Mennonite Brethren as has mission."[12]
- G. W. Peters: "This group ... became the seedbed for a missions enterprise that soon germinated, then grew and flourished with surprising vigor"; "… Mennonite Brethren missions was an attitude, a way of life, a product of the general biblicism of the brotherhood ... far from being a 'department,' missions was a central motivation of prime importance."[13]
- Hans Kasdorf: "As the product of a revival movement within the larger Mennonite community, the Mennonite Brethren have from the very beginning in 1860 sensed a missionary responsibility towards the world."[14]

As mentioned in the Editor's Preface, the present volume is a continuation of sorts of an earlier compilation from 1967.[15] Mission for MBs looked very different

at that time than it does now. Primary leadership in most fields still came from the missionaries. Organized conferences of churches existed in five or six countries; today there is an International Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches (ICOMB) composed of twenty-one conferences. MB Mission missionaries then were serving in ten countries; today they serve in about thirty countries. Issues in focus then were the global tensions of the Cold War, the changes coming in recently emancipated colonies, the impact of the western social revolutions on missions, and the primacy of evangelism over social ministries. The concept of least-reached people groups was hardly known, communication via cell phones or internet was unheard of, and no one was speaking of postmodernism or "post-Christian" countries. Some of the challenges we face today are introduced above in the third and fourth paragraphs. Of course there are many more.[16] Yet there are very encouraging developments in our world, in the world of missions, and in MB mission efforts worldwide. In sum, a new generation requires a new set of reflections, even as they value and build on the former. To that end the present compilation is offered. The title points to, we hope, a merger of the earlier missional reflections and those required for a new generation of mission workers in a new century.

*The Church*. Mennonite Brethren understand that the *missio dei* is carried out primarily by the *missio ecclesiae*; it is God's mission and it is God who sends the church to accomplish his mission. The church only sends because she has been sent. The primary agent of the kingdom of God is the church of God. Someone has popularized this by saying that the church are God's hands and feet in this world. In this they are aligned with an Anabaptist understanding of church-centered mission.

Far beyond the notion of a denomination on a mission, MBs understand themselves as a church within the universal church on God's mission. We are a movement that is part of a much larger world Christian movement, a stream flowing into a river. From our beginnings, MBs have been more eclectic than exclusive in terms of evangelical influences. We are beneficiaries of Anabaptism, of German Pietism, of North American Evangelicalism and of aspects of the charismatic movement. MBs have also contributed to other "churches in mission" and to the larger world Christian movement by sharing gifts that they have received so that the *missio dei* could be accomplished. Some of those gifts are writers in this volume.

*In Mission*. Each generation of Christians must understand and embrace the mission of God and the mission to which it has been called for its time. What is non-negotiable is that we are called to be a people on a mission. The outworking of that mission will have different applications according to each generation, but the essence remains the same since Abraham's call (Gen. 12:1-3). God is about restoring humanity from the Fall; about blessing the nations; about seeking and saving the lost; about redeeming the enslaved; about healing broken lives; about reconciling the

estranged to himself, to each other, and to his creation. The people of God are called to the same mission … "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). The well-known catchphrase of Emil Brunner bears repeating: The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning!

*Perspectives.* Following the model of the enormously influential *Perspectives* reader (now in its fourth edition),[17] this reader also presents four perspectives: 1) Biblical/Theological, 2) Historical, 3) Cultural, and 4) Strategic. These perspectives are also near and dear to who the MBs are as a global family. We are a "people of the Book"; we are a people who want to learn the lessons of history, our own and that of others, on the way to a brighter future; we are a people with ethnic origins, who have broken down barriers, embraced other cultures and languages, yet still need anthropological insights for the missionary journey; we are a people of practice who are always in search of better means and methods to accomplish our God-given tasks (the number of chapters in the Strategic section may well be indicative of who the editor is as much as who the MBs are).

*Global*. This is perhaps the most welcome feature to this sequential volume. The new reality for Christians in general and MBs in particular is that the church is global, the majority church is once again non-Western, and a new generation of global church and mission leaders has been raised up to serve at all levels. The cross-cultural missionary force is increasingly non-Western.[18] How exciting! How challenging! If we are to walk and work together in mission, we need to listen to and understand each other's perspective. Every attempt has been made to call writers from the global MB family.

*Mennonite Brethren*. As mentioned above in comments under *The Church,* the MB family highly values the larger world Christian movement of the global church of Christ. We also sense the need to have a "family conversation." Yet we want to have this conversation publicly so that we can both share our story and lessons with others, but also receive input and critique from friends and families beyond this particular denomination. Thus, this is a round-table discussion from and for MBs, but with the door wide open and chairs available for others to join us.

*21st Century*. With the exception of the writer of the Foreword, Elmer Martens, all the writers in this compilation are absent from the original compilation of 1967. That is by design.  In the following pages are perspectives *of* this generation and *for* this generation (and hopefully the next). As with the men of Issachar who joined David in his mission, our prayer is that the men and women who have contributed to this band are those who "… understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (I Chr. 12:32).

That said, it would be altogether presumptuous to leave out a smaller band who mentored us and taught us to love God, his church and his mission. We really do

stand on the shoulders of giants. Therefore, we have included reprints of a small group of MB missiologists that have had an enormous impact within and beyond the MB family. They have passed on to their eternal reward, yet their voices still speak to us today.

The following perspectives are then offered as an instrument to be used globally, in formal and non-formal training settings, for workers in training, for missionaries, mission leaders, and for all who embrace the missional call of God; also for all who embrace the family of God and long to see further global advance of the church in mission.

## Notes

[1] "Evangelical" is used here according to the following definition: "All who emphasize and adhere to all four of the following: The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole source of salvation through faith in Him, as validated by His crucifixion and resurrection. Personal faith and conversion with regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Recognition of the inspired Word of God as the ultimate basis and authority for faith and Christian living. Commitment to biblical witness, evangelism and mission that brings others to faith in Christ." From Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th Edition (Colorado Springs:  Biblica Publishing, 2010), 958.

[2] Ibid., 21.

[3] The title of a vision-casting booklet written by a mentor in mission, Hans Kasdorf. *It's sunrise in world mission: A vision statement from the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1984).

[4] These disturbing global trends, and many others, are listed in Mandryk, *Operation World*, 10-18.

[5] Ibid., 21-27.

[6] "Document of Secession (Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860)," accessed February 6, 2015,   http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Document_of_Secession_%28Mennonite_Brethren_Church,_1860%29#Secession_Document

[7] A recent and fuller summary of this history is in John B. Toews and Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Brethren Beginnings," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Winnipeg and Kitchener: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 13-30.

[8] The recent 150-year anniversary produced considerable conversation around these themes, some of which is contained in a compilation of reflections found in Abe Dueck, Bruce Guenther, Doug Heidebrecht, eds., *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011).

[9] This was not the name of the mission board or agency. The MB mission agency was originally the Committee for Gentile Missions (1885), then the Committee for Foreign Missions (1896). By 1909 it had again changed to the Directorate of Foreign Missions. In 1936 the same became the Board of Foreign Missions. In the same year the Board of General Welfare and Public Relations was created to oversee matters relating to relief, peace, and colonization. The Board of Foreign Missions dropped the designation "Foreign" in 1960, and in 1966 the Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS) resulted from the merger of the Boards of Missions and General Welfare. In the following years the use of the board name (BOMAS) diminished and the agency name (MB Missions/Services, MBMS) increased. In 1998, with a growing international missionary force, the name changed again to MBMS International. In 2011, the current designation, MB Mission, was adopted. For purposes of simplicity and clarity, "MB Mission" will be used throughout this text, even when referring to the board or agency of earlier years.

[10] J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church: A Missionary Movement*. A history of foreign mission work in the Mennonite Brethren Church told by veteran church leader J. B. Toews to a live audience in Winnipeg, MB. Burton Bueller, ed., 1988. VHS videocassette.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Paul Hiebert, introduction to *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* by G.W. Peters (Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1984), 1.

[13] G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1984), 9, 44.

[14] Hans Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 1986).

[15] A.J. Klassen, ed., *The Church In Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967).

[16] For an excellent summary of current political, social, demographic, environmental and missionary challenges, see Mandryk, *Operation World*, 10-23; and Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 2011), 1-20.

[17] Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* 4th Edition (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009).

[18] According to veteran researcher Patrick Johnstone, sometime between 2000-2010 the cross-cultural missionary force from Africa/Asia/Latin America actually surpassed that of Europe/North America/Pacific. See Johnstone, *Future*, 228.

Section A

# Biblical/Theological Perspectives

# 1 Mission in the Old Testament
Pierre Gilbert

### A Call to Mission in the Old Testament?

While the New Testament makes a solid case for the involvement of every Christian in mission, it is not quite as straightforward when it comes to the Old Testament. As the renowned biblical scholar Walter C. Kaiser points out, to a great extent, the very notion of a mission mandate for Israel has essentially been abandoned by Old Testament scholarship.[1] This conclusion is motivated in great part by the (alleged) near-absence of Old Testament passages promoting an "evangelistic" impulse and the observation that neither ancient Israel nor the Jewish people have shown much interest in proselytizing Gentiles.

Among scholars who concede the presence of a mission mandate for Israel, the debate tends to orbit around whether her mandate was "centrifugal" or "centripetal." Was Israel called to bring men and women into the nation or was her role limited to being a community of witness, a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6) intended to attract the Gentiles to the living God?

Pierre Gilbert (M.A., Old Testament, Providence College and Seminary; Ph.D., Old Testament, Université de Montréal) has served in pastoral and teaching roles with the Mennonite Brethren since 1984. He is Associate Professor of Bible and Theology at Canadian Mennonite University and MBBS Canada. Throughout his years of service, Pierre has endeavored to understand how followers of Christ can communicate a life-changing vision of the Christian faith to a society that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. He is author of *Demons, Lies & Shadows* (Kindred, 2008).

I believe there is justifiable ground to challenge both the assertion that Israel was not given a mission mandate or that its mission consisted simply in being a witness. At the very core of the rationale for creating Israel, there is an unmistakable missional[2] impulse, which is first hinted at in the promise to Abraham. In a declaration in which Yahweh promises Abraham he would become a great nation, an organic link between Abraham's descendants and the nations' future is created: "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). In Exodus 19:5-6, we find an extraordinary statement of purpose for Israel: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Note the win-win character of this promise. If Israel will be faithful to God, God will bless her as his "treasured possession" and use her as a priestly intermediary between the nations and himself. Isaiah 42:6-7 clarifies Israel's priestly role and gives it an explicitly missional spin:

> I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

In addition to highlighting the centrifugal *and* centripetal character of God's mandate to Israel (it is probably best not to create a sharp dichotomy between these two concepts), this passage underlines the win-win character of God's promises: 1) God acquires a people; 2) Israel is no longer orphan; 3) the nations are introduced to the living God.

In a similar vein, the story of the prophet Jonah not only points to the centrifugal implications of Israel's mandate to reach the nations, but magnificently confronts ancient Israel's static and self-centered view of its status and role as God's chosen people.

### Failure or Success? Two Levels of Discourse

Assuming the Old Testament does indeed point to Israel's mandate to reach out to the nations, the most seminal expression of this principle being found in the promise to Abraham, we need to assess more precisely what might have been entailed in the blessing as such.

From a historical perspective, the promise that Abraham would be a blessing to "all peoples on earth" likely included an allusion to Israel's witness to the nations with respect to the character of Yahweh, including both the centrifugal and centripetal dimensions of such a mandate. While Abraham and his descendants did, on

occasion, turn out to be the conduits of God's blessing,[3] Israel's performance with respect to broadcasting the knowledge of God to other nations was dismal. Ancient Israel appears to have been much more theologically and culturally influenced by her neighbors than vice-versa.

The promise to Abraham can also be read in a Christological perspective. Beyond the strictly "evangelistic" mandate that Israel failed to fulfill, God nevertheless intended for the nation to be the conduit of God's revelation in Word and flesh. Israel mediated God's self-revelation in the form of the law and the prophets and, in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), she became the locus of the very presence of God in the person of Christ. It is indeed in Jesus Christ that the full significance of this blessing for all the nations must be apprehended (Rom. 16:25-26).[4]

While in all likelihood the promise to Abraham implied an invitation for Israel to spread the "good news" of Yahweh, the reality is that we can derive but little information about the missional enterprise from an analysis of how Israel implemented its historical mandate to reach out to the nations. In order to gain some insight into this question, we must shift our focus to God himself both with respect to the strategies he used to reach his own people and to the role of the nations in God's redemptive project.

### The Creation of a New People

God's missional impulse towards humanity is anchored in his primordial desire to create a people who would love and serve him. Once it becomes clear, however, that humanity's first representatives would reject God's invitation to exercise their free will within a framework of loyalty to God, thereby initiating the deployment of the death impulse in the world (see Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-24); the Great Missionary immediately launches his plan of redemption.[5] From the moment humanity is ushered into chaos, God will ceaselessly reach out to men and women.

Humanity's salvation would eventually necessitate the creation of a distinct people from the seed of Abraham and culminate in the birth of the Son of God as a Jew, and his eventual death and resurrection under the reign of Pontius Pilate (Mark 8:31). The creation of a distinct people was intended to secure a "landing pad" for the divine invasion.[6] The survival of Israel as a religious entity was, therefore, not for her only, but for the benefit of all.

The Old Testament is the record of how God implements his plan of redemption through the creation and the preservation of a distinct people[7] mandated to be his witness and designated to be the conduit for the coming of the Messiah. Three traditions provide valuable insights into God's missional strategy: the Torah, the prophets, and the wisdom corpus.

## The Torah

In Genesis 2:15-17, God invites Adam and Eve to enter into a partnership with him. The injunction to refrain from eating "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" denotes the most fundamental dimension of the relationship that would exist between humans and God, i.e., freedom. God's friendship is graciously offered and must be freely received.

If by their disobedience, the first two trigger a cataclysmic chain reaction that will in time spread to the very core of reality (Rom. 8:20-22), judgment is not the last word. Adam and Eve cannot avoid the sentence that their choice entailed (Gen. 2:17; 3:8-22), and human existence will be arduous, painful, and violent, but life will go on. God is infinitely committed to the human project and chooses to partner with men and women in spite of the structural flaws that have been introduced by their disobedience. History goes on, because God's love demands that the species be redeemed.[8]

The next major phase in God's plan of salvation involves working through Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). God's commitment to this new chapter of history is unconditional. While God's people vehemently resist him in every way possible, God continually devises new strategies to bring them back to himself.

For instance, the Exodus experience highlights well God's love and compassion (Ex. 2:25). While it is now fashionable to refer to God as the one who manifests himself in weakness, Christ's *kenosis* (self-emptying) being the most spectacular manifestation of God's willingness to come to down to our level in order to create space for the relationship (Phil. 2:7), God will sometimes reveal himself in all of his magnificent grandeur. When Yahweh intervenes to liberate his people, the Hebrews show little enthusiasm for following this new God. But their reluctance is somewhat understandable. The Hebrew slaves face an existential choice that can only be resolved by assessing who the stronger party is. They need to establish whether their future lies in Yahweh or Pharaoh.

Yahweh understands the terror that fills these men and women. By ordering Pharaoh to let his people go (Exod. 5:1), God sets the stage to demonstrate his absolute superiority over Pharaoh and the Egyptian pantheon.[9] The outcome of this duel will provide the theological foundation necessary for the Hebrews to follow Moses out of Egypt.

God's willingness to reveal himself represents another example of the kind of strategy God uses to win his people. Whereas the gods of the ancient Near East maintained a tight lid on what they expected from their worshippers, Yahweh generously revealed himself. This self-disclosure is evident in Genesis 1:28, where God proffers his first command to humanity, and 2:15-17, where Yahweh spells out

what Adam and Eve must do in order to experience life. God never ceases to disclose his will. When Moses loses faith after a first catastrophic encounter with Pharaoh, and asks God whether he knows what he is doing, God offers Moses a glimpse of a bigger picture (Exod. 5:22-6:8). Later, when the Hebrews take possession of the land, Yahweh enters into a binding agreement that delineates what they need to know in order to live faithfully as a free people. The Ten Commandments and the various law codes modulate what is expected of them. The curses and blessings (Lev. 26 and Deut. 27-28) outline the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Nothing is hidden. God reveals his will to his people and extends to them the dignity of moral accountability.

There are two passages in the Pentateuch that offer some valuable insights into Israel's missional calling: Exodus 19:4-6 and Deuteronomy 26:16-19.

First, Israel's calling is rooted in God's saving action towards her: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod. 19:4). God doesn't simply impose his rule over Israel. He has secured his right to enter into a privileged relationship by liberating her from a terrible oppressor and taking her as his "treasured possession."[10] The most fundamental characteristic of Israel's status as God's people is not in the mere observance of a given set of laws, but in participating in a loving relationship with God.

Second, God's command to Israel to "obey me fully and keep my covenant" (Exod. 19:5) and "to follow these decrees and laws" (Deut. 26:16), does not reflect some arbitrary divine requirement that is simply intended to appease the deity. If God requires obedience, it's because observance of the laws is necessary to give concrete expression to the relationship in which Israel now participates and to display the nature of the living God as a witness to the nations. As Daniel I. Block points out, the missional emphasis expressed in these two passages and, to a large extent, the rest of the Pentateuch emphasizes a centripetal movement. At that stage of Israel's history, the emphasis is on Israel becoming a distinct people: "He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised" (Deut. 26:19). Block describes the mechanism that will attract the attention of the nations:

> While the world watched, the Lord delivered Israel from her Egyptian bondage, entered into a covenant relationship with her, put Canaan into her hands, and blessed her. As his covenant partner, his special treasure, and his holy people, Israel became an example of the power of divine grace and glory to the praise, renown, and honor of the Lord. What the Lord had done for Israel he sought to do for all, but like Rahab and Ruth

they must come to Israel... The prevailing formula was simple: demon-
strate gratitude for divine grace through loyal living and experience the
Lord's blessings, thereby attracting the attention of the nations, who
would give praise and glory to the Lord and would join Israel in their
covenant relationship with him.[11]

But this glorious vision of a faithful, prosperous, and righteous Israel will never
see the light of day. As the Hebrews become the nation of Israel, their history will be
marked by rebellion, idolatry, and injustice. But God will not give up on a people
that is hopelessly bent on sinning itself into oblivion. With the covenant in place,
the terms of the relationship are explicitly laid out. While God would be morally
justified in annihilating his people, he relents. Instead, he invites a special group of
men to call the Israelites to uphold their side of the bargain. These men were the
prophets of Israel.

## The Prophetic Tradition

### The Role of the Prophet

The prophet is a mediator to whom is attributed a dual role. If, on the one hand,
he is to communicate the Word of God to his people, on the other hand, he speaks to
God on behalf of his people. He never positions himself in self-righteous judgment
over the people; on the contrary, he stands in complete solidarity with them.

The common thread of the prophetic discourse resides in a condemnation of
idolatry. Among the rulers and the upper classes, the idolatrous impulse manifests
itself by a concentration of political power that is used to destroy the mechanisms of
wealth creation that the "middle class" (farmers, tradesmen, and laborers) depended
on to subsist. Among the working class, idolatry was exhibited through a more open
worship of Baal. The prophetic discourse does not reflect some ancient pseudo-
Marxist manifesto pitting the rich against the poor, but a denunciation of a deeply
entrenched self-abandonment to idolatry. Beyond poverty and wealth, what the
prophets discern are the structures of death that are strangling Israelite society. The
prophet is, in a sense, a cultural pathologist.

### The Message

#### Israel

With respect to Israel, the prophet calls for a radical turnabout from the death
impulse that forever emerges from the human heart.[12] While the prophet's primary
source of calling, motivation, and discourse resides in his experience of God, his
message is anchored in the knowledge of the Torah. The prophet intervenes, because
the people of Israel are in "breach of contract."

The prophets are master communicators; they use every rhetorical means at their disposal to command the people's attention and to get their message across.[13] On some occasions, they would offer a vision of a renewed future in order to stimulate the imagination of the people for what could be if they repented. But as a cursory reading of the prophetic books reveals, the prophets would, more often than not, resort to uttering unimaginably brutal oracles of judgment against the people. While these oracles sometimes appear to announce the utter and final destruction of Israel, their primary function is to bring Israel back from the brink of self-destruction. At the very core of the curse motif, there is a redemptive purpose: the language of annihilation was intended to shock Israel out of its self-induced idolatrous slumber.

We should note, however, that not all is rhetoric and pedagogy. The prophetic oracles of judgment clearly leave the door open to the possibility of actual destruction if the people will heed neither the warnings nor the disasters they have experienced (Amos 4:4-12). The oracles of judgment exploit language that leaves open the possibility of a point of no return. If there is an open horizon relative to the possibility of salvation, there is also an equally open horizon on the eventuality of Israel's destruction.

### The Nations

For the most part, the references to the nations are framed in the context of the oracles of judgment, most of which are attested in Amos 1:1-2:3, Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, and Ezekiel 25-31. These texts were probably not directly intended for the nations as such. They either represented a message of warning for Israel: If the Israelites commit the same sins as the nations, their fate will be similar (cf. Amos 1:1-2:3). Or they may in fact have served as oracles of salvation: God will destroy those who oppress his people (cf. Nah. 1:1-15). Whatever the case might be, a number of prophetic texts do draw attention to God's intent for the nations and Israel's role in reaching out to them.

Three books are entirely devoted to the fate of specific nations. The book of Nahum constitutes a cry of celebration over the destruction of the Assyrians, a people who oppressed much of the ancient world for almost a century. Obadiah represents a word of judgment against the Edomites for siding with the Babylonians when they invaded Judah in 587 B.C. These two books affirm God's sovereignty over all the nations and the reality of God's justice. But they go beyond affirming God's sovereignty and power. They represent a profound source of hope for all those who are oppressed by evil forces, regardless of whether they are Israelite or Gentile. They constitute a confirmation that God is not indifferent to the human condition. He deeply cares for all men and women and will ensure that evil doesn't prevail forever.

The book of Jonah outlines a slightly more complex situation. One the one hand, the narrative also affirms God's righteous sovereignty over the nations. Jonah is mandated to proffer a message of judgment and destruction against the Assyrian city of Nineveh. In that respect, the theological assumptions of the book are entirely consistent with the message of Nahum and Obadiah. Where the book differs is in highlighting God's compassion for the Ninevites. As Jonah rightly infers, God's primary intent is not to destroy that city, but to offer its inhabitants an opportunity to repent and be saved.

The book of Jonah is a powerful reminder of both God's concern for the nations and Israel's role in God's plan of redemption. God choosing Israel as his people was never intended to be an end in and of itself. Israel was chosen to be a vehicle of God's grace to all the nations by reflecting God's character and by proclaiming the Law to the nations. While Nineveh's injustice will not be ignored, the book's conclusion proclaims God's mercy and desire to see all repent and be saved (Jon. 4:11). In fact, the very impetus behind sending a prophet to deliver a message of judgment is in itself an act of mercy, for by so doing, God offers the Ninevites an opportunity to change their ways and be spared. Jonah is particularly significant in that it makes explicit the centrifugal movement implicitly stated in the Abrahamic covenant. Jonah confirms that it was indeed God's intent for Israel to reach out to all the nations, even those who were historically her enemies.

A number of other texts, particularly so in Isaiah,[14] confirm God's redemptive intent for the nations. One of the most notable of these is found in Isaiah 19:24-25:

> In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

This passage is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it harks back to the Abrahamic covenant and provides further clarification with respect to the scope of the promise and Israel's role. The three references to blessing in this passage echo the promise to Abraham, where the same root is used five times in Genesis 12:2-3. God states he will bless Egypt and Assyria, and those who are blessed will be a blessing to others. As Israel becomes both an object and an agent of God's blessing, so are these two nations. This is very significant, for this passage virtually erases any distinction between Israel and the nations; Egypt and Assyria are included in the promise on the same footing as Israel. As Christopher Wright states,

> So these foreign nations come not only to *experience* blessing but to *be* "a blessing on the earth." In other words, both dynamic movements in God's word to Abraham are at work here. The recipients of the Abrahamic blessing become the agents of it. The principle that those who are

blessed are to be the means of blessing others is not confined to Israel alone, as if Israel would forever be the exclusive transmitters of a blessing that could only be passively received by the rest from their hand. No, the Abrahamic promise is a self-replicating gene. Those who receive it are immediately transformed into those whose privilege and mission it is to pass on to others.[15]

In Isaiah 25:6-8, the prophet alludes to a time when God will extend his hospitality to all nations, "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines (25:6)." There are two things to note. First, the banquet metaphor symbolizes the "celebration of God's rule by people from around the world."[16] This feast is intended for those who welcome God's righteous rule (cf. 25:1-5). Second, what makes this passage truly exceptional is the promise that death itself will be eliminated from human experience: "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever" (25:7-8). The promise also alludes to a time when all tears will be wiped away and there will no longer be any hostility between Israel and the nations (v. 8). God's sovereign rule is not an opportunity to oppress and enslave, but to bring liberty and life to all.[17]

In Jeremiah 4:1-2, the prophet links the fate of the nations to the faithfulness of Israel: "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray…then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory." This verse confirms the critical role Israel is called to play with respect to the nations' salvation. As the promise to Abraham suggests, there is indeed an intimate connection between the fate of Israel and that of the nations. The future of the nations is entirely contingent on Israel's faithful obedience to God. For better or for worse, true knowledge of God will be mediated through Israel.

The notion of Israel as a blessing to the nations is confirmed by the prophet Zechariah in 8:13: "As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing." God's benevolent intent for the nations is confirmed in Zechariah 2:10-11; 8:20-22; 14:9, 16. These passages highlight both the centrifugal and centripetal dimensions of mission. In 2:10-11, God is described as coming and living among the nations, who will, just like Israel, belong to God: "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you" (2:11). In chapters 8 and 14, it is the centripetal dimension that is emphasized. If 8:20-22 proclaims that one day "many peoples and powerful nations" will march to Jerusalem to consult the God

of Israel. In chapter 14, the prophet proclaims the sovereignty of God throughout the world (v. 9); the eventual destruction of those who stubbornly oppose Jerusalem, and, to all who survive the final conflict, God's renewed invitation to worship him in Jerusalem (v. 16).

While there are other prophetic passages that draw attention to the fate of the nations, the texts we have examined provide an adequate summary of God's intention for them. First, the nations have always been an intrinsic part of God's plan. In their repeated allusions to the nations, the prophets simply reflect the fundamental premise put forward in Genesis 1-11[18] and highlighted in the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). God chooses Abraham and his posterity, not to limit salvation to a particular family or ethnic group, but as a means to bring salvation to all the nations. As David J. A. Clines states, the patriarchal narratives represent a form of mitigation of God's judgment on Babel and "a re-affirmation of the divine intentions for humanity."[19] Second, while the nations are ultimately subjected to God's sovereignty, accountable to him, and the recipients of his judgments, God's original intent and ultimate purpose is to reach and redeem them all. The prophetic books propose a twofold, centripetal and centrifugal, strategy in this respect. On the one hand, Israel is to be the kind of people that will display God's glory and, in so doing, be a light that attracts men and women. On the other hand, God's plan also involves an outreach component that involves the transmission of the knowledge of God to all corners of the earth.

## The Wisdom Tradition

### A Culture Under Siege

In the Hebrew Bible, the wisdom corpus is comprised of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, and some would add the Song of Solomon as well to this list. Wisdom elements are also found in the Psalter (most noticeably in Psalms 37 and 73) and the creation account, where it is most clearly signaled by the life and death thematic attested in Genesis 2:15-17.

During the period in which the wisdom tradition is formalized, extending presumably from the time of Solomon to the post-exilic period, Israel was exposed to the cultures of the great empires of the time: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and perhaps Greece. Since it was by far the possibility of religious assimilation that represented the most serious threat to her existence, wisdom was in great part an attempt at addressing how Israel could preserve her distinct identity as God's people in a world of competing truth claims.

**The Object of Wisdom**

Hebrew wisdom can be described as "evangelistic" and "pastoral." It is not, however, evangelistic in the sense that we would normally attribute to it. The primary object of Hebrew wisdom is not the conversion of the outsider. Rather, its purpose is to offer a powerful ideological alternative for the various competing truth claims that tugged, especially so, at Israelite youth, who were most at risk of being drawn away from faith in Yahweh. It is "evangelistic" in that it seeks to convince those who might be considering giving allegiance to other gods to turn to Yahweh. It is pastoral in that it offers faithful Israelites a medium to guide their reflection on some of the most critical dimensions of the Hebrew faith. In a nutshell, biblical wisdom is, at its very core, shaped by a profound polemic and apologetic impulse.

**Wisdom and the Nations**

In the wisdom tradition, allusions to God's judgment on the nations or their eventual salvation are rather muted. This is not to suggest that biblical wisdom is altogether silent about their fate. Wright highlights three motifs that suggest both the reality of an open horizon on the outsider and the presence of a missional impulse.[20]

First, there is interest in discerning wisdom in other cultures. Such appreciation is, for instance, evident in the story of Solomon in which the historian acknowledges the wisdom of "all the men of the east," the wisdom of Egypt, and of such men as Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol, and the sons of Mahol (1 Kings 4:30-31). The remarkable parallels that have been observed between Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and the Egyptian text, The Wisdom of Amenemope, suggest a determination to *critically*[21] incorporate foreign sapiential insights. Second, by reflecting on human existence more intentionally from the creation traditions rather than those linked to the redemptive story of Israel, wisdom offers a discourse that draws on and points to more explicitly universal premises. Finally, because Israelite wisdom focuses on the universal challenges and difficulties inherent to the human condition (particularly so in Ecclesiastes), it offers a more welcoming platform to engage non-Israelites in dialogue.

It should be noted that while I did not include a separate section on the book of Psalms (mostly because of space constraints), the Psalter does indeed make numerous allusions to the nations and their role in God's plan of redemption. Even if it should be admitted that the Psalms are primarily designed to be used in worship, the numerous allusions to the nations found in these poems do give us an insight into Israel's view of the nations. George W. Peters writes,

> It is a profound fact that "the hymn of praise is missionary preaching par excellence," especially when we realize that such missionary preaching is

supported in the Psalms by more than 175 references of a universalistic note relating to the nations of the world. Many of them bring hope of salvation to the nations.[22]

As Peters notes, some of the most explicit Psalms in this respect are Psalms 2, 33, 66, 72, 117, and 145. As in the Torah, the prophetic and wisdom texts, we find both the centripetal and centrifugal dimensions of witness. For instance, Psalm 86:9 highlights the nations coming to Israel to worship God: "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name." But in Psalm 67, the poet invokes God's mercy on Israel so that God's ways may be known all over the earth: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, Selah, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you" (67:1-3). The psalmist makes here a direct connection between Israel's well-being and the fate of the nations. While the link between Israel being blessed and the resulting knowledge of God among the nations is not made explicit, the assumption is that this knowledge of God will only be transmitted to the nations if Israel prospers. As in other passages we have examined so far, the expansion of God's knowledge and his reign is not portrayed at all as the imposition of a totalitarian rule leading to oppression and enslavement. God's rule is depicted as a win-win proposition for all; the inauguration of a new era where everyone will know God, praise him, and be blessed by him.

> May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. Selah. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him (Ps. 67:4-7).

## Missional Implications

### First Things

The missionary's primary task is to invite men and women into the Kingdom of God, disciple them, and do everything in their power to enable them to maintain their identity as God's people in the world. This agenda is at the core of the Torah, the prophets, and the wisdom tradition.

The community of believers is called to reflect God's character in all aspects of life so as to witness to the nature of the one and only God to all the nations. God's desire to reach out to his own people and the nations is urgent, constant, and insistent. It is motivated by love and an unquenchable desire to reconcile all men and women to himself.

**The Pentateuch**

*An Invitation.* At the heart of God's redemptive project is the invitation to enter into a relationship with him. And because it is to be characterized by love (Deut. 6:4-5), no one can be coerced into it.

*The Sickness and the Cure.* Missionaries must have a crystal clear understanding of the human predicament and its ultimate cause. In this respect, the creation account, written in order to provide the most basic elements of a new worldview, represents a critical source of information. The story teaches that God is good, and that humans are the primary architects of the terrible condition in which they find themselves. As a result of the Fall, men and women are radically alienated from God and cultivate a visceral hostility towards him (cf. Col. 1:21). But there is hope (Gen. 3:15). God has provided a way out of the situation in which humanity finds itself, but as God's words to Cain highlight, each person is responsible to respond to the invitation to turn away from sin (Gen. 4:6-7).

*The Power of God.* For most people, making a Christian commitment is an intensely conflicting decision requiring much more than a simple invitation to turn to Christ. Under totalitarian regimes, such a decision may well result in persecution and death. In secular cultures, a commitment to Christ will most often entail a titanic struggle in terms of changing one's center of gravity away from the self to God. In the same way the Hebrews needed to experience the power of God in order to follow Moses out of Egypt, our contemporaries need to feel the power of God to turn to Christ. That may explain why the charismatic movement has had such a deep impact in so many parts of the world, notably and remarkably so in Latin America. It is the task of the missionary to reflect on how to pray for and facilitate an appropriate manifestation of God's power in their context.

*God's Self-Disclosure.* God constantly discloses himself. The Christian faith is grounded in historical events whose significance is parsed through a number of propositional statements articulated throughout Scripture. Divine revelation is the key to identifying the root cause of the illness that inflicts human nature, the nature of the cure, and the source of the strength we need to live faithfully. Francis of Assisi's so-often rehearsed quote, "Preach the gospel always, and if necessary, use words!" is most likely apocryphal. Without an explicit message, there are, to paraphrase Elton Trueblood, only people who think so highly of themselves and their personal righteousness that they themselves can actually draw a sinner to God. "The person who says naively, 'I don't preach; I just let my life speak,' is insufferably self-righteous."[23]

**The Prophets**

*A Sense of Calling and Intimacy with God.* The prophet's calling and authority originate from God. His ability to overcome opposition and discouragement also lies in his calling and a continued experience of God. Missionaries can only speak and live out of what they have experienced. This is particularly true in regards to God's grace. The prophet does not speak from a place of self-righteousness. He is himself a recipient of God's grace and speaks as one who has been shown mercy (Isa. 6:1-13).

*Theological Clarity.* Like the prophet, the missionary must have an unconditional commitment to biblical truth particularly as it pertains to the character of God, the biblical worldview, sin, and redemption. A theologically confused missionary will be an ineffective missionary. Theological clarity is particularly critical with respect to the unique claims of Christ and, in animistic contexts, the character of spiritual warfare and belief in magic. Whether the mission field is here at home or abroad, there is no room for the kind of postmodern Christianity that some have promoted over the past few years.[24]

*Understanding Culture.* Just like the prophet, the missionary must have a thorough understanding of the recipient culture in order to recognize the potential points of contact between that culture and the gospel. The cultural investigation that principle assumes should especially highlight the elements of the culture that betray the most evident manifestations of that society's death impulse. Like the prophet, the missionary needs to have a clear view of how sin manifests itself in that culture in order to be in a position to calibrate the presentation of the gospel.

*A Difficult Task.* The prophetic ministry consistently met with resistance and most often resulted in failure. Confronting a culture or a people group with the claims of Christ always represents an overwhelming challenge. The missionary must be keenly aware of the inherent difficulty of the task and its propensity to miscarry. Communicating God's message is unlike any other enterprise. If some will accept the message and turn to God, many will be indifferent, if not outright hostile.

*The Good of the Nation.* The prophetic mission was fundamentally driven by a redemptive impulse. The missionary is to be motivated by a similar desire to bring spiritual salvation to all and new life into the recipient culture. Love is to be the root motivator of the missionary's action. Failure to root one's intervention in the love of God and neighbor will result in a discourse crippled by legalism and moralism.

*A Personal Change of Allegiance.* The prophetic call to turn back to God is infinitely more than uttering platitudinous clichés to some nebulous collective. As Isaiah's call in chapter 6 underlines, there is an irreducible dialectic between the

individual and the community. The work of the missionary must extend beyond vague notions of social justice and the promotion of peace. While some of these objectives may in fact derive naturally from the gospel (such as the abolition of slavery was in the nineteenth century), they are not the *heart* of the gospel. At the core of the Christian message is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. To preach the gospel is to extend an invitation to turn away from self and to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. It is and will always remain an intensely and radically personal process.

*The Big Question.* The redemption of the individual and that of a nation are not unrelated questions. In the book of Isaiah, the fate of the nation is critical, for the future of God's overall project of redemption is indeed contingent on the survival of a community. The first five chapters of Isaiah outline the disastrous condition of the people. By the end of chapter 5, we cannot avoid asking whether Israel can be saved and if so, how. Chapter 6 provides the answer to that existential question by describing how one man, the prophet Isaiah himself, is cleansed from his sin, transformed, and thus empowered to become Yahweh's partner. The message could not be clearer: A community can be redeemed, but its redemption will be brought about by the redemption of the individual. One transforms a nation through the transformation of one person at a time.

Missionaries work in cultures that are sometimes profoundly infected by sin and evil. Like William Wilberforce, who combatted slavery, or William Carey, who tirelessly labored to eradicate the rite of Sati in India, missionaries may feel compelled, like the prophets of old, to address the evils of a culture, and so they should. While they may resort to using political levers to address those issues, they should never forget that it is ultimately through the transformation of the individual that great social changes are brought about.

### The Wisdom Tradition

*Reaching Youth.* What is most striking about the wisdom tradition is its emphasis on youth. Missionaries should never hesitate to prioritize youth, for young people are often the ones who are most receptive to new religious or ideological options. This also implies that they are most vulnerable to embracing values that may prove to be extremely detrimental. The propensity for urban gangs, for instance, to recruit teenage boys should come as no surprise to anyone, for these boys can most effectively be turned into the kind of heartless "drones" that are so useful to criminal organizations. Young people do, however, have the ability to let their commitment to Christ shape their lives in unexpected ways and to hear God's call to represent the Kingdom in strategic and unexpected places.[25]

*A Spiritual War.* At the very core of the wisdom tradition is the conviction that human existence is ultimately about choosing between life and death. But life is much more than an accumulation of days, months, and years. To live is to make choices that either promote life or further spread the spiritual virus that has poisoned human existence since the first two were expelled from the garden. But discerning where life is and actually choosing it will not be always be without its share of struggles and cruel uncertainties. Powerful forces, some inherent to our very nature (Matt. 15:19), some carried by evil ideologies, conspire to compel men and women to adopt the path of death. Wisdom is engaged in a campaign whose ultimate aim is to win the allegiance of the audience; its battlefield the souls of men and women.      Mission is anything but some drowsy exercise involving the exchange of religious bromides over a dainty cup of tea. Genuine Christian mission is always about life and death. It's about persuading those who are in the clutches of sin and self-destruction to embrace the source of life: Christ himself. Mission is also about encouraging and enabling those who have embraced the Christian faith to remain faithful to God.

*By All Means.* Wisdom appeals to a remarkably wide array of interests, desires, fears, and aspirations in order to draw the audience into the "foyer" of the house of wisdom: allusions to prosperity, knowledge, power, peace of mind, health, and long life abound. Wisdom teachers will not hesitate to use the voice of the mother or the father to soften the heart of the indifferent and the rebellious.

Missionaries need to be as creative and strategic as the wisdom teachers in their efforts to capture their audience. Whether they find themselves in a traditional or postmodern culture, the wisdom tradition offers a model of evangelism and discipleship that is centered on dynamic engagement, reflection, and an invitation to change one's allegiances.

### Last Things

To address the topic of mission in the Old Testament is to explore how God worked in history to win a rebellious people back to himself, ensure a "landing pad" for Christ's incarnation, and to fulfill the greater plan of redemption for all of humanity.

## Notes

[1] For more details, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," *International Journal of Frontiers Missions* 13 (1996): 3-7.

[2] "Missional" is used in its most comprehensive manner as including both discourse and action.

[3] See for instance Gen. 30:27-30 (Laban and Jacob), Potiphar and Joseph (Gen. 39:5), Pharaoh and Jacob (Gen. 47:7, 10). For a more detailed discussion, see Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic), 210-211.

[4] See also 1 Cor. 2:1; Eph.1:9-11; 3:3-9; Col. 1:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Heb. 1:1-2.

[5] The first seminal expression of the promise of God's ultimate victory over sin can be traced to Gen. 3:15, where the text announces that one of Eve's descendants will eventually crush the serpent's head. The significance of this text does not only lie in its announcement of victory, but in providing an insight into the human/divine partnership mechanism God will engage in order to bring about humanity's redemption (see also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, *Word Biblical Commentary* [Waco: Word, 1987], 80-81).

[6] The landing pad was a concept used by C. S. Lewis to denote God's plan to save humanity one person at a time (see *Mere Christianity* [New York: Harper San Francisco, 2001 (1943)], 40-46).

[7] Elmer Martens examines this theme at length in *God's Design*, 3rd ed. (N. Richland Hills: Bibal Press, 1998).

[8] The text introduces a number of key elements that suggest that this is not the end: 1) the creation account is given to the Hebrews in a context that is located after the Fall, which by implication signals that God's original invitation to humanity extends to the fallen race; 2) if God enacts his judgment against humanity and the created order, God also indicates that the human race will endure (Gen. 1:17-20); 3) God states that the great conflict that has been initiated between the serpent and humanity will ultimately result in the latter's victory over the former (Gen. 3:15).

[9] See P. Gilbert, "Human Freewill and Divine Determinism: Pharaoh, A Case Study," *Direction* 30. (2001):76-87; James K. Hoffmeier, "Egypt, Plagues in," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 374-378.

[10] This expression, which appears three times in the book of Exodus (7:6; 14:1; 19:5), denotes God's sovereign election of Israel to be assigned a special status and to reflect God's glory among the nations (for more details, see Daniel I. Block, "The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut. 26:16-19)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (2005): 397-398.

[11] Block, "The Privilege of Calling," 404.

[12] For an exploration of the prophetic call to conversion, see P. Gilbert, "The Function of Imprecation in Israel's Eighth-Century Prophets," *Direction* 35 (2006): 44-58.

[13] For instance, in some cases the prophet would engage in what scholars call prophetic acts such as Hosea's marriage to a harlot (Hos. 1:2), Isaiah being stripped and barefoot for three years (Isa. 2:3), or Jeremiah buying and wearing a linen belt

around his belt (Jer. 13:1). Such actions served as object lessons intended to underline the sin of the nation and God's imminent judgment against the people.

[14] Isa. 19:24-25; 25:6-8; 45:22-2; 60:12. See also Jer. 4:1-2 and Zech. 8:13.

[15] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 236.

[16] Gary V. Smith, Isaiah 1-39, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 432.

[17] Among other Isaiah texts pertinent to mission, see Isa. 42:1-4; 45:22-24; 49:1-6; 60:10-12.

[18] In Genesis 2 and 3, Adam and Eve are portrayed as human beings, not Israelites per se. God's plan of redemption announced in Genesis 3:15 is therefore not restricted to the chosen people as such. The table of nations attested in Genesis 10 depicts all the nations of the earth as belonging to one family. According to Block, this document represents the only known example of an attempt to articulate a foundation to relate all the nations of the earth to each other (see Daniel I. Block, "Nations/Nationality," *NIDOTT*, vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 971). For more details, see M. Daniel Carroll R., "Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 24-27.

[19] David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series, vol. 10, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997 ([1978]), 85.

[20] For more details, see Wright, *The Mission of God*, 441-453.

[21] As Wright points out, any borrowing the ancient Israelite wisdom teachers may have engaged in was intentionally filtered through their understanding of who Yahweh was as revealed in the Torah (*The Mission of God,* 443-445, 446-448). See also Elmer Martens, "God, Justice and Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament," in *Practicing Truth: Confident Witness in Our Pluralistic World*, eds. David W. Shenk and Linford Stutzman (Scottdale: HP, 1999), 46-63.

[22] George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 116.

[23] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper, 1961), 53. David Ewert examines this question in "Evangelism by Lifestyle," *Direction* 28 (1999):18-27.

[24] See for instance Grant C. Richison's critique of postmodern Christianity in *Certainty* (Pickering: Castle Quay Books, 2010) and D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

[25] In this respect, Daniel is an extraordinary example of a young man who managed to contribute to God's project by maintaining a high degree of personal integrity

and by letting God prepare him for an assignment that was critical for the survival of Israel in a foreign land (see P. Gilbert, "Welcome to the Complex Life," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, vol. 45 [September 1, 2006]: 8-9).

## Recommended Reading

Kaiser, Walter C. Jr. *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Martens, Elmer. "Ezekiel's Contribution to a Biblical Theology of Mission." *Direction* 28 (1999):75-87.

Martin-Achard, Robert. *Israël et les nations. La perspective missionnaire de l'Ancien Testament.* Genève, Suisse: Editions Labor et Fides, 1959.

Martin-Archard, Robert. *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World.* Translated by John Penney Smith. Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962.

Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

Porter, Stanley E. and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds. *Christian Mission: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Developments.* McMaster New Testament Studies Series 9. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010.

Vogels, Walter. "Covenant and Universalism: A Guide for a Missionary Reading of the Old Testament." *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 57 (1973):25-32.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.

Wright, G. E. "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission." In *The Theology of Christian Missions.* Edited by G. H. Anderson. New York: McGraw Hill; London: SCM Press, 1961.

## Study Questions

1. In light of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, give two examples of how Israel became a blessing to the nations?

2. In the section of the article entitled "The Creation of a New People", the author describes God's program to establish a "landing pad" for his invasion of the world. Explain and discuss the meaning of this concept.

3. What is unique to the perspective on mission that is found in each section of the Old Testament: the Torah, the Prophets, and the wisdom literature?

4. Do you have a favorite story or passage in the Old Testament that expresses God's heart for the nations? If you are in a group, share these with each other.

# 2 Jesus' Inaugural Sermon: Clues to a Theology of Mission in the Gospels

E. D. Solomon

## Introduction

There are some compelling reasons for selecting Jesus' inaugural sermon (Luke 4:18-19) when searching for a theology of mission in the Gospels. First, the passage is biblical. It talks about prophecy and fulfillment. In doing so it takes both the Old and the New Testaments into consideration. Luke places Jesus' mission within the scriptural mandate (Isa 61:1-3; 58:6 in relation to Luke 4:16-30). Secondly, Jesus has a response to poverty in an unjust world. Jesus responds by announcing "liberty to the poor." His identity with the poor will be clarified through the exegesis below. Thirdly, I come from a Global South country; so I am asking what good news the Jubilee legislation would have for the Indian context. The passage calls for a radical response to God and his Jubilee legislation.[1] With such goals in mind I will attempt to exegete the passage and make an application to India and similar Global South situations. I will also interweave insights from the other Synoptic Gospels and John.

E. D. Solomon (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is New Testament and Missiology Professor at the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College, Shamshabad, India. He is an ordained minister of the Conference of the MB Church of India. He has served as pastor and in a variety of conference ministries in Christian education, evangelism, and as editor of *Suvarthamani*, the monthly conference journal.

The broader context for Jesus' inaugural address, as it unfolds in Luke 4:14-9:50, demonstrates the way the mission ministry of Jesus was inaugurated in Galilee. Our specific passage (vs.16-30) falls within Luke 4:14-44, which tells of Jesus' teaching ministry in synagogues. Joel B. Green, a New Testament authority, summarizes four features of Jesus' ministry in the Luke 4 passage as follows:

> First, his is a ministry empowered by the Spirit. Second, Luke's central interest in Jesus' message, and the inseparability of teaching/preaching (4:15-21, 31, 43-44) and the miraculous (4:16-21, 33-36, 38-41), is foregrounded here. Indeed, 4:18-19 establishes a narrative need for Jesus "to bring good news to the poor," and so these verses characterize the form and primary recipients of Jesus' ministry. Third, 4:43 establishes a second need—namely, for Jesus to carry out a ministry noted for its itinerant nature. Both needs are rooted in God's purpose—4:18-19 by reference to the Scriptures, 4:43 by reference to divine necessity ("must"). Finally, Luke highlights the importance of response to Jesus' ministry— whether positive (4:15, 39, 42), negative (4:28), or, at least, a recognition that may lead to a faith-response (4:22, 32, 36). Jesus, we may recall, has come to clear the threshing floor (3:17), to cause a division within Israel (2:34), for the manifestation of God's purpose in his ministry elicits responses both negative and positive.[2]

## Exegetical Comments on Luke 4:16-30

### A Jubilee Nuance (vs. 18-19)

The quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 given in vs. 18-19 is crucial to our exegesis.  At the end of reading these verses Jesus announces, in the hearing of the people, their fulfillment that very day.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
> (NRSV Luke 4:18-19).

A careful reading of Isaiah 61:1-2 will tell us that there are two phrases missing in Luke's version: first, "to bind up the brokenhearted" (1b); second, "and (to) proclaim the day of the vengeance" (2c). The first expresses additional comfort/good news to the discouraged people. The second announces political advantages for Israelites. They believed that when the Messiah came he would defeat the Roman armies and restore freedom to the nation. Jesus seems to have deliberately avoided such martial overtones. Instead he directed the attention to himself as fulfilling the promises, and that with reference to the Jubilee with its political overtones.

The Isaiah passage defines the Jubilee in the hearing of the people present in the synagogue. The prophet's message echoes the Mosaic legislation about the Jubilee year.  Every fiftieth year the land was not to be cultivated.  Any lands purchased within the fifty years were to be returned to the original owner. Slaves were to be freed (Lev. 25). Liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land to all inhabitants (Lev. 25:10). Such instruction had large economic implications. Is this why the listeners tried to kill Jesus?  We will clarify their action as we proceed with the exegesis of the passage.

According to missionary statesman David Bosch, Jesus did not come to establish a political kingdom on earth. However, that does not mean his mission was apolitical. His gospel of the kingdom of God was more radical than the message of any revolutionary. Bosch states, "The Sermon on the Mount, in particular, is eminently political since it challenges almost every traditional societal structure. His politics were, however, of peace-making, of reconciliation, of justice, of refusing vengeance… and above all, of love of enemy."[3]

Bosch goes on to make his point by quoting Pinchas Lapide: "(Jesus) was a threefold rebel of love, much more radical than revolutionaries of our day." This was the case particularly since there was no tension between what he said and what he did."[4] Bosch concludes his insights on Matthew's mission as disciple-making by again quoting Lapide: "It gets its true binding force only through the exemplary life, suffering, and death of the Nazarene who sealed its validity with his own blood."[5]

Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi, the father of modern India, was influenced by the Sermon on the Mount.[6]  Of special interest for us is his understanding of the value of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.  Gandhi refused to reduce the gospel of the cross to pietistic individualism. For him the quest for individual enlightenment was inseparable from a commitment to social transformation.

**Spiritual, Universal, and Prophetic Overtones (vs. 18-20)**

*Anointed by the Spirit*

These verses, as stated earlier, are a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2. The structure of these verses indicates certain facts. Brevard Childs says that the three "me's" in these verses identify the Servant in Isaiah (42:7, 49:9). The first "me" occurs in v. 18: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me." As in most of Luke's writings, it is the Spirit who takes the initiative: Jesus is "drawn" by the Spirit to the desert for temptation; Jesus is "filled" with the Spirit and might even find Isaiah's text a consequence of the Spirit's guidance."[7] The Spirit upon Jesus is thought to be the "Elohim."[8] The second "me" is also in v. 18: "he has anointed me." Unlike the pouring of oil in the Old Testament to commission a leader, this was a new anointing by the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22, cf. Ex 29:7). The anointing was for a specific purpose.

*The universal scope of mission for Jesus*

The infancy narratives in both Matthew and Luke trace Jesus as related to all humans. The genealogy of Matthew (Matt 1:1-17) shows that Jesus is a historical person, and not a myth. Read from a feminist perspective, the genealogy raises the image of gentile women in a context of a male-dominant Jewish society. It lists five women, namely (1) Tamar (Matt 1:3 cf. Gen 38), (2) Rahab (Matt 1:5), (3) Ruth (Matt 1:5), (4) Uriah's wife (Matt 1:6) and (5) Mary the mother of Jesus (Matt 1:16). Of the five, only Mary is a Jewess, bringing home the point that caste, color and ethnic diversity do not/do matter in God's salvation plan. All of the women had irregular conjugal relations, but are accounted as God-fearing grandmothers of Jesus.

While Matthew's genealogy is concerned with Jesus as a Jew, Luke relates Him to the entire human race (Luke 3:23-38), back to Adam the son of God. Thus both evangelists stress salvation to Jew and Gentile alike.

*A prophetic sending*

The Isaiah text which Jesus quotes and applies to himself addresses the sending question, which is also the third "me": "He has sent me" (v.18). Mission is *missio dei* even for Jesus. His is a clear vocation and co-work with God. The phrase echoes John's Gospel, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). With this purpose statement John reminds us of several principles of mission. By saying "As ... so" Jesus indicates the manner in which Jesus was, and we are, sent. It indicates the incarnation as the model for his coming, for emptying himself, even to the point of death on a cross. By saying "I send you" he declares his person and authority.

He is the Creator and he is the "I Am" (e.g. Bread of Life, etc.). As model and sender, he also mentors missionaries when they are worn out, and restores them to mission (John 21:1-14, 15-19).

The Lucan text, drawing on Isaiah, can be summarized as to the mandate of God's anointed. That mandate is 1) to preach the good news to the poor (v. 18a); 2) to proclaim freedom/release to the prisoners (v. 18b); 3) to release the oppressed (v. 18b); and 4) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (v. 19). This cluster of imperatives identifies the nature of the Jubilee year and offers directives for Jesus' mission, and ours, his disciples.

## Jubilee Directives for Mission

Three dimensions of this mission require comment.

### Attention to the Poor

In Mediterranean culture the "poor" would have been all kinds of disadvantaged people. Green asserts that "the poor" was somewhat of an inclusive term that would include the spiritually poor and economically poor, but need not be limited to these categories. He clarifies:

> In that culture, one's status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities, but depended on a number of elements, including education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economics, and so on. Thus, lack of subsistence might account for one's designation as "poor," but so might other disadvantaged conditions, and "poor" would serve as a cipher for those of low status, for those excluded according to normal canons of status honor in Mediterranean world. Hence, although "poor" is hardly devoid of economic significance, for Luke this wider meaning of diminished status honor is paramount.[9]

These *have-nots* were in utter desolation. For them to become part of an egalitarian society was next to impossible. "Their status referred to here is an abject poverty with no recourse, but leaves them at the mercies of God. So the good news as proclaimed by Jesus was a true release to them."[10]

### Release from Bondage and Debts

*Release* is Jubilee language. The release is that Jesus has identified with socially segregated people like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), those whose *sins are forgiven*. These people make restitution in return. They start to follow the teacher

(Luke 5:27-32). When sins are forgiven there is the reunion of a person into the family and community. I am moved that Jesus identified with sinful women (Luke 7:36-50), like Mary Magdalene, and had their support in his ministry (Luke 8:2-3). Women became the first witnesses to his resurrection (Luke 24:1-12).

Moreover, in some cases release meant *release from the power of Satan* (Luke 13:10-17; Acts 10:38). Luke points out that certain kinds of sicknesses were caused by Satan: "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" (Luke 13:16). Jesus was looking at an evil system as the real cause of poverty. The Jubilee themes point to Jesus the Messiah as a political and social activist. However, the task of totally defeating Satan and the evil system remains till the Messiah's second coming (Rev. 22:10). Announcing freedom from debts was also part of the Jubilee legislation (Luke 4:18-19; Lev. 25:39-54).

The relation between "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" and the reaction of those present in the synagogue at Nazareth is significant. Jesus must have meant that the Jubilee had come into effect just then. In turn, because it required major changes in practice and lifestyle, it brought on a negative and even angry response to Jesus' message (Luke 4:21, 28ff). Jesus challenged their complacency, their failure to live justly, and so challenged their world order.

## Implications of Jubilee for Mission

### A Challenge to Jubilee Thinking About Mission

To be sure, thinking about mission using the Jubilee model would severely challenge the common worldview, even among Christians. Donald B. Kraybill pointedly addresses the present worldview by noting how radically the language of God's kingdom differs from current thinking, so that he calls it the "upside-down kingdom." He offers several observations, limiting himself to the ethical dimension. First, Jubilee demands that believers understand God's ownership of both the land (Lev. 25:23) and human beings (Lev. 25:42, 45). Second, believers, like Israel, should remember that they were once slaves and that God redeemed them (Deut.15:15). Freedom is a gift to them (Lev. 25:38). Third, the Jubilee response is gratitude to God for his blessings (Deut. 15:13-14). Fourth, Jubilee instructions are a reminder of the grace of God. God cares for the poor; hence the land is to lie fallow so as to feed the poor and the wild animals and also give rest to the land (Exod. 23:11). His followers should make sure that there are no poor among them (Deut. 15:4-5, 7-8, 11). Fifth, in a revolution of this sort, it is important that the oppressed

do not become the oppressor; instead socioeconomic pyramids are to be flattened out. Sixth, the upside-down kingdom is characterized by institutionalized grace. In this connection Kraybill makes two important observations: no institution should institutionalize the benevolence it extends to people; and no individual should take personal initiative as a permanent privilege.[11]

Such a presentation of the kingdom is welcome, one hopes, but tensions are often strong—as then, so also currently.

### Extending Mission Activity Beyond Israel's Borders (Luke 4:21-29)

We date Jesus' inauguration of the Jubilee to the year AD 26/27. At the outset of his ministry he encountered opposition and responded with explanations. With his announcement, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," the hearers were confronted with the Jubilee pattern of God's method of working. The congregation's initial amazement turned to serious objection based on their perception of who Jesus was. They saw Jesus merely as the son of Joseph, as one among them. It is a general human response, one that looks at surface realities and fails to look deeper into how God is at work. Jesus provoked their thinking by expanding the meaning of the Jubilee: it was not concerned just with the parochial release for the Jewish nation, but a release with universal import.

Jesus' focus on the beyond-Israel reach of the Jubilee message is illustrated by two examples from the prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Both stories illustrate ministry to the Gentiles. Salvation comes to outsiders. Elijah's story is found in 1 Kings 17:8-24: his ministry was to a widow in Zarephath. Elisha's story is of the healing of Naaman, a Syrian commander (2 Kings 5:1-19). By referencing these stories, Jesus emphasized that ministry is not to be limited to certain regions. Moreover, he himself was a prophet and not just their boy. Also, saying that the scripture of Isaiah, understood as messianic, was fulfilled in their hearing implied that he, Jesus, was indeed the Messiah.

The resulting fury of the listeners led to attempted murder (Luke 4:28-29). Mob psychology took over: their response was one of rejecting the messenger of the Jubilee.

A theology of Christian mission must take into account the resistance to the good news of God's liberation in the Jubilee. That resistance may come from religious groups, as it did for Jesus. In the perversity brought by sin, even in religious circles, the good news is rejected.

But Jesus allowed neither Satan nor humans to defeat his purposes (v. 30). Jesus escaped by passing through the crowds; later he would pass through death to continue his universal mission (Acts 2:24-32). Jesus' ministry at Nazareth ended, but

it moved toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), and later, through his disciples to the ends of the earth.

In relating Jesus' conversation with the disciples on the Emmaus road, Luke reminded the church of its primary mission.

> Then he  opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:45-47, NRSV).

Jesus assigned his followers to be witnesses and to wait for empowerment in Jerusalem. David Bosch states that the Holy Spirit "not only initiates mission, he also guides the missionaries about where they should go and how they should proceed."[12] The book Acts of the Apostles, the second of Luke's twin volumes, records how the early church practiced the mission mandate. Paul the missionary was still active in Acts 28:25-31 and found people still responding in a two-fold way. The Gentile world was wide open to the gospel (Acts 28: 28) while the majority of Jewish people continued to reject it (Acts 28: 26-27). The Spirit's forecast is "Jewry's persistent refusal to be a matter of salvation-historical necessity." However, in view of the predominance and arrogance of the Gentile church, Bosch cautioned,

> "Gentile Christianity did not, however, replace the Jews as the people of God; rather, in the wake of Pentecost thousands of Jews, after embracing the staggering realization that their sacred customs are to give way before the "impartiality" of God (Acts 10:15, 34, 47; 11:9, 17-18), became what they truly were –"Israel."[13]

Luke's community also knew that "a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). The non-response of the majority of Israel today should raise our concern to reach them and the people of South Asia with the Kingdom news. This leads me to the relevance of the inaugural sermon to the South Asian peoples and to the Global South.

## Relevance of the Jubilee Message to India and the Global South

Jesus' message about Jubilee, its good news, and its call to freedom for those who have been victimized, will always challenge the church.  For us in the Global South that challenge is one of a socio-religious response in three areas: structural evil, identification with the poor and needy, and an assessment of communalism.

**Dealing with Structural Evil**

If Jesus were to preach the same sermon in an Indian church, what would the likely response be? A welcome or a refusal? Jesus' exposure of structural evil at Nazareth met with a violent response. Senior and Stuhlmueller suggest that Jesus had provoked Jewish "provincialism."[14] The listeners were not willing to free the slaves and redeem the land in a Jubilee year.

Apart from individual resistance, evil is organized and corporate as well. A synagogue, if devoid of self-critique, could replicate some ecclesial structures today. Protecting self-interest seems more important than obeying the King of the kingdom. Denying Jubilee reforms is to exploit a brother, or refuse to extend the Redeemer to the universe or a neighboring nation (such as the Sidonian woman, or Naaman, a Syrian). Because the listeners did not understand Jesus' re-interpretation of Scripture (Luke 4:28-29) they wanted to eliminate him.

The evil world listens to the truth but refuses to repent or ask for forgiveness of their sins. People with absolute power lose the capacity to listen. We may not agree with the conclusions of pluralists, yet it is worth noting their analyses of how power corrupts. S. Wesley Ariarajah, in his well-received essay, "Mission in the context of cultures and religions," states:

> Those with power gradually lose their capacity to listen; they begin to equate their ideas with "truth"; they expect everyone else to follow them or to be on their side because they have power. Those with power never ask, "How can I connect to the beliefs of others?" They expect others to find the connection, if necessary by abandoning their own ideas.[15]

In India, William Carey long ago had questioned evil practices such as the caste system and sati (voluntary burning of the wife on the funeral pyre of her husband).[16] Carey worked hard to influence the British government to abolish child marriages. Such action is the calling of the church in India when it chooses to follow the implications of Jubilee regulations.

The real intent of the gospel writers was to change the mindset of people. This can only happen when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus the Christ. Social activist Vishal Mangalwadi declares,

> "Oppressive systems survive by propagating falsehood. Evangelism liberates by spreading truth, i.e. by undercutting the intellectual foundations of an exploitative system and by creating an alternative social structure which seeks to live by the truth."[17]

In such oppressive systems our calling is to walk with courage and declare our solidarity with the marginalized peoples. If we are empowered by the Spirit we will be authentic witnesses in our context. We should consider that it may be normal for people living in oppositional systems to respond negatively to the gospel. Yet church ministers work in hope that the response to the gospel will be positive.

### Identifying With the Poor and Needy

Poverty is a dehumanizing agent which mars the image of God in humans. Poverty is rampant in India, especially in the regions where the Mennonite Brethren Church is found. Solidarity with them is our calling. One way to serve the poor is to side with their struggles.[18]   Harry M. de Lange is right when he writes that Jubilee means to let the needy into our lives.[19] I feel that women are the most affected when it comes to poverty. There are scriptural mandates that clearly call for a ministry to them, and to all the destitute, whoever they are. "We shall need to break the walls of separation between the class, race and gender."[20]

### Addressing Communalism

Communalism is defined as one religious group resisting the onslaught of another. For example, a Hindu party dominates the government of India. Brahmins primarily head the government. The political networks see to it that no other community comes to power. Even a democracy sometimes shows the face of ethnic cleansing: we experienced Hindu-Muslim butchery during the partition of India in 1947. Still, there are wonderful testimonies of Christians who, in accord with the Jubilee message, were binding the wounds of those who were injured during these brutal acts of hate. This is one way to practice Jubilee.

The people of Nazareth thought of their self-interest. They wanted Jesus' socio-religious and economic interests to agree with their perspectives. Likewise, the people of India try to preserve what is profitable to themselves. Christian Dalits, for example, are affected by evil legislation like "reservations." Reservation in education and employment is extended to Scheduled Caste Hindus, but denied to Christians from Scheduled Caste background. I think Jubilee calls us to oppose these inhuman regulations.

The gospel of release from oppression, whether that be the spiritual load of guilt or more tangibly oppression within the social structure, remains the mandate and privilege of the church. By operating mission boarding schools, orphanages, medical schools, and ministerial training, and by establishing churches, the Mennonite Brethren practice the gospel. There is still much need to emphasize addressing

social needs along with preaching the gospel. From the initiative of the churches in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states, more recently there have been outreaches to Karnataka, Mumbai and North India.

But there is also resistance to the gospel. A majority of high caste Hindus remain closed to the gospel for various reasons. They are indifferent to the gospel because in India the gospel is identified with low castes. They remain uninterested in the gospel because evangelical preaching is mostly about individual salvation, and such a gospel does not appeal to people like Gandhi whose concern was for a nation's freedom struggle.

As to the social dimensions of the Jubilee message, Christian activists have worked for many years to abolish oppressive practices like child marriage and *sati*. Hindu reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy used the precepts of Jesus (from the gospels) to renew Hindu religion. Christian theology addressing Indian society is in the making. But have we interpreted the Jubilee message correctly? Has the church in India modeled an authentic Jubilee message? Has it been too indifferent to the national struggles?

## Conclusion

We have surveyed the Nazareth response to Jesus' announcement of Jubilee, the Kingdom of God; we have gleaned insights from the Synoptic Gospels and John. It is a challenge to observe Jubilee legislation in a global community. For example, faithfulness to Jubilee would mean partnership between a church and mission in sharing of resources, whether human and/or financial resources. It calls for more relational than businesslike understandings.

Jubilee for India would call for a radical discipleship. The church needs to participate in nation-building, for example by responding with assistance during natural calamities (earthquakes, floods, etc.). The church would do well to raise its voice against the exploitation of daily wage earners in the villages. We in the South also have environmental issues to fight for. Surely we cannot be spectators while the states of Jammu and Kashmir are bleeding now for more than two decades. Should the church check on the human rights violations in this state?

Another big challenge is to live as a true community of Jesus Christ to show that we are beyond communalism. The principles of Jubilee were not only meant for the New Israel but also for the world, since God is the creator and owner and judge of all humanity. A true discipleship to Christ then would demand following through on the Jubilee message, with its call to good news, which includes evangelism and social action.

## Notes

[1] The familiar term "Nazareth Manifesto" is from Latin American Liberation Theology. Jesus declared his mission statement to seek a response from his audience. He was declaring the new order of the Kingdom of God.

[2] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 197.

[3] David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 70.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Gandhi was influenced by his mother's saintliness, and a couple of pacifist writings such as a Gujarati didactic *Return Good For Evil* (p. 4), Tolstoy's *The Kingdom Of God Is Within You* (p. 14), Raychandbhai's *Panchikaran* (pp. 14-15), Haribhadra Suri's *Shaddarshana Samuchchaya*, and the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7) in the New Testament. Unto the last he remained a Hindu. Page numbers in this footnote are from GANDHI, M.K., *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1941).

[7] Jacques Matthey, "Luke 4:16-30 The Spirit's Mission Manifesto - Jesus' Hermeneutics - and Luke's Editorial," in *International Review of Mission* 89, No. 352 (2000), 1.

[8] John Nolland, Luke 1-9:20.*Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol.35A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 196.

[9] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 211.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1978), 101-112.

[12] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 114.

[13] Ibid., 115

[14] Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller. *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 261.

[15] Wesley S. Ariarajah,"Mission in the context of cultures and religions" in *Mission Paradigm in the New Millennium: A Study on Missiology–An Indian Perspective,* ed. W.S. Milton Jaganathan (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2000), p.23

[16] Ruth Mangalwadi and Vishal Mangalwadi, *William Carey and the Regeneration of India* (Mussoorie, UP, India: Nivedit Good Books, 1993), 58.

[17] Vishal Mangalwadi, *Truth and Social Reform,* third edition (Mussoorie, UP, India: Nivedit Good Books, 1996), 45.

[18] M. Kariapuram, "Theologizing in the Context of Poverty" in *India Missiological Review* 20, No. 4 (December, 1998), 47-50. See Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee-Images for Ethics and Christology,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 95.

[19] Harry M. de Lange, "The Jubilee Principle: is it Relevant for Today?" in *Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986), 443.

[20] Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life: An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesial, and Social Transformation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 105.

## Recommended Reading

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.

De Lange, Harry M. "The Jubilee Principle: is it Relevant for Today?" *Ecumenical Review* 38 (1986): 437-443.

Kariapuram, M. "Theologizing in the Context of Poverty." *Indian Missiological Review* 20, No. 4 (1998): 44-51.

Kinsler, Ross and Gloria Kinsler. *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life - An invitation to Personal, Ecclesial, and Social Transformation.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999.

Kraybill, Donald B. *The Upside-Down Kingdom.* Kitchener: Herald Press, 1978.

Mangalwadi, Ruth and Vishal Mangalwadi. *William Carey and the Regeneration of India.* Mussoorie, UP, India: Nivedit Good Books, 1993.

Matthey, Jacques. "Luke 4:16-30 - The Spirit's Mission Manifesto - Jesus' Hermeneutics - and Luke's Editorial." *International Review of Mission* 89, No. 352 (2000): 1-6.

Ringe, Sharon H. *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee-Images for Ethics and Christology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Senior, Donald and Carroll Stuhlmueller. *The Biblical Foundations for Mission.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983.

Trocmé, André. *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution.* Scottdale: Herald Press, 1973.

## Study Questions

1. The author presents an understanding of mission through the lenses of the Old Testament Jubilee. Is this a new understanding for you? Name three new insights you have gained from this chapter.

2. Salvation has been presented here as including a social or communal dimension. Do you agree? If not, why not? If so, in practical terms, how could your local church present the good news in ways that include the good news of Christ for both individuals and the community?

3. Who are the people in your society that are in bondage by social and structural evils, and who desperately need the release of this gospel of Jubilee?

# 3 Missionary Theology and the New Testament[1]

George W. Peters

The missionary theology of the New Testament (outside of the gospels) is not difficult to establish. We need only remind ourselves of the fact that the book of Acts is the authentic missionary record of the apostles and the early church and that all epistles were written to churches established through missionary endeavors. Were Christianity not a missionary religion and had the apostles not been missionaries, we would have no book of Acts and no epistles. With the exception of Matthew, even the gospels were written to missionary churches. The New Testament is a missionary book in address, content, spirit and design. This is a simple fact but it also is a fact of reality and profound significance. The New Testament is theology in motion more than it is theology in reason and concept. It is "missionary theology."

George W. Peters, 1907-1988 (Ph.D., Kennedy School of Missions), a Mennonite Brethren evangelist, educator and missiologist, was born in Ohrloff, Russia. With his widowed mother, he migrated to Canada (1926). Peters helped found the Western Children's Mission, the first organized missionary outreach by MBs to non-Mennonite people in Canada. He was instrumental in beginning mission work in Colombia (1945). He provided visionary and academic leadership to at least three MB theological schools, and served on the MB Mission board for over 25 years. He taught missions at Dallas Theological Seminary for nearly 20 years.

Again, in keeping with the practice of their Master, the apostles upheld great principles of faith and conduct, implanting great ideals of missions into the life of the churches. They trusted that the Holy Spirit in his own time would transform these ideals into dynamic motivation. This had been their own experience. In this manner world evangelism would become a living and dynamic ideal of the churches rather than a "command" in letters to be legally obeyed or submitted to. Thus while the apostles did not command missions, the great ideals in the epistles imply it most emphatically.

This emphasis becomes most pronounced in the writings of the apostle Paul, as might be expected. Is not God the God of all nations? Did not Christ die for all mankind? Is it not stated that God is not willing that any should perish? Are not Christians exhorted to pray for the salvation of all men? Is Paul not definite on his call to be a missionary to the nations? Does he not accept this as a special grace from the Lord? Is not the church to be gathered from among the nations? Is Paul not specific that the ignorant and unbelieving shall perish from the presence of God? Does Paul not uphold certain missionary churches as special examples to other churches? Is Paul not raising a series of startling questions in Romans 10:14:15? Is the apostle not training a large core of faithful workers to carry on the missionary work which he had begun? Such are some of the great New Testament missionary ideals. It is amazing how much of missionary ideology there is in the epistles.

On the other hand, we need to keep in mind that the New Testament presents a twofold movement: the vertical and the horizontal. The latter dominates the Acts of the Apostles, the former the epistles. Together they constitute a divine unit which brings balance to Christianity and to the churches. We must always keep them together.

We must also remember that every church found itself in a mission setting in a very peculiar sense. Every church was surrounded by multitudes without God, without hope. Here was their first challenge, as Paul tells the church at Philippi (Phil. 2:12-16). Similar words are spoken to the churches at Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica and Colosse.

Again, Paul commends the churches at Rome and Thessalonica for their efforts in evangelizing their communities and beyond their borders (Rom. 1:8; 1 Thes. 1:8). The apostle admonishes the church of Corinth to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58), that is, they are to excel, to go beyond their usual bounds, to spill over and do the unusual. The apostle also praises the Philippians for having an active part in his ministry (Phil. 4:10). It must be remembered that the Philippian church had a missionary out in the field (Phil. 2:25).

Finally, the writings of Paul present some of the greatest missionary texts and thoughts. We cannot read Romans 10:12-18 and not think missions. Second Corinthians 5:9-21 remains a standard missionary text, and no doubt these verses have inspired thousands to an active participation in missions. Ephesians 3:1-12 rings with a missionary challenge. This is true also of such passages as Romans 1:13-17; 1 Corinthians 9:16-18; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Timothy 2:1-7. Many others could be listed. Paul says much about missions and evangelism. Supremely an exponent and propagator of the gospel, he expected the early churches to be of like kind.

Missions is not peripheral in the New Testament. The apostles knew the value of missions in their own experiences. They actively enlisted newly founded churches in the missionary enterprise, soliciting their prayers, accepting their contributions, and drawing their co-laborers almost exclusively from them. In order to present missionary theology of the New Testament, we shall briefly survey the basic missionary concepts which underlie the missionary activities of the twelve. We shall also look at the missionary theology of Paul.

## The Twelve

The gospels report very few of the sayings of the apostles. Here they were observers, followers, learners, disciples. To know their mind and learn their theology we must hear them speak and read their writings. Our main sources, therefore, are the book of Acts and those epistles written by apostles.

In the book of Acts we see the apostles at work, first as missionaries to their own people and later as ambassadors of Christ to the nations of the world, though we do not have the accounts of the various members of the apostolate. Retrospectively Mark writes, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it" (Mark 16:20). The exact locations and geographical areas we are unable to establish with certainty. From the course of history of Christianity in apostolic times, we are justified to conclude that all of them were effective evangelists and missionaries. According to tradition, most of them laid down their lives as martyrs in the mission fields of the world. The rapid and far-flung spread of Christianity within a few decades is our best commentary on the zeal and labors of the apostles.

The great dividing line in the lives of the twelve is Pentecost, the watershed of evangelical missions. Here New Testament missions began a progressive course of realization. Therefore, the missionary significance of Pentecost is beyond human estimation. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles made all the

difference, for it fashioned them into men of God and apostles. Boldly they confessed that they were witnesses of God's redemptive event in Christ, emphasizing particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To the Jews at Jerusalem they witnessed supremely of the resurrection of Christ. Boldly they taught that in the resurrection God had vindicated all the claims of Christ, had consummated redemption, and had established Christ as Lord, Christ (Messiah), Saviour and Judge (Acts 2:32, 36; 3:15, 26; 4:10-11, 33; 5:31-32; 7:52, 56). Emphatically they declared that Christ alone is the Saviour of mankind and that there is no salvation in any other, "for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Courageously they told the high court about their inner compulsion to obey God rather than any court order. The inner glow of their experiences could not be contained; they had to speak the things they had seen and heard.

As we trace the missionary theology of the apostles, we come to the depth of their missionary motivation. Let us define several areas which relate to their missionary thrust.

## Apostolic Missionary Motivation

It is never easy to do justice in an analysis of motivations. They are not singular but become dynamic in constellations. Some are evident while others remain hidden and unrecognized. Some surface and become dominant at one occasion and others at another time. Thus even the best analysis is a penetration only in part.

We are assisted in our study of the apostles by some clear statements on their part as other men sought to probe their motivations. This puts us at least in the right path in our pursuit and should also enable us to understand and interpret the apostles correctly, even if not completely.

### The Apostles Were Gripped by God's Great and Sovereign Redemptive Act Rooted in His Eternal Counsel

This act which had taken place in Christ Jesus, the man of Nazareth, had been accomplished in history—in the here and now, in time and space. Taking place according to prophecy, it was completed for the benefit of all mankind. It must be appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ, and such faith is experientially related to repentance from sin.

*The apostles knew God had acted.* He had acted sovereignly, decisively and redemptively. Though not exonerating the Jews of their guilt in crucifying Christ, Peter unhesitatingly states that Christ was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23; 4:28). The rejection and crucifixion of Christ

were not only due to the sin of Israel, for somehow God had acted in them according to his gracious purpose and plan of salvation. Thus the sending of Christ and the resurrection of Christ are consistently ascribed to God; they are the acts of God.

In a similar vein, John writes, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). The God of eternal love has acted in a very concrete, decisive, appropriate and effective manner. Though evil hands had crucified the Lord of glory, this was not contrary to the eternal purpose of God. Nor was it independent of his plan, for, in the ultimate sense, God had acted. He gave his Son; he sent his Son. He manifested his love.

*The apostles were convinced that the decisive, redemptive act of God had taken place in Christ Jesus the man of Nazareth.* Although the act of God was sovereign, it was not without mediation. God's redemptive act was indissolubly linked with Christ. He is the servant Jesus, the holy One and the Just, the Prince of life, the Lord of glory (Acts 3:13.15; James 2:1). He is Lord, Messiah and Saviour. In the words of Paul, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). The apostles know of no salvation apart from Christ. "Whoever has the Son has life" (1 John 5:12). They were borne along by the deep conviction of the sole saviorhood of Christ crucified and raised. They knew him and they declared him boldly as both Saviour and Lord to the Jew as well as to the nations (Acts 2:36; 4:12; 10:36).

Very similarly, the saviorhood of Christ is lifted up in Acts 3:20; 4:12; 5:31. When asked by what power or by what name the miracle of healing the lame man had been wrought, Peter knows of only one name. Thus "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." And again: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10, 12). Emphatically Peter declared, "All the prophets testify about him [Christ, the historic person, slain and raised from the dead and ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the dead] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

No other witness in the New Testament is more emphatic on the sole saviorhood of Christ than is John. Christ is "the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Clearly John states: "No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). The apostle informs us that "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us"

(1 John 3:23). The harmony of the apostles in this fundamental truth is obvious throughout the New Testament, Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Lord. In him, God has acted once for all—conclusively, decisively and adequately for all mankind.

***The apostles were convinced that the act of God in procuring salvation was a historical event with consequent historical results.*** It was eternal and spiritual reality manifested in time and in space. It is not "faith belief" (illusion). It is not mythology or a dream of ecstatics. It is reality concrete and datable. It happened to a historical person—"Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22; cf. 10:38). It took place in a geographical setting and in a historical city, Jerusalem (Acts 2:14). It occurred under a specific Roman procurator in Palestine, Pilate (Acts 3:13). These are historical facts and cannot be denied. God acted in history, in the here and now.

Therefore Christianity offers a historical salvation, a salvation which is personal and social. It is real "here and now" in personal experience, offering forgiveness of sin and cleansing from sins and bestowing eternal life which is a present possession. It upholds a transforming power in the Holy Spirit, inviting man to share peace, joy, assurance, hope, godliness and fellowship with God through Christ Jesus as present and abiding experiences. It is available to all now upon repentance of sin and faith in Christ Jesus. This is the gospel, the good news of God in Christ Jesus. It must be proclaimed now because it operates in the great and gracious now of God. This is the day of salvation. The present-day reality of the salvation of God in Christ Jesus is the central theme of the book of Hebrews. At the same time it presents the supremacy and the finality of Christianity.

***The apostles were convinced that all that had happened was in perfect harmony with the prediction of Old Testament prophecy.*** Pentecost had transformed their vision. They saw the chain of events not as tragic failures and disappointments of history but as fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. Thrice Peter refers to Old Testament predictions in his great Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:16, 25, 34). He also reminds his hearers that "The promise is for you and your children," telling them that "this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer" (Acts 2:39; 3:18). Peter knows of the prophecy of Moses and expresses a most comprehensive view of fulfilled prophecy in Acts 3:24. The apostle knows Jesus as "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6; Isa. 28:16). No less convincing was the reasoning of Stephen in the synagogue (Acts 6:9) and the words of James at the

stormy Jerusalem council meeting when he freely quoted from the writings of Old Testament prophecy (Acts 15:15-18).

The full scope of the usage of the Old Testament by the early church is best illustrated by the gospel of Matthew, who himself was an apostle, the book of Hebrews, and the preaching of Paul in the synagogues as Luke records it in the second half of the book of Acts. The Old Testament was their Scripture. They found it fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

It was the settled conviction of the apostles that God had acted in perfect harmony with his predetermined counsel and his plan as unfolded in the writings of the Old Testament. This conviction gave steadiness to them in the midst of storm and stress, pressure and tensions, threats and persecution, suffering and martyrdom.

*The apostles were convinced that the redemptive act of God in Christ was for the benefit of all mankind.* Peter explicitly states on the day of Pentecost, after having exhorted the people to repent and be baptized, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). And as Peter reported his experience to some contentious brethren in Jerusalem (11:4), Luke informs us, "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life'" (11:18).

John joins in the universality of Peter and plainly declares that Christ "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). And again he says, "the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). Nationalistic particularism may have lived in the sentiments of the disciples, but it had no place in the inspired theology of the apostles.

Jude knows of the "common salvation." In his brief epistle he is most inclusive in his embrace of salvation and judgment in history. Certainly he is not a nationalistic particularist in his doctrine of salvation.

Thus the voices of the writers unite in the fact that God has acted decisively and graciously in Christ Jesus for the benefit of all mankind. The universality of salvation ideally held and proclaimed by Christ comes to practical and dynamic fruition in the apostles.

*The apostles were convinced that repentance and faith were the God-ordained way to enter into the salvation of God.* The salvation of God in Christ Jesus is available to all people, but it must he consciously and voluntarily appropriated by faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is essentially related to repentance from sin. It may

be noted that faith is the positive and repentance the negative aspect of that living and dynamic relationship which relates man savingly to Christ. Both aspects are emphasized by the apostles.

It is evident from the preaching of the apostles that they were not merely announcing the good news of God's salvation. They were prevailing upon men and women to repent of their sins and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The call to repentance rings out distinctly, loudly and repeatedly (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 11:18).

No less emphatic is the challenge to faith. Man must by faith receive what God has provided in Christ Jesus. Faith is all-important (Acts 2:44; 3:16; 4:4, 32; 6:5, 7-8; 8:12-13, 37; 9:42; 10:43; 11:17, 21, 24). Without faith it is impossible to please God and to experience his gracious provisions.

There is a clear line in apostolic teaching separating people into two distinct groups. On the one side are the believers who experience the salvation of God in Christ; they are the children of God. On the other side are the unbelievers and disobedient who do not possess the salvation of God. Thus apostolic preaching aims at persuasion as well as at dispensing information. The apostles sought to move men and women to repentance from sin and faith in Christ Jesus. The outlined cluster of theological convictions is reinforced by personal commitment in obedience to their Lord and the experience in their hearts.

### The Apostles were Impelled in their Missionary Endeavor by the Commitment in Obedience to their Lord

They were urged forward by the persuasion in their hearts that they must obey God and fulfill his blessed will regardless of difficulties and cost. Twice Peter set the will of God over against the authority and orders of the priestly court boldly telling the Jewish authorities that it behooved them to obey God rather than men. This was more than human audacity; this was divine persuasion. Logically the court may have agreed with Peter but was not the voice of the high priest the voice of God? Here is the fatality of the blindness and confusion of the natural man. The apostles had the spiritual discernment to distinguish human interpretation from divine inspiration and revelation.

Obedience is a key word to understand the operation of the apostles; it became prominent in their vocabulary. Emphatically Peter links obedience to the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). On several occasions the apostle uses the words *faith* and *obedience* interchangeably, thus indicating the experiential unity of these two basic Christian concepts (1 Pet. 1:2, 22; 2:71; 3:20; 4:17). Obedience is held up as a cardinal Christian virtue and a proof of belonging to God, keeping and doing the commandments of God (1 John 2:3-4; 2:29; 3:7, 24; 5:2-4). To the apostles,

obedience is not optional; it is occupational. It occupies all of their life and commits them in obedience and loyalty to their Lord and Master.

### The Apostles Were Motivated by the Experience of the Living Christ

The apostles were irresistibly inspired by the glow of their personal experience of the living Christ indwelling their lives through the Holy Spirit. The reality of Christ in human experience became their blessed portion; it was their sustaining and impelling power. They knew Christ had been raised from the dead. And even though they had seen Him ascend on high and disappear in the clouds, they were conscious of His presence in their lives. He was not a distant Christ to them. With Paul they could confess, "Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Christian experience was meaningful and dynamic to them.

Joyfully Peter exclaims, "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Repeatedly the apostles refer to the resurrection of Christ Jesus. He was an ever present reality to them (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:10, 33; 5:29-32). The experience of the risen Lord was indelible, transforming, overwhelming, constantly refreshing, abidingly inspiring, gloriously triumphing. Confidently John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life … We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

The language of the apostles betrays the fact that they were unable to get away from the glory of the resurrected One. His glory was reflected in their experiences, which may be seen in their repeated usage of the word glory. It constitutes a prominent part in their vocabulary. Stephen speaks of "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). James knows "our glorious Lord" (James 2:1). Peter refers to "the spirit of glory" (1 Pet. 4:14). We are informed that the Christians are called to glory (2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Pet. 5:10), are to receive a crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4), are partakers "in the glory to be revealed" (1 Pet. 5:1), are filled with "an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Pet. 1:8). In his dying moments Stephen saw the glory of God (Acts 7:55). There was glory in the experience of the apostles. Here were glory, glow, and go.

### The Apostles Lived and Labored in the Consciousness of Being Possessed by the Holy Spirit

The experiences of the living and glorious Lord were mediated through the Holy Spirit. Thus there is a strong and consistent emphasis upon the Holy Spirit in apostolic teaching and experiences.

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic in their ministry, and to be filled by the Spirit is essential for effective and acceptable service (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5, 10; 7:55; 8:29, 39; 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Holy Spirit is also the adequate source of power and comfort in suffering and martyrdom.

The apostles knew experientially the significance of the Holy Spirit. Without him their lives would have remained less than Christian, less than normal, for he mediated life, dynamic, meaning, direction and glory. It was because of his presence in their lives that the glory of the risen Lord radiated forth from the apostles and impelled them in their missionary endeavor.

## Apostolic Missionary Vision

### Fullest Missionary Presentation

The fullest missionary presentation is made by John in the book of Revelation where most dramatically God is presented as the God of the cosmos — the God of all the earth and of all the nations, no realm excluded. His majestic, radiant throne is high and lifted up above all, and from it the lines of rulership go out in every direction. God is in continuous governmental relationship with the world as progressively as well as catastrophically his rulership is extended over the whole earth. All people must stand before him in judgment. No other god is acknowledged or shares in his power and authority. He alone is the God of the universe, the God of the nations, the God in whom salvation and refuge are found, the God who is the sole, sovereign and righteous judge of mankind. His authority and power must and will prevail, and his standard of right and wrong will be acknowledged by all. Finally, he alone will be worshiped by redeemed mankind upon a new earth and in a new heaven. His victory is complete and his worship unrivaled. All other gods have been cast out, all rebellion has been overcome, and all power has submitted to him. God is all and in all.

Similarly John sees the Lamb of God in the book of Revelation. He portrays the Lamb not as bearing the sin of the world but as having triumphed over sin, hell, Satan and the grave. He does not behold the Lamb as operating among the Jews and in Palestine; instead, the Lamb is walking among the churches in Asia and in pagan cities. Jerusalem and Mount Zion are not in sight in the beginning of the book.

In his second major vision, John sees the Lamb at the right hand of God in glory preparing for world operations in judgment and gospel expansion. Certainly there is nothing limiting or particularistic about the visions of the Lamb in His relationships.

In the closing scenes John sees the Lamb triumphing over all systems of the world, the religious included. As the new heavens and the new earth appear, the

Lamb shares in the glory and worship of the Father while the nations enjoy the blessings that flow from the abounding throne of the Lamb. Such is the missionary vision of John, and we may well assume that John speaks representatively. The twelve are in accord with him. God is redemptively related to the world through Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is operating in the name of the Father and the Son to make the good news of God's redemptive love and act in Christ known to the world by means of gospel communication. This he does by mobilizing and energizing the church as God's chosen instrument.

### Conclusion

These blessed realities, facts and truths in the consciousness of the twelve became the source of the missionary motivations and thrust of the apostles as well as the cornerstone of their missionary theology. Little is said of the example of Christ, although he went about doing good, healing all who were oppressed of the devil. No direct reference is made to his Great Commission, although we must not conclude that it played no role in the early church. The fact that in some form it is found in every gospel is sufficient evidence that it was part of the living tradition and teaching of the early church.

The missionary theology of the apostles, however, was rooted more deeply than in a command. It was anchored in the foundation which made the command of world evangelism an evangelical and spiritual imperative, an outflow of life rather than an imposition. Thus, they became missionaries not as slaves but as bondslaves. Missions became their life, their all-absorbing interest, their all-consuming passion to which their lives were joyfully dedicated.

## The Apostle Paul

Of all the apostles, Paul stands out as the central figure in the interpretation and propagation of Christianity. We can hardly imagine Christianity without him, but he is not a cofounder, an innovator or a rival to Christ. Christ remains the fountain, foundation, cornerstone and content of Christianity.

Paul is the fullest exponent, the foremost theological representative, the greatest evangelical apologist, and the most ardent advocate of Christianity. Therefore, we present his thought on universality and, where needed, correlate the teaching of the other apostles to that of Paul.

We need not project an elaborate apologetic for the universality of Paul in God's provision of salvation for all mankind (*ideal* universality) in God's purpose to have his gospel universally proclaimed (*practical* universality). Both are too obvious in the life

and teaching of Paul. He is the concrete incarnation of ideal and practical universality. In vain students search the New Testament for *realized* universality within the scope of history or post-history. There is no indication in the New Testament that all people will be saved. Clearly and emphatically the New Testament teaches that this is not the case and that people will actually be lost eternally from the presence of the Lord.

### The Ideal Universality of Paul

Paul has indelibly impressed many truths upon the world, foremost among which is the fact that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" \(2 Corinthians 5:19). In other words, God has provided in Christ a salvation adequate to save man from his total and eternal lostness unto a glory unspeakable and indescribable. Paul stressed that God has provided a Saviour and salvation sufficient for all mankind. Again, Paul emphasized that God fervently desires that this gospel be made known to all men everywhere for the purpose that man might believe and subjectively possess what God has wrought objectively in Christ. The details of this glorious message we can only follow later in outline.

I am well acquainted with the so-called theory of limited atonement as implied in the teachings of Calvin and explicitly advanced by some schools of theology. I simply find no biblical basis for the theory of limited atonement. Paul's comprehensive statement is sufficient proof against it: "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people" (Rom. 5:18). And again, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time" (1 Tim. 2:3-6). John heartily endorses this position when he writes, "He [Jesus Christ the righteous] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins [the sins of the believers], and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). These were dynamic truths that lived in the mind of Paul. Like a mighty, onrushing torrent, they bore him on in his ambitious purpose to preach the gospel where Christ had not been named. There were no national or cultural bounds in the missionary thinking of Paul because he found no such bounds in the purpose of God and in the sufficiency of Calvary.

In a logical and convincing manner Paul presents a series of great missionary thoughts in his most doctrinal epistle, the epistle to the Romans. Perfectly fusing theology and missions, his logic is as follows:

1. The whole universe is the creation of God. It is manifesting God, is under his sovereign rule, and is therefore responsible to Him (Rom. 1:18 ff.).

2. The whole human race is an organismic unit created in Adam. The organic unity of the entire human race is never questioned in the Bible. Paul firmly holds to it (Rom. 5:12-21).

3. The whole human race fell in Adam and became sinful because of this (Rom. 5:12-21).

4. The whole human race followed a course of sin and therefore became guilty before God (Rom. 1:18.21).

5. The whole human race was represented in Christ, and in him salvation was provided for all mankind not only by substitution but by identification and representation (Rom. 5:12-21).

6. God has provided only one way of salvation—the way of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. This holds true for the Jew as well as for the Gentile (Rom. 3:21— 5:21).

7. God's way of salvation is not discovered by man. It comes to him by revelation, and it must be preached to him from the revealed Word of God. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Rom. 10:8-17; cf. 16:25-26).

8. Paul knew himself called of God and separated unto the gospel of God to bring men and nations to obedience of faith. This was his apostleship; for this he labored, always pressing onward. For this he suffered, and in this he gloried (Rom. 1:1, 5, 14; 11:13, 25; 15:15-16, 18-23; 16:25-27).

There are no arguments anywhere by any of the apostles in the New Testament to conflict with the thinking of Paul.

### Implications of Paul's Ideal Universality

The implications of Paul's universality are far-reaching. They caused most serious disturbances even within the early church and brought to Paul much misunderstanding, difficult theological struggles, and bitter persecutions. However, Paul survived them all, as did his great and eternal ideals, the ideals of God's gracious purpose in Christ Jesus.

In this ideal universality Paul sees all mankind assuming equal position before God as sinners, whether they be Jew or Gentile (Rom. 1:18-3:20; Eph. 2:1-3); being

under equal condemnation and in need of salvation from the present and eternal wrath of God (Rom. 1:18-3:20); experiencing justification on equal terms, by faith in Christ as God's provision and propitiation (Rom. 3:21-5:21); receiving equal status in the church of Jesus Christ as members of the body of Christ (Eph. 2:11-3:12); enjoying equal relationship with God as Father in the household of God (Eph. 2:19; Rom. 8:15; Gal 3:26); sharing equal privileges and riches as heirs of God and joint-heirs of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:6; Rom. 8:17).

The latter thoughts are most fully developed in the epistle to the Ephesians, a writing which is filled with the universality of the Christian gospel and equality of all believers.

The epistle allows for no Jew-Gentile division. A new dividing line is being emphasized. Paul divides all mankind into two classes: those "in Christ" and those "not in Christ." This becomes his wall of partition. Those in Christ constitute the body of Christ (1:23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30). They are the household and the family of God (2:19; 3:15); they are the temple and the habitation of God (2:21-22); they are the new man (2:15); they are fellow citizens and fellow heirs (2:19; 3:6). Together they share one Father (1:3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23); they are children of God (5:1). The concepts of unity and equality of all who are in Christ permeate the whole epistle. There is no privileged people in our dispensation as there was in the Old Testament, for all who are in Christ share equal experiences, relationships, rights, privileges and responsibilities (2:4.10, 13-22). At the same time Paul emphasizes that the privilege to be in Christ is extended on equal terms to all nations (3:6, 8-9), and all of this is according to the eternal purpose of God as he purposed it in Christ Jesus (3:11).

It was Paul's identification with God in his eternal purpose in behalf of the human race, his identification with Christ who had come to redeem the race, his identification with the Holy Spirit who operated on behalf of the salvation of the race, and his identification with the kingdom of God which is to embrace the total race that enabled him to rise above nationalistic particularism and Judaism and become the gospel champion in the interest of the race. Thus he became the world missionary, and his ideal universality, triumphed in practical universality.

His course as the world missionary took him on his several missionary journeys over land and sea, from city to city, and from one people to another people. Neither perils nor sufferings could halt him. Triumphantly he could write after some twenty-five years of hard labors and at the close of a very fruitful life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on

that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). With this, his labors and his life were concluded.

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

## Study Questions

1. Compare the apostolic motivations presented by the author with missionary motivations that you hear about or experience in our day. What are the similarities and differences?

2. The exclusivity of Christ as the way to God is under debate today, even in evangelical circles. What insights does this chapter offer?

3. The author emphasizes the theme of the universality of the gospel. Explain the difference between universality and universalism. How does Christianity differ from other religions in regard to its universality?

# 4 Biblical Theologies of Mission: An Overview

Johannes Reimer

## Definitions and Perspectives Matter

Christian mission claims to follow God's plan and as such will rely on what God reveals in Scripture, the ultimate source of all transformative energy in life (1Tim. 3:16). Consequently, a responsible Christian theology of mission will build on Scripture. Christian mission is biblically founded and motivated, or else it is not Christian. The nature, foundations, goals, motives, and praxis of mission in the church of Jesus Christ is defined in God's Word. Responsible missiology will search in the Bible to define the nature of its subject.

It is easy to see how difficult such an enterprise may be. Even a superficial overview of publications on biblical theology reveals how rare the explanations on mission are. For most Old Testament scholars, mission is no subject of the Old Testament at all.[1] Even New Testament scholars debate the validity of Scripture for a theology

Johannes Reimer (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Th.D., Missiology, University of South Africa) grew up in Soviet Estonia, moving to Germany with his family in 1976. He was ordained by an MB church as a pastor in 1985 and in 1986 founded the mission organization LOGOS International. He is currently professor of Missiology at UNISA (South Africa) and *Theologischen Hochschule Ewersbach* (Germany). Johannes has served as an evangelist in many countries, and has a heart for church planting and reformation. He has written numerous books and articles on mission.

of mission.[2] Is their skepticism justified? Or is their inability to read the Bible as a missionary document possibly motivated by a predetermined definition of mission? The latter seems to be the case. Others read the Bible as a "grand narrative" on God's mission.[3] Mission in the Bible is a matter of debate and controversy in academic theological circles. The reaction of practitioners of mission to the sceptical academia is a growing stream of publications on biblical theology of mission adding to the uncertainty what mission in the Bible is. To understand the growing variety of the so-called "biblical theologies of mission" we need to carefully inspect the motives and perspectives of their authors.

It is a simple truth that we find in Scripture only what we search for. The working definition of what mission *ought to be* is crucial. No other term has become so watered down as *mission*. Until the fifties the term was solely used by Christians,[4] describing the active promotion of faith in God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and his salvific work.[5] The German historian of mission Gerhard Rosenkranz still claimed in 1960 an exclusively Christian and theological use of the term.[6] Today mission is not only used for all religious promotion, it is a preferred term to describe the character and nature of any institution in society. It is therefore crucial to our understanding that we examine the Bible for its usage of the term mission. A simple etymological or historical insight into the Latin term *missio* or Greek *apostello*, meaning *sending*, the two terms behind the basic idea of Christian mission, will not be enough. What is needed is a broad search for God's initial idea, aim and motives in creating the world around us, and his work for the salvation and transformation of it. Only understanding God in his mission, the church will avoid shortcuts in her own understanding and praxis of mission. In God himself we may see the nature of all sending[7] and avoid the traps of wrong motives for mission which are determining the current crisis of mission.[8] Since Hans Dürr asked in 1951 the question of "pure motives for mission,"[9] missiology has been preoccupied with basic questions of what finally biblical mission might mean.[10]

Without a doubt, to solve the problem we will again and again have to consult God's revelation in Scripture. And we will be well advised to read the whole of Scripture in order to avoid selective readings which automatically result in narrowing the original meaning of mission.[11]

God reveals his will to humans in the Old and New Testaments. A responsible search for God's heart for mission must therefore approach the whole Scripture as the Roman Catholic Lucien Legrand rightly claims.[12] Founding mission on the New Testament only is not enough. Still, a number of biblical theologies focus solely on

the New Testament. Horst Rzepkowski even claims that "the difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission".[13] A view shared by many and which is obviously motivated by a predesigned understanding of mission as the centrifugal sending action of crossing frontiers. The Old Testament knows little to nothing about mission as sending in crossing frontiers to nations far from knowing God.[14] But does the absence of a sending practice justify neglect of the Old Testament in matters of mission? And is such a definition of mission sufficient to cover biblical views and concepts on mission at all? Would an inclusive definition of mission describing God's work in the world, as Vatican II suggested,[15] change our perspective? I believe so. It is in the Old Testament where we find all founding information of who God is, how he reveals himself in human history and what his own sending is.[16] He defines the destiny of his own people in the midst and in the interest of the nations.[17] The authors of the New Testament derive their missionary theology from their Bible and this was the Old Testament. It seems right, therefore, to consult the Old as well as the New Testament for a proper biblical understanding of what mission is. The reduction of one part will automatically result in a narrow understanding of mission. Biblical theology of mission requires a view on mission from the perspective of the whole Bible from from "Genesis ... to Revelation" as Philipp Steyne rightly claims.[18]

This is in no way a simple enterprise. We can't enter the Bible as a "storehouse of truth"[19] where you just pick and choose the obvious. The biblical texts have been written by different people in different times and reflect their current historic and political contexts. Biblical truth must be understood before it is transferred to the modern listener.

## Reading the Bible Responsibly

A biblical theology of mission consults the Bible for what mission is. As simple as this sounds, it becomes complicated in praxis. How do you search for mission in the Bible without knowing what mission is? And is the Bible promoting one specific understanding of mission, or must we ask deeper questions and search for different concepts of mission? Which of the many that are possible? You can see that a responsible reading of the Bible requires a responsible hermeneutic, an approach beyond predefined ideas of what mission is, or might be, carefully distinguishing between "missionary indicatives and imperatives" in the Bible.[20] Walking with the Bible and applying what Wright calls a hermeneutical map[21] is an exciting journey, but it may also require clear hermeneutical instruments.[22]

In the recent years scholars of missiology have been proposing different approaches for such a responsible reading of Scripture.[23] Let's examine some of them.

## Confessional Approaches

Traditionally the biblical foundation of mission followed a confessional pattern. What misson was and how mission had to be practised was dogmatically predetermined by a confessional text, developed in a historic context. David J. Bosch examines the historical mission paradigms of the Western church in his opus magnum *Transforming Mission*[24] and concludes that mission understanding of churches in certain times followed an interactive dialogue between the church and her current beliefs, and the context within which the Bible is interpreted. Bosch even names certain biblical narratives as central for the particular epochs of mission history. In Bosch's view John 3:16 is the central text for the Patristic time and the Orthodox mission paradigm, Luke 14:23 for the medieval Roman-Catholic,[25] Romans 1:16 for the mission paradigm of the Protestant reformation[26] and 2 Corinthians 5:14 for time of the European Renaissance.[27]

It becomes obvious that the search for biblical truth in such confessional readings of the Bible is widely defined by the contextual challenges in time and space. For example, the situation of Christians in the hostile environment of the Roman Empire is different from the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages with its dominance in all matters of life. And the battle for the right faith of the reformers created a different agenda of mission than in times of the European colonial expansion. It is the context which sets the agenda and the church in its confessional understanding reacts to the context defining what mission is or might be. Biblical justification is sought for an understanding which is already in operation. It is not difficult to see how such biblical theology becomes biblicistic. Instead of asking what the Bible says, those promoters of Christian mission asked for biblical proof for their own preset theories. Proof-texting is potentially dangerous as Wright rightly argues.[28] It narrows our concepts of mission down to a certain definition and action, excluding potentially important issues from our reflection.[29]

## Missio-Historical Approaches

The Bible is a historic text. And as such it carries stories of God's works in history. It seems right, therefore, to examine the Bible as a historic text searching for the phenomenon of mission in different phases of history, establishing salvation-historical patterns of God's mission in the world, or in other words attaching salvation related

meaning to certain periods of God's history with the humanity. A number of scholars follow such an approach.[30] This approach offers enormous prospects, but at the same time creates a number of problems. Two such problems must be mentioned.

First, there is the question of a working definition of what mission is. You will only find in historic texts what you search for. All authors following the missio-historic pattern, will have to predefine mission. The monograph of Eckhard Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Early Christian Mission) is a case in point.[31] Schnabel defines mission as sending, returning to the Latin term *missio*.[33] In his view mission is "intentional action."[34] Schnabel follows herein DuBose[35] and many others. But why this definition? How is it justified? Is the author asking the right questions? Schnabel and with him all other authors following historic patterns of mission base their initial terms in the Gospels, Jesus and his disciples, and then go back to Scripture to search for a development of the "gospel idea of mission" in time and space. Such a salvation-historical approach is typical for this group of scholars. All of them would subscribe to a kind of salvation-historical theology. And all view salvation as the central term of God's mission in the Bible. Already in the late nineteenth century Gustav Warneck, the father of Protestant missiology, followed such a pattern.[36] The authors may vary in accentuating one or another aspect of mission, but in principle they all see a progressive development of mission as sending from particularity to universality, from the one nation of Israel to all nations of the world.[37] They may distinguish between the missionary message of salvation, aim and action as Harold R. Cook suggested,[38] discovering the message of mission in the whole Bible and the action predominantly in the New Testament; nevertheless it is the totality of Scripture which carries the basic notion of God's salvation to the nations.

But what is salvation? Is the theme consistently developed in the Old as well as the New Testament? Correlating salvation and mission by referring to Jesus and his concept of the gospel of the kingdom in a restored relationship between God and humanity is a helpful point of departure, but does it cover all aspects of what life under God's rule may contain?

Lesslie Newbigin suggested viewing mission in correlation between dimension and intention,[39] broadening the biblical idea of mission. According to his view missionary dimension covers all revelation of God in the universe, while missionary intention refers to God's specific salvific acts. David J. Bosch, who follows a similar approach, finds it enormously difficult to define mission in the Bible at all, exchanging *mission is* with a vague *mission as*.[40] And Christopher Wright examines *indicatives and imperatives* of mission, searching to understand God with a mission, humanity with a mission and lastly the church with a mission.[41]

It becomes obvious that the issue of definition is crucial in a missio-historical approach and will decide what Bible readers discover in their search or rather leave unseen behind.

Reading the Bible historically forces the reader to ask for the exact historic context in which the given text has been first formulated, deriving its meaning from the original setting. This proves to be problematic in many ways as decades of an intensive historic-critical analysis of biblical texts has shown. In the end we may question more and answer nothing. In most instances this has been the method to dismiss mission language from major parts of the Old and New Testament, because the so-called historic-critically "recovered original text" supposedly did not carry any language of mission. If only these biblical scholars would agree what finally the recovered text contains. This is due to the many open questions of historical research, still all preliminary. And as a result their *findings* in terms of mission in the Bible must be qualified as hypothethical.

Secondly, reading the Bible as a historical text is problematic because the Bible is not only history. Major parts of the Bible are liturgical, poetic, and wisdom literature. It is not sufficient to read those texts historically only. Theology builds on revelation and claims meta-meaning. Eckhard Schnabel, for instance, sees the problem and searches in the texts for both history and theology.[42] Wright even urges to go beyond a biblical foundation of mission, which searches for an apology of mission by searching for textual evidence in time and space.[43]

It is obvious that the missio-historical reading of the Bible leads to a set of possible problems. As helpful as such a reading is, it may not open for the reader the grand missionary narrative of the entire Bible. In fact, parts of the Bible will not disclose their magnitudes to the reader by reading them historically only.

## Canonical Approaches

The historical reading of the Bible in examining mission is not sufficient, because it may mislead the reader to overlook the canonical structure and unity of the whole of Scripture. Major parts of the biblical texts are theological in nature and must be read accordingly. The message of the text is more central than the historic images or language.

Therefore, a number of scholars suggest consulting the Old as well as the New Testament canonically, by taking into consideration the intention of particular texts within the whole of the given canon. Eckhard Schnabel, for instance, searches for mission in the Torah, the historical books, the psalms and the prophets by underlining certain aspects of God's salvific nature (Torah), aim (historic books), promise (psalms) and communication of salvation (prophets) as the foundational background of the

mission of the early church.[44] Paul A. Beals divides the Old Testament canon into law, history, poetry and prophets and examines its messianic language establishing the promise of the Messiah for the nations in the Old Testament.[45] And Roger Hedlund examines lines of thought in particular parts of the canon to establish his "call to service" as a central theme of a biblical theology of mission.[46] Siegbert Riecker uses the same approach to establish the correlation between the notion of blessing and mission in the Old Testament as central.[47]

The canonical reading, it seems, allows one to look for a greater perspective, without the need to search for a given idea of mission. It potentially expands the meaning of what mission in the Old and New Testaments contains and allows one not only to ask the question of what mission in the Bible means, but, as the Dutch missiologist A.B. Jongeneel ingeniously suggested, to ask how the Bible was used in mission.[48] On the other hand, such a perspective may overlook important aspects of the texts, by artificially forcing the text into one great theme. The authors discussed above clearly show this potential danger. Schnabel's attempt to combine an historic and canonical reading may offer a solution for this problem.

### Systematic-Theological Approaches

Some scholars examine the Bible along doctrinal themes such as salvation, reconciliation, sending, blessing, etc. Legrand for instance, develops his biblical theology of mission along the notion of liberation.[49] His attempt is valid and reveals a great deal on liberation-centered theology in the Bible. But as Legrand himself states, a liberation-centered theology of mission does not totally cover the scope of mission in the Bible.[50] Stuhlmueller in contrast searches the Bible for an understanding of universal salvation as the central term of God's mission in the world.[51] Peters follows with salvation in christological perspective[52] and Kane as well as Steyne follow patterns of the communication of salvation in Scripture.[53] Alfred Neufeld examines the knowing of God as a central theme of mission in Scripture.[54] Walter C. Kaiser follows the promises of God in the Old and their fulfilment in the New Testament as mission,[55] and Waldron Scott proves the validity of justice as a central notion of mission.[56] Steven Bevans and Roger Schroeder even develop a systematic theology putting mission at the heart of their considerations.[57]

These are just a few variations of systematic-theological search. And all of them are to a certain extent important and valid, but while they underline aspects, they miss the construction of a *biblical* theology of mission.

Concentrating on one aspect of God's mission in the world is accompanied by another systematic-theological trap. The authors come from certain theological

traditions and easily follow the pattern of their own theological convictions. Peters, Kane and Steyne, for instance, do not reveal their dispensationalist frame of thinking, but this is obvious in what they *discover* or how they order the biblical texts. Peters as well as Steyne follow a christological, salvation-historic approach, failing, however, to reveal the theology behind it. Others base their findings in Lutheran,[58] Reformed,[59] or Anabaptist theologies.[60]

The systematic-theological approach helps, however, to develop a more differentiated view on what a biblical idea of mission may be. It enlarges our vision, stresses new aspects and helps to open windows into God's revelation on what mission is.

## Religio-Phenomenological Approaches

Mission implies the development and expansion of religion. Some researches read the Bible with an interest in the growth of religion following the old school of religious phenomenology. One of the newest publications is the work of Reinhard Achenbach, looking for the interreligious dialogue as a formative power in mission as described in the Bible.[61] The interreligious dialogue is in fact a major issue in mission theology today. The development of common ground theologies, for instance, requires a biblical foundation. A close look at those issues in the Bible is desired.

A religio-phenomonelogical perspective in itself will, of course, not yet establish a biblical base for mission. It should be what Achenbach rightly calls it—a biblical perspective.

## Contextual Approaches

Since the sixties, theologians in the majority world have massively questioned the Western perspective on theology and subsequently mission. As a result contextual theology was born, a theology from praxis and for praxis; that is, doing theology following a new epistomology in which praxis analysis was put before theological reflection. Here theology was done in context, analyzing the real life questions and challenges of the people and then consequently searching for answers and solutions in the Bible and tradition. Theological reflection following context analysis, which is done inductively, avoids the traps of an academic theology which derives its conclusions from academic reasoning only and often misses day-to-day relevance. It also helps avoid denominational and worldview-driven readings of Scripture.

Contextual theology was celebrated as an open door for rereading Scripture from a life perspective of the poor and needy.[62] Reading the Bible in a context and in a community of those in need of help and assistance may indeed free the church to

see the revelation from a different perspective. As an outcome, a number of biblical theologies of mission developed. Legrand's work is an example. He reads his Bible in search for a theology of liberation, because he works in a context of oppression.[63] Similarly, Gustavo Gutiérrez,[64] Leonardo Boff[65] and other contextual theologians from different countries of the world wrote their theologies of liberation out of the pressing needs of the poor in Latin America or their own contexts. African, Black, Feminine and other theologies developed through the years using a similar approach.

The primacy of praxis in contextual theology guarantees relevancy, but it also puts the question of an incomplete theology on the table. The danger of partiality and incompleteness of theology, even syncretism, has been widely discussed. A point in case is the so called *local theology* as proposed by Robert J. Schreiter in his book *Constructing Local Theologies*.[66] The danger of syncretism is at hand as the author himself acknowledges[67] and evangelical voices have clearly pointed towards it.[68]

## Towards a Comprehensive Biblical Theology of Mission

### Mission Is Biblically-Based

No doubt Christian mission is biblically-based.  All Christians base their views of mission on the Bible. But their understandings differ considerably. This short overview of possible perspectives on mission in the Bible, leads to the conclusion that perspectives and approaches matter and will decisively influence our findings when reading the Bible. What mission is and how mission needs to be done is revealed in God's Word. We have no other source. But simply reading the Bible seems not enough. A differentiated, comprehensive approach is needed. And for such we will have to take the biblical text, the reader, and their contexts seriously.

### Reading the Bible Inductively

How do you read the Bible responsibly? How do we search for mission in Scripture without reading our own ideas into the text? Köstenberger and O´Brien avoid the traps of the approaches discussed above by applying an inductive biblical search.[69] Instead of approaching the biblical text with a predetermined mission idea, they systematically read the texts of the Bible and search for God's aim and interest in each of those texts. Only after all individual textual perspectives have been named do they attempt a joint overall biblical perspective on what God's mission in Scripture might be. The authors start their journey in Genesis and follow the Scripture in its canonical appearance. They examine, for instance, every book of the Torah, summarizing for each of the books the basic themes of God's revelation to the world and his action in the world. The simple questions are: Who is God? What does God do? What

is he aiming for? How does he achieve his goal? What role is assigned to humans? At the end of the day the reader will discover God and his mission, humanity and her mission, Israel and her mission, Jesus and his mission, and the church and her mission.[70]

It is obvious such an inductive reading is complex. Yet in my view it is the only way to allow Scripture - from within its own context, genre and authority - to reveal its own specific perspective on mission and lay open the indicatives and imperatives of God's great narrative on mission.

Starting with God's creation and his self-revelation in time and space will help to avoid a mission understanding which rests on Christ only, expanding it to a trinitarian format and placing it at the very heart and nature of the triune God.[71] In such a construct the mission of God the Father (*missio patri*) will describe God's divine plan for the world and humanity (Eph. 1:3), the mission of the Son (*missio Christi*), God's divine method of salvation and reconciliation of the world with himself (2 Cor. 5:18-21) and the mission of the Spirit (*missio spiritus*)—the praxis of God's mission in the world (2 Cor. 3:1-17). Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interconnected in a reciprocal intimacy. You can't think of one without the other. And similarly you can't envision the plan, method and praxis of mission separate from the base they have been connected to.[72] In such a conception, both the Old and the New Testaments build a crucial foundation for mission. In the Old Testament God's creation and his holy nation Israel, called to be a model and a blessing for the nations of the world, are displayed. In the New Testament, God's salvific act in Christ and the mission to the nations of the world as an act of the Holy Spirit through the church of Christ are described. The Old Testament reveals the dimension of mission, the New the intentional action!

## Reading the Bible In Community

An inductive search for God´s idea of mission must be done in community. Not only do we humans intentionaly ask preset questions, not only do our approaches and perspectives distort our vision—we are by our very nature confined in space and time and, therefore, contextually fixed. We will never see the whole truth of God's revelation by ourselves. We need our brothers and sisters to understand the whole of God's missionary plan. We need the church as a discerning community; we must consult other perspectives beyond our own mission history in order to understand God's heart properly.

Reading the Bible in community requires a hermeneutic of humility, bold humility. We will surely avoid shortcuts of denominational readings and, therefore,

overcome narrow mission understandings. We will be able to listen to our forefathers in every branch of the church, in every time and context. And we will be open to accept God's missionary heart seaching for obedient followers in his kingdom worldwide.

## Notes

[1] An excellent overview of works on mission in the Old Testament is given by Siegbert Riecker, *Mission im Alten Testament? Ein Forschungsbericht mit Auswertung* (Frankfurt: Lembeck 2008).

[2] See discussion in Eckhard Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus 2002); in English: *Early Christian Mission*. Vol. 1. (Downers Grove: IVP 2004).

[3] For example the British Old Testament scholar Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God. Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP 2006).

[4] Hans-Ulrich Reiffler, *Handbuch für Missiologie: Missionarisches Handeln aus biblischer, historischer und sozialwissenschaftl. Perspektive* (Nürnberg: VTR, 2005), 77.

[5] Gerhard Rosenkranz in Reiffler, *Handbuch,* 77-78.

[6] Ibid. Peter Beyerhaus warned as early as 1969 not to use the term uncritically because of the danger of a rapid loss of meaning, especially in ecumenical conciliar movements.

[7] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (*Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 1-2; Reiffler, *Handbuch*, 78.

[8] Hans-Werner Gensichen. *Glaube für die Welt: Theologische Aspekte der Mission (*Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 27-29. Repeated by David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 4-6.

[9] Hans Dürr, "Die Reinigung der Missionsmotive" in *Evangelisches Missions Magazin* (1951), 2-10.

[10] See Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 168-175; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 5ff.

[11] Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: The Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 5-7, rightly warns against applying preset mission ideas to biblical studies on mission.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Horst Rzepkowski, "The Theology of Mission," in *Verbum SVD* 15 (1974): 80.

[14] See David J. Bosch, *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu. Eine Untersuchung zur Eschatologie der synoptischen Evangelien.* (Zürich: Zqingli Verlag, 1959), 19;

F. Hahn, *Das Verständnis der Mission* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neurchner Verlag, 1965), 20; Gensichen, *Glaube,* 57, 61; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17.

[15] *Ad Gentes,* Chapter II, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_council_ii_vatican_ council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

[16] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17, underlines the fundamental role of the OT for the Christian faith and mission.

[17] Ibid: 17ff.

[18] Philipp M. Steyne, *Schritt halten mit dem Gott der Völker* (Bonn: VKW, 1998), 27.

[19] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 9.

[20] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 58.

[21] Wright, *Mission of God*, 68-69.

[22] See in this regard: David J. Bosch, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Biblical Foundation of Mission" in: *Ecumenical Review of Theology* 17 (1993), 437-451.

[23] See an excellent overview in: Siegbert Riecker, *Mission im Alten Testament?,* 117-127.

[24] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 1991.

[25] David J. Bosch, *Mission im Wandel: Pradigmenwechsel in der missionstheologie,* (Giessen: Brunnen, 2013), 278.

[26] Ibid., 282.

[27] Ibid: 337.

[28] Wright, *Mission of God*, 36.

[29] David J. Bosch "God's Reign and the Rulers of this World: Missiological Reflections on Church-State Relationships" in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium,* eds. Charles Van Engen, Dean Gilliland, and Paul Piersonn (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 439-440.

[30] See works on mission by: John R.W. Stott, John Osewalt, Roger Hedlund, Charles Scobie, Alfred Neufeld, Paul Biels, Walter Kaiser and David Bernett.

[31] Eckhard Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2002).

[32] Ibid: 11.

[33] Ibid: 10-11.

[34] Ibid: 10.

[35] Francis DuBose, *God who sends* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983).

[36] Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein missionstheoretischer Versuch*, 5. Bde. 2. Auflage (Gotha: Perthes, 1897).

[37] See for instance: Hans Kasdorf, "Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament," in *Fundamentum* 4 (1980), 54-62; 1 (1981), 48-55; 2 (1981), 50-57.

[38] Harold R. Cook, *An Introduction to the Study of Christian Mission* (Chicago: Moody, 1954), 51-64. See also George W. Peters, *Missionarisches Handeln und biblischer Auftrag: Eine Theologie der Mission,* 3. Auflage (Bad Liebenzell: VLM, 1977); Richard De Ridder, "The Old Testament Roots of Mission," in *Exploring Church Growth,* ed. by Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 171-80; Arthur Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The story of God´s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Wright, *Mission of God,* 2006.

[39] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 121.

[40] Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 8-11.

[41] Wright, *Mission of God*, 62-68.

[42] Schnabel*, Urchristliche Mission,* 20.

[43] Wright*, Mission of God,* 34-37.

[44] Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission,* 52-97.

[45] Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name. A Church-based Mission Strategy* (Pasadena: WCL, 1995), 38-49.

[46] Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of The Church in the World: A Biblical Theology (*Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 19-148.

[47] Siegbert Riecker, *Ein Priestervolk für alle Völker: Sendungsauftrags Israels für alle Nationen in der Tora und den Vorderen Propheten,* SBB 59 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2007).

[48] A. B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th centuries: A Missiological Encyclopedia,* Part I (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 106-116.

[49] Legrand, *Unity and Plurality.*

[50] Ibid., 5-6.

[51] D. Senior and C. Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 9-140.

[52] George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 9.

[53] J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Mission in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); P.M Steyne, *Schritt Halten mit dem Gott der Völker: Weltmission im Alten und Neuen Testament (*Bonn: VKW, 1998).

[54] Alfred Neufeld, *Die alttestamentliche Grundlagen der Missionstheologie* (Bonn: VKW, 1994).

[55] Walter Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament Israel as the Light of the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

[56] Waldron Scott, *Bring Forth Justice: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

[57] Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today,* American Society of Missiology 30, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004).

[58] Gensichen, *Glaube.*

[59] Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament.*

[60] See for instance: Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

[61] Reinhard Achenbach, "Mission in Biblischer Perspectiv." I*n Leitfaden Ökumenischer Missionstheologie,* ed., C. Dahling-Sander (Güresloh: Kaiser, 2003), 32-50.

[62] For different approaches in contextual theology see: Steven Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

[63] Legrand, *Unity and Plurality.*

[64] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Die historische Macht der Armen* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1984); *An der Seite der Armen: Theologie der Befreiung* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2004).

[65] See for example: Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christus, der Befreier* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989); *Schrei der Erde, Schrei der Armen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2002).

[66] Robert J. Schreiter and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985).

[67] See for instance his discussion on the New Catholicity in: Robert J. Schreiter. *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local,* Faith & Cultures Series (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).

[68] See for example Matthew Cook, *Local Theology for the Global Church: Principles for an Evangelical Approach to Contextualization* (Pasadena: WCL, 2010).

[69] Andreas Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 19-23.

[70] Wright, *Mission of God,* 59ff.

[71] See the discussion on a trinitarian foundation of mission in Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen: Theologie des gesellschaftlichen Gemeindebaus,* 2. Aufl. (Marburg: Francke, 2014), 150-191.

[72] Ibid., 160.

## Study Questions

1. The author alerts the reader that before one settles on a biblical theology of mission, one must define what is meant by "mission." Attempt your own definition of mission at this point in your journey.

2. What is the importance of taking an understanding of mission from all of Scripture, as opposed to selecting a few "mission nuggets" from both Old and New Testaments? (e.g. Genesis 12:1-3, Matthew 28:19-20).

3. By recommending an inductive approach and a community reading to arrive at a biblical theology of mission, the author seems to imply that those who are not professional theologians can also arrive at a biblical theology of mission. Should not such difficult tasks be left to the "professionals"?

# 5 Anabaptist Theologies of Mission: An Overview

Alfred Neufeld

## Introduction

No doubt, the two major theological interpretations of the Anabaptist movement so far are Harold S. Bender's *The Anabaptist Vision* and John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*. To a lesser extent the Jewish outsider Robert Friedmann, friend of Yoder and Bender, with his *Theology of Anabaptism* has also provided creative and challenging theological paradigms of interpretation, especially his concept of existential Christianity, overcoming the "faith-works" divide. The recent little book by Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie* – Eine Rechenschaft in my opinion comes close and gives new impulses to the big three works of twentieth-century interpretations of Anabaptism.[1]

Harold S. Bender in his *Anabaptist Vision* and even more so in *These are my People*[2] develops an interpretation of Anabaptism which gave birth to the missional church concept or the "messianic church" among Anabaptist theologians and missiologists.

Alfred Neufeld (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary: Ph.D., Contextual Theology, University of Basel) is Rector and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences at the Evangelical University of Paraguay in Asunción. Alfred served on the task force of the ICOMB Confession of Faith project, completed in 2004, and currently is chairman of the Faith and Life Commission of the Mennonite World Conference. He assists in pastoral ministry at the Concordia MB Church in Asunción.

Yoder with his *Politics of Jesus* as well as in his *Priestly Kingdom* and *Body Politics* gives priority to the kingdom of God as embodied by the historical Jesus and his church.[3]

I am glad that the topic given to me talks of Anabaptist theologies of mission in the plural. The sometimes enriching, sometimes frustrating fact is that the Anabaptist movement was not homogeneous and not overly systematic, although in some amount of organic contact the "multigenesis" approach seems to do justice to the historical data. And even the perspective of Hans-Jürgen Goertz, who talks about *Wildwuchs* (wild growth), should not be ignored, although it might be an overstatement.

In any case, concerning mission's theology during the time of the Anabaptist renewal, the following four limiting perspectives must be taken into consideration:

1. The modern concept of mission was born about 200 years after the Anabaptist dissent, with the pietistic renewal of Spener, Francke, Zinsendorf, and the British-based idea of mission agencies.

2. We must be quite creative in trying to feel and interpret the implicit mission theology of Anabaptist faith and life, since there is no explicitly formulated mission agenda and mission theology.

3. There were few Catholic missionary models in the time of the early Anabaptists (the efforts of Jesuits and Franciscans in Asia and Latin America began much later). The primary model was the legacy of the different monastic medieval missionary movements.

4. Among Protestants, the Reformed Church under Calvin and the Huguenots started to have some vague ideas of missions around the mid-sixteenth century. The socalled Martyrs' Synod of over sixty Anabaptist leaders in Augsburg, 1527, might be the first solid effort during the Protestant Reformation to shape something which centuries later was called "missions."[4]

## Strong Missionary Impulses Based on the Way of the Anabaptists

Pulling together historic phenomena and reading them through missionary glasses we could at least come up with the following "missionary impulses" and "missionary acts and strategies":

1. Rebaptism of everything as a missionary act: As we will see further ahead, a low sacramental view of the ritual of baptism opened the door of radical practice of rebaptism, so scandalous in its time, because it put into question the whole *corpus christianum.* This practice actually stated: What has been done so far by church and religion is not valid and needs to be redone right from the bottom core.

2. Breaking the church/culture symbiosis as a missionary act: This symbiosis covered several dimensions: church/state, church/society, church/national identity, and church/individual. Once this symbiosis was questioned, everything was back to base one, and the whole known reality became a mission field.

3. Renouncing fatherlands and embracing "the earth of the Lord" as a missionary act: "Mission by migration" in the early church and in the Radical Reformation was a method and a path not chosen voluntarily, but it was a most powerful way of triggering a missionary movement.

4. The church as alternative and marginalized society – a missionary act: Yoder and Driver have developed the virtues of the sectarian, prophetic and missionary voice from the social periphery: The excluded and marginalized minorities which established themselves as alternative societies were the kingdom of God materialized, and shine into the world.[5]

5. Anti-clericalism as a missionary act: Hans-Jürgen Goertz continues to prove that the pathos and actions of radical anti-clericalism have been a powerful force in the expansion of Anabaptism all over Europe. It was nothing less than a forceful coming of age of the laity and the common people which represented the vast majority of church and society.[6]

6. Anti-sacramentalism as a missionary act: Protestantism in general, but Anabaptism in particular, reflected some kind of later prominent enlightenment and rationalism (Kant's *Aufklärung*). What Max Weber has called *Entzauberung der Welt* (disenchantment of the world) definitely was present and strongly motivated the wide spread acceptance of Anabaptist symbolic and testimonial understanding of the sacraments.

7. The priesthood of all believers as a missionary act: The positive construction of anti-clericalism was the empowerment of each member of the believing congregation. God's calling to all, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every baptized believer and the plurality of gifts of the Spirit transformed a small religious dissent movement into an overall missionary force, covering in a few decades most of sixteenth-century European territory.

8. Love to enemies, persecutors and Turks as missionary acts: The well known attitude of Michael Sattler towards the Turks[7] and Dirk Willems' instinctive rescue of the soldier who persecuted him,[8] as well as the blood and the loving and non-violent attitude of Anabaptist martyrs constituted a powerful missional ingredient.

9. Biblicism and hermeneutics of obedience as missionary acts: It has often been said that the missionary mandate (Matthew 28:16-20) is the most quoted and most radically lived and obeyed portion of Scripture in the original Anabaptists' lives and communities.

10. Unlimited confidence in the authentic work of God's Holy Spirit as missionary act: In the last decades and in dialogue between Anabaptist and Pentecostal charismatic researchers, it becomes more and more evident that there are many affinities between sixteenth-century Anabaptism and twentieth-century Pentecostal and charismatic revival movements. The 100-year anniversary of Azusa Street Revival together with the Mennonite World Conference Symposium in Pasadena (2006) provided first evidence of something absolutely prominent in old Anabaptist literature and Ausbund hymns: the centrality and overall reliance on the Holy Spirit.[9]

## An Emerging Anabaptist Missiology

Hans Kasdorf and Wilbert R. Shenk might rightly be considered the most prominent missiologists of recent Anabaptist Mennonite writings.  Shenk summarizes Anabaptist mission in three essential themes:

> a) an Anabaptist theology of mission is rooted in the work and message of Jesus the Messiah; b) an Anabaptist theology of mission assumes a dynamic relationship between church and world with the cross as bridge; and c) an Anabaptist theology of mission will be embodied in the faithful community of the Messiah that lives in the eschatological tension of the kingdom already present but not yet fulfilled.[10]

Shenk rightly calls the Augsburg Synod of 1527 "the starting point" of Anabaptist missions. "They staked out separate areas of mission responsibility in a "grand map of evangelical enterprise." Then the conference commissioned leaders to visit communities in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland to encourage the faithful and evangelize these scattered communities…Opposition did not succeed in stopping this movement.[11] Hans Kasdorf points out, "By the middle of the sixteenth century Anabaptist missionaries were preaching in every state of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, France, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, and Italy". The eminent German scholar Ernst Troeltsch summarized the spread of Anabaptism saying: "From Zurich the movement spread with great swiftness and intensity: everywhere it attracted to itself all who were dissatisfied with the Reformation, as well as a remnant formed of members of the earlier mediaeval evangelical groups. The whole of Central Europe was soon covered with a network of Anabaptist communities,

loosely connected with each other, who all practiced a strictly Scriptural form of worship. The chief centers were in Augsburg, Moravia, and Strasbourg, and, later on, in Friesland and the Netherlands.[12]

Bernhard Ott, developing "an Anabaptist contribution" on the holistic mission debate, reaffirms the centrality of Matthew 28:16-20 – the so-called Great Commission. Convincingly he argues that for Anabaptists this text was much more than just a command to evangelize. This "programmatic text" according to Anabaptist reading and praxis puts mission into the context of power, worship, proclamation, healing, ethics, prayer, conflict, and the everlasting presence of Christ. He concludes that "in order to get a more integral understanding" the Great Commission does not provide a foundation for an evangelism-only concept of mission. "On the contrary, the final verses of Matthew provide a powerful and sound foundation for an integral understanding of mission – if interpreted in the light of the entire Gospel."[13]

In this essay I would like to honor the kingdom of God – and the missional church perspectives in the building of Anabaptist theologies of mission. And then I would like to offer my personal contribution which works out of the simple theology and practice of "rebaptism." After all, rebaptism in the sixteenth century was a main reason for scandal, martyrdom and mission expansion of the radicals of that time.

## Anabaptist Theology of the Kingdom of God as Foundation for Mission Theology

The old debate, whether Anabaptism held to the Lutheran perspective of two-kingdom theology or Calvinistic Reformed perspective of the one kingdom, does not have a clear-cut answer. Probably it's a wrong question. But ever since George F. Vicedom wrote his groundbreaking missiological piece *Missio Dei*,[14] it is clear that the concept of the kingdom of God is absolutely crucial to any biblical theology of mission. All the writings on Jesus' missiology, ecclesiology and ethics of John Howard Yoder point into that direction. That is why topics of power, authority, citizenship, identity, accountability, obedience, and loyalty must all be seen in the context of a theology of the kingdom of God. This I have tried to make relevant for Latin American Anabaptists.[15]

Anabaptist practice and theology of mission to a large extent can be expressed in the good old spiritual "Ride on King Jesus." Helmut Isaak's (2006) interpretation of Menno's theology eloquently documents the very prominent place kingdom language and kingdom practice held in the life and work of Menno Simons.[16]

Gerald W. Schlabach, evaluating strengths and limitations of the Lutheran and Calvinistic approach to kingdom theology, advocates for a third way, namely, beyond two- versus one-kingdom theology. "For describing a dynamic,

open-ended duality that is true to the biblical story…is much more adequate than are one- or two-kingdom models. It clarifies why it is so important to be a distinct community – yet it does not relegate all that happens outside the community to hell, irrelevance or worldliness. It tells of God's saving, loving, activity for creation, yet does not hastily idolize those tentative signs of the Kingdom we think we perceive in the world."[17]

In my opinion the Anabaptist missiological reading of kingdom of God theology has at least seven dimensions or implications:

1. The sovereignty of God over the whole earth is absolutely crucial for the missionary mandate of the church (Ps 24).

2. The kingship of Christ exercises for the follower of Jesus priorities over against any other governments.

3. The risen and in-heaven-enthroned Christ King Jesus has given a mandate to proclaim his gospel to all nations, which must be obeyed.

4. Since the earth is of the Lord, the loss of homestead, fatherland, and nationality is not ultimate tragedy, as long as the kingdom community can be transported to other geographical areas.

5. Being in the kingdom of God and under command of the king means protection.

6. Doing the work of the kingdom of God means ultimate victory of the lamb/lion/king.

7. The kingdom of God produces specific communities with specific ethic and relationship, which reflect the realities of the New Jerusalem.

## Anabaptist Ecclesiology: The Church as Messianic Society and Witnessing Community

The Anabaptist understanding of the church might well be considered the basis for the modern concept of the missional church. The much-repeated critique, that Harold S. Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* lacked a sense of mission and of spirituality, seems a little unfair to me. Bender grew up in the headquarters of the missions agency of his church and always affirmed, that "to recapture the Anabaptist vision, we must above all else embrace a missionary consciousness."[18]  Correctly, John A. Toews interpreted Bender's insistence on a theology of discipleship as "obedience to the Great Commission," taking seriously a theology of martyrdom.

I think it's adequate to say that Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* with his three dimensions of believers' church, discipleship, and peace ethics was written for a non-Mennonite

historical society. Seen from that perspective it might not be the most effective tool to describe Anabaptist mission theology. On the other hand, for Bender it always was clear that all three dimensions of the Anabaptist vision were profoundly missional in nature and witness. I am glad he didn't reduce mission just to one additional aspect of Anabaptism, but opened up the possibility to put mission and the sending of the church into the world as the core dynamic of the whole movement.

Very helpful in my opinion is the approach which Larry Miller and others have developed, building on Bender's and Yoder's insights: They propose to understand the church as messianic movement and messianic society, with messianic hope expressed in messianic groups. What Miller calls "alternative society" really has relevance for mission theology and mission practice. "…messianic groups called to provide in some sense and to some degree an alternative to established society; *alternative* peoplehood, *alternative* friendship, *alternative* family, *alternative* politics, *alternative* economy, *alternative* education, *alternative* piety, *alternative* ritual, *alternative* festivals. Messiah's followers were to live life in another manner than it was normally lived in macro society."[20]

Miller concludes his analysis of the missional potential of messianic churches: "After all, only churches whose goals have something to do with salvation in a comprehensive sense, who embrace not only religion but all of life, stand in the tradition of the Messiah. Only churches which are alternative societies, transformed in relation to existing society because they are already conformed to Messiah's vision of the future, can demonstrate the nature of life in the coming kingdom."[21]  A good integration of kingdom theology and messianic church missiology is Wolfgang Vorlaender's popular book *Gelebte Hoffnung*[22]  (Living Hope).

Being a missional church in the Anabaptist perspective can contribute at least the following missionary dynamics:

- To be an attractive community for seekers.
- To be a community of hope for people in despair.
- To be a modeling community for people searching for life models.
- To be a community of quality relationships for those who are lonely and disconnected.
- To be a community of purpose and meaning for those with existential gaps and crisis.
- To be a community of acceptance for those suffering rejection.
- To be a community of healing for people who have been hurt.
- To be a community of justice and mercy amidst a world of egocentrism and violence.

- To be a community of belonging for those lacking identity and family.
- To be a community of freedom for those that feel oppressed, burdened, and enslaved.

## The Theology of Baptism and Rebaptism as Foundational for an Anabaptist Approach to Mission and to the World

Wilbert R. Shenk in his highly recommendable essay "Three Studies in Mission Strategy" states two problems which Mennonite missionaries faced in Africa, Latin America and Asia: They did not teach Anabaptist history and theology and they were not able to explain the Anabaptist theological vision missiologically. "We did not have and still lack a satisfactory answer. Indeed, this answer revealed a split between the theology of the sending church and the missiology that guided the missionary. A second concern is that we must be able to explain our theological vision missiologically. Most of us are not prepared to do this… It is my conviction the only theological vision worthy of the body of Christ is one that supports and motivates the church to engage in the mission Jesus gave to his disciples."[23]

### The Anabaptist Dissent In Historical and Missiological Context

With the change of baptismal practice much more was at stake than a modified clerical administration of the traditional sacrament. "For the whole matter of the beginning of the Christian life as well as its nature focused on baptism. Moreover, baptism was the external act by which Anabaptists expressed their rejection of the sacramental Church of Rome and the territorial churches of Protestantism. Their view of baptism also touched on questions of original sin, predestination and free will, and eschatology."[24] An alternative vision of salvation, a new vision of church and Christian ethics emerged. These both arose from and gave rise to a socio-philosophical shift concerning how voluntarism was viewed in religious matters. "At the most fundamental level baptism was viewed as a sign that the old life of sin had been abandoned and a new life of following Christ begun. This was done voluntarily and after careful consideration. It was assumed by all that men had the capacity to respond to God's call."

However, in contrast with their fellow radicals, the Spiritualists, Anabaptists retained the communal dimension of salvation: baptism was the rite by which one entered the church; all Christians were members of one visible body. Therefore baptism involved the acceptance of discipline and of mutual aid both spiritually and materially. Commitment to the "Rule of Christ" (Mt.18:15-18) was necessary since the reality of sin even in the church was taken for granted.

It might be fair to say that in the turbulent times of the sixteenth-century doctrine was used not only for seeking truth and church renewal, but also for sustaining or acquiring power. The dissident movements as well as the position of Rome and the Magisterial Reformers can all be read through the lens of access *to* or exercise *of* public power. To take one example, segments of Anabaptism were drawn into the Peasant War, which in turn was condemned by Lutherans. To take another example, the humanistic movement led by Erasmus related to the renovation of academia and inspired the Swiss and South German humanist Anabaptists. Neither was dissociated from the structures of power.

It would be simplistic to read the whole Anabaptist movement through the lens of anticlericalism. But it is definitely a seminal factor in the shape Anabaptism took, as Hans-Jürgen Goertz rightly argues.[26] Walter Klaassen comes to the conclusion that the newly installed practice of adult/believer's baptism had to do with the coming of age of the laity. According to that view, infant baptism equaled making immature Christians, and adult baptism became a sign of religious maturity.[27]

Using Niebuhr's classical typology concerning "Christ and Culture", it might be fair to state that the traditional approach to the religio-political synthesis in the beginning of the sixteenth century was "Christ *of* culture" or "Christ *above* culture" whereas the Anabaptists might be typified more as "Christ *against* culture." In very different ways both sides claimed "Christ *converting or transforming* culture."[28]

John Howard Yoder, gladly accepting the sectarian character of Anabaptism, would make the case that, not only the practice of baptism on confession of faith, but the whole Anabaptist ecclesiology aimed to establish an alternate society with new cultural practices that would embody and reflect the mind of Christ.[29] Catholic notions of enculturation (transformation from within the culture) are quite compatible with the practice of child baptism. The Anabaptist approach would be more compatible with the idea of transformation from without, a "Christian counter-culture," or the concept of the church as "resident alien."[30]

Yoder goes on to relate baptism directly to the creation of an alternative society:

> "Thus the primary narrative meaning of baptism is the new society it
> creates, by inducting all kinds of people into the same people. The church
> is (according to the apostolic witness – not in much of its later history)
> the new society; it is therefore also the model for the world's moving in
> the same direction."[31]

The consequence of church as counterculture was a definite break with – and reversal of – the Constantinian shift that had marked church life prior to the Lutheran and Anabaptist dissent. It must be remembered that baptism was the

basic means by which population was registered, and church baptismal books provided social identification. As Goertz states rightly, to replace the traditional rite of baptism through a new one, meant to "shatter the societal order of Europe in its very foundations."[32]

Paul Hiebert's typology of contextualization presents an ideal that neither the Anabaptists nor their contemporaries achieved. What Hiebert calls "critical contextualization"[33] is neither rejection of the *old* nor uncritical acceptance of the *new*; dealing with the *new* in the light of the Bible is required to keep being faithful to the original church. Critical contextualization must be critical toward one's own tradition, but also critical to the new cultural environment. Rereading the Bible in the light of cultural changes, as critical contextualization asks for, led the Anabaptists to some new ways that later became the common property of many Christian traditions and Western civilization: separation of church and state, voluntarism in religious matters, respect for the individual conscience, priesthood of all believers and the reduction of the gap between laity and clergy, strong solidarity between rich and poor, modern missionary concepts; and last but not least, a later broad acceptance of adult/believer's baptism in many post-reformation evangelical churches.

### Missiological Implications of the Practice of Rebaptism

One of the ironies of the Anabaptist movement was that they had to suffer persecution and oppression not because they had such a heavy theology of baptism, but precisely because water baptism for them had far less sacramental power than for Catholics and Lutherans. This is what I exposed in our first trilateral dialogue with these two church traditions in Rome 2012.

The not-very-helpful approach in ecumenical dialogues about validity or non-validity of baptism as well as the need for rebaptism actually calls for a separate theological analysis. When the apostle Paul puts in Ephesians 4:3-6 "one baptism" in the same line with one Lord, one faith, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Father and God, in my opinion he wants to say that there is just one message of the rite of baptism, as there is one Christian message of faith and one Christian message of hope that we proclaim. He even could have said: one Lord's Supper, although we are invited to celebrate it more than once. The Catholic, as well as Lutheran and Reformed rites of confirmation, precisely indicates the need to reconfirm the message and testimony of baptism on a continuum in the timeline.

Of course rebaptism was considered the prime crime of Anabaptists in their time. Not so much because of sacramental theology, but because the practice of rebaptism was a public act of rebellion against the status quo, calling for a Christian

counter-culture. And the power of the whole movement precisely consisted in this brave act to put into question traditional Christendom, the almost complete symbiosis between church and state, between faith and culture. Obviously, where that symbiosis is intact, there is no room and need for mission. But when it is put into question suddenly the whole social environment becomes a mission field. And the church of Christ becomes a real ecclesia, the group of disciples called out of the world and placed into the kingdom of God and its new society, the church.

Therefore the coherent practice of rebaptism can be interpreted almost as a new world view, as a new paradigm, that certainly has lots of missionary implications:

- The continuum of Spirit baptism, water baptism, and blood baptism illustrates the cooperation between God's intervention and human witness in mission.
- The practice of baptism as a rupture with the past has a missionary nature.
- The practice of baptism as initiation of something into a new society is a missionary act.
- The practice of baptism as public witness is profoundly missional.
- The interpretation of the ordinances as communicational rituals illustrates visibly what has happened spiritually. This has missionary power.

The practice of rebaptism, calling the world to the narrow way of Christian discipleship, to a new culture of peace and justice in the church, to a new overall worldview from the perspective of the coming kingdom and the heavenly Jerusalem, to a certain extent finds parallels in forms of radical Christianity in the 20th century.[34]

## Conclusion: Is There Room in the Modern World for a Radical View of Rebaptism?

To identify one or many modern theologies of mission in the original Anabaptist movement might be a bit ambitious and artificial. But definitely the whole movement was a going, a sending, a witnessing, a suffering, a baptizing and a proclaiming movement. In that sense it was one of the most important missionary movements of church history.

In contrast to most previous conquering and crusading movements it was free of violence and political ambition, as well as nationalistic and expansionistic motivations.

There are many elements which can make this heritage fruitful for the missionary mandate of Christ's church today: kingdom theology, messianic church, and a radical theology of baptism might be three pathways useful for further exploration.

## Notes

[1] Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1944), accessed February 11, 2014, http://www.mcusa-archives.org/library/anabaptistvision/ anabaptistvision.html. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster* (Grand Rapids: 1994). Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1973). Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie heute. Eine Rechenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht: 2010).

[2] Harold S. Bender, *These are my People: The nature of the church and its discipleship according to the New Testament* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962).

[3] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social ethics as gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), and *Body Politics: Five practices of the Christian community before the watching world* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2001).

[4] Christian Hege and Harold S. Bender, "Martyrs' Synod," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1957), accessed February 11, 2014, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs%27_Synod&oldid=111413

[5] Yoder, *Body Politics*. John Driver, *Radical Faith: An alternative history of the Christian church* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1999).

[6] Goertz, *Bruchstücke*.

[7] Gustav Bossert Jr., Harold S. Bender and C. Arnold Snyder, "Sattler, Michael (d. 1527)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), accessed February 11, 2014, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Sattler,_Michael_ (d._1527)&oldid=106314.

[8] Nanne van der Zijpp, "Dirk Willemsz (d. 1569)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1956), accessed February 11, 2014, http://gameo.org/ index.php?title=Dirk_Willemsz_(d._1569)&oldid=107540.

[9] Juan Francisco Martínez, "When Anabaptists relate to Pentecostals," *Courier* 1 & 2 (2006): 2-3, accessed February 11, 2014, http://www.mwc-cmm.org/ joomla/images/files/courier/Courier2006_1-2.pdf.

[10] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Three Studies in Mission Strategy," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 14 (2006): 114.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Hans Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 66.

[13] Bernhard Ott, "Matthew 28:16-20 and the Holistic Mission Debate: An Anabaptist Contribution," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 14 (2006): 163.

[14] Georg F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei. Einführung in eine Theologie der Mission* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958).

[15] Alfred Neufeld, "Reino de Dios y Transformación," in *Consulta Anabautista Latinoamericana* (Guatemala: Ediciones SEMILLA, 1999).

[16] Helmut Isaak, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2006).

[17] Gerald W. Schlabach, "Beyond Two- versus One-Kingdom Theology: Abrahamic Community as a Mennonite Paradigm for Christian Engagement in Society," *Conrad Grebel Review* 11 (1993): 197.

[18] Walter Sawatzky, "The many faces of Anabaptism and mission since 1860," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 14 (2006): 139.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Larry Miller, "The Church as Messianic Society: Creation and Instrument of Transfigured Mission," in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R.Shenk (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1993), 138.

[21] Ibid. 149-150.

[22] Wolfgang Vorlaender, *Gelebte Hoffnung* (Neukirchen/Vluyn: Aussaat Verlag, 1988).

[23] Shenk, "Three Studies," 111-112.

[24] Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981), 162.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Goertz, *Bruchstücke*, 126.

[27] Walter Klaassen, "Die Taufe im Schweizer Täufertum," in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1989), 87.

[28] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 15-90.

[29] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 31-90.

[30] David Bosch, *Believing in the future: Toward a missiology of Western culture* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1995), 35.

[31] Yoder, *Body Politics*, 32.

[32] Goertz, *Bruchstücke*, 126.

[33] Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11:3 (1987): 104-112.

[34] Michael Ian Bochenski, *Transforming Faith Communities. A Comparative Study of Radical Christianity in Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism and Late Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

## Recommended Reading

Bender, Harold S. *The Anabaptist Vision*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1944.  Accessed February 11, 2014.  http://www.mcusa-archives.org/library/anabaptistvision/anabaptistvision.html.

Driver, John. *Life together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-first Century.* Goshen: Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, 2011.

Goertz, Hans-Jürgen Goertz. *Bruchstücke radikaler Theologie heute. Eine Rechenschaft.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2010.

Kasdorf, Hans. "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission." In *Anabaptism and Mission*, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk.  Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984.

Klaassen, Walter. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*.  Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981.

Miller, Larry. "The Church as Messianic Society: Creation and Instrument of Transfigured Mission." In *The Transfiguration of Mission*, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk.   Scottdale: Herald Press, 1993.

Neufeld, Alfred.  "Reino de Dios y Transformación."  In *Consulta Anabautista Latinoamericana.*  Guatemala: Ediciones SEMILLA, 1999.

Ott, Bernhard.  "Matthew 28:16-20 and the Holistic Mission Debate: An Anabaptist Contribution."  *Mission Focus Annual Review* 14 (2006): 149-165.  Accessed February 12, 2014.   http://www.ambs.edu/publishing/documents/Mission_Focus_Vol_14.pdf.

Padilla, C. Rene.  *El Reino de Dios y América Latina*.  El Paso: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1975.

Sawatzky, Walter.  "The many faces of Anabaptism and Mission since 1860." *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 14 (2006): 134-148.  Accessed February 12, 2014.  http://www.ambs.edu/publishing/documents/Mission_Focus_Vol_14.pdf.

Shenk, Wilbert R.  "Three Studies in Mission Strategy."  *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 14 (2006): 90-122.  Accessed February 12, 2014.  http://www.ambs.edu/publishing/documents/Mission_Focus_Vol_14.pdf.

Yoder, John Howard.  *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World.*  Scottdale: Herald Press, 1992.

## Study Questions

1. Review the "missionary impulses" taken from the way of the Anabaptists (p. 84-86). In what ways does this list inspire your motivation and methodology for mission? Should anything change from the way you approach mission right now as a result of considering these factors?

2. Review the Kingdom theology that drove Anabaptist mission as listed by Neufeld (p. 87-88). Again, what inspiration or change might such a list provoke?

3. Do the same for the "Anabaptist ecclesiology" (p. 88-90)

4. How would you relate the theology of baptism and rebaptism (p.90-93) to your idea of mission in your context?

# 6 Evangelical Missiology: An Overview

Juan Francisco Martínez

Evangelicals are a "restless" people, committed to an activist role in evangelizing the whole world. The tasks of proclamation and invitation often override any other concerns, including reflecting on the impact of what we are doing. In some evangelical circles, evangelical missiology would still almost seem like an oxymoron since many are more concerned about action, results, and movement than analyzing the task. Many evangelicals around the world do not stop to "reflect" on what they are doing and if they do reflect it is for pragmatic purpose; they are looking for "better results." For them, missiology is one more tool to improve the work being done and produce better results. Activism is the driving concern.

Nonetheless, throughout the twentieth century evangelicals around the world have reflected on what mission means today and on the impact Christian mission is having in the world. During the last century evangelicals expanded their mission efforts, and also developed several important ways of thinking about the task and

Juan Francisco Martínez (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary) is Vice Provost and Professor of Hispanic Studies and Pastoral Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, USA. His academic work has focused on Latino Protestantism in the United States, and on transnationalism and mission. He was also an editor of *Global Dictionary of Theology* (InterVarsity, 2008). Juan has been an MB pastor, church planter, supervisor of Latino MB churches, director of an MB Bible Institute and rector of SEMILLA, the Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala.

these set the parameters for evangelical missiology today. To understand how these broad missiological categories developed we will briefly review the development of evangelical missiology during the twentieth century, catalog the broad categories of evangelical missiology drawing from Samuel Escobar's typology and enumerate some of the tasks pending for an evangelical missiology today.

## Evangelicals and Missiological Reflection in the 20th Century

Evangelical mission efforts gained new energy and impetus toward the end of the nineteenth century. Younger denominations from the US and the English-speaking world, as well as faith mission agencies, joined existing European mission agencies in sending out missionaries to the "non-Christian" world. Added to these formal efforts were the myriads of lay people who were impacted by the Pentecostal awakening of Azusa Street, and the Pentecostal awakenings in various parts of the world, such as Brazil, India, and Sweden, and who took the message of their Pentecostal experience with them around the world.

The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 was a crucial touchstone for a large segment of Protestant missions around the world. The older historical mission agencies and some of the newer ones brought together their leaders to reflect on their watchword: the evangelization of the world in this generation. The conference addressed important questions related to the relationship between gospel and culture, contextualization, trinitarian framework for thinking about the task, the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, and the role of dialogue in evangelism. Almost all of the participants were from the "Christianized" Western world. The conference reflected the optimism of European countries that were at the zenith of their imperial expansion. The documents that came out of the conference stated that the time was right to create a new impulse for the evangelization of the whole world.

World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution started soon after the Edinburgh Conference and eventually created a crisis of faith in Europe. That war also marked the beginning of the end of the European imperial effort, a breakdown that would greatly accelerate after World War II. The mission-sending countries of Europe would lose their mission focus as the missionized former colonies became politically independent and as the younger Christians began to reflect on the missionary task on their own. It was in this environment that what Escobar calls post-imperial missiology developed.

While Edinburgh represented one group of Protestants and evangelicals, many others did not participate. Protestant missionaries to Latin America, and Latin American Protestants, were not invited to Edinburgh and they organized a series

of mission conferences in that region (Panama 1916, Montevideo 1925, Havana 1929) that would shape missiological thought in Latin America. Pentecostals, who were already growing in many parts of the majority world, were not accounted for in any of these conferences. Also, even as Europe was going through a crisis, a new generation of evangelical missionaries, mostly from North America, went around the world after World War II.

Among these missionaries were many who had social science training, particularly as anthropologists. They began to apply social sciences to their mission work around the world. Two missionaries who worked in India became paradigmatic of this process: Donald McGavran and Leslie Newbigin. McGavran studied the complexities of sharing the gospel in Indian society, and realized that the gospel spread most easily within castes. This observation led him to the homogeneous unit principle. Eventually he drew together other missionary social scientists and developed what would become Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission (now School of Intercultural Studies). Other seminaries, like Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, would also begin their own schools of mission creating spaces for the development of an academic evangelical missiology involving both theological and social science disciplines. These schools of mission brought academic rigor to the task, but also began to ask difficult questions about how mission had been done and how mission efforts might best respond to the complex needs of the human experience.

Leslie Newbigin reflected on his India experience when he returned to England and called on Christians to recognize that they now lived in a post-Christian world. His missiological reading of late modernity made it possible to understand how the Enlightenment had influenced English society, such that they were becoming a pagan society with false gods. He invited English (and Western) Christians to learn from Christians in India as to how to live as a faithful minority people. His writings have served as the basis for what is now called the missional church movement.

Events in Latin America created another important influence on evangelical missiology. The East-West tensions of most of the second half of the twentieth century played out through proxies in the region. Brutal right wing dictatorships were often supported by the US because they were anti-communist, particularly after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Many evangelical missionaries either favored these anti-communist governments or kept silent when they saw the abuses they committed in the name of national security. A growing number of young Latin American evangelicals questioned the stance of US and Western missionaries. They called for the preaching of a gospel message that responded to the injustices against the poor

and that sought change throughout society. A young Samuel Escobar was one of the key people in that movement of "radical" evangelicals that would eventually develop *critical* missiology from the peripheries.

In 1966 evangelicals, mostly from the United States, organized the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin that was intended as a spiritual successor to the Edinburgh Conference and as a recovery of evangelism which many evangelicals felt had been lost in the ecumenical movement. This conference was the precursor to the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. That became a watershed moment for evangelical missiology. The Lausanne Covenant, written by John Stott, with influence from the Latin American radical evangelicals, brought together evangelization, understood as verbal proclamation, with the importance of a commitment to a holistic gospel, one that called for change in all areas of life. It also recognized that all cultures are fallen and that the gospel needed to be incarnated in each culture where it was proclaimed.

The Covenant focused on holistic mission, but the connection between evangelism and social concern was not clear for many evangelicals. Some questioned whether social action was integral to the gospel, or merely a good means for verbal proclamation and a call to accept Jesus Christ. This tension continued to be seen in Lausanne II (Manila 1989) and the various evangelical mission efforts at the end of the twentieth century. Movements like AD2000 continued to put the focus on verbal proclamation and the call for individual conversion. Other movements were more closely linked to the Lausanne Covenant and sought to have a stronger connection between evangelism and social action. Toward the end of the century there were also a growing number of evangelical movements that put their principal focus on addressing social ills.

While evangelical movements continued to grow, Pentecostal moments were growing even faster around the world. But during most of the twentieth century, Pentecostals were not counted as evangelicals, so they were not a key part of many of these conversations. But little by little, many Pentecostal groups began to participate, though they were not given a voice commensurate to their size.

The World Evangelical Fellowship held a major conference in Brazil in 1999, out of which came the Iguassu Declaration. It included statements on culture, religious pluralism, the world economic order and ecology. The next series of conferences were all directly or indirectly linked to the 100th anniversary of Edinburgh. Cape Town was a continuation of the Lausanne movement, while the conferences in Tokyo, Edinburgh and Boston reflected various interpretations of the Edinburgh

Conference. The fifth conference CLADE V (the Fifth Latin American Congress on Evangelization) was not held in 2010 as originally planned because of the other four conferences.

Academic evangelical missiology broadened the scope of mission research throughout the twentieth century. The usage of social sciences expanded the ability to analyze the task and to bring new questions to bear. It also encouraged students to address a broader set of issues. Of course, it also complicated the task because the success of schools of mission in the broader academy meant that their research was now available to everyone. Studies that seemed "obvious" in the Christianized world often raised complex issues for Christians in countries where they are a small minority and therefore often suffer for their faith.

## Escobar's Typology of Evangelical Missiology

Peruvian missiologist Samuel Escobar has often spoken of three types of evangelical missiology: post-imperial, managerial and critical. This typology points to the major ways that evangelicals are doing mission and thinking about their task. Though one can point to more categories, or sub-categories of these three, the typology gives as a starting point for thinking about the various ways evangelicals are thinking about, and using, missiology.

As stated earlier *Post-imperial* missiology was born in the changing relationships between Christian missionaries from formally imperial powers and Christians from formally colonized countries. It points in various important directions. On the one hand, this category requires us to recognize that, during the modern period, evangelical mission has usually been tied to empire and power. Mission and missiological reflection was done from a position of power to non-power and post-imperial missiology is about recognizing that mission is now being done from the whole world to the whole world. The missiological questions raised from the majority world are fundamentally different from those that come from the centers of power. Mission also looks very different when done from a position of human power, from when done from below.

Escobar uses the term *managerial* missiology to describe the missiology that has developed from the church growth movement in the United States. He uses this term in a negative way, but nonetheless points to an important aspect of this type of missiology. This type of missiology is managerial in that it focuses on the management of tasks and results. It also tends toward a definition of mission that focuses on verbal proclamation and conversion. Though Escobar´s analysis is uniformly negative, he

does describe a pragmatically-oriented missiology that uses research and reflection to produce better results.

*Critical* missiology refers to the type of reflection that was born in Latin America among the radical evangelicals. The focus of this type of missiology is to ask questions related to a holistic view of mission. From this perspective, if mission does not address the injustices of the context, then it is not truly or fully the gospel. These types of questions tend to be asked by those on the traditional peripheries of missionary work. It often stands over against the previous category, in that the church growth movement is often seen to be proof of a proclamation that does not call people to profound change.

Of course, these are not exact or pure categories. They are ways that evangelicals are thinking about the task of mission. During the first part of the twenty-first century evangelical missiological reflection is often reflecting some of each of these categories, to a lesser or greater extent. Because Mennonite Brethren and other Anabaptist mission groups have until recently done mission from within a North American evangelical framework they often reflected a managerial missiology. But when mission agencies have had a strong Anabaptist focus, they have drawn on some of the same sources as a critical missiology. At times these two perspectives have pulled in different directions among Anabaptist mission groups, with each questioning the other, directly or indirectly.

Each of these missiological perspectives also invites us to address issues important to a robust evangelical missiology. On the one hand, post-imperial missiology calls us to recognize that during the modern period mission has often been linked to Western power. Christendom developed a model of mission that went from the center to the periphery, power to non-power. But mission from power has focused on the role of money, education, and planning and has often lacked dependence on the Holy Spirit. This model has often also created triumphalism among those doing mission and dependency among the receptors of those missionary efforts. Post-imperial missiology also challenges us to recognize that God is at work in the whole world and that evangelical missiology needs to reflect from the perspective of the majority and those that have been missionized in the past.

Evangelical activism has often led to a view of mission that assumes that success is within our reach and that it is easily measurable. A managerial missiology can sometimes give the impression that if one can count the number of missionaries, converts or "significant" converts, then one can measure success. Yet it calls us to remember that we want more people to confess faith in Christ and we need to be sure that the ways we share the gospel are effective.

Critical missiology challenges us to recognize that the gospel has to impact all areas of life. A gospel that does not transform life, in all its aspects, is an incomplete gospel, at best. The church is to live as a sign and sacrament of God's future in this world today. Too often we have been captivated by the political and social agendas of our world and have been ready to accept less than a total conversion that brings profound change to all of life. If the church is truly to point toward God's future it needs to reflect change in all aspects of life on earth.

Evangelical schools of mission have taught us the usefulness of using the tools of the social sciences to understand the task and its complexities. This has been one of the important contributions of evangelical schools of mission. But Pentecostals remind us that the mission is God's and that transformation has to happen through the work of the Holy Spirit. We can neither use the Holy Spirit as an excuse for shoddy mission, nor academic excellence as a substitute for dependence on God.

## Missiological Issues for 21st Century Evangelical Mission

Evangelicals confess that God is still working in the world. The key question for mission is, how do we recognize God's work and become a part of it, particularly in a rapidly changing world? What does the proclamation and practice of the gospel look like today? Where is the Spirit working and how do we become a part?

Some evangelicals have placed the motivation for mission on the expectation of Christ's return. The assumption is that Christians will only be sufficiently motivated to mission by the urgency created by the *parousia*. Yet, even as we await the second coming, we need to remember that our call is to be faithful to God's mission, in which our role as part of the church is to be sign and sacrament of God's future for humanity.

The issues raised by evangelical missiology during the twentieth century point us to the questions we need to ask as we serve God's purposes in the first part of the twenty-first century. What difference does the gospel make in the lives of people? How should the gospel influence the social, political and economic orders? What is the church's prophetic mission? What is the relationship between proclamation and living the gospel?

These questions need to be addressed within a global context. Christians from around the world are involved in mission around the world. Evangelicals need to include more voices so that our cultural, ethnic, social or national blinders do not limit our missiology. We also need to recognize that the church is growing the most in places outside the West, places where Christians are often a minority. We also

have to recognize that evangelicalism is growing most among those that have not traditionally been included in missiological conversations.

As evangelicals we also need to address the changing religious landscape of our time. Most of the traditional Christian world is becoming post-Christian. This shift is linked to a growing secularization and various forms of paganism. This means that Christendom is now a mission field. On the other hand Christianity is growing in areas where it is a minority and where it is constantly in the midst of other religions. More than ever, evangelicals need to consider the implications of our encounter with the religions of the world.

But we also need to develop a robust missiology that can connect our evangelical commitments to the issues of our world, as reflected in the Capetown Commitment.[1] If the gospel does not speak to injustice, to creation care, to bioethics, to globalization, to issues of sexual identity, to children at risk, and to the myriad issues of our twenty-first century world, how can we call it God's good news for humanity?

We started recognizing that evangelical activism guides evangelical mission. This is one of the four characteristics of evangelicals mentioned by David Bebbington (the others being the focus on the Bible, the importance of the atonement and the need for conversion).[2] Evangelical missiology is an important means for guiding evangelical activism toward Kingdom goals.

## Notes

[1] The Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment – A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," accessed February 11, 2015, http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment.

[2] "David Bebbington," accessed February 11, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bebbington.

## Recommended Reading

Escobar, Samuel. *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003.

Sunquist, Scott W. *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

Taylor, William, ed. *Global Missiology for the twenty-first Century The Iguassu Dialogue.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.

The Lausanne Movement. "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action." Accessed February 11, 2015. http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment.

Wright, Christopher. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

## Study Questions

1. With which category of missiology (understanding and reflecting on mission) do you most identify: post-imperial, managerial, or critical? Why?

2. For evangelicals, much of the twentieth century was given to debating the relationship between verbal proclamation and the social action aspects of the gospel. Put another way, is evangelism the priority, the center, or just one half of the gospel? Is this debate still necessary, or in your circles is there agreement about the whole gospel?

3. The author affirms that evangelicals are known for their activism, but calls evangelicals also to careful reflection about the gospel in our world. Where are you on this pendulum? Where is your church?

# 7 Toward a Global MB Theology of Mission: An Agency Proposal

Ray Harms-Wiebe

## Introduction

As Hans Kasdorf notes, in his 1988 *Mission Focus* article, "Toward a Mennonite Brethren Theology of Mission," Mennonite Brethren "have not yet outgrown the stage of self-theologizing," neither in North America nor in other regions of the world (evidenced by new confessions of faith in India, Japan and elsewhere), and the challenge of each generation is to be engaged in dynamic conversation with God, the biblical writings and its surrounding context(s). Doug Heidebrecht rightly adds, "The MB theology of mission has emerged through an active engagement with Scripture in the midst of changing contexts and realities."[1]

Charles Van Engen helpfully describes the practice of doing mission theology:

Mission theology helps us integrate who we are, what we know and what we do in mission. It helps us bring together and relate to the cognate

Ray Harms Wiebe (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Ph.D. candidate, University of Wales) with wife Judy served as a missionary in Brazil for 18 years. His ministries included church planting, leadership development and MB conference resourcing. From 2004-2014 Ray was Team Leader for Global Program at the international office of MB Mission. He has visited and served missionaries and national partners in most mission fields where MB Mission is active today. He is currently the preaching pastor at Willingdon Church (MB), Burnaby, Canada.

disciplines of missiology our faith relationship with Jesus Christ, our spirituality, our consciousness of God's presence, the church's theological reflection throughout the centuries, a constantly new rereading of Scripture, our hermeneutic of God's world, our sense of participation in God's mission, and the ultimate purpose and meaning of the church.[2] Over the past 150 years, MBs have embraced this endeavor, both consciously and subconsciously, in multiple contexts around the globe.

Kasdorf summarizes the development of MB mission theology in the following manner:

1. The early Mennonite Brethren based their *holistic mission theology* of preaching, teaching, helping, and healing on the simple content of the Scriptures, and they demonstrated it by their effort of obedience in faith.

2. In the course of time they ground their *salvationist theology* in the love of God and the cross of Christ.

3. Upon revolutionary times in the world and in mission, they saw Christ as lord and themselves as servants. Thus their *kingdom theology* is rooted in the lordship of Christ and in servanthood ministry.

4. Their *Trinitarian approach* is anchored in God's love for the world, in Christ's obedience to the Father, and in the Spirit's empowerment for mission. Herein lies their most comprehensive theology of mission.[3]

Today, MB mission theology would draw on all four historic streams, consider what is being discovered in global mission today and suggest some new directions in a number of significant areas affecting theology and praxis.

## Trinitarian Theology

### Three persons in mission

Contemporary MB mission theology, in harmony with the progression outlined by Kasdorf, begins with an understanding of the triune God. The mandate to reach the world with the love of Christ issues forth from God himself.  Engagement in the missionary task is grounded in relationship with the same Father who sent Jesus to earth and the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus.

The Father, the great "I AM," passionately desires to see "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). As the lover of all peoples, from the first pages of Scripture, he is on a mission to draw all people to himself (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 5:9-10). As the ultimate expression of his gracious will for all of creation, He sends his Son Jesus. The Father desires deep, bonded relationships with his children. He wants to be known.

Jesus is the "I AM" revealed. Through the incarnation, the glory and holiness of the Father are unveiled in human history. Although all things have been created through him, Jesus empties himself in order to redeem a fallen humanity that cannot save itself. He is the only way to salvation, the truth that liberates, and the life that makes whole. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurates the new covenant, between the Father and his children, and shows the way to covenant community for all who desire to follow his self-emptying path.

The Holy Spirit is the evangelist who witnesses to Jesus and leads his followers to wholeness. He enables God's children to perceive their distance from the Father's glory and awakens within them a desire for intimacy with the Father. He teaches the truths of the kingdom to followers of Jesus and binds them together in covenant community through his indwelling presence. He transforms God's children from glory to glory. He is the creative power who equips Jesus' disciples and empowers them for service.

All three persons in the Trinity work together in perfect harmony to reveal their glory, to serve and to love human beings, and to shepherd their children. Together they reign over all things, communicate the good news and enter into covenant with their people. They invite disciples into a dynamic, loving reality. They want their followers to experience life in its fullness.

### Mission application

MB Mission believes the Trinity provides the relational model, creative life and sure foundation for global church planting. The salvation message (holistic gospel) has as its source the Father's love for the world. This love embraces all people groups. Jesus' incarnation and sacrificial service determine the model for participating in God's mission. The gospel is founded on his life, death and resurrection.

The Spirit of God creates, shapes and empowers the church to carry on God's mission to the least reached peoples of the earth. Through listening prayer and community discernment, MB church planting efforts are a response to God's calling on MB Mission to participate in the extension of his kingdom among the least reached.

### Trinitarian Community

The above summary of the MB Trinitarian understanding serves as a foundation for its newfound emphasis on the Trinitarian community. Not only are the three persons of the Trinity on mission, they are also communal. Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in an intimate, eternal relationship. Father, Son and Holy Spirit love each other deeply, glorify each other, cede to each other, enhance each other, release each

other for specific roles, share everything, are committed to eternal oneness and always communicate with each other. They work together for the salvation of humankind and the restoration of all things.

### Mission application

For this reason, MB Mission seeks to form church planting teams that reflect the Trinity in their relational life and live the shared values of Jesus' kingdom as they cross frontiers to plant churches.

They send teams characterized by shared divine calling, covenantal relationships, strategic team leadership, healthy patterns of conflict resolution, a common philosophy of ministry, and an environment oriented by grace. As ambassadors of God among least-reached people groups, missionaries seek to experience and reflect this glorious oneness as they live community before those who have never heard of Jesus or had the privilege of participating in Christian community.

MB Mission sends out church planting teams, called and equipped to live in community, with complementary gifting (Eph. 4:11-16; I Cor. 12-14), doing life and ministry together so that the least-reached people will experience the presence of God among them through this Spirit-filled community of followers and be inspired to form their own indigenous communities of faith that reflect the presence and glory of God.

## Kingdom of God

### Holistic Service

Holistic ministry is rooted in the MB understanding of the Kingdom of God, encompassing all of life, and God's eternal desire to see his glory manifest among all the *ethne.*[4] The apostolic task is to invite the peoples of the earth to form communities of followers around Jesus. Disciples of Jesus are to experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit on all levels: spiritual, emotional, physical, relational, familial, social, and financial. MB Mission is seeking to transform its "implicit holistic theology" and historic three-priority framework for mission (evangelism and church planting, leadership training, and social action) into a fully-owned, integrative process which reflects the fullness of God.

Churches of the kingdom value medical and educational ministries as much as evangelism and healing ministries. Agricultural and business personnel who follow Jesus walk full of the Spirit and share their faith with those they assist through both word and deed. There is no need for separation. "Holistic church planting that transforms communities among the least reached," the vision statement of MB Mission, should simply emanate from a life of communion with the Triune God.

When the understanding of holistic ministry is grounded in the nature of God, there is no need to separate evangelism and spiritual deliverance from justice and peace initiatives. As the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed and incarnated, demons are expelled, relationships are healed and communities are transformed. Salvation, peace, and justice are possible because of Jesus' authority over all things. They are seamlessly and integrally connected in God's holiness. They are faces of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus.

### Mission application

Followers of Jesus work for peace and justice in the world. They understand that individual and communal peace is only possible when Jesus himself is their peace, reigning in their lives and healing their communities (Eph. 2:11-22). Our mission candidates are equipped to walk under the authority of God in their homes, the church and the workplace. If they have not learned to walk under God-given authority in these spheres, they will lack wisdom and authority in arming themselves to confront their spiritual enemies and work for lasting peace among the least reached.

As God's kingdom is established among new people groups, missionaries and national believers often encounter resistance and attack from their spiritual enemy. Governments are sometimes hostile. New believers are ostracized by families and the larger society. Mission candidates are being equipped to walk under the authority of Jesus as they share the good news of the kingdom through peacemaking and conflict resolution, spiritual deliverance, inner healing and gospel proclamation.

The challenge is for MB missionaries to understand their primary identity as disciples under the lordship of Jesus who are ready to immerse themselves long-term in the least-reached context, willing to die for the least reached people group out of love for Jesus. His invitation is to walk in the fullness of the Spirit, as lambs among wolves, in the midst of darkness (2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 6:10-20).

## Mission Ecclesiology

An understanding of the "who" of God shapes the "who" of the church. If God defines what it means to be alive in the kingdom, then the church is to be the most tangible expression of that kingdom life. If God empowers human beings for service, then the church must be an experience of God's gracious reign and the empowering body that releases its members for mission to the world. If God is present in the world to save and restore, then the church must exist for the redemption of the world and be the community of faith, which ministers healing and radically works for peace. If the Trinity lives in eternal covenant community and seeks to covenant with human beings, then the church should be the human community where covenant values are embodied through the bonding of the Holy Spirit. If God is one who compassionately

cares and shepherds his people, then the church should be the community where the Shepherd's voice is heard and disciples learn to follow his counsel. The church is to be a visible revelation of the Trinity to a watching world. To be seen it must be actively involved in the world.

In essence, the church is to be a reflection of the Godhead on earth. It is to live the reality of God's presence, embody the values of the kingdom of heaven, and make disciples of all people groups. MB Mission believes that the primary agent for kingdom transformation among the world's people groups is the gathered community of Jesus' followers: that is, a planted church in a given context (e.g., ethno-linguistic people group or geographical region).

### *Mission application*

Therefore, MB Mission intentionally trains mission candidates and forms teams under the guidance of the Spirit that will reflect the multiple gifting necessary for kingdom life. The way training is done is as important as the content of the instruction. Our missionary expression naturally flows out of who we are. Who we are and how we live is as important as what we know and what we can do.

MB Mission promotes a transformational training philosophy which facilitates the integration of character change (spiritual maturity), relational growth (conflict resolution patterns, interpersonal communication, etc.), spiritual awareness, cross-cultural sensitivity, and ministry skill development. For transformation to happen on all levels, this learning experience requires the Spirit of God, a cross-cultural context, experience, reflection, and analysis. The learning process takes place in real life.

### Servant Leadership

An understanding of the "who" of God is not only transforming the MB understanding of church, it is also fundamentally transforming its understanding of the character and function of leadership. In the past, at times, MB leadership has been largely confined to the pastoral and teaching roles (most often positions). While shepherding and teaching ministries are critical for the pastoral care of the community of faith and the instruction of God's people in the whole counsel of God, they do not fully reflect the fullness of God's design for leadership in his kingdom.

The New Testament provides ample support for a broader definition and experience of leadership. Apostolic ministry carries the glory of God into yet unreached people groups or regions. It lays the foundation for the expansion of the church. Prophetic ministry hears the voice of God and speaks forth his word to the church and the nations. Evangelistic ministry shares the good news of Jesus through word and deed with the world. The teaching ministry instructs disciples in the ways of the kingdom and encourages them to multiply. The shepherding ministry cares for the wounded,

empowers the weak for service and zealously labors for the health of God's people.

Church leadership is not grounded in positional authority. In Scripture, the Father delegates all authority to the Son. Jesus exercises his authority through service (John 13) and eventually makes the ultimate sacrifice for a fallen humanity (John 19). After his resurrection, he delegates all authority to his disciples (Matthew 28). They are to exercise their authority by making disciples of all nations in the power of the Spirit. The first disciples delegate their authority to new disciples.

Leadership exists to empower and equip the members of Christ's body for service so that the mystery of the gospel might be revealed to all peoples—God present among his people (Eph. 4:11-16; 3:7-10; Col. 1:24-29). This empowerment is received as leaders live a life of worship in his presence among the nations. All ministries empowered by the Spirit are essential for the church to mature and experience the fullness of God.

### Mission application

Missionaries are trained in church planting contexts where the realities of service to the world demand the emergence of all ministries of the Spirit. Along with training in shepherding and teaching ministries, mission candidates are mentored in apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic ministries. Without these ministries, missionaries become less visionary and hopeful in relation to their moment in history, less perceptive in their understanding of spiritual truth for their time, and less compassionate for those who live outside of Christ. Most importantly, they and the churches they plant fail to fulfill their purpose as the embodiment of God's love on earth.

## God and His Immanence

### God Speaks

Our God is on mission. He is the initiator who serves, speaks, empowers and sends his followers. As the Father sent his Son into the world, twenty-first century missionaries are sent by the Holy Spirit (John 20:21) to embrace their eternal inheritance among the *ethne* (Matt. 28:18-20). But, as Jacob Loewen rightly notes, many Western missionaries have difficulty hearing the "still small voice" and "often miss strategic directives from him, and when this happens we become hindrances in God's work."[5] When considering our future, we do not hear God's invitation to participate in his redemptive plan for humanity. When walking among the harassed and helpless of our generation, we do not sense God's heart of compassion. When working among those who have never heard of Jesus, we are not prompted to share the good news of the kingdom. When observing the unfolding of human history, we do not feel called to intercede and act.

Throughout Scripture, however, we find God speaking clearly and repeatedly to individuals and whole people groups (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3; Isa. 6:1-7; Jer. 1:4-10; Acts 13:1-3; Rom. 4:17-21). The advance of God's kingdom, from the first pages of Scripture to the final day of ultimate consummation, utterly depends on the leading of God's Spirit. MB Mission believes that God continues to speak to his people through Scripture, prophetic words and listening prayer. He calls, guides, counsels, teaches, orients and directs.

*Mission application*

For this reason, mission candidates are taught to listen to God's voice through Scripture, community, prayer, silence, creation and circumstances. God is creative. He is speaking to his people and to the nations. As mission candidates stop to listen, they find that God not only speaks to them, but he shares with them his heart for the *ethne.*

When considering new church planting initiatives among least reached people groups, MB Mission employs an extensive community decision-making process. Team members are mobilized to pray for the people group, intercession teams are sent to the geographical region, local churches of mission candidates are engaged, and leadership teams (Lead Team and Mission Board) provide discernment. Engagement in mission is a response to God's invitation to receive our inheritance.

## God the Catalyst

Jacob Loewen rightly suggests that a catalyst needs "to improve his hearing of and his obedience to directives from God's Spirit" if he is to be sensitive to God's work among a chosen people groups.[6] As Mennonite Brethren are called to participate in God's mission among the *ethne*, they discover that God the initiator is already at work in the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) family. He has catalyzed a process in the lives of individual followers, their families, and their communities of faith. The task of the leadership team is to be sensitive to what God is stirring among his people and hear what he is saying.

Following affirmation and sending, church planting missionaries seek to discern what God is catalyzing among the least reached people group. The are not bound to prescriptive strategies and prefabricated methodologies. They seek to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. Jacob Loewen referred to the missionary role as a catalytic role, a passing role, where he or she refuses to become a major player in the local context. When missionaries begin to work among a chosen people group, they again recognize that God has been active among them. They attempt to respond in obedience to the directives of the Spirit as they enter the new culture.

*Mission application*

Following the Jesus model, missionaries seek to incarnate the Word of God by learning the heart language of the new people group, adjusting to cultural patterns and norms, serving the people in a sensitive manner, communicating the salvation message, and above all, cultivating a genuine love for the people. MB Missionaries are taught to serve with an equipping, empowering, and releasing mindset. From the outset, they prepare to leave and transition to new initiatives.

The current MB church planting philosophy equips and empowers new followers of Jesus to lead their communities of faith from the outset. Missionaries are available to equip with biblical training, provide access to alternative models, serve as a mirror to the emerging national church, connect indigenous leadership with the global family of faith and, more importantly, direct them to the Spirit of God as their source for provision and guidance. In faith, they plant seeds of the kingdom.

The goal is a contextually relevant, indigenous church which reflects God's glory, fully embraces its identity in the kingdom, multiplies spontaneously and follows the leading of the Spirit in mission to other *ethne*. As the new family of churches coalesces, MB missionaries continue to serve, as requested, as catalysts in the areas of community development, leadership training, and mission sending (Mission Capacity Building). If they are being invited to come alongside, their role is to nurture those planted kingdom seeds.

## God of All Peoples

### Christ's Return and God's Eternal Reign

The missionary passion of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists "sprang from the conviction that the end of the world was near."[7] They accepted their call to make disciples of all nations as a sacred trust. In similar fashion, MBs believe they are living in the last days. These "last days" dawned with Christ's death, his resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first disciples at Pentecost. They will end with his second coming and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. Between Pentecost and Christ's return in glory, "the church carries out its mission in the world."[8] Christ's return is imminent.

*Mission application*

The imminence of Christ's return shapes life priorities and elevates the urgency of the missionary endeavor. Mennonite Brethren understand that "the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations (*ethne*), and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). They believe that Jesus came to

ransom "people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" and to make them "a kingdom and priests" to God so that they might worship God together and reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-14). God's desires "all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Mennonite Brethren believe that all *ethne* are to enter the eternal city reflecting God's glory through their unique ethnicities and cultures (Rev. 21:22-27). Mission in the "already" (present) anticipates the coming kingdom, the "not yet" (future). To that end, they carry God's glory to the nations so that all *ethne* might enter into the fullness of salvation through Jesus Christ and fulfill the purpose for which they were created (Ps. 67). "Confident in this hope the church engages in mission until the Lord returns, empowered by the certainty that God will create a new heaven and a new earth."[9]

### The International Community of the Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jesus' name is being worshipped around the globe. Mission is no longer from North America and Europe to the Global South. Today, many ICOMB partner conferences are also sending missionaries. The role of MB Mission, as the mission agency of the Canadian and American MB conferences, and the ICOMB partner conferences, is to continue to send missionaries to the least-reached regions of the world. The Great Commission and the Great Commandment are as binding today as they were for the first disciples. Currently, MB Mission has long-term workers among least-reached people groups in West Africa, North Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and Latin America. ICOMB partner conferences are also sending missionaries to these regions.

For the ICOMB family to participate more fully in God's mission, all members must find their identity in Jesus. All must see themselves as full heirs of the kingdom of God—sons and daughters of the Father, sent out under Jesus' lordship, full of the Holy Spirit, with authority to proclaim and live the gospel among the nations. All must see themselves as a sign of the in-breaking kingdom of God. All members must look with faith to the same God who inspired and led the first followers of Jesus.

### *Mission application*

As the global MB mission networks continue to take form, ICOMB has requested that MB Mission encourage the ICOMB partner conferences in their efforts to embrace their global mission, building their capacity through leadership equipping and community development (Mission Capacity Building service). As part of this service, MB Mission facilitates the church planting and mission sending initiatives of ICOMB partner conferences. From the perspective of MB Mission, the key

questions are those of national or regional vision, ownership, and initiative. It must be remembered that MB Mission's Mission Capacity Building service is an interim step toward the full development of a global mission alliance.

This engagement as an ICOMB family is already leading to the formation of multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multinational teams—a tremendous challenge, but also a wonderful expression of God's glory. As global mission has served to unite the Canadian and American conferences, MB Mission believes that ICOMB partner conferences will be united by participation in global mission together. Walking together in mission, the people groups encompassed by the ICOMB family will more fully reflect the glory and goodness of God to a watching world. As they do this, they will anticipate their worship-filled reunion with all communities of faith, submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ and united by the Holy Spirit, before the throne of the Father in his eternal kingdom.

## Notes

[1] Doug Heidebrecht, "Mennonite Brethren and the Gospel: A Theology of Mission on the Way," *Direction,* 42/2 (2013): 207.

[2] Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 21.

[3] Hans Kasdorf, "Toward a Mennonite Brethren Theology of Mission," *Mission Focus,* 16/1(1988): 1-6.

[4] Paul Hiebert, "World Trends and Their Implications for Mennonite Brethren Mission," *Mission Focus* 16/4 (1988): 75-82.

[5] Jacob Loewen, "Strategies for Cross-Cultural Mission: Past, Present and Future," *Mission Focus* 16/4: 88.

[6] Loewen, "Strategies," 84.

[7] H.W. Meihuizen, "The Missionary Zeal of the Early Anabaptists," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1984), 90.

[8] *Confession of Faith: Commentary and Practical Application* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000), 200.

[9] *Knowing and Living Your Faith: A Study of the Confession of Faith International Community of Mennonite Brethren,* eds. Elmer A. Martens and Peter J. Klassen (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008), 128.

## Recommended Reading

*Confession of Faith: Commentary and Pastoral Application.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2000.

Engen, Charles Van. *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.

Harms-Wiebe, Ray. "The Global Mennonite Brethren Movement: Some Reflections and Projections." In *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections after 150 Years,* edited by Abe J. Dueck, Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011.

Heidebrecht, Doug. "Mennonite Brethren and the Gospel: A Theology of Mission on the Way." *Direction* 42/2: 207-228.

Hiebert, Paul. "World Trends and Their Implications for Mennonite Brethren Mission." *Mission Focus* 16/4 (1988): 75-82.

Kasdorf, Hans. "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking." Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 1986.

Kasdorf, Hans. "Toward a Mennonite Brethren Theology of Mission." *Mission Focus* 16/1 (1988): 1-6.

Loewen, Jacob. "Strategies for Cross-Cultural Mission: Past, Present and Future." *Mission Focus* 16/4 (1988): 84-90.

Martens, Elmer A and Peter J. Klassen, eds. *Knowing and Living Your Faith: A Study of the Confession of Faith International Community of Mennonite Brethren.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008.

Peters, G. W. *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions.* Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1984.

## Study Questions

1. The author articulates the individual roles of the three persons of the Trinity in mission, and their united operation as the Triune God in mission. List two individual roles of each person of the Trinity. Also list two operations that the Trinity does together.

2. According to the author, the church is the primary agent of the kingdom of God. What does this mean for mission agencies sponsored by their church? For parachurch agencies? For the kind of mission activity we engage in?

3. Do you agree that the fivefold leadership ministry is valid for today—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? If not, why not? If so, can you identify people in your circle with these gifts?

4. This chapter was written from a mission agency perspective. Is that why after each theological reflection there is a section of mission application, or should all theological reflection result in mission application? Discuss.

Section B

# Historical Perspectives

# 8 The Anabaptist Approach to Mission[1]

Hans Kasdorf

The Swedish historian Gunnar Westin points out that beginning with the apostolic era God's *ekklesia* consisted of free independent minority fellowships within Jewish and pagan societies. This *ekklesia* was free from governmental control, separated from the world, voluntary in terms of membership, bound together by a sense of fellowship among its members, submissive to the authority of Scripture in matters of theology and ethics, and strong in missionary outreach.[2] These were precisely the characteristics that captured the attention of the Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation, as both European and Anglo-American scholars have pointed out.[3]

Their primary objective was not to reform the Constantinian-Theodosian structures of the territorial church, but to restore the primitive-apostolic model of the believers' church with its implicit theology of discipleship under Christ's lordship

Hans Kasdorf, 1928-2011 (D.Miss., Fuller Theological Seminary; Th.D., Missiology, University of South Africa), a Mennonite Brethren missionary, educator, missiologist, and theologian, was born in Siberia, Soviet Union. With his family, he migrated to Brazil in 1930. Following studies in Canada, Kasdorf returned to Brazil as a missionary for five years. For most of the next 50 years he taught in numerous schools and churches around the world, especially at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (Fresno, USA) and *Freie Theologische Akademie* (Giessen, Germany). He was a prolific writer in both German and English.

and explicit evangelistic witness in the power of the Holy Spirit. This led them to unquestioned obedience to the risen Christ's mandate to "make disciples of all peoples" (Mt. 28:19). "No words of the Master," contends Franklin H. Littell, "were given more serious attention by the Anabaptist followers than His final command."[4]

So central was the Great Commission to the total life of the Anabaptists that it became a key factor to enhance their understanding of history and the world, the church and the kingdom, discipleship and witness.

The missionary mandate and radical obedience were considered to be inseparable ingredients for a life of discipleship under Christ's lordship. This found its clearest expression in Anabaptists' engagement in world mission which in turn reflected an advanced concept of a mission strategy.

Mission strategy may be defined as the way and manner in which the church carries out the Lord's command to make disciples. Every strategy must be in harmony with biblical teaching, relevant to the time in which it is used, and effective when applied to mission situations. This implies adequate goals, appropriate time and place, well-defined methods, the right kind of people, and, above all, the dynamic and power of the Holy Spirit, without whom no person can be a witness in this world, as the Lausanne Covenant points out.[5] The Anabaptists firmly believed in this kind of mission strategy. Although these terms were not used, the principles they expressed undergirded the entire Anabaptist mission program. Thus the application of contemporary mission concepts will enhance our understanding of—and appreciation for—the dynamic mission movement of sixteenth-century Anabaptism.

## Setting Definable Goals

The Anabaptists firmly believed that it was significant to observe carefully the order laid down by the Lord in the Great Commission for the sole purpose of making disciples of all peoples: (1) *going* into all the world; (2) followed by *preaching* the gospel to every creature; (3) upon preaching, a sense of *anticipation* that humankind will respond by believing in the gospel; (4) then *baptizing* those who respond by faith, having the promise of being saved; and (5) subsequently *incorporating* the saved into the fellowship of believers, the true Christian church.[6]

The Anabaptists dealt in depth with the concept of making disciples. No other Christian movement between the apostolic era and the modern mission period has articulated and demonstrated more clearly the meaning of discipling than have the Anabaptists. While mainline Reformers rediscovered the great Pauline term *Glaube* (faith), the Radical Reformers rediscovered the evangelists' word *Nachfolge* (discipleship). People cannot, they maintained, call Jesus Lord unless they are his

disciples indeed, prepared to follow him in every way. This was the message they preached, the code they lived by, and the faith they died for. This was a unique message, one of reconciliation and forgiveness. But it was a costly message, one that people heard mainly from the Anabaptists. Harold S. Bender (1897-1962) has described the Anabaptist concept of discipleship in these words:

> It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. The Anabaptist could not understand a Christianity which made regeneration, holiness, and love primarily a matter of intellect, of doctrinal belief, or of subjective "experience," rather than one of the transformation of life. Repentance must be "evidenced" by newness of behavior. "In evidence" is the keynote which rings through the testimonies and challenges of the early Swiss Brethren when they are called to give an account of themselves. The whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ in a covenant of discipleship, a covenant which the Anabaptist writers delighted to emphasize. The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships. The true test of the Christian, they held, is discipleship.[7]

The missionary objectives emerge from the Christian's life which is, as the Anabaptists understood it, that of being a disciple. This, in turn, means multiplication of that life by making more disciples who not only enjoy the privileges, but also participate in the responsibilities and share in the cost which such life entails.

## Selecting Responsive Population Groups

Some evidence suggests that the Anabaptists operated on what some missiologists today call the homogeneous unit principle.[8] That means that the missionaries sought to witness to people with whom they had things in common. They concentrated their efforts on peoples who were of similar social and economic status as the missioners themselves. Thus the lay missionaries were sent to rural areas, winning whole family units to Christ; the artisan evangelists were sent to people of their profession, leading them to profess Jesus as Savior and Lord; the educated were sent to the cities where they were bound to meet the sophisticated and secular elite, introducing them to Christ.

Time and place were equally significant in finding people who readily responded to the claims of Christ. This became particularly crucial in view of existing ecclesiastical and civil laws. To preach the gospel outside the framework of either the Roman Catholic or Protestant Church and by people not authorized by ecclesiastical and state officials was punishable by one or more of the following measures: confiscation of property, expulsion from the land, imprisonment, or death. But multitudes of people were not reached through the institutional channels, and the Anabaptists felt responsible to witness to them, even if that meant suffering the consequences. This meant that prudence had to be exercised in selecting time and place for evangelistic gatherings. That is precisely what they did, as a German historian has convincingly pointed out:

> Usually they had their gatherings in a forest. In the Forest of Strassburg, [Alsace], for example, they had as many as 300 people in one single meeting. They also met regularly in the Ringlinger Forest at Bretten, in the Schillingswald between Olbronn and Knittlingen, and in the Forest of Prussia near Aachen. These meetings were held between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. In the section of the forest called *Bregehren* at Walkerbach in Wuerttemberg one can still find a pulpit-like rock known as *Gaisstein* where they conducted their worship and gospel services with the aid of two lanterns to dispel the darkness. In addition, they met in isolated mills, such as the one at Kleinleutersdorf in Orlammunde, or at the sawmill in Zorge on the Harz and in similar places. Peter Valk preached in a sheep barn at Saal in Thuringia. Enders Feckelein preached to a number of people sitting there with open Bibles around two tables in a blacksmith shop. Sometimes they gathered for meetings at places that would allow them to escape quickly from the hands of persecutors in the event they were found out. In Tirol, for example, they met on remote farms, in sand pits, and in the shelters of huge rocks. But not all places were hideouts. There were at least two castles where the Anabaptist missionaries evangelized. One was the Schloss Munichau at Kitzbuhl and the other the Schloss Neuhof at Brunneck in Tirol. The records also show that these meetings generally drew large crowds.[9]

## Applying Relevant Methods

We will consider the Anabaptists' missionary methods in terms of an earlier spontaneous expansion and a later strategized expansion. The first period covers about three-and-a-half years. It began on January 21, 1525, when the unavoidable

breach between Zwingli and his most faithful disciples occurred over the issue of the mass and ended with the famous Missionary Conference of Augsburg (also known as the Martyrs' Synod), held from August 20-24, 1527. From this time on every mission endeavor of the Anabaptists became increasingly marked by a deliberate mission strategy that aimed at evangelizing all of Europe and the whole world.

### Spontaneous Methods before August 1527

Historical records point to at least four specific methods the Anabaptists used to make known their faith.

*Preaching pilgrims*. During the early period the Anabaptist faith spread much like that of the apostolic church. "Anabaptist leaders at first wandered as pilgrims, seeking relief from persecution, and shepherding from time to time the little groups of the faithful. As persecution grew more savage, hundreds of families took to the road, moving slowly eastward toward the Moravian settlements. A whole people thus became pilgrims, exiles for Christ."[10]

Wherever they went these persecuted, wandering Anabaptists preached the gospel of the kingdom, calling men and women to repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. They may well have learned this method from Zwingli, whom they respected as a dynamic preacher.

*House meetings*. The Anabaptists' objective was to reach whole households with the gospel. Fritz Blanke records a number of house meetings held during the week of January 22-29, 1525. At times these were the spontaneous result of a casual visit; at other times they were planned by believers. Sometimes these meetings resulted in the conversion and baptism of all adult members, who then celebrated the Lord's Supper together. These meetings frequently manifested the typical characteristics of a spiritual awakening. Fritz Blanke comments:

> When we seek a caption for the inner processes of these eight days, the concept "revival movement" presents itself. We thereby understand the sudden occurrence of a religious awakening, in which not just a few individuals but a considerable number are gripped by a personal Christian disposition to repentance and break through to the joy of salvation.
>
> This happened in Zollikon. We can still dearly see the process of repentance in sequence from the protocol of the hearings (Nos. 29, 31, 32)... Here we meet the reformational understanding of sin, and that not just as abstract theory but as personal experience.

The impact of this experience is underscored by the strong emotions accompanying it. These farmers, who otherwise certainly were accustomed to hide their feelings, broke out in wailing and weeping.[11]

Professor Blanke concludes that the "soul struggles" of countless ordinary nameless Christians of this period were crowned by forgiveness and sealed by baptism, the visible sign that God has pardoned the sinner.[12]

*Bible reading and lay evangelism.* Since the leaders of the awakening were quickly arrested and banned, the responsibility of spiritual care and continued evangelism was transferred to local farmers and artisans. Those who could read began to read the Word of God to nonliterates as they met in homes and barns and village churches. When people confessed Christ, lay brothers performed the rite of baptism. Hans Bichter, for example, baptized thirty believers within a week, and Jörg Schad baptized forty in a single day—in the village of Zollikon.[13] A significant benefit these new Christians shared with other reformers was Luther's New Testament which had gone through at least twelve editions between 1522 and 1525.

*Persecution.* Persecution was severe, and only two or three of the sixty leaders who met in Augsburg for the missionary conference in August 1527 lived to see the fifth year of the Anabaptist movement.[14]

---

**Witness of the Accused**

(Ausbund Song No. 12)

A few excerpts translated from song Number 12, written in 1550, serve as an example. Followed by a fairly long narrative conversation between the official accusers and the Christian accused, the latter vindicates his case by saying, "We speak of these things only from the Word of God." Then he adds in rather unso¬phisticated but in no uncertain terms this appeal:

We do not want you to forego
The truth which we ourselves do know;
That by erroneous teachings
And even by decrees,
By falsehood and deceptions
You have been totally deceived;
For thirteen hundred years
You have these lies believed.

I plead, please let me say to you
That wolves are anxious to pursue:
They come clad in clothes of sheep—
With subtle stealth and guile
Deceive the poor in spirit.
To count the cost they do refuse,
They see not their reward;
In death their life may lose.

Oh hear the call from God, our Lord,
The apostles' teaching of His Word
With compassionate voices
Wooing to Him to come.
So knock and call now on Him,
He will open wide the door,
Will break your prison walls.
Oh praise Him evermore!

(My translation)

Some of the early Swiss leaders did not even live to see the 1527 conference. As one pages through the Ausbund,[15] the first Anabaptist hymnary published in 1564, one reads time and again a biographical note about the author, including such execution data as burned 1525, beheaded 1528, drowned 1526, hanged 1537. Many of these songs not only told the story of the martyrs and their deaths; they also were a powerful evangelistic message to the executioners and those who witnessed the executions. The appeal was to repent and be converted and reconciled to God. Donald F. Durnbaugh states that "in the duchy of Wurttemberg in the sixteenth century, all of the Anabaptist men were expelled or executed," and "only women with small children were allowed to remain at home." That is not to say, however, that the authorities considered the women less dangerous than the men in spreading the "illicit faith." In fact, the government chained the women in their homes "to keep them from going to their relatives and neighbors to witness to their faith," as was their custom.[16]

Despite such stringent measures, the martyrs and evangelists seldom recanted. Their testimony made a lasting impression on many executioners and spectators, so that not a few came to accept the same faith they had tried to resist and obliterate. Yet by 1527 all Anabaptist founding fathers in Switzerland had either been executed or banished and all followers so successfully exterminated that the movement became more dynamic in other European countries than in Zürich and Zollikon. As the movement spread through the pilgrim witnesses, the biblical message was so winsome, so overpowering, and so appealing to the masses that, as one recent German historian has put it, "often a few hours at a new place were sufficient to found a new congregation."[17]

**Strategic Methods after August 1527**

This section highlights several missionary methods between 1527 and 1565, covering the time from the first missionary conference in Augsburg to the so-called golden age of the Anabaptist movement in Moravia. I will not discuss this golden age which was initiated after 1565 under the dynamic leadership of Peter Walpot. Walpot headed "the greatest missionary organization of the epoch maintaining an extensive correspondence and guiding a large and effective corps of lay missionaries."[18]

*Evangelizing Wandermissionare*. This method of preaching by the wandering missioners continued past the second half of the sixteenth century. Like the famous Irish *peregrini* almost a thousand years before them, these Anabaptist preachers wandered from place to place and proclaimed the gospel. But unlike *the peregrini,* these Anabaptist missionaries baptized new converts, established Christians in their

faith, and gathered them into local congregations. One such preacher was the ex-priest Georg Blaurock (1492-1529). He was no doubt the greatest evangelist of the time, traveling far and wide throughout Europe. During the four years from his conversion under Zwingli in 1525 until his death at the stake in 1529, he baptized at least a thousand (some say 4,000) new converts and planted many new churches.[19]

*Systematic sending of missionaries*. The Anabaptist churches discerned and systematically sent out many apostles. The designation *apostles* was deliberately chosen for those who were sent out in apostolic teams. Generally, such teams consisted of three people who were commissioned to specific places for the sole purpose of evangelism and church planting. Hans Hut (d. 1527), one of the chairmen of the 1527 missionary conference in Augsburg, had already been instrumental in sending apostles to many parts of Europe. But by then the Augsburg church was behind the program in evangelism, and the Anabaptist apostolate took on new shape and form.

Due to intensified persecution, these apostles were convinced that time was running out for their missionary efforts. The sending church of Augsburg shared this conviction of the missionaries and urgently called for commitment to evangelism. Within two weeks (from the termination of the conference on August 24, 1527, to the issuance of a new mandate by the Augsburg authorities against the Anabaptists on September 6) the Augsburg church recruited and sent out more than two dozen missionaries to strategic centers in Germany and Austria. But what had happened to the dynamic mission centers in Switzerland a few years earlier now became the fate of the sending church in Augsburg: It was choked by fierce persecution. Three years after the conference only two or three of the sixty leaders in attendance had escaped the hangman's scaffold. That is why history has ironically recorded the first Protestant missionary conference of August 1527 as the Martyrs' Synod.

*Dynamic lay witness*. Early Anabaptism operated on the principle of the priesthood of all believers. Lay people were missionaries. Schäufele has likened this method to that of the primitive church where the bearers of the gospel message were predominantly the common folk, not the ordained leaders. The sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) is reported to have said that Luther's principle of the priesthood of all believers was actualized "in Anabaptism with its revivalistic character, on the basis of its sect sociology."[20] Durnbaugh observes that the Reformation churches have scarcely anything like it to set over against the Anabaptist phenomenon. This applies to both the ministry of mission to the world and the ministry of care in the church.[21]

With lay evangelism, one authority notes, the Anabaptists made use of three specific channels to point people to Christ. One of them was the web of family relationships. Schäufele comments: "Family relationships played an important role in

the expansion of the Anabaptist revival in the years 1527 and 1528 in Augsburg."[22] Thus an old Anabaptist calendar of the time reports on the lay ministry of a certain Endris Fachlein near Stuttgart who is said to have won almost his entire relationship to the Anabaptist faith. The historical record offers interesting illustrations as to how one family member won another to Christ and how the faith contagiously moved on to cousins, uncles, and aunts.[23]

Another channel for lay witness among the Anabaptists was to neighbors and other acquaintances. Bible study groups met in homes and invited unbelievers from the neighborhood with the objective of winning them to the Lord. Social events such as weddings and similar community affairs, as strange as it may sound to us, provided excellent opportunities to make new acquaintances and to invite people to a Bible Reading.

"There is indeed impressive evidence," says one historian, "that most members felt the call to convince and convert others, relatives, neighbors, strangers. The rapid spread of the movement is otherwise inexplicable. The well-known Martyrs' Synod of 1527 staked out separate areas of mission responsibility in a 'grand map of evangelical enterprise.'"[24]

Occupational contacts provided another channel for lay missionary outreach. The Anabaptist employer sought to win employees to a life of discipleship under Christ. When Katherin Lorenzen, who later became the wife of Jacob Hutter, had to testify in court about her faith, she said that her employer, a Christian baker, as well as other believing employees, had witnessed to her and persuaded her to join the Anabaptist sect. Records also show that laborers and artisans took their evangelistic tasks seriously in everyday contacts with people. Since many of them were banned from their cities and states, they had to search for employment elsewhere, either in the craft of their occupation or with farmers on the land—at least until 1539 when the Decree of Regensburg made it illegal to hire an Anabaptist. Until that date the Anabaptist workers witnessed to their masters and fellow workers.[25] Thus, sent missionaries and laity alike made a deliberate and conscientious effort to form what we might call extension chains for the spreading of the gospel and the planting of believers' congregations.

## Sending Responsible Agents

These people were at the right time in the right place, employing the right methods to achieve the goal of making disciples and multiplying churches. The Anabaptist annals record several characteristics of those who were committed to present the claims of Christ to the lost in the world.

**Compelled by the Great Commission**

The great Anabaptist missionary Hans Hut often preached to large crowds. Upon baptizing large numbers of those who repented of their sins and confessed Christ as Lord, Hut would challenge each one to obey the Great Commission and tell others the good news. Those who obeyed always went under the shadow of the cross, "where the representatives of the state churches dared not go, and for the Gospel's sake were made pilgrims and martyrs throughout the known world." When asked what compelled them to go, they answered without hesitation: the Great Commission.[26]

**Convicted by a Deep Sense of Calling**

The Anabaptists called it *Berufungs-bewusstsein.* Nothing is more apparent in the Anabaptist missionaries than their deep sense of calling to the task. This call, as they understood it, always had two dimensions: One is internal, the other external. They explained this experience as a direct call from God inwardly perceived and a call from the church outwardly confirmed.[27]

In the first place, the Anabaptists placed great emphasis on a specific spiritual gift for the missionary task. "It is God who sends us, but the Holy Spirit who gives to us the apostolic gift for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ." Again they said, "The Spirit of God tells our spirit that we are called and must go and preach ... for it is for that purpose that He has given us to possess the gift of the Holy Spirit."[28]

Second, the call contained an external dimension. Schäufele states that in addition to the inward charismatic call, the Anabaptists followed Luther's principle of the authority of the local congregation to discern the inner call and then to commission people to the ministry to which they felt called.[29] In the early Anabaptist document known as *The Schleitheim Confession* (February 24, 1527), we find the instruction that the local church has the responsibility to choose the right person for the right task, whom the Lord has thus appointed. Once the persons had been discerned, the congregation publically confirmed their calling and sent them on their way as missionaries.

**Commissioned by a Supporting Church**

The Graner Codes, found in the so-called Brunner Archives, describe in some detail an Anabaptist commissioning service.[30] First, the candidates reported to the congregation how God had called them into mission work and to preach the gospel in other lands. This was followed by a session of admonition and encouragement. The missionaries asked the congregation to remain faithful in their local tasks, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and providing for the poor and unemployed. In

conclusion the missionaries asked that they themselves be remembered with prayers and material provisions. In response the people of the congregation pledged their support, wished them well, and prayed for God's mercies upon their ministry. Thus the commissioning service was actually a kind of covenant between the commissioning body and the commissioned team.

The entire congregation observed the commissioning ceremony. In most cases the missionaries were married men, leaving families behind; occasionally wives went with their husbands. In the event that the missionaries would be executed by "sword and fire," as expressed in the song, the church was committed to take care of the widow and the orphaned children.[32]

All this speaks of a profound *Sendungsbewusstsein* or sense of sentness. According to the late professor J. A. Toews, Sebastian Franck (1499-1543) was both friend and critic of the early Anabaptists. He was so impressed by their consciousness of mission that he described this aspect of their life as follows: "They wish to imitate apostolic life . . . move about from one place to another preaching and claiming a great calling and mission." Some of them were so sure of their calling, wrote Franck, that they felt "themselves responsible for the whole world."[33]

### Committed To a High View of Discipleship

The missionaries sent out from the main centers in South Germany, Switzerland, and Moravia were all of noble character. Since they were committed to the concept of the believers' church as a visible structure within society, they

---

**A Song of Commission**

Since singing played a significant role from the inception of the Anabaptist movement, and since hymns were often written for specific occasions, I have selected and translated several verses from a twenty-five stanza song used for an early commissioning service.[31]

"As God his Son was sending
Into this world of sin,
His Son is now commanding
That we this world should win.
He sends us and commissions
To preach the gospel clear,
To call upon all nations
To listen and to hear.

To Thee, O God, we're praying,
We're bent to do thy will;
Thy Word we are obeying
Thy glory we fulfill.
All peoples we are telling
To mend their sinful way,
That they might cease rebelling,
Lest judgment be their pay.

And if thou, Lord, desire
And should it be thy will
That we taste sword and fire
By those who thus would kill
Then comfort, pray, our loved ones
And tell them, we've endured
And we shall see them yonder—
Eternally secured.

Thy Word, O Lord, does teach us,
And we do understand;
Thy promises are with us
Until the very end.
Thou hast prepared a haven—
Praised be thy holy name.
We laud thee, God of heaven,
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen!"

insisted that their converts live exemplary lives. "No one can truly know Christ," they said, "unless he follow Him in life."[34] This was precisely one point of tension between the Church of the Restitution and the *corpus christianum* of the Reformation. The emphasis in the latter was on faith, but the Anabaptists stressed faith plus *holy* living. That is why all missionaries had to undergo rigorous tests as to ethical character before they were sent out by the church.

The Moravia churches (after 1565) had a special mission committee, a kind of sodality, whose members were well informed about both the missionary's character and the needs and opportunities for mission work. The task of this committee was to screen each of the candidates on the basis of call, gifts, and moral and spiritual qualifications. Their concept of discipleship under the lordship of Christ covered all these areas.

### Called to Carry Out the Apostolic Task

We find a close correlation between the call of the missionary to the apostolic task and the responsibility felt by the sending church to help individuals carry out the task. Whenever possible, the area of service was clearly defined by the church, taking into account such important matters as education, trade, social status, culture, and language of the candidates.[35]

As already noted, the missionaries were sent in apostolic teams to carry out their task. Since persecution was almost inevitable, the missionaries were usually sent in teams of three: First was the *Diener des Wortes,* or minister of the Word. That person was the preacher and the teacher. Second came the *Diener der Notdurft,* the servant to the needs of others, a type of deacon. Finally was the *gewöhnliche Bruder,* or common lay brother. These as well as their families were supported by the sending church. Professionals (such as architects or engineers) sometimes worked as tentmaking missionaries, supporting themselves.[36] In the event that one of the team members was apprehended, the church was immediately notified so that reinforcement could be sent and those in prison visited and their needs supplied. The task of the common lay person was usually to serve as liaison between the church and the missionaries.

## Measuring the Resulting Harvest

As we look at the missionary effort of the Anabaptist movement we are naturally interested in measurable results, in terms of both quantity and quality.

### Quantitative Results

Unfortunately, sixteenth-century church records are unavailable or incomplete. Then, too, many records are inconsistent. Furthermore, no statistics are available concerning some of the best-known leaders of the Anabaptist movement. Yet from

the fragmentary records that have been preserved we can measure, at least in part, Anabaptists' fruitful mission work.[37] (See chart below)

| Name of Missionary | Known Number of Converts Baptized | Time of Baptism | Estimated Total | Time of Service |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jakob Gross | 35 | 1 day | | 1525 |
| Jörg Schad | 40 | March 12 | | 1525 |
| Wilhelm Roubli | 60 | 1 day | | 1525 |
| Balthasar Hubmaier | 360 | Easter | 6,000 | 1525-28 |
| Conrad Grebel | "a whole procession of men and women" | | | 1525-1526 |
| Johannes Brötli | "nearly a whole village" | | | 1525 |
| Hans Bichter | 30 | March 8-15 | | 1529 |
| Martin Zehentmaier | 40 | | | 1527 |
| Leonard Dorfbrunner | 100 (about) | few mts. | 3,000 | 1525-29 |
| Georg Blaurock | 1,000 | | 4,000 | 1525-29 |
| Hans Hut | 100 (about) | 2 weeks | 12,000 | 1527-29 |
| Georg Nespitzer | 22 | 2 years | 4,000 | 1527-29 |
| Leonard Schiemer | 200 (over) | 6 mts. | | 1527 |
| Michael Kürschner | 100 (about) | 11 mts. | | 1528-29 |
| Jacob Hutter | 19 | August '35 | | 1533-35 |
| Leenaert Bouwens | 10,378 | 31 yrs. | | 1551-82 |
| Hans Mändl | 400 (about) | | 4,000 | 1561 |

Most of these missionaries died a martyr's death, and their short time of service was interrupted by days, weeks, and even months of persecution and imprisonment. Nevertheless, congregations of believers sprang up almost overnight in many parts of Europe, especially after the 1527 mission conference. By 1528 Austria was dotted with Anabaptist churches. From 1532 to 1539 the Tirol area was permeated with missionaries and young congregations, a number which grew daily.[38]

The famous social philosopher-theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) has written extensively on the impact of the Anabaptists, whom he calls "an early premature triumph of the sectarian principles of the Free Church." Troeltsch underscores their drive for missionary expansion in these words: "The whole of Central Europe was soon covered with a network of Anabaptist communities, loosely connected with each other, who all practiced a strictly Scriptural form of worship. The chief centers were Augsburg, Moravia, and Strassburg, [Alsace], and later on, in Friesland and the Netherlands."[39]

The historians Wiswedel, Littell, and Schäufele record similar achievements of the Anabaptist mission movement. Like Troeltsch, these scholars point out the growth of the church in Europe and add that scores of missionaries were sent from these centers in all directions. By the middle of the sixteenth century Anabaptist missionaries were preaching in every state of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, France, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, and Italy. Several even went as far as Denmark and Sweden in the north and Greece and Constantinople in the south. The record of a conversation among early Swiss Anabaptists states that on one occasion they talked about going "to the red Indians across the sea."[40]

### Qualitative Results

The cost of obedience to the Great Commission, however, was high. Over 2,000 Anabaptist martyrs are known by name. One authority estimates that 4,000 to 5,000 "men, women, and children fell prey to water, fire and sword."[41] To this Roland Bainton adds:

> Those who thus held themselves as sheep for the slaughter were dreaded and exterminated as if they had been wolves. They challenged the whole way of life of the community. Had they become too numerous, Protestants would have been unable to take up arms against Catholics and the Germans could not have resisted the Turks. And the Anabaptists did become numerous. They despaired of society at large, but they did not despair of winning converts to their way. Every member of the group was regarded as a missionary. Men and women left their homes to go on evangelistic tours, The established churches, whether Catholic or Protestant, were aghast at these ministers of both sexes insinuating themselves into town and farm. In some of the communities of Switzerland and the Rhine valley Anabaptists began to outnumber Catholics and Protestants alike."[42]

## Concluding Lessons

Every biblical mission strategy calls for total obedience on the part of a missionary people in every generation. As the Anabaptist of the sixteenth century, so the members of the believers' church in the twentieth century must view with equal significance the ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the *Magna Carta* of the Great Commission. The one is a call to discipleship, the other a command to make disciples. Both are given by the same Lord. Both are rooted in his abiding Word. Both must find expression by *telling, being,* and *doing* in the lives of Christ's

disciples, the people of the way (cf. Acts 9:20). Unless we learn from history, history's record has been written in vain. From the annals of our Anabaptist forebears come several lessons.

### Radical Obedience

The Anabaptists' uncompromising obedience to the Great Commission is best understood in the light of their concept of discipleship on one hand and their view of Christ's lordship on the other. Robert Friedmann (1891-1970) has pointed out that the Anabaptists lived by an implicit, relational—rather than by an explicit, creedal—theology. Such a theology of *being* and *doing* finds its clearest expression in discipleship and obedience, yet not without a verbal witness.

Obedience, however, does not emanate from a servile or legalistic attitude, but from an attitude of freedom of the will which is in harmony with the Lord's will. "If God gives commands in his Scriptures, they are meant to be obeyed and not only to be looked at as something unattainable and paradoxical."[43]

The test of discipleship stands or falls with the ancient question, "What think ye of Christ?" (Mt. 16:13-16). Hans Renck (1500-1527), one of the early Anabaptist missionaries, maintained correctly that to know Christ means to follow him; to follow him means to know him.

Harold Bender (1897-1962) attempted to answer the question of who Christ really is in Anabaptist thought:[43] Christ is more than a prophet or moral teacher of an ethical code—though he taught ethics; he is more than the second person of the Trinity included in a liturgy of praise and worship—though he is worthy of our highest adoration; he is more than an exclusive Savior who gives the gift of forgiveness and the blessings that go with it—though he is the only Savior reconciling people to God. Christ is the prophet and teacher to be listened to, the Son of God to be worshiped, the Savior who saves from sin. He is all that and more: Jesus Christ is *the Lord* who makes the believer his disciple who follows and obeys him. Radical obedience is the key.

### Priority of Mission

As the believers' church is Christocentric, so its mission is ecclesiocentric. The Lord said on one occasion, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21). As Christ maintained a consciousness of being sent by the Father, so the members of the believers' church in the New Testament tradition maintain their deep awareness of *sentness* for *witness.* Their sense of priority of mission found expression not only in a conviction of *being sent* by the Lord, but also in a recognition of responsibility *to send* missionaries into all the world across social, cultural, linguistic, economic,

religious, and geographical frontiers. Mission always implies the crossing of frontiers from faith to unfaith.

### Legitimacy of the Apostolate

The Anabaptists retained the New Testament concept of apostle and applied it to their own missionaries. In fact, they considered the apostolic band of a Paul and Barnabas to be a legitimate model for the proclamation of the gospel as a means to extend and expand their newfound faith and life in Jesus Christ, their Redemptor and Master.

### Living Witnesses

The Anabaptists looked to the mission of the apostolic era as the golden age of evangelism. All believers have the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and are, therefore, living witnesses to give expression in relationships with others of the divine life within. As believers witness by *telling, being,* and *doing—and* even by dying for their faith—unbelievers become believers. Whether people come to Christ through spontaneous expansion or through strategically planned evangelization, those who believe, the Anabaptist maintained, must be baptized and gathered into local congregations. New converts were taught all the things which the Lord commanded pertaining to both discipleship and lordship (Mt. 28:20). They were being equipped to worship, honor, love, serve, and *obey* the Lord between his ascension and coming again.

## Notes

[1] From *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk. © 1984 Herald Press, Scottdale, PA 15683. Used by permission.

[2] Gunnar Westin, *The Free Church Through the Ages*. From the Swedish by Virgil A. Olson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), pp. 2-8.

[3] Hans Kasdorf, "The Reformation and Mission: A Survey of Secondary Literature," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6:4 (October 1980). The section on the Anabaptist mission involvement affords significant references for in-depth studies.

[4] Franklin H. Littell, "Protestantism and the Great Commission," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 2:1 (1959), p. 30. Cf. Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church*, third printing (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 109-37; notes on pp. 195-206.

[5] J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World-Wide Publications, 1975), p. 8.

[6] Cf. Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Mission," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 21:1 (1947), p. 13.

[7] Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision,* ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 42-43.

[8] Cf. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 851. The HUP (homogeneous unit principle) is a much-debated concept in missiological circles. Those interested in studying the subject may want to consult the following: *Global Church Growth Bulletin* 17:1 (January-February 1980) and 17:2 (March-April 1980). Both issues are devoted to that debate. Several years ago the Lausanne Continuation Committee sponsored a consultation on the HUP. The conclusions were published in "The Pasadena Consultation-Homogeneous Unit," *Lausanne Occasional Papers* No. I (Wheaton: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978).

[9] Wilhelm Wiswedel, "Die alien Täufergemeinden und ihr missionarisches Wirken," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 40 (Part I, 1943); 41 (Part II, 1948). The quotation is from Part II, p. 124. Translation mine.

[10] Littell, 1972, p. 120.

[11] Fritz Blanke, *Brothers in Christ*, translated from German by Joseph Nordenhaug (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1961), pp. 32-33.

[12] Ibid.,pp. 34-38.

[13] Wolfgang Schäufele, *Das missionarische Bewusstsein und Wirken der Täufer* (Hamburg: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1964), pp. 121-23.

[14] Littell, 1959, pp. 15-16.

[15] The full title of this hymnbook reads, *Auss Bundt, des ist: etliche schöne Christenliche Lieder, tote die in der Gefängnuss zu Passau in dem Schloss von den SchweizerBrüdern und andern rechtgläubigen Christen hin und her gedichtet worden.* Reprinted edition (Basel: Jak. Heinr. von Mechel, 1838).

[16] Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 231-32.

[17] Horst Penner, *Weltweite Bruderschaft* (Karlsruhe: Verlag Heinrich Schneider, 1960), p. 20.

[18] Littell, 1959, pp. 38-39.

[19] John Allen Moore, *Der Starke Joerg: Die Geschichte Georg Blaurocks, des Täuferführers und Missionars* (Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1955), p. 35. John C. Wenger, *Even Unto Death* (Richmond: John Knox, 1961), p. 24.

[20] Wolfgang Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36:2 (1962), p. 100.

[21] Durnbaugh, op. cit., p.132.

[22] Schäufele, 1962, p. 99.

[23] Ibid., pp. 104-105.

[24] Durnbaugh, op. cit., p. 233.

[25] Schäufele, 1962, pp. 106-109.

[26] Littell, 1972, p. 112. Cf. Wiswedel, op. cit., Part II, p. 123.

[27] Schäufele, 1964, P. 117.

[28] Wiswedel, op. cit., Part 1, p. 196.

[29] Schäufele, 1964. pp. 122-23.

[30] Cf. Wiswedel, op. cit., Part II, p. 119ff,

[31] Ibid., pp. 121-22.

[32] Schäufele, 1964, pp. 165-72.

[33] John A. Toews, "The Anabaptist Involvement in Mission," *The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews*, ed. by A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), p. 95.

[34] Schäufele, 1964, p. 62.

[35] Ibid., p. 167f.

[36] Ibid., p. 185. Modern examples of tentmaking ministry are described by Professor J. Christy Wilson of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in *Today's Tentmakers* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1981).

[37] Cf. ibid., pp. 238-46. Ernst Crous, "Anabaptism, Pietism, Rationalism and German Mennonites," *Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision,* ed. by Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 237-38.

[38] Schäufele, 1964, p. 245.

[39] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches,* two volumes, tran. from the German by Olive Wyon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), Vol. 11, p. 704.

[40] Moore, op. cit., p. 29.

[41] Schäufele, 1964, p. 34.

[42] Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); pp. 101-102.

[43] Robert Friedmann, *A Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1973), p. 44.

[44] Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24:1 (1950), pp. 27-29.

**Study Questions**

1. The author includes this statement: "often a few hours at a new place were sufficient to found a new congregation" (for the early Anabaptists). Discuss some factors that made this possible that might not be present for a cross-cultural missionary.

2. Compare Kasdorf's record of early vocational Anabaptist missions effort to what Jonathan Lewis writes about in the article called "Tentmaking Missionaries."

3. Why do you think that the first decades of Anabaptist history saw such missionary zeal and today such a small percentage of Anabaptists go into mission work?

# Europe

# 9 Mennonite Brethren Missions in Europe

Heinrich Klassen and Victor Wiens

In this brief chapter on such a diverse and extensive subject, we offer a summary survey of the many and varied mission efforts of the Mennonite Brethren. Some of these have been carried out by resident national churches, their members and ministries. Others have developed through strategic and organized efforts of MB mission agencies. Still others have origins with other Mennonite or evangelical groups, and have been adopted by the MBs. These will be presented in chronological order and by country. Following this brief survey, we shall offer some reflections, seeking to find some missional lessons as we look back that will be applicable as we look forward.

## The Soviet Union and Russia[1]

Shortly after the creation of the Soviet Union (1917), the only Mennonite Brethren Bible School, located in Crimea, was closed in 1924. Most of the Bible teachers emigrated from Crimea to Canada and founded the Winkler Bible Institute. In the Soviet Union, both churches as well as German-language schools were suppressed,

Heinrich Klassen (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Th.D., Missiology, University of South Africa) was born in Siberia, and grew up in Kyrgyzstan, Soviet Union. When he was a teenager, his family migrated to Bielefeld, Germany. For over 20 years, Heinrich has been pastor of the Heepen MB Church of Bielefeld, Germany. He served in leadership of the Logos International mission agency during a period of expansion into twelve countries. He currently serves as chairman of the *Bund Taufgesinnter Gemeinden* (Conference of Anabaptist Churches), a member conference of ICOMB.

prohibited and closed, and the teachers in part liquidated. The Stalinist purge in the years 1937-1938 are considered the "dark years" in the story. During this time and during the Second World War, neither the Mennonite nor MB Churches could do much in the area of church life and church planting.

The Mennonite and MBs retained their German language up to the closure of their church buildings and expulsion from their villages. The deportations to the most remote places in the Soviet Union and labeling members as "German" led in many cases to also being called "fascists." As a result, they were branded and made indirectly responsible for the war between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. To establish their own churches was now almost impossible, and to establish a new foundation for such before the Second World War was unthinkable.

The revival meetings during the years 1954-56 brought thousands back into the churches, but in this case into the Russian-dominated Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches.[2] Many Mennonite (and thus German) Christians attended these meetings and became official members. However, this did not apply to the strong-minded MB leaders in Karaganda, Kazakhstan and Novopavlovka, Kyrgyzstan.[3] These churches strove for an autonomous recognition by the government and attained the same about ten years after their beginnings.[4]

The missionary efforts of the MB churches within the Soviet Union amounted to individual initiatives. Evangelistic outreach and church planting were conducted yet limited to little growth, however, in the context of severe oppression and the persecution of preachers. Even so, the change of residence of many German families within the Soviet Union often led to the creation of new congregations. These remained either as independent MB churches so as to maintain their German culture and language, or they joined in time with the existing Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches.

During the decline of the Soviet Union, Mennonite Christians already living in Germany founded the first full-time Bible School of the postwar period in southern Russia. In the small village of Belorechensk the instruction began in October 1990 as an initiative of the mission agency LOGOS International, under the leadership of Andrej Rempel, Johannes Reimer, Peter Penner and Heinrich Klassen. Two years later, the Bible school was moved to Saint Petersburg and is now called St. Petersburg Christian University. Since its founding the school has trained hundreds of missionaries, church planters and pastors.

The two waves of German emigration from the Soviet Union to Germany in the seventies and nineties has led to the creation of more than 400 local churches.[5] Some families of Mennonite origin, however, understood their missionary call was to stay

in the Soviet Union and support the remaining church. Senior preachers like Franz Thiessen in Karaganda, and Heinz Voth and David Reimer in Kyrgyzstan have excelled in this ministry, as well as numerous others of Mennonite origin.[6]

## Germany

The expansion of the Mennonite Brethren into Germany began only after the Second World War. This is not as surprising to historians as it is to missiologists. After all, it is important to remember that the MB churches began in 1860 in Ukraine, Europe. However, only about ninety years later were the first MB churches planted in Germany.  This fact raises the question of why no churches were planted within this long period. In fact, it was only due to the missionary efforts of North American brothers and sisters, who were sending missionaries to German-speaking Europe, that the first MB congregations in post-war Germany and Europe were founded. The following is an overview of the emergence and development of MB churches and the MB identity in Europe.

### A Mennonite Presence Spanning Centuries

Mennonite communities have been established and present in Germany for centuries. The Hamburg-Altona Mennonite Church has existed for more than 400 years.[7] The Bolanden-Weierhof Mennonite Church was founded in 1682.[8] "The Association of German Mennonite Churches (VDM) was founded in 1886 as a conference of Mennonite churches in order to promote the preaching of the gospel within the churches, but also to represent the churches before the State and other churches."[9] The roots of this Association date back to the seventeenth century.

### North American Initiative in Germany

An MB missionary initiative before the Second World War is unknown. Social initiatives were successfully conducted through the efforts of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) along the way; this Mennonite work done during and after the war provided an excellent service that was both helpful and lasting.[10] Since those afflicted by war fled or relocated to the United States and Canada often through Germany, and since the MB churches and conferences had preserved the use of their original German language, there was a desire to offer not only humanitarian aid in war-torn Germany, but also to establish local churches. The MB churches of North America were concerned for the emergence of such communities and thus sent their first missionaries.[11]

In addition to the families of Anna and Cornelius C. Wall (in Neuwied am Rhein), H.H. Janzen, Jacob Toews, Mary and John N. Klassen, and Selma and Lawrence Warkentin, other missionaries followed. In this way, more churches

emerged. These came together in the beginning of the sixties to form the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Germany. Ten years later they changed their name to the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland* (AMBD, Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Germany).[12]

This church planting work was carried out as an initiative of the MB Mission, an agency founded and led by the MB Conference churches in the United States and Canada. The missionary efforts of Selma and Lawrence Warkentin led to the establishment of other churches in Bavaria, southern Germany. Due to the long distance from the AMDB-related churches, the Bavarian MB churches came together to form their own regional conference in 1987. It is called the *Verband der Evangelischen Freikirchen Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Bayern* (VMBB, Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Bavaria). Both church conferences are a result of church planting by North American MB churches in Germany. They still form a fellowship, even if originating from two distinct regions. This is also reflected in their joint representation in the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB).



**Selma and Lawrence Warkentin[13]**

Over time the associations have taken further initiatives, resulting in other church organizations, such as the *Pioteam Münsterland*, an outreach into the Dresden and Berlin regions.[14]

In 2013 the official statistics for these two church associations were as follows:

- AMBD - 15 churches with about 1,600 members.
- VMBB - 5 churches with about 300 members.

### German MB Churches with a Soviet Flavor

In the context of the family reunification program of the German Federal Government, thousands of people from the Soviet Union resettled in Germany over the course of decades.[15] This led to the creation of numerous congregations in the different cities of Germany. The freedom they enjoyed in this country resulted in a conscious search for their identity. During this search, some chose the historical name of Mennonite Brethren, others retained the Soviet designation Evangelical Christian

(Baptists), and still others took a new name such as Evangelical Free Church.[16] The search for identity is not yet completed; the return to a common confession of faith serves as a unifying influence.

Following are three categories of immigrant MB churches. First are the autonomous MB churches. The first church of this kind was built in Frankenthal, the Palatinate. The founders were mostly people or their descendants who had been a part of the Karaganda MB Church (b. 1956, modern Kazakhstan). These churches evidence a strong return to earlier MB values and the 1902 Confession of Faith.[17] They emphasize the autonomy of each local church and train their church workers and missionaries in their own internal Bible School. The mission agency AQUILA in Steinhagen is understood to be an extension of these MB churches.

The second group, the *Bruderschaft der Christengemeinden in Deutschland* (BCD, Brotherhood of Christian Churches in Germany), with about 20,000 members is the largest in number. This association retains a strong influence from the former Evangelical Christian Baptists (Soviet era) in its governance structures.[18]

The *Bund Taufgesinnter Gemeinden* (BTG, Association of Anabaptist Churches) is the third conference with MB elements. In 2013, it included twenty-six churches with a total of 7000 members. The BTG is also a member of ICOMB. The BTG seeks to represents Anabaptist theology and its principles. In 1989, seven churches agreed to cooperate together, encouraging each other toward shared growth even while guaranteeing the autonomy of each local church. Holy Scripture is the basis of the partnership, these being recognized by all member communities as the Holy Spirit-inspired, infallible, and fully valid Word of God. In addition, the revised version (1975) of the MB Confession of Faith from 1902 and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics are used as a guide for cooperation in theological matters.[19] With regard to the regulation of internal community issues, the member churches are independent.

An inter-church cooperation happens mainly in those areas where the tasks can be jointly handled better and more effectively. One example is the *Bibelseminar Bonn* which offers biblical training at diploma, bachelor, and master levels. Another example is the publishing house, *Lichtzeichen-Verlags*, known for its broad publication and distribution of MB authors.

## Austria[20]

Austria was blessed to receive the Anabaptist message and churches shortly after 1525. However, the severe enforcement of the Catholic Counter-Reformation eliminated or expelled most Anabaptists. This Anabaptist absence continued for centuries. Although a greater measure of tolerance toward non-Catholics developed in the later twentieth century, a general culture of suspicion and intolerance toward

non-Catholics continues. A recent census indicated 4.7% of the population are Protestant, and 0.3% are classified as free Protestant or evangelical.

Following the Second World War, tens of thousands of refugees were fleeing from Eastern Europe, many of whom came to Austria. In 1950, an American MB evangelist, Henry K. Warkentin and his wife Margaretha of Reedley, visited the refugee camps and brought the gospel by showing evangelistic films. The following year MB Mission decided to begin planting churches in Austria and in 1953 sent John and Pauline Gossen, and John and Martha Vogt. They chose Linz as a starting point and began their work. Soon Abe and Irene Neufeld also arrived and the first church was established by the end of 1955.

Many other missionaries arrived, and many also departed. Other churches were begun in Steyr (1955), Wels (1958), Salzburg (late fifties), and Gmunden (seventies). A number of other attempts were made to plant churches; however, while disciples were made, the churches were not established. The churches of Vienna (1969) and Heitzing (2006) joined the MBs from other origins.

Noteworthy is the role of the Austrian churches in the beginning and development of the Bavarian MB churches referred to above. Missionaries Lawrence and Selma Warkentin, while serving in Austria, led outreach teams to Traunreut and other towns in Bavaria. Eventually eight churches were begun in nearby Bavaria. Initially they were part of the Austrian conference, and later formed their own conference (VMBB). A fraternal and mutually supportive relationship continues to this day. The Austrian and Bavarian conferences are represented together in the annual ICOMB gatherings.

A union of the Austrian churches was formed in 1962. Today it is called the *Mennonitische Freikirche Österreich* (MFO, Mennonite Free Church of Austria). Together the churches have sponsored a Bible School (now closed) and regularly sponsors conferences for its members and workers. At the end of 2011 the MFO was composed of five churches and 380 members.

## Portugal[21]

Following some encouraging results in Catholic-majority countries in Latin America, and more recently in Spain, the MB Mission of North America began to discern a possible entry into Portugal. Factors in this discernment included: 1) Portugal now enjoyed a more open posture to outside influences following the end of an imperial and oppressive dictatorship in 1974, 2) a "cluster approach" to church planting favored the placement of a team near to Madrid, Spain, where MB Mission also had a very young work—teams in Madrid and Lisbon could support each other,

3) missionaries who had served in Brazil, also Portuguese-speaking, were available to serve elsewhere since Brazilian visas were difficult to acquire at the time, and 4) the Marxist leanings of some of Portugal's former colonies were causing many Portuguese citizens, both European and African, to want repatriation to Portugal—a large influx of new immigrants and refugees seemed like an open door to present the gospel.

The decision to enter Portugal was made in 1984 and the first missionaries, Hans and Waltraut Krueger, arrived in 1986. The following year Manuel and Anne Franco arrived. They began to reach out with home Bible studies, music and English classes, and of course by making as many friendships as they could. Other missionaries arrived soon after, namely Erwin and Joyce Klassen (1988) and Otto and Marjorie Ekk (1989). Not only for MB missionaries, but for those of other agencies, the challenges of a Catholic, traditional and resistant culture were taxing. Missionary attrition was high. Only the Ekks have remained for the long term and still serve to this day in Portugal.

The low receptivity of European countries, and the higher receptivity in some other regions, stemmed the flow of missionaries to Portugal. Providentially, connections beyond MB Mission were available. Missionaries, short- and long-term, joined the Portugal team from Germany and Brazil. Among these were Carola Unger and Walter/Nadia Klause from Germany (with roots in Kazakhstan), and Ilse Kuss and Marcos/Marcia Soares from Brazil. At the same time an Angolan couple joined the team, Mente and Teresa Marques.

Small fellowships began to form and grew, beginning in the Loures area of greater Lisbon. The entire Marques family, with support from a Swiss Mennonite mission, was instrumental in bringing together an African congregation in Amadora made up of mostly Angolan and Congolese immigrants. The Klauses have planted two churches (in Loures and Vila Franca de Xira) among Russian-speaking immigrants, mainly from Ukraine (also other Eastern European countries); they are now beginning a third (Montijo). A second congregation focused on Portuguese nationals began in Massamá in 2000 and is led by Portuguese leaders José and Paula Arrais.

The diverse yet unified cluster of churches comes together regularly for mutual support and fellowship. The *Associação dos Irmãos Menonitas de Portugal* (AIMP, Association of Mennonite Brethren in Portugal) was formed in 1989. In addition to the mutual support of the local churches, the AIMP also operates a thrift store, and is awaiting municipal authorization to begin a community center on land already donated by the city of Loures. The AIMP today is composed of six churches and around 200 members.

## Ukraine[22]

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of statehood by Ukraine in 1991, a new door also opened for Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren to return to the land of their birth as a global movement. Not a few of those who either had been born in the Ukraine, or whose parents had been, desired to return to the areas from which Mennonites and other Germans had been expelled almost seventy years earlier. Some MBs returned to visit the birthplace of the MB Church (Molotschna settlement, now Molochansk), others to visit the Crimea where a vibrant Bible school and church had existed in Tschongrav (now Kolodiazne).

Still others, including some Canadian Mennonites, desired to re-engage in a missionary effort to continue the legacy of faith of their forefathers. In the mid-nineties, individuals like Frank Dyck, George Schroeder and Anna Jantz began to return on a regular basis. They led both efforts at spiritual rebuilding of people's lives, and the physical rebuilding of derelict church buildings such as that of the former MB church in Kutuzovka. At the same time, since 1995, the Disciple-Making International (DMI) ministry of MB Mission began sending teams of evangelists that eventually visited most provinces in the Ukraine.

An exploratory visit was made by representatives of MB Mission, Logos International (Germany) and Mennonite Church Canada Witness in 2003. A decision was made by these three agencies to cooperate together in planting churches once again in the Ukraine. Led by James Nikkel of DMI, a strategy to develop three church clusters emerged: one in the Molochansk region (former Molotschna), another in the Zaporozhye region (former Chortiza), and the third in Crimea. Through the tireless efforts of DMI teams, led by Nick Dyck and coordinated locally by Feodor Fedorenko, at least five churches have been planted in these regions (Morosovka, Nikolaipol, Tokmak, Balkovo, Kolodiazne). Other MB churches were planted in Feodosia and Zaporozhye. Two other churches that relate to Mennonite Church Canada were established in Zaporozhye and Kherson.

In 2004, the three mission agencies named above and four local churches gathered to form the Association of Christian Mennonite Churches of Ukraine (ACMCU). The Confession of Faith from ICOMB was accepted as the doctrinal statement of this new conference. From 2004, Logos missionary Jacob Tiessen provided general oversight. From 2007-2013 John and Evelyn Wiens, MB Mission missionaries, gave pastoral leadership to the conference, now composed of ten churches. Since the untimely death of John Wiens in early 2014, the conference has been led by Ukrainians, with continued support from MB Mission Europa.

## Lithuania[23]

The development of Mennonite Brethren churches in Lithuania is linked to the development of LCC International University. However, before North American involvement, already during the era of Soviet President Gorbachev (1985-1991), some Mennonite families from more distant regions had relocated to Lithuania to be closer to Germany and connections there. With Mennonites from Germany assisting, a small church was begun in Siauliai, and called itself the Free Christian Church. After Lithuania's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, a visionary international delegation approached the new Lithuanian Ministry of Education with a proposal to begin an English language institute and a liberal arts Christian college modeled after similar schools in North America. The delegation was composed of Lithuania's evangelical leader Otonas Balciunas, German MB educator Johannes Reimer, and Canadian MB businessman Arthur DeFehr. The proposal found favor and the following year the English language institute was begun in the city of Panevezys, staffed mainly by North American MBs. With spiritual leadership from Frank Dyck and others, a small fellowship began linked with the language institute.

In 1992, because of opposition from the local Catholic Church in Panevezys, it was decided to begin the Lithuania Christian College (LCC) in the city of Klaipeda. Although not formally a MB project, LCC has received heavy investments of personnel and finances from MB individuals, churches and missionaries sent by MB Mission. Ernest and Elfrieda Reimer, leaders and liaisons for LCC, have served for most of its history as champions for the school. Today it is a thriving English-language Christian liberal arts university, serving 650 students mostly from Lithuania and eastern Europe.

Even as MB Mission was contributing to the development of LCC through sending teachers, it recognized an open door to conduct direct church planting in this opening society. From 1994-1997 a number of church planting couples were sent to further develop existing groups in Siauliai, Panevezys and Klaipeda. Other churches were planted in Silute and Vilnius. Christoph and Antonia Haegele, sent in partnership between the AMBD conference of Germany and MB Mission, gave leadership for many years to these emerging churches. Other missions that have contributed to these developments are: Eastern Mennonite Missions (USA), *Kontaktmission* (Germany) and *Deutsche Missionsgemeinschaft* (Germany).

The *Laisvųjų Krikščionių Bažnyčia* (LKB, Free Christian Church in Lithuania) was registered as a consortium in 2003.[24] It is composed of seven churches (Alytus, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Panevezys, Šiauliai, Šilute and Vilnius) and just over 200 members.

It participates actively in the Evangelical Bible Institute in Siauliai, as well as promotes summer youth camps, children's clubs, and pastors' and members' retreats. Under the leadership of bishop Arturas Rulinskas, the LKB was welcomed into the global ICOMB family in 2014.

## Other Countries[25]

An effort over twenty years was made to establish an MB cluster of churches in Spain. Some of the rationale used a decade later to enter Portugal, was first thought appropriate for Spain, namely, an increasingly openness to the gospel, as presented by non-Catholics such as Anabaptists, in the wake of the end of the Franco dictatorship. A team of three experienced couples was sent beginning in 1976. They were Ernest/Elsie Friesen, Jim/Patty Friesen, and Ron/Fran Penner. Over the next twenty years, churches were planted in three regions of greater Madrid: Bellas Vistas, Saconia, and Tres Cantos. Some of the original missionaries terminated and were replaced by others so that for most of the years there was a viable missionary team. However, due to an unexpectedly slow response to the gospel and the consequent delay in church planting, by 1989 the MB Mission board had decided to reduce efforts in Spain. By 1995, the reduction of the missionary force, the early transition to Spanish leaders not ready for full ownership, and some confusion on the part of MB Mission in preparing for a healthy transition, all led to a termination of efforts to plant churches in Spain. Only the church in Tres Cantos has survived, grown and now cooperates with another Anabaptist association of churches.

In the last decade, MB Mission has begun to engage in France. One couple uses media and the arts in cooperation with other ministries for evangelism, discipleship and leadership training. An international team is in the Paris area reaching out to North African Muslim immigrants. Also, in cooperation with the Association of Evangelical Mennonite Churches of France, a short-term mission program for French youth has begun. Finally, it is noteworthy that not a few Congolese and Angolan MBs have relocated to France, usually residing in immigrant communities with others of their kind. No organized mission work has resulted among these yet.

Other countries in Europe have hosted MB missionaries, missional immigrants, or short-term teams of mission-minded volunteers. Among these could be listed Belgium, Czech Republic, Switzerland, England and Ireland.

## Looking Forward

Nearly 500 years ago, God in his love and sovereignty raised up the Anabaptists as a movement of renewal and mission, beginning in Europe. A small branch of that great global movement has returned to western Europe in the last sixty years—the Mennonite Brethren, also understanding their calling to be a movement of renewal

and mission. On this old continent our story is still quite new. Even so, as we look forward, the preceding pages help us to look back and ask what are the missional reflections, indeed the lessons, we will need as we seek to be faithful to our callings.

It is essential to understand the realities of European cultures. These are diverse and each people group merits its own contextual analysis for mission. That said, there are some common generalizations one might dare to make about European culture, obvious to some though perhaps not to all. Europe is a post-Christian continent. The birthplace of Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anabaptism, Pietism, etc., while nodding to glorious traditions, is no longer practicing their essence. This is not to say that Europeans are no longer spiritually minded, though secular humanism is likely the dominant worldview. Rather, the search for spiritual meaning leads especially younger Europeans to New Age thinking, relative truth, reincarnation and the occult. In certain countries, the growing population of Muslim immigrants is redefining spirituality. If Europe is post-Christian, it is also postmodern. Rational apologetics, systematic presentations of propositional truths, and scientific fact are no longer the strong allies they once were for western Christians on mission in this continent (see Marlene Wall's and Arthur Dück's chapters in this volume). Our own experience in Spain, Portugal and Ukraine have reminded us that a change in political status does not necessary cause people to change their worldviews and other cultural presuppositions.

As in other continents, the link between migration and mission is unmistakable. In his missional purpose, God continues to move his people around to carry out his mission of bringing transformation through Christ. The great Mennonite emigration from the former Soviet Union back to Germany cannot be understood apart from God's grace and missional purpose. As in North America, Brazil and Paraguay, the challenge for generations to come will be to steward the blessings of freedom and prosperity for the sake of the gospel and its global spread.

Receptive peoples are more often than not immigrants or refugees. Consider the MB beginnings in Germany and Austria after the Second World War. More recently, we note a certain receptivity among nominal Christian immigrants from Angola and Ukraine to Portugal. There are signs that outreach efforts to Muslim immigrants in France and Germany are also finding some receptivity. If God is moving some of his people back to Europe for the sake of renewal and mission (in this regard, note also the many African and Latin American Christians immigrating to Europe), he is also moving peoples, not yet his, to Europe so they will be touched by his love, hear his voice, and heed his call.

On a more practical note, we may note the importance of a stable and long-term presence in the sharing of the gospel in word and deed. Healthy churches and conferences will be planted by nationals and missionaries who stay as long as it takes.

Positive examples of this can be seen in the AMDB of Germany and the AIMP of Portugal. We wonder if greater longevity might have been at least one factor lacking in Austria and in Spain.

Europe is filled with examples of fruitfulness borne out of inter-church, inter-agency, international worker cooperation. Consider the different yet complementary roles played by MCC and MB Mission in the early years in Germany and Austria. Consider how essential have been the contributions of the German, Brazilian and Swiss workers to complete the team in Portugal. Ukraine and Lithuania have seen fruit through the efforts of multiple agencies and workers in cooperation for the advance of the Kingdom.

ICOMB is an excellent platform for inter-conference coordination, exchange, sharing, prayer and mission. Our North American siblings, with their zeal and devotion to God, their church planting efforts, and their vision serve as a model for Europe. Global cooperation with all MB conferences broadens the horizons for God's work. It also pulls the conferences in Europe closer together! In this regard, European MB churches and conferences are motivated to form networks. Voluntary exchanges should therefore be further supported and developed so that common resources can be discovered and grow even stronger. Especially for Europe, the agency MB Mission Europa was founded. This includes the support of existing projects, training of missionaries, preparatory courses for candidates in question, coordination, etc.

The free churches and especially the MB churches are (religious) minorities. This status comes with certain risks: without the European and international "togetherness" they will not survive in the long term. They will move to the mainstream and the MB identity will be discarded over time. A strength of the MB churches is to be autonomous, but at the same time this can be a weakness, especially when church leadership and community develop independently. Not everything that was founded by MBs has continued with this name. Likewise, many good leaders from MB churches have made and are now making important contributions in other ministries.[26] This is to be commended, provided they do not deny their own identity and origin. At the same time MB churches need to learn to accept diversity and lay aside their exclusivity, if such exists. Much more important than a name is to live what one believes. In this approach, many churches established by emigrants hope for a greater acceptance of their ministries and organizations.

Europe is a mission field. This reality should cause the MB conferences, churches and ministries, with their presence and their theology, to join forces as well as experience international cooperation. It is necessary to establish strong churches and ministries, which in turn, will serve their communities and develop a holistic missional lifestyle. This is the need of the hour for Europe.

## Notes

[1] The vastness of the subject of MB missions in Russia, the Soviet Union, and then again Russia is beyond the scope and space of our treatment. Our comments serve merely as an introduction to the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.  For extensive treatments the reader is referred to John A. Klassen and Heinrich Klassen (German readers) in the Recommended Reading section, and to Johannes Dyck (English readers) in note 22 below.

[2] This union was called VSECHB (All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists), which was founded and organized in 1944 under the influence of Stalin.

[3] Viktor Fast and Jakob Penner, *Wasserströme in der Einöde. Die Anfangsgeschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Karaganda 1956-1968* (Steinhagen: Samenkorn, 2007), 110ff.; Viktor Fast and Hilfskomitee Aquila, *Wunderbar geführt: 50 Jahre Gemeinde Nowopawlowka, 1958-2008* (Steinhagen: Samenkorn, 2012), 19ff.

[4] Also, some Mennonites gathered and held worship services (often illegally) in private homes. They were compelled to do so since they were not included in other free churches because of their different form of baptism (sprinkling or pouring).

[5] John N. Klassen, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie* (Nürnberg: VTR, 2007), 93ff.

[6] In all three cases, the persons concerned are part of the Evangelical Christians Baptists, not necessarily referring to themselves as MB, yet hold to and live out an MB theology.

[7] "Mennonitengemeinde zu Hamburg und Altona Kdö.R," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.mennoniten.de/hamburg.html

[8] "Mennonitengemeinde Weierhof," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.mennonitengemeinde-weierhof.de/index.php?id=3.

[9] "Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden Kdö.R.," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.mennoniten.de/vereinigung.html.

[10] Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen: Als MCC-Mitarbeiter in England, den Niederlanden und unter rußlandmennonitischen Umsiedlern in Deutschland* (GTS Druck, 1994), 44ff.

[11] John N. Klassen and Johann Matthies, eds., *In Gott leben wir, bestehen wir und sind wir! 150 Jahre Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden Beiträge des Geschichtssymposiums in Oerlinghausen, Deutschland* (Lage: Lichtzeichen-Verlag, 2011), 49 ff.

[12] "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.ambd.de/ueber-uns.

[13] Source: http://www.mbherald.com/46/11/storieslive.en.html

[14] "Pioteam Münsterland, Gemeindegründungs-Initiative für das Münsterland," accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.pioteam.de/HTM/Website.htm.

[15] Klassen, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen*, 80.

[16] The BTG is an example of the diverse names chosen. Their twenty-six churches have fifteen different names, yet all in the association adhere to the MB Confession of Faith.

[17] "Mennonite Brethren Church Confession of Faith (1902)," accessed January 31, 2015, http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php/Mennonite_Brethren_Church_Confession_of_Faith_%281902%29.

[18] John N. Klassen, *Jesus Christus leben und verkündigen:150 Jahre Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden* (Lage: Lichtzeichen Verlag, 2010), 183.

[19] "Mennonite Brethren Church Confession of Faith (1975)," accessed January 31, 2015, http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Church_Confession_of_Faith_(1975); "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," accessed January 31, 2015, http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago2.html.

[20] Most of the information for this section is taken from Franz Rathmair, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Austria," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around The World: Celebrating 150 Years,* Abe J. Dueck, ed. (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 243-254.

[21] Most of the information for this section is taken from Otto Ekk, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Portugal," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around The World: Celebrating 150 Years,* Abe J. Dueck, ed. (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 255-262.

[22] Most of the information for this section is taken from Johannes Dyck, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and the former Soviet Republics," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around The World: Celebrating 150 Years*, Abe J. Dueck, ed. (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 211-212; more recent information came from John Wiens in personal correspondence with the editor.

[23] Much of the information for this section is taken from Ray Harms Wiebe, "Expanding Horizons," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around The World: Celebrating 150 Years,* Abe J. Dueck, ed. (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 356-358.

[24] As per the LKB website, accessed February 1, 2015, http://www.lkb.lt/lkb.

[25] Most of the information for this section is taken from Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections,* 1966-2006 (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 132-136.

[26] George W. Peters was co-founder and director of the mission school in Korntal. His books continue to exercise a great influence in the German-speaking countries. John N. Klassen, a Canadian MB missionary, contributed substantially to the formation of the Bibel Seminar Bonn. Hans Kasdorf, after his retirement from the MB seminary in Fresno, was for years a lecturer and head of the mission department at Giessen.

## Recommended Reading

Dueck, Abe J. 2010. *Celebrating 150 Years. The Mennonite Brethren churches around the world*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Ens, Harold. 2010. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission. Observations and Reflections*, 1966-2006. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006.

Gerlach, Horst. *Die Russlandmennoniten – ein Volk unterwegs*. Vol 2. Kirchheimbolanden: Selbstverlag, 2007.

Kasdorf, Hans. *Flammen unauslöschlich:Mission der Mennoniten unter Zaren und Sowjets 1789-1989.* Bielefeld: Logos Verlag, 1991.

Klassen, Heinrich. *Mission als Zeugnis. Zur missionarischen Existenz in der Sowjetunion nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Lage: Lichtzeichen-Verlag, 2001.

Klassen, John N. *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie*. Nürnberg: VTR, 2007.

Klassen, John N. *Jesus Christus leben und verkündigen:150 Jahre Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden*. Lage: Lichtzeichen Verlag, 2010.

Klassen, John N. and Johann Matthies, eds. *In Gott leben wir, bestehen wir und sind wir. Beiträge des Geschichtssymposiums in Oerlinghausen, Deutschland*. Lage: Lichtzeichen-Verlag, 2011.

Lapp, John A. and C. Arnold Snyder, general eds. *Testing Faith and Tradition. Global Mennonite History Series: Europe.* Intercourse: Good Books, 2006.

## Study Questions

1. Name and briefly describe two examples from Scripture (one from each Testament) where God moved his people around to be a blessing to the nations.

2. When the response to the gospel is low, how should mission agencies and missionaries proceed? When is it appropriate to "shake the dust off" and move to more receptive fields, and when is it necessary to "preach the Word … in season and out of season?"

3. Where are the bright spots of the Kingdom of God advancing in Europe today? What might be learned from these?

# North America

# 10 Mennonite Brethren Missions in North America[1]

Peggy Goertzen, Bruce L. Guenther, Erika M. McAuley

Peggy Goertzen (B.A., English, Tabor College) has served as the director and archivist of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Tabor College, Hillsboro, USA, since 1992. Earlier she served in the Center for MB Studies, Fresno Pacific University. She is a frequent contributor to historical publications, including *Tabor College: A Century of Transformation, 1908-2008* (CMBS, 2008).

Bruce L. Guenther (Ph.D., Canadian Religious History, McGill University) is president of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary Canada, as well as associate professor of church history and Mennonite studies. He is a member at Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church, Abbotsford, Canada.

Erika M. McAuley (M.T.S., Trinity Western University) works as a researcher and special projects manager for Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary Canada. She and her husband Kevin live in Abbotsford, Canada, where they attend Arnold Community Church (MB).

## United States of America (*Peggy Goertzen*)

Every church, every conference, has its own beginnings, and with its beginnings, one must mention pivotal individuals and localities essential in shaping these beginnings. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) church from its beginning in 1860 in South Russia (today, the Ukraine) has had a heart and passion for bringing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to others, and for developing committed disciples to Jesus Christ. Support for missions among MBs initially was generated by several influential factors: mission literature from the Moravian Brethren, the missionary efforts of the Dutch Mennonites in Java and Indonesia, Baptist missionary zeal and activities promoted from Hamburg, Germany, and missionary conferences centered in Gnadenfeld, Russia, which included such prominent evangelists as Edward Wuest. Once settled in America, John F. Harms, first editor of the MB periodical, the *Zionsbote*, did much to create and encourage mission interest in a land where such pursuits were possible. The strongest mission thrust for MBs was admittedly focused on other continents, but significant strides were made in home missions as well, although on a more limited scale.

**John F. Harms[2]**

### Initial Missions Outreach to Home Circle

The layers of mission ministry for MBs can be compared to the Acts 1:8 mandate. "You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the world." The inner circle of Jerusalem was the home circle. The priority for evangelism or "home missions" was the family, the unsaved children of members of the MB church. The goal was for the entire biological household to be saved.

To this end, ministers in the denomination were selected at conference sessions to serve as evangelists, reaching out to the as-yet-"unconverted" members of the family, holding two to six weeks of evangelistic revival meetings in MB congregations. Active evangelism often did not occur at home, although devout MBs read a passage from their German Bible and prayed every morning and evening as a devotional discipline. The expectation was for the evangelist to give out the claims of the gospel and offer a call to salvation in Christ. Evangelism was repeatedly affirmed as a priority at the General Conference or bi-national level. "If finances permit, two evangelists would suffice for the conference. These brethren evangelize among the churches under the direction of the churches, wherever the door is open, be it among our brethren or

in places outside of our churches…" (1889).[3] There was considerable disagreement regarding compensations for the elders and ministers who served as evangelists, and compensation for those who provided soul care for church members.[4] It seemed there was more money available to support the evangelistic effort than ministry to the needs of those who were already saved. Additional tensions surfaced with regard to the requests by churches for certain evangelists. Early-day evangelists for MBs with broad effective ministry included Peter Wedel, Heinrich Voth, Frank Wiens, H. S. Voth, C. N. Hiebert, H. D. Wiebe, and P. R. Lange. These evangelistic efforts in the home circle met with good success and led in the founding of numerous congregations across the United States.

**Expanding Outreach to the Larger Germanic Circle**

Expanding beyond the MB home circle was the Germanic circle, German-speaking people in nearby or distant communities, the common bond being the language of High German, not church tradition. The intention was to proclaim the gospel in regions with concentrations of German-speaking residents. Potential localities were presented to conference, and assignments made to willing MB ministers and elders. As early as the 1890s and 1900s, small mission stations were established by the work of the evangelists/ministers sent to Kirk, Colorado (1892), Pueblo, Colorado (1896); Westfield, Texas (1897). Loveland, Colorado (1906), Nolan, Michigan (1906), Hurley, Wisconsin (1908), and Henrietta, Texas (1910). Criteria were approved that if a mission station had up to 50 members, and there were brethren with teaching ability, plus willingness and financial means to support an elder, that station could or should be organized as a church.

**Outreach Extended to English-Speaking Neighbors**

Crossing the linguistic boundary, efforts to proclaim the gospel extended further to non-Germans, those who did not claim German as their *Muttersprache* [mother tongue], but to English-speaking people. In reaching out to this group, often termed in the earliest church and conference records as *die Englische* or *die Amerikanischer*, efforts were extended to different people groups on United States soil. Here the line of demarcation was language.

What would have happened if these German-speaking immigrants from Ukraine and Poland initially reached out to their neighbors of different backgrounds unfamiliar to them? The Bethel MB Church (later known as Balko), the first year of their organization (1906), held Christmas services in *both* German and English. English neighbors were present and participated. What a marvelous beginning!

Unfortunately, the English service was discontinued, and although English-speaking neighbors did sporadically attend the holiday event and receive "a Christmas sack," they did not regularly attend because they could not understand a word of German! Occasionally the early MB conference evangelists at Balko attempted a revival service or two in the English language but this was not carried over into routine Sunday services. A potentially fruitful mission strategy was aborted!

**Outreach Expanded to Other Ethnic Groups**

The ever-widening circle of mission expanded to include the uttermost part of the world, which in reality meant people groups who spoke neither German nor English. This resulted in mission efforts to relate to and communicate with Comanche Indians at Indiahoma/Post Oak, Oklahoma, quite early. This mission work with the Comanche Indians was considered oddly enough "foreign missions" despite its location on United States soil. Mennonite missionary Henry R. Voth was invited to consult with the MBs at their annual conference in Lehigh, Kansas, and recommended a mission field among the Comanches. N. N. and Susie Hiebert, who had been serving in India from 1899 to 1901, also supported this work. Heinrich and Elizabeth Kohfeld began this work in 1894, followed by Abraham J. and Magdalena Becker in 1901.[5] Hiebert, whose health prevented him from strenuous overseas missionary activity, became a great motivator for missions both at home and overseas. Mission strategies employed at Post Oak included visitation, engaging in life activities, evangelistic "camp meetings," and the government field matron work of A. J. Becker's wife, Magdalena, which proved critical to the success of the Comanche mission work. Many of the first converts were women, with whom Magdalena Becker had interaction in teaching health practices, sewing, cooking, childcare, and other life skills. The first Native American to be baptized was Sam Mo-Wat (No Hand) whose baptism occurred July 21, 1907. The Post Oak MB Church was officially organized later in 1907, as a congregation of one man and six women. In gratitude to God, the Beckers named their new daughter born later in the year, Herwanna, (The Day has Dawned). The light of the gospel had indeed come to the Comanches. In time, a Bible school and a parochial school were established in the late 1940s.

In 1930 A. J. Becker extended his ministry efforts to the Mexican families living at Lawton and Richards Spur, Oklahoma, and largely through the work of Joe and Anna (Hiebert) Gomez, the first MB mission work among Mexicans was established at Lawton.[6] In June of 1937 C. N. Hiebert and H. W. Lohrenz participated at the dedication of this Lawton church, described as "the first Mexican Church of the Mennonite Brethren conference."

In 1937 Harry and Sarah Neufeld came to the Rio Grande Valley in search of a suitable place to begin "a Gospel work" in South Texas. P.E. Penner had held evangelistic meetings in this region prior to this time. With the assistance of the Spanish-speaking brethren, Ricardo Pena and Ricardo Zapate, they made house visitations, and held Sunday schools and Bible schools for children. This work was taken on by the Southern District MB Conference. Young men who felt called to missions among the Spanish-speaking, such as Albert Epp, trained at Tabor College, and served as leaders in this work. In time the El Faro School was built, 1946-1948. In 1960, with the expansion of the mission churches, the financial burden of the El Faro School, and inflation, the Southern District MB Conference could not continue support, and the mission churches were transferred to the MB Board of Foreign Missions, which began to form a Latin conference along the Rio Grande River; missionaries lost their support, and native pastors were left to carry on the gospel work. Three former missionary couples, Alvin and Ruth Neufeld, Henry T. and Anna Esau, and Ruben and Eva Wedel, remained on their own financial support, and were useful in building the churches into the Latin American MB Conference (LAMB). Longtime LAMB conference leader, Rolando Mireles, has been a passionate voice for church planting and cross-cultural work, and describes himself as a third generation MB, as his grandfather was the first convert as a result of MB outreach in South Texas.[7]

Mission work with the Sioux Indians on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (South Dakota) began in 1948 with Art and Isabelle Unrau, under the sponsorship of the Central District MB Conference. Unrau started the Gospel Mission, and led regularly scheduled services in homes in outlying communities, Slim Buttes, Wounded Knee and Porcupine. The strategies of ministry to the Sioux included Vacation Bible Schools, visitation, regular church services, with the singing of hymns, and being involved in the Indians' lives, sharing meals, and other traditional celebrations. Despite a meager income and considerable traveling, Unrau and his wife wholeheartedly worked to give the good news of the gospel to the Sioux. Unrau's response was, "What else could I do but do it?" Unrau's primary opposition came from the Latter Day Saints Church (Mormon) and the (Roman) Catholic Church. The Gospel Mission, a.k.a. the Gospel Hall Chapel, is still functioning today.

As early as 1920 members of the Reedley MB Church (California) organized a Sunday School for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese who had come to live in the Reedley area. Initially four children were taught by Susie Richert. By 1925, the group had increased to sixty people. When the group numbered eighty, the Japanese converts

requested evening services. A desire to fellowship with other Japanese Christians prompted many of them to join the Japanese Methodist Church of Fresno. With the 1941 Japanese evacuation, Japanese people from the West Coast were brought to Reedley and attendance at the Sunday evening services at the Reedley church increased to 150. This service ceased when the Japanese were ordered to move to Poston, Arizona in August, 1942. As only a few of the original group returned after the war in 1945, the ministry among the Japanese was discontinued.[8]

Home mission efforts to reach Russian-speaking people in the US led to the establishment of the MB mission at Kief/Balfour in McHenry County, North Dakota in 1906. For some this group was simply called "The Russian MB Church." A second Russian MB group was established at Dogden, in McLean County, North Dakota, in 1911. This latter group sent delegates to the MB Conference until 1930, while Kief continued until 1965. A periodical for the Russian MBs was published in the Russian language at Hillsboro, Kansas, titled *Logos,* but no copies are extant.

Through the passion, perseverance, and encouragement of Dr. Arnold W. and Ann Schlichting to reach migrant Hispanics with the gospel, and the financial generosity of the Reedley MB Church, five Hispanic congregations were established in the Reedley area of California. Schlichting, Willie Thiessen, Jacob Eitzen, and other members of the Extension Committee of the Reedley MB Church in the early 1950s gathered funds and promoted vision, but no workers could be found. Despite the lack of knowledge of the Spanish language, the ministry began. A building—a dance hall—was rented in the "La Colonia" area west of Parlier in January, 1956 and services were held.[9] With the assistance of returned Spanish-speaking missionaries and a young teenage convert, Frank Rodriguez, who acted as translator, adult attendance increased. A church building for Parlier MB, funded by Reedley MB, was dedicated December, 1957. The Reedley MB Church sponsored similar beginnings nearby in El Faro, Orosi, Orange Cove, and Traver in the 1960s.

### City Missions Outreach

City missions for MBs began in 1905 with Bernhard F. and Margaret Wiens from Henderson, Nebraska engaging in intensive evangelistic campaigns among workers in lumber camps, sawmills, and railroad camps in Superior and Hurley, Wisconsin. Strategies included street meetings and Sunday Schools in fair weather months. In the summer of 1909 A. A. and Susie Smith joined the Wienses in Hurley. In February of 1910 the MB General Conference approved relocation of the mission to Minneapolis, Minnesota which resulted in the establishing of the Southside Mission, generally recognized as the first official city mission for MBs. This church plant consisted of regular church meetings and Bible studies, and proved very fruitful especially with children. The Smiths served here for 34 years. The Minneapolis MB

Church (later known as the MB Church of New Hope) was organized in 1955. After several relocations, this church closed in 2007.

The concern for city missions in California is evident in the minutes of the Pacific District MB Conference. As early as 1913, B. J. Friesen presented the need for a city mission in Bakersfield. Two years later, in 1915, the Potomac Mission was formally organized, separate from the "mother" church of Bakersfield MB (now Heritage Bible) but supplied with workers from the mother church.[10] The first Hispanic MB congregation in the Pacific District of the US was actually a city mission— the City Terrace Mission in East Los Angeles, California, founded in 1926 in a dominant Jewish community with a growing Hispanic population. English-speaking children attended and through them, parents accepted the Lord. The congregation was "a combination of Hispanics, Anglos, and international students"[11] under the initial leadership of two brothers, Aaron and John Friesen.[12]

Related to city mission outreach was the participation and support of many MBs for Union Rescue Missions in urban areas across the US where MBs were situated. Beginning in the 1950s, MBs cooked monthly meals, prepared worship services with preaching and testimonies, volunteered at thrift shops, donated clothing, Bibles, and funds, all with the intent of sharing the gospel with the homeless, the poor, the lonely, and the "marginalized" of society, and leading them to faith in Christ.

Another home missions strategy consisted of radio broadcasts, airing sacred music through men's choruses, quartets, and choirs, combined with Gospel preaching and devotionals. The Carson MB Church, Delft, Minnesota, maintained a radio broadcast on KWOA, from 1947 to 1963, out of Worthington, Minnesota, which proved very effective.[13] After the discontinuance of the Carson Male Chorus broadcast, a new radio broadcast, Words of the Gospel, was produced in Fresno, California at the US conference level, from 1963 to 1984, under the leadership of Al Kroeker. This program, consisting of a choir and quartets of MB singers and MB speakers from the surrounding San Joaquin Valley, was also viewed as a home missions or evangelistic effort, and was well received, bringing Christian music, along with the Christian message, into listener's homes.

**Initial Perception of Home Missions**

The adherence to the scriptural pattern of mission activity, according to Acts 1:8, for MBs was not chronological or time-linear. MB mission activity, foreign and home, has been described as "unorganized" and lacking structure, yet in fact MB home missions evidenced a strong commitment "to go where the Spirit leads," relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance and the willingness of individuals to act on the Spirit's call to evangelize and serve.

In the early years of the United States conference, there was a clear perception that the most "honorable" mission work was overseas, demanding sacrifice, separation from home and family, and physical hardship, as obedient servants of Jesus Christ. The early financial accounts printed in the MB periodical, *Zionsbote,* testify to the fact that foreign missions was where the money was sent. The "home mission" field was largely neglected and ignored in print. It was considered easier and more legitimate to go the distance overseas, both physically and financially, than to share the Gospel with a non-Christian neighbor on local soil. Churches were admired publically for their foreign missions giving. The Mountain Lake MB church, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, raised money and purchased a Model T Ford for the J. N.C. Hiebert family, missionaries to India, for use on the foreign mission field in 1938-1939, and had the car shipped overseas.[14] The Balko MB Church, a small congregation in the Oklahoma Panhandle, was also known for sacrificial giving to foreign missions, to the extent that modern restroom facilities were deemed unnecessary and frivolous in view of the compelling needs of the peoples overseas without the knowledge of Christ.

## Merger of MB and KMB Home Missions

The history of MB missions in the United States must by necessity include the mission vision and activity of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB), which denomination officially merged with MBs in 1960. Cornelius F. Plett, KMB Conference chairman, described the merger as "a step of historical and vital significance,"[15] a step which should be well-pleasing to God because it was a step of unity and oneness motivated by the missionary mandate to bring others to salvation in Christ. "Together our Christian witness will be stronger than separately."[16] With the merger, the mission history and work of KMB was absorbed into the mission history and work of MB, adding new vitality and dynamic along with new mission fields.

The earliest home mission work of KMBs was begun by Henry and Lizzie Wiebe from the Springfield KMB Church, rural Lehigh, Kansas, who felt a missionary call, and originally intended to serve overseas in India, working with children. Delays in decision-making led the KMB Conference to send the Wiebes provisionally to the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee to work with African-American children, answering a call for missionary teachers from a Presbyterian missionary, Emily Prudden.[17] This was an English-speaking work crossing racial lines, using education as the entry point for ministry. Jacob M. and Katharine Tschetter from the Salem KMB Church, South Dakota, joined the Wiebes in 1903 and added

evangelical mission to the education strategy.[18] This small beginning led eventually to the establishing of the North Carolina MB Conference, consisting at one time of thirteen small congregation in its earliest years.

The KMB Church conference met annually and its Home Mission Board supervised its home mission activities, preaching the Gospel, gathering believers, and building churches. The Home Mission Board suggested pastors and church leaders for each congregation, and the conference approved the suggestions. KMBs moved away from the German language in their annual conference yearbooks a bit sooner than MBs, in order to include the English-speaking black people in North Carolina.

### Missions Training and Christian Education

Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren early recognized the need for higher education for their young people with the underlying motivation of providing properly-educated workers for the church. Concerted efforts were made to start several high schools, Bible schools, and academies but without long-term success. After an interim period of using the German Department of McPherson College, McPherson, Kansas (1896-1908), Tabor College in Hillsboro, KS was established in September 1908 with thirty-nine students and three full-time faculty to provide Christian higher education for their young men and women. Tabor College became the hope for the MB denomination to provide trained leadership for the ministry, the mission field, the Sunday School, the Bible school, as well as a biblical basis for life and perspective for its constituency.[19] Many MB conference leaders, ministers, missionaries, teachers, church workers, and church planters received their formal education at Tabor College. With the founding of Pacific Bible Institute, Fresno, CA (now Fresno Pacific University) in 1944, and in 1955 the MB Biblical Seminary (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary), more opportunities for leadership training became available.

### Additional Perceptions of Home Missions

Criticism of early home mission efforts, both MB and KMB, centered on the strategy of reaching out to children first, not adults. It was felt by some constituents that a viable congregation could not be built on children, but rather adults with a heart and will to continue as disciples of Jesus Christ and the financial means to support such a ministry. Working with children has been at the forefront since the early years in the US and has led to a deep commitment to building Sunday Schools, Bible clubs, and Awana programs. Yet work with children is time-consuming and

labor-intensive, and often slow in showing fruit. A "Double in a Decade" program to revitalize Sunday School was initiated by MBs in 1963, through the leadership of Elmo Warkentin, in coordination with the National Sunday School Association, in an attempt to reach more families.[20]

In spite of these difficulties, "success stories" inspire continued work with children. Luella Pankratz, Zelma Lohrenz, and others set up Child Evangelism classes in Wichita, Kansas in the early 1940s under the Home Mission Board of the Southern District. Children accepted the Lord, which led to the conversion of the adults in their families, out of which over time grew a large urban congregation—First MB Church, Wichita, Kansas. This church now holds three services and has a membership of 892 with an average Sunday morning attendance of 950 to 975.

### USA Conference Evangelist Position Created

Efforts to legitimize and promote MB home missions efforts led to the establishing of a permanent position of the US Conference evangelist. Evangelism at home was deemed so crucial, that conference funds were allocated to support this position. Waldo Wiebe, known for his frequent probing ("how is it with your soul?"), served as the first full-time conference evangelist (1957-1963) for the US MBs, followed by David Wiens (1963-1966). From 1966 to 1971, there was no conference evangelist. Henry J. Schmidt was appointed US Conference evangelist in 1971, and was available to congregations for evangelistic and renewal meetings and Bible conferences, moving on in 1978 to involvement in world missions through the MB Biblical Seminary. A forceful and passionate speaker, and conference visionary, Schmidt dramatically shaped the MB denomination through "his energy and commitment to biblical preaching, evangelism, and practical theological training."[21] He pushed for unity around a strong mission mandate, and became the spokesperson for a church planting and evangelism thrust in 1983, affirming the "mother-daughter" church planting strategy of the US regional districts, and the urban "metro-ethnic strategy" of the US conference.

District ministers for the three larger regional conferences in the US (Pacific, Central and Southern) also carried the weight of responsibility to build and support the vision of home missions or church planting in their respective districts. In November of 1986, the five-member District Minister Management Board drafted a job description for the position of District Minister for the Southern District which specified an individual with "a vision for the Southern District, serving as pastor to the pastors, giving leadership to church planting, recognizing and assisting in the struggles of church planting pastors, as well as the struggles of pastors in small struggling congregations."

**Development of Mission USA and Related Ministries**

A lack of direction and coordination in evangelism resourcing and church planting in all conference levels led to a refocusing and restructuring at the US Conference level. With the Great Commission as *the priority* for MBs in the US, goals were adopted to pursue the training of church planters, the establishing of urban congregations, the development of cross-cultural communication skills, and the motivating of established churches towards evangelism. The sponsoring agencies in this thrust—termed Mission USA—were the US Board of Evangelism and Christian Service, chaired by Henry Schmidt, and district home mission boards. Optimism was high as it was reported that "the open doors for ministry in evangelism, church planting, and Christian service are unprecedented." Ambitious vision statements were implemented: annual growth goals of 3.3 percent, five new churches, 50 percent non-Anglo, 900 new members, and 2 percent of membership becoming pastors/missionaries/church workers during the nineties.

In 1991, a ministry was initiated among the Slavic immigrants in metropolitan Seattle, Washington, through the leadership of Gordon and Esther Balisky, with three separate congregations, each numbering over 300 people, asking to affiliate with MBs, coming under the MB "umbrella" as it were, adopting our 1902 MB Confession of Faith. In 1994, the MB work among the Slavic peoples was described as "a modern-day miracle" by evangelism director Loyal Funk. "For many decades, our own conference, born in the Ukraine, has prayed for the people behind the 'Iron Curtain.' God has answered our and their prayers. The walls came down and the very people we prayed for have come in large numbers to America."[22]

In 1994, cross-cultural ministries which emerged as newly-planted or adopted congregations under the Mission USA initiative, were reported in five people groups on US soil: East Indian (Santa Clara, CA; Queens, NY); Hispanic (Hillsboro, KS; Portland, OR; Omaha, NE; Laredo, TX); Japanese (Fresno and San Diego, CA); Chinese (Upland, CA); and Slavic (Seattle and Vancouver, WA; Portland, OR; Milwaukee, WI; Salem, OR; Sacramento and Fresno, CA; Parma, OH; Tulsa, OK).[23] The work of Loyal Funk from the Pacific District, who began as Director of Evangelism in 1988, was critical in this effort, serving as church planter catalyst, fundraiser, networker, and encourager.

In 1996 Ed R. Boschman, who had served as founding pastor of the Laurel Glen MB Church in Bakersfield, California (1978-1989), and lead pastor of the Willow Park MB Church in Kelowna, British Columbia (1989-1996), became the Executive Director of Mission USA. Serving in this role for six years, Boschman, with both church planting and church renewal experience, pushed MBs to move past the status

quo: "Unless Jesus saves and transforms people's lives, we're missing the mark of being a faithful people." During his tenure Boschman became "the evangelistic conscience of the MB Conference."[24]

One notable Mission USA church plant, in partnership with Pacific District MB Conference and the Laurelglen Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., intentionally pursuing Boschman's goal to "mobilize everyday MB Christians to befriend and develop relationships with people who need to find peace with God, was begun in 1998 among "disenfranchised" Mormons (officially Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) in the greater Salt Lake City area of Utah. Under the leadership of Paul Robie, this ministry developed into a large thriving MB congregation, known as South Mountain Community Church, Draper, Utah. The Utah MB family grew to include a daughter church, Shadow Mountain Community Church, and two satellite campuses, Daybreak in South Jordan and The Springs in St. George. The spiritual battle is severe, however, as evidenced by the closure of one Utah MB church plant, New Hope in West Valley in 2012. The most recent MB church plant in Utah is The Greenhouse at Saratoga Springs, Utah, established in 2014.

Home mission or "church planting" strategies shifted from more traditional methods to relational evangelism. Building trust and credibility in a personal relational context, rather than presenting a "canned" summary of the gospel or a tract, became the emphasis. Inviting your non-Christian neighbor to a barbeque steak dinner rather than handing him a *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet became the ideal for evangelism for MBs within cultural lines.

Boschman was succeeded by Don Morris, who became the Executive Director of Mission USA in 2004. Morris promoted and still promotes a four-point plan: 1) church planting, 2) church renewal, 3) evangelistic vision, and 4) leadership development. Morris emphasizes that despite changes in methodologies, the focus of home missions/evangelism remains the same—that of life transformation through Jesus which includes not only salvation but discipleship as well. We now plant churches by various means, using various funding streams, and various means of isolating/choosing church plant couples. In essence, there is no one set way of planting a new MB church. And, our church planting is always in partnership with our districts. Mission USA does not plant churches on its own. The current explicit goal for Mission USA is to be involved in planting six new churches per year over a ten-year period which began January 2012, all in an effort to retain our God-given vision…to see more people come to know Jesus. Up to this point twenty-seven churches have been planted under the Mission USA initiative.

Prior to the dissolution of the binational General Conference of MB Churches, Ed Boschman, Executive Director, articulated the denominational vision of spiritual

renewal and ethical faithfulness to the Great Commission in the context of change. New times demand new methods. "We have opened our doors, homes, and hearts to those near us, but we must move ahead and do things differently than in the past. We must be 'crazy for God and our neighbor in a crazy world.' We must be madly passionate and in love with God. In the midst of our crazy world characterized by information, change, corrupted normalcy, fragmentation, and relativity, we must find new and effective ways to communicate God's love to our pre-Christian neighbors. 'Have I told you lately that I love you?' This is mission."

## Canada (*Bruce L. Guenther, Erika M. McAuley*)

Stamped into the DNA of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) movement is a vigorous and enthusiastic commitment to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others. Both the courageous heroism of their sixteenth-century Anabaptist forbearers, along with nineteenth-century Baptist and German Pietist influences, reinforced this missional impulse as part of a spiritual renewal within the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia.[25] The renewal was part of a much larger evangelical awakening taking place in western Europe, England, and North America. The priority given to missions by the new movement was more than simply an extension of historical influences: it was, and continues to be, driven by a serious desire to shape personal and church life according to the life and words of Jesus Christ, and the example of the first-century apostolic church portrayed in the New Testament.[26] It emerged as a spontaneous and grateful response of obedience to a biblical imperative that gradually came to be expressed both through individuals and institutional structures.

The centrality of missions in the life of the MB Church has been arguably one of the most significant unifying forces within an increasingly global MB movement. In this chapter we show how it served as a catalyst for change and the development of creative outreach strategies by challenging persistent tendencies towards ethnocentrism and institutionalization; it inspired considerable sacrifice on the part of countless individuals; and it motivated collaboration with other like-minded Christians and denominations. The story, however, is not without difficulties: the sacrosanct status of the missionary mandate has meant that mission initiatives have not always been transparently assessed for fear that commitment and motivation of volunteers or donors might be diminished. Along with the considerable achievements resulting from MB missionary endeavors both in Canada and beyond, there are occasional examples of insensitivity, inflated reports of success, exploitive use of religious language ("white-unto-harvest," "fast closing door," etc.) to generate financial support, and pragmatic, impulsive decision-making practices that sometimes resulted in unnecessary conflict and wasted resources.

Only a year after their secession from the larger Mennonite Church in Russia in 1860, MB leaders launched a program of house visitation and Bible distribution in an attempt to reach their Russian neighbors. Despite legal restrictions and the threat of imprisonment or exile to Siberia, evangelists such as Johann Wieler managed to baptize a number of Russian laborers in 1862. In less than a decade, the MBs organized an independent Russian Baptist congregation. Church members routinely participated in mission prayer circles, and contributed financially to local evangelistic initiatives and foreign mission societies. After years of directing missionary candidates to Baptist missionary societies, in 1889 the Russian MB Church sent its first missionary couple to India.

The central concern for mission remained intact among those MB individuals who left southern Russia during the 1870s to settle in scattered communities throughout the central United States. Despite the hardships of pioneer life, they organized regular conferences to foster a common sense of identity and to consider collaborative mission initiatives. Without a mission agency of its own, they followed the example of their counterparts in Russia by supporting Baptist missionary efforts in India and Africa. The move towards establishing their own organization took a step forward with the opening of a mission station among the Comanche



**Heinrich Voth**[27]

Indians in Oklahoma in the late 1880s. A decade later, in 1900, the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union was formed and sent four missionaries to India. Mission initiatives were regularly discussed at conference meetings and received higher financial support than any other cause. Many MB leaders were actively involved in outreach as evangelists or mission board members, while congregants encouraged, prayed for, and financially supported such mission endeavors.[28] Out of this environment, a deliberate mission effort was sent to the north, and thus begins the dynamic and often complex story of MB missions in Canada.
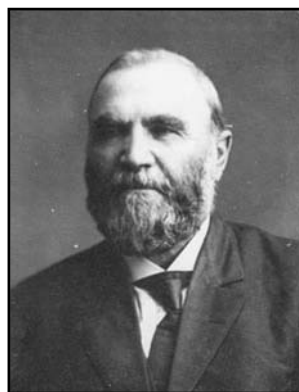
**Born of Mission: The Early Years (1880 - 1920)**

The MB Church in Canada began as an evangelistic initiative by MB settlers in the United States. In 1883, Heinrich Voth (Minnesota) and David Dyck (Kansas) were commissioned to do itinerant evangelistic work among German-speaking Mennonites living in southern Manitoba. Although their insistence on rebaptism by immersion aggravated the inter-Mennonite conflict that surrounded the MB

origins in Russia, in 1888 the first MB congregation in Canada was organized at Burwalde near Winkler.

The ongoing work of these itinerant ministers, combined with a steady trickle of incoming MB immigrants from both Russia and the United States led to a string of new congregations in southern Manitoba and in Saskatchewan. Spiritual leadership was provided to these widely scattered congregations through itinerant ministers such as David Dyck, David H. Klassen, Jacob Lepp, Benjamin Janz, J.W. Thiessen, John F. Harms, H. A. Neufeld, and Johann Warkentin. The crucial role that this itinerant strategy played in promoting unity and facilitating church extension cannot be overemphasized.[29] By 1913, the dozen congregations in Canada had joined to create the Northern District Conference, one of four regional districts in the newly organized General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America.

A vision for expansion beyond the rural Mennonite communities was already evident in this early period. In 1906 a group began meeting and conducting weekly Sunday schools, attracting up to forty children in the Elmwood area of Winnipeg. In 1909 this group became the first urban MB congregation in Canada. The ongoing needs in Winnipeg, which served as a gateway to the prairies for thousands of new immigrants, prompted the appointment of William and Helena Bestvater as city missionaries in 1913, and of Anna Thiessen two years later.[30] Thiessen's forty-year ministry in Winnipeg included teaching Sunday school, conducting sewing classes, making home visitations, and serving as the matron of the Mary-Martha Home, which helped young Mennonite women working in the city as housekeepers. The city mission of Winnipeg, which included outreach to people of many nationalities, served as a template for subsequent city missions in Saskatoon (1933) and Vancouver (1936).

**Immigrant Growth, Consolidation and New Initiatives (1920 - 1960)**

The desire to escape the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent civil war, famine, and persecution brought a wave of approximately 20,000 traumatized German-speaking Mennonite immigrants. Approximately 20-25% of these immigrants were MB. These *Russlaender* Mennonites, as they came to be known, dramatically changed the MB demographics in Canada as they established new congregations in rural regions of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, as well as in urban centers such as Winnipeg and Saskatoon.[31] Larger congregations often assisted in the organization of new congregations, including several "mission" churches. By 1940, membership exceeded 7,800, more than quadruple the total in 1920.

Although several outreach initiatives were started during this period, considerable attention was given by the first-generation immigrants to grounding successive

generations in the Mennonite faith, language, and way of life. The primary means were the more than twenty Bible schools that MBs established in the years prior to 1960.[32] John F. Harms from Kansas started the first school in Herbert, Saskatchewan in 1913. Teachers used both German and English textbooks, which introduced MB young people to the larger evangelical Protestant world and helped legitimize the use of English in outreach and ministry. The Winkler community welcomed several former staff members of the Tschongraw Bible School including A. H. Unruh, who in turn founded a Bible school in Winkler in 1925.

Other Bible schools followed in quick succession. All began either as educational extensions of congregations, or as the efforts of like-minded individuals who formed a society to organize and promote a Bible school in their region. At the outset, the schools served predominantly rural constituencies, creating a kind of invisible link binding congregations together in a common cause. Advances in communication and transportation during the 1940s, and the growing economic burden created by what were, in many cases, redundant institutions only a few miles apart, precipitated a trend towards consolidation and amalgamation. Many of the smaller, congregationally-based schools closed, and the survivors, particularly those located in regions with a large number of congregations in close proximity, served ever-larger geographical areas. By 1960, only four MB Bible schools remained in western Canada: Winkler Bible Institute; Bethany Bible Institute, started in 1927 in Hepburn, Saskatchewan; Alberta Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, started in 1929 in Coaldale, Alberta; and Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, began in 1936 in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

The schools emphasized the preparation of young people for service within congregations: the setting was ideal for identifying individuals with interest, good character, and leadership ability. They created a common religious experience, a high level of biblical literacy, and an enthusiasm and predisposition for participation in the life of the church that was an ongoing source of vitality and energy for local congregations and that, over time, shaped the ethos of the entire denomination.

These schools played a crucial role in expanding a vision for mission. They led the way in adopting the use of English as a primary language decades before a similar transition was made in congregations. The desire of eager mission-minded students to obtain training in order to minister in non-German, non-Mennonite settings militated against a rigid insistence on the preservation of the German language. The pressure from students for more English-language instruction occasionally became intense: for example, in 1935, an entire class confronted the teachers at Bethany Bible Institute with an ultimatum threatening "to go elsewhere for their training" (i.e., Prairie Bible Institute or Briercrest Bible Institute) if there were not more English-language courses.[33]

The Bible schools led the way in mobilizing young people for pioneer outreach initiatives at home and abroad at a time when opportunities for missionary service on behalf of the denomination were limited. For example, in 1935 the staff at Bethany Bible School led by Jake H. Epp formed the "interdenominational, international, evangelical, and evangelistic" Western Children's Mission, which sent dozens of young people into rural communities across northern Saskatchewan to conduct vacation Bible schools for children. Other Bible schools organized similar ventures. In 1939 the idea of a children's mission traveled to British Columbia, where the West Coast Children's Mission was formed and soon became the center for MB home mission (*Randmission*) initiatives. Workers were sent to organize Sunday schools and evening services, to do colportage work and home visitations, with the hope of starting new congregations.

Leaders involved in Vacation Bible School (VBS) ministry quickly recognized the evangelistic and leadership development potential of camping ministry. By 1950, MBs were operating two summer camps in Saskatchewan and two in Manitoba; several more started during the 1950s in Ontario and British Columbia. These outreach strategies were more an "arms-length" approach that involved gospel proclamation, but not incorporating new believers into MB congregations. Many new believers were encouraged to join other denominations rather than expecting English-speaking converts to enter a predominately German-speaking denomination.[34] By the end of the twentieth century, camp ministry had become one of the denomination's most effective forms of evangelistic outreach.

Virtually all the early MB overseas missionaries had roots within the Bible school movement. Interest in foreign missions was promoted by visiting missionary speakers, missionary conferences, prayer bands, and involvement in summer VBS ministry programs. Many prospective missionaries gained their first experience in evangelism and cross-cultural ministry during their time at Bible school.

Interest in foreign mission was already evident in 1898 at the first MB conference held in Winkler at which the Canadians discussed the possibility of organizing their own foreign mission program.[35] Although the Canadian MBs actively supported the American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union's (renamed the Board of Foreign Missions in 1909) decision to send American missionaries to India in 1899, they struggled to have the Board support the sending of Canadian men and women. The first missionary from Canadian circles to be ordained and sent under the auspices of the Board was Helen Warkentin from Manitoba, who was sent to India in 1919.[36] The limited geographical scope of MB overseas missions, and the perception that prospective missionary candidates from Canada were being discriminated against when they applied, prompted many to volunteer with independent "faith missions."[37]

When interest emerged in Africa as a potential location for missionary work, students, and staff from Winkler Bible School helped organize the independent (and controversial) Africa Mission Society under whose auspices Henry and Anna Bartsch were commissioned in 1932 to go to the Belgian Congo.[38] The society was organized partly because of reticence by the Board of Foreign Missions to allocate resources towards Africa, and partly due to the ongoing dissatisfaction among Canadian (mostly *Russlaender*) leaders with the Board. The Board was concerned about the allegedly inadequate education of many of the missionary candidates from Canada who had not completed high school and some college training.[39] It took more than a decade for tensions to subside so that the work of the Africa Mission Society could be placed under the direction of the Board, and Canadian representation on the Board was substantially increased.[40] As a result, Canadian participation in activities of the Board expanded dramatically after 1945. The struggle for greater inclusion contributed towards the formation of a unique sense of identity among Canadian MBs, and strongly influenced their determination to set up their own missionary training college in Canada and obtain their own independent denominational charter in 1945.

By the mid-1940s the MBs in Canada outnumbered their counterparts in the United States, a disparity that was amplified by the influx of another wave of 6500 Mennonite refugees from Europe after World War II. Its size, recent independence and organizational maturity prompted leaders to centralize home mission initiatives in 1949 under the auspices of the Canada Inland Mission. Within a decade, however, a process of decentralization transferred responsibility for home missions to provincial conference bodies.

In 1944 the MBs in Canada established a degree-granting college—a "higher Bible school"—called Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC), which quickly became another symbol of Canadian Conference autonomy and maturity. Prior to this time most Canadians who wanted a more advanced education in the context of a church institution enrolled at Tabor College located in Hillsboro, Kansas. Frustrations about the number of Canadian students who remained in the United States, and a sense that their American counterparts exercised too much control over cooperative programs, created a desire for greater freedom in training and preparing Canadians for church and missionary work. The new school was strategically located in Winnipeg, a metropolitan area of considerable significance for Canadian Mennonites and for western Canada in general. Abraham H. Unruh, until then the principal of Winkler Bible Institute, spearheaded the new institution, but quickly recognized the need for a leader who was more fluent in English. The declared purpose of the school was

to train Bible school teachers, missionaries, and church workers to fill positions of leadership in Bible schools, congregations, and mission agencies. In three years it became the largest MB theological school in Canada. By 1960, the enrolment at MBBC equaled almost 50% of the total enrolment in the four MB Bible schools in existence at the time. MBBC became the main institution for the training of MB pastors and church workers as well as for missionaries and evangelists at home and abroad until the 1970s.

The home mission activities that had been sponsored for three decades by the Northern District Conference was limited primarily to itinerant evangelism and the city mission work in Winnipeg and Saskatoon. To a large extent they were intended for retaining existing members within the MB fold, and only secondarily for reaching others.[41] The success of these early city missions prompted MBs in other locations to start a variety of new missions with the hope of seeing them become established congregations. Some began as extensions of VBS and Sunday school ministries (e.g., Niagara, Ontario).[42] Some targeted specific ethnic or religious groups (e.g., Russian immigrants near Arelee, Saskatchewan, the Japanese population in Port Edward, British Columbia, and Jews living in Winnipeg). Still others were organized to support MB young people employed in a particular location (e.g., the Gospel Light Mission in Brandon, Manitoba, which became a congregation in 1960). In the late 1950s, a group of fifteen individuals in "mobile professions" used the "colonization" method by relocating to Prince George for the purpose of evangelizing in a new area, and succeeded in starting a new congregation in 1959.[43]

Although never on the same scale as the enormously influential women's missionary societies in more established Protestant denominations, women in MB congregations organized their own means for supporting home missions, assisting the destitute, and helping fund overseas missionaries and special projects. Early in the twentieth century, women in many congregations organized sewing circles (*Naehverein*) or women's missionary fellowships. These groups helped raise funds for missionaries abroad, furnish local congregations, and provide food for Bible school kitchens. During the 1950s local groups started banding together to collaborate on larger projects, and to organize inspirational and educational events (e.g., the formation of Mennonite Brethren Church Ladies Aid of British Columbia in 1953, and the Mennonite Brethren Mission Auxiliary in 1959 in Saskatchewan). These organizations played an integral role in raising funds and promoting the cause of home and overseas mission within congregations.[44]

Denominational growth, economic prosperity, and more established denominational structures made it possible for the MBs to diversify further their

outreach ministries by mid-century. As suspicion of radio technology diminished, and as English-language fluency increased among MB leaders, efforts at "gospel broadcasting" proliferated. The Gospel Tidings program aired on a Saskatoon radio station as early as 1940.[45] In 1946, students at MBBC in Winnipeg started the Gospel Light Hour, which came to be recognized in several provinces as the voice of the MB Church. It is known today as Square One World Media, (though its previous name—Family Life Network—may be known more broadly). By 1955, individual congregations or schools were producing at least twenty different broadcasts often modeled after popular gospel programs like the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour.[46] They were not exclusively intended to be an evangelistic witness, but were sometimes used as a strategy for connecting with German-speaking groups and those unable to attend regular services.

After World War II the MBs in Canada took an increasingly active role in relief and service work. This took place primarily through the international inter-Mennonite organization Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), which began in 1920 following efforts by Mennonites in North America to help their co-religionists escape from Russia. Those who succeeded in escaping wanted to express their gratefulness by helping others facing similar emergencies such as the refugee crisis in Europe after World War II. Before long MCC expanded its humanitarian ministry both at home and abroad by becoming involved in projects on behalf of people who did not necessarily have any prior connection with Mennonites. "Service in the Name of Christ" became the motto for aid work among those victimized by famine, natural disaster, or war. In more recent decades, MCC Canada diversified its activities by engaging in a wide range of social issues including settlement of new immigrants, economic development and advocacy on behalf of First Nation communities, victim-offender mediation services, and programs to address the needs of women, disabled persons, the unemployed, and the mentally ill.[47] Despite general appreciation for enabling large-scale acts of compassion, some MBs are suspicious of MCC's intermingling of political advocacy with aid and development work, the politicization of "peace" theology, and the general reluctance to use aid and service work as opportunities for evangelism. MBs have contributed both financial support and volunteer workers to other agencies such as the inter-Mennonite Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) started in the early 1950s, and the interdenominational Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFB), which began in the 1980s. MDS focuses on assisting communities in North America that have suffered severe loss from natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods. CFB channels surplus grain grown by Canadian farmers to needy locations overseas.

**Adapting to a Rapidly Changing Canada (1960 - 2000)**

The 1960s marked a watershed decade for Canada in general, and the MBs in particular. Technological advances in transportation and communication, along with a post-World War II economic boom, made the vastness of the country less formidable and helped create new metropolitan centers. The movement of the MBs from being a largely rural, German-speaking ethnic sub-culture, to becoming a predominately urban, multi-cultural community mirrored many of the broader patterns of change taking place in the country.[48]

These transitions did not always occur easily. The changeover from German to English created conflict in many older congregations: some tried to maintain a link between German and Christian values, while others pressed for rapid change on the grounds that it was essential for retaining young people and incorporating new converts into the church. Urbanization brought more educational opportunities and occupational diversity, but it also diminished the ethnic homogeneity and sense of community that had previously existed. Congregations moved from using a model of shared leadership to elected church councils and salaried pastors. Pressure increased to include women in decision-making and leadership roles. By the end of the twentieth century the majority of MBs were comfortably middle-class urbanites, with some having become very wealthy. This new prosperity enabled the support of innumerable mission initiatives in Canada and around the world, but affluence also brought the temptations of materialism and indifference. The changing relationship to society carried with it considerable anxiety about the impact of new cultural influences on young people, but it also positioned the denomination for new approaches to mission.

The ongoing use of the German language, public discussions about exemptions from military service during World War II, and the steady move towards greater levels of acculturation prompted a re-evaluation of MB identity and the relationship between faith and ethnicity. Federal government support for multiculturalism during the 1970s, which resulted in support for the retention of ethnic identities, amplified the issue as some claimed the term "Mennonite" as an ethnic label. Some congregations however considered the ethnic associations with the word "Mennonite" to be a barrier to outreach and removed the word from their name. During the 1980s the denomination considered a name change proposal and debated the deeper issues of ethnocentrism, theological identity, and the multi-ethnic vision inherent within the Great Commission.[49]

The gradual identification on the part of the MBs with a larger multi-denominational evangelical Protestant network in Canada coincided with the process of acculturation. As evangelical Protestants became more affluent and better

educated, they began to feel less like estranged outsiders in Canadian culture, and more like cultural insiders with a sense of responsibility for the character of Canadian society. As the different denominational groups that made up the evangelical mosaic emerged from their respective enclaves they began to discover one another, interest emerged in creating a network of interlocking institutions comprised of a mutually supportive fellowship of organizations and individuals. This desire was formalized by the formation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), an organization started in 1964 to further the collective social action interests of evangelical Protestants. Although MB involvement with EFC created some ambivalence regarding its identity as a faith community and its place within the larger Mennonite world, it is consistent with the collaborative ecumenism that is present throughout MB history. In comparison to their counterparts in the United States, the MBs in Canada have played a much more prominent role in the development and life of innumerable evangelical institutions and ministry organizations throughout the country.

Acculturation and interaction with other evangelical denominations generated a search for new ways of doing outreach, particularly church adoption and urban church planting. When the interdenominational Canadian Congress on Evangelism was held in Ottawa in 1970, MBs were one of the best-represented groups. During the 1980s the Canadian Board of Evangelism began promoting the "scientific" methods of the church growth movement, led by people such as Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner. The church growth movement strategy insisted on a strong centralized leadership model, and the "homogeneous unit principle," which suggested that people become Christians most easily when they do not need to cross racial or linguistic barriers. While the emphasis on church growth signaled a renewed commitment to mission in Canada, particular components of the church growth movement generated controversy.[50] The MBs in British Columbia in particular allocated significant resources towards an aggressive church planting campaign aimed at doubling the number of congregations during the 1990s: the initiative led to a 46% increase in membership. Much of their initial success came through establishing or adopting congregations made up of recent immigrants from a variety of ethnic groups including Chinese, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Laotian, Arabic, Persian, Indonesian, and Korean.

By far the largest non-white MB group is the Chinese with the majority found in the greater Vancouver area. Since the formal organization of the first Chinese congregation in 1977, at least a dozen more have been started to reach out to the successive waves of Chinese immigrants who came to Canada in the latter part of the twentieth century. The task of leadership within these congregations was complicated

as congregations tried to integrate more recently arrived, predominately Mandarin-speaking immigrants, older first-generation, mostly Cantonese-speaking immigrants, and second and third generation Canadian-born English-speaking Chinese. The difficulties surrounding the transition to English in this ethnic group are remarkably similar to those experienced by the German-speaking immigrants from Russia. The Chinese congregations have demonstrated their commitment to missions by sending several pastors to plant churches among the Chinese diaspora living in Venezuela.[51]

The rapid growth of urban centers in Canada prompted the Canadian Conference Board of Evangelism (in partnership with provincial conferences) to launch an ambitious outreach strategy in 1998 called the Key Cities Initiative. The plan called for one new city to be targeted for church planting every two years for a ten-year period. Mission Calgary was identified in 1998, Love Toronto in 2000, *Rendez-vous Montréal* in 2002, Ignite Vancouver in 2004, and both Dream Manitoba and Harvest Saskatchewan in 2006. In its first decade, the program served as a catalyst for starting thirty new congregations.

Unanticipated developments abroad, rather than a carefully-planned strategy of outreach in Canada, presented unexpected opportunities. In 1960, political circumstances forced most of the missionaries in the Belgian Congo to leave the country. Their fluency in the French language made it natural for them to look to Quebec as an alternative field of missions. Ernest and Lydia Dyck were among those evacuated from the Belgian Congo and became pioneer missionaries in Quebec. At the time the province was experiencing its "Quiet Revolution," which significantly reduced the Roman Catholic Church's influence in Quebec culture and politics. The spiritual vacuum created by the wide-scale rejection of the Roman Catholic Church generated new opportunities for other denominations. The first MB congregation was organized in 1964. Twelve MB congregations were started by the end of the 1980s. In 1976 a Bible school (*Institut Biblique Laval*, now *École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal*) was founded. Later the periodical, *Le Lien*, was begun, as well as Camp Peniel.

During this period, Canadian congregations continued to support hundreds of missionaries serving around the world under the auspices of a broad range of mission agencies including MB Missions and Services, as the Board of Foreign Missions came to be known in the 1970s (now known as MB Mission). In 1969, the Mission supported a total of 224 long-term missionaries and ninety-two short-term mission workers. Since then, the number of long-term missionaries has declined, replaced in part by a distinct trend towards more short-term cross-cultural mission projects often organized directly by MB congregations and schools. The recent relocation of

the Mission headquarters from Fresno, California to Abbotsford has strengthened connections between MB leaders and congregations in Canada with MBs in other parts of the world.

**A Vision for Global Missions in the Midst of Diversity (2000 - present)**

Without minimizing the Dutch-German-Russian ethnic heritage of the early MBs, the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for *all* people has enabled the creation and celebration of an unprecedented ethnic mosaic—MBs in Canada worship in more than twenty languages. Discussions continue about the nature of denominational multiculturalism: some prefer congregations in which ethnic homogeneity is preserved, while others suggest that congregations are the ideal place to be intentionally "intercultural." Despite the ethnic diversity that now exists within MB congregations, the same diversity cannot yet be seen within the denomination's leadership structures.

As the Key Cities Initiative came to completion, a new initiative called Re:Generate 21-01 was proposed in 2007 to continue and improve the work started by Key Cities. It promised a nationwide partnership with provincial conferences that would help MB congregations "build health and capacity to reproduce" by shifting the onus for church planting away from denominational structures. Instead of implementing Re:Generate 21-01, a re-thinking of MB church planting strategies based on the experience of the Board of Church Extension in British Columbia resulted in the formation of the C2C Network. It functions as "a catalyst for multiplication and church planting throughout Canada." Like previous mission initiatives C2C Network focuses on urban areas in Canada, and operates as an MB-based, interdenominational network that facilitates collaboration with other denominations in assessing, training, and coaching church planters. The current strategy illustrates well how mission initiatives within the MB denomination sometimes prompt the abandonment of old structures in favor of new alliances and methods of ministry. During the first decade of the twenty-first century the pace of numerical growth among MBs in Canada slowed from 20% to less than 10%, indicating the difficulty of outreach in an increasingly indifferent, and sometimes hostile, post-Christian culture.[52]

**Conclusion**

Although mission has remained a core component of MB identity in Canada, the means by which and the structures through which it is expressed have changed. The twentieth century began with the formation of a Northern District, itinerant evangelists, and the opportunity to be increasingly involved in Canadian society. The twenty-first century began with Canadian MBs actively participating in the emerging

International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), which helped to rejuvenate a common sense of identity and facilitate global mission. Leaving behind the internal struggles of ethnicity and an antiquated structure, ICOMB was initiated as a "concrete step to translate biblical principles and a mission dynamic into strategic realities. ICOMB has become one of the most important instruments enabling the MB Church to live out its commitment to internationalism and multiculturalism."[53]

George W. Peters, a prominent MB missions specialist, summarizes the Canadian MB experience well: "Mission is a demanding enterprise. It is not static, an establishment that seeks to maintain itself, but a living institution with a steady purpose, and unchanging message, an expanding horizon. It does, however, require continuous adjustments in a dynamic society in order to keep up with ever-changing demands and new situations."[54] The MBs manifested the same blend of commitments and qualities that sparked the renewal movement in 1860: the Anabaptist courage to proclaim the gospel boldly regardless of cost, the pietistic innovative and collaborative practicality that recognized the importance of combining acts of compassion and theological education along with proclamation as integral aspects of mission, and a deeply Biblicist theological identity that is motivated by the desire to act in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ to make disciples.

## Notes

[1] Portions of this chapter are based on a previously published essay co-authored by Abe Dueck and Bruce Guenther, "The Mennonite Brethren in Canada," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe Dueck, 49-71 (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010). This material is used by permission from Pandora Press and Kindred Productions.

[2] Source: www.gameo.org

[3] "Yearbook of the General Conference Mennonite Brethren Church, US, convened in Minnesota, Cottonwood County, 7-8 October 1889." Minutes translated by Otto Reimer. (Editor's note: This is one of many archival references cited by the author and available only in centers for MB studies. The interested reader is encouraged to contact the author for a full list of other archival references).

[4] John B. Toews, "Salary for the Elder?" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Fall 2013.

[5] Mrs. H. T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro: MB Publishing House, 1954), 26-27.

[6] Marvin E. Kroeker, "Reverend A.J. Becker" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Spring 1999. 1-4.

[7] "Mireles: An effective but reluctant leader" in *The Christian Leader,* June 2004, 26-27.

[8] Esther Jost, *The Church Alive in its 75ᵗʰ Year: 1905-1980* (Reedley: Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church, 1980), 70.

[9] Jost, *The Church Alive,* 74-75.

[10] Bernice Richert Cox, personal interview by Peggy Goertzen, 11 Nov. 2011. Also Henry J. Schmidt, "Telling the Good News" in *75 Years of Fellowship: Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1912-1987* (Fresno: Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1987), 34.

[11] Juan F. Martinez, "Reaching Out to Our Neighbors: Hispanic Mennonite Brethren churches in California" in *75 Years,* 50.

[12] Schmidt, "Telling the Good News" in *75 Years*, 34.

[13] Elaine Ewert Kroeker, *A Culture of Call: The Story of the Carson Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Tabor College, Carson Center for Global Education, 2014), 83-85.

[14] Kroeker, *Culture of a Call*, 2. Phyllis Martens, personal interview, 26 July 2014.

[15] 1960 KMB Yearbook. 1.

[16] 1959 KMB Yearbook, 18.

[17] Peggy Goertzen, "Ministry in the Mountains. Earliest Beginnings of the North Carolina Conference" in *CMBS Newsletter*, Spring 2012, 9-10.

[18] Wesley G. Tschetter, "Rev. Jacob M. Tschetter (1873-1956)" in *CMBS Newsletter*, no. 33, Spring 2012, 2.

[19] Peggy Goertzen, "Birth of a Vision: Our Own School 1908-1931" in *Tabor College: A Century of Transformation 1908-2008* (Hillsboro: CMBS, Tabor College, 2008).

[20] "Can We Double in a Decade?" *The Christian Leader*, 25 June 1963, 17

[21] Connie Faber, "From the editor," *The Christian Leader*, February 2011. 2.

[22] Minutes and Reports of the 20ᵗʰ Convention of the MB Churches of the US… 1994, 19.

[23] Minutes and Reports of the 20ᵗʰ Convention of the MB Churches of the US… 1994, 16-19.

[24] Connie Faber, "Boschman affirmed as bold leader" http://www.usmb.org/news/article/Boschman-affirmed-as-bold-leader.html. Accessed January 8, 2015.

[25] G. W. Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1947), 43-50.

[26] G. W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1984), 43-44; and *Foreign Missions: Guiding Principles and Field Policies* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1947).

[27] Source: http://archives.mhsc.ca/voth-heinrich-s-1851-1918.

[28] James Pankratz, "From Foreign Mission to Global Partnership," in *For Everything a Season, Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002: An Informal History*, eds., Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002), 67.

[29] J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 156, 196, 222. The strategy has been used throughout the history of Christianity including the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. See Hans Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission: A Vision as Relevant to the Twenty-First Century as it was to the Sixteenth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 59.

[30] Anna Thiessen, *The City Mission in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1991).

[31] Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 163-169.

[32] Bruce L. Guenther, "'Wrenching Our Youth Away from Frivolous Pursuits': Mennonite Brethren Involvement in Bible Schools in Western Canada, 1913-1960," *Crux* 38, no. 4 (December 2002), 32-41.

[33] Margaret Epp, *Proclaim Jubilee! The Story of Bethany Bible Institute* (Hepburn: Bethany Bible Institute, c. 1976), 44.

[34] *A Century of Grace and Witness, 1860-1960: The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1960), 57-60.

[35] J. B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America, 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 101.

[36] Prior to 1957 when the practice was rescinded by the General Conference, it was commonplace to ordain women for mission work both in North America and overseas. See Doug Heidebrecht, "Mennonite Brethren Ordination of Women, 1899-1958," *Mennonite Historian* 34, no. 4 (December 2008), 1-2, 8-9.

[37] William Neufeld, *From Faith to Faith: A History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1989), 34.

[38] Anna Bartsch, *The Hidden Hand* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1986); and Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 97-107.

[39] Ted Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 361.

[40] Peter M. Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987), 141.

[41] Wally Unger, "Broadening our Horizons," in *For Everything a Season,* 173.

[42] Edward Boldt, *"When Your Children Ask": A History of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1957-1982* (n.p., 1982), 60-61.

[43] Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 49.

[44] Valerie Rempel, "The Life of the Congregation," in *For Everything a Season*, 140-141.

[45] Harold Jantz, *Rooting the Faith: A Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren Story of Losses and Gains* (Saskatoon: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, 2008), 30-33.

[46] Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 320-321.

[47] Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2013).

[48] John H. Redekop, "Mennonite Brethren in a Changing Society," in *For Everything a Season*, 151-165.

[49] John H. Redekop, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987); and "Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren: Issues and Responses," *Direction* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 3-16.

[50] Paul Hiebert, "Ethnicity and Evangelism in the Mennonite Brethren Church" *Direction* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 91; and J. B. Toews, "The Church Growth Theory and Mennonite Brethren Polity," *Direction* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1991), 108-110.

[51] Joseph Kwan, "We are in the Same Family: The Growth of Chinese MB Churches," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 40, no. 21 (9 November 2001), 2-8.

[52] Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length,* 150-156; and Abe J. Dueck, ed., *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010).

[53] Victor Wall, "ICOMB: Its Vision and History," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World,* 360.

[54] Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions*, 5.

## Recommended Reading

*A Century of Grace and Witness, 1860-1960: The Mennonite Brethren Church.* Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1960.

Dueck, Abe J., ed. *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years.* Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010.

Penner, Peter. *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada.* Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987.

Plett, C.F. *The Story of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church.* Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1985.

Redekop, John H. *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren.* Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987.

Regehr, Ted. *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Toews, J.A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers.* Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975.

Toews, J.B. *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America, 1860-1990.* Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993.

Toews, Paul, ed. *Bridging Troubled Waters: Mennonite Brethren at Mid-century: Essays and Autobiographies.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1995.

Toews, Paul and Kevin Enns-Rempel, eds. *For Everything a Season, Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002: An Informal History.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2002.

## Study Questions

1. One of the challenges faced by both US and Canadian groups was the missional shift from preservation of identity and the faith of the children of immigrants to reaching out into the culture in which the church lived. What principles could be derived from this shift that could speak to the core values of mission within a new immigrant context? Within an established context (second or third generation)?

2. Compare the approaches to "foreign" mission and "home" mission (church planting) by the North American churches. Would you say "home" mission enjoys equal status with "foreign" mission? If so, why? If not, why not? Should it?

3. Consider the George W. Peters quote in the final conclusion – mission is "not static" but a "living institution" requiring "continuous adjustments." What adjustments – or even new paradigms – might be needed in mission in your particular areas of interest, be they geographic areas or demographic areas?

# Asia

# 11 Mennonite Brethren Missions in Asia

I.P. Asheervadam, Victor Wiens,
Junichi Fujino, Ray Harms-Wiebe

Asia contains eighty percent of the world's least reached peoples, and over sixty percent of the world's population. God's missionary call to us as a denomination and its diverse mission instruments have led us to many fields within Asia.

I.P. Asheervadam (D.Th., Church History, United Theological College, Bangalore) is Principal and Professor of Church History at the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College, Shamshabad, India. He also serves as Executive Secretary of the Historical Commission of the MB Church of India. He is a co-editor and contributor of the recent *Mission at and from the Margins: Patterns, Protagonists and Perspectives* (Regnum, 2014).

Junichi Fujino is pastor of Hirakata Christ Church (MB) in Osaka Prefecture, Japan. He has served as moderator of the Japan MB Conference, and as the Conference representative for ICOMB. He teaches part-time at the Evangelical Biblical Seminary (MB).

## India[1]

During the 150-year MB Church anniversary celebrations held on January 17th, 2010 in Jadcherla, India, in front of a huge gathering of over 3000 people, Rev. Dr. P.B. Arnold, the President of the MB Church of India, said:

> These celebrations are a celebration of MB Missionary services in India and worldwide. But it is also a celebration of faith journey of our great-grandparents, grandparents, our parents and us. This celebration is extremely significant for us here in India. Today we are not the people just saved by the blood of Jesus Christ but we are also the people evolved to a higher status in faith, in Biblical knowledge, in interpretation of the scriptures, in culture, in social status, in economic status, and in political status. Once our ancestors were blind, now we see. Once we were objects of mission and now we are sufficiently evolved and empowered to be the agents of mission.[2]

The foreign mission of the MBs began with MB missionaries from Ukraine, Russia. India was the very first mission field to receive the attention of MB missionaries in 1889. In these 120 years, the Conference of the MB Church of India has developed into one of the largest denominations in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh and also became one of the largest members in the Mennonite World Conference.

What attracted the young MB Church in Ukraine to come to the Telugu-speaking people in South India? How was the ground prepared for Dalits which resulted in mass conversions to Christianity upon the arrival of missionaries in the nineteenth century in Andhra Pradesh? How did the MB mission continue and achieve success in the midst of various missions in India? How has the India MB Church enjoyed substantial growth in the post-missionary era?

### Historical Background

Andhra Pradesh, the state that attracted the Russian and American MBs at the close of nineteenth century, is historically called "the Rice Bowl of India." It is the third largest state in the Indian union and the biggest state among the South India states both in area and population. Telugu is the predominant language of the state and it is the second most spoken language in India after Hindi which is our national language.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the coming of the Christian missions of various denominations, witnessed substantial Dalit[3] conversions to Protestant Christianity in Andhra Pradesh. Studies have shown that the present state of Andhra Pradesh has witnessed the highest percentage of group conversions (mass

movements) to Christianity in India.[4] The Indian caste system and "untouchability" are perhaps the most important features that must be understood in relation to the conversions of Dalits in India. Dalits constitute seventy to seventy-five percent of the Indian Christian population and approximately ninety percent of the Christian population in the state of Andhra Pradesh comes from this background.

### Messianic Movements and Dalit Conversions

Dalits cannot change the stigma of their social situation through economic or other mobility. Groups of Dalits over the years have converted to religions such as Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity in attempts to escape the humiliation, social disgrace, and indignity they experienced at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and to gain a new religious identity. With the coming of the Protestant missionaries and their teachings about the equality of all human beings and educational opportunities for all, new doors opened for Dalits. The good news of a loving God embodied in Jesus Christ offered Dalits something unique that governments or other religious faiths could not provide. Conversion to Christianity gave Dalits an opportunity to be an integral part of the worship and fellowship of the faith they professed. It also gave them a sense of human dignity, a clear religious identity and, of course, the promise of salvation.

### Dalit Mass Movements of Ongole attracted Russian MBs to India

The era of MB mission in India began with the coming of Abraham and Maria Friesen from Russia in 1889. By 1889, although the Russian MB Church had a membership of only 1800 members, in less than three decades after its founding it had sent their first missionaries to Hyderabad, India. They arrived at Secunderabad on October 2nd 1889. In fact American Baptist missionary John Everett Clough's success at Ongole had attracted young Friesen to opt for India and the Telugu region.[5] Therefore, unlike many Protestant missionaries who first looked for the high caste people, and when they failed to convert them, they began to concentrate on the Dalits; the MB missionaries concentrated on Dalits as soon as they arrived.

However the young Russian MB Church was not in a position to start their own field due to a lack of resources. Therefore, Friesen began his work with the collaboration of American Baptists. In May 1890, Friesen with five native missionaries from



**Abraham & Maria Friesen[6]**

Ongole Baptist Mission moved to Nalgonda to take over an outstation started in 1885. Friesen and his native preachers established the first congregation with 120 converts, and it was reported that a total of 325 baptisms were given by the end of that year.[7] Abraham Friesen, after baptizing the first converts, attributed the success to the dedicated preachers and the Bible women.[8] The MB Church in Russia sent around half a dozen missionary couples to meet the growing needs of the mission work in India. They established stations at Suryapet, Bohnigir and Janagam.[9]

By 1910, these stations had about 3000 members.[10] They carried their mission until the First World War and the Russian Revolution. After that, it became difficult to receive funds from Russia; the American Baptist Mission in Boston took over these three mission stations. By then they had an estimated membership of between 7000-8000 people. The American MB Mission, which began their mission work in the same area, did not show any interest in adopting these stations, due to their own interests and reasons.[11] However, the important contribution of the Friesens was to motivate the American MBs (AMB) to come to India.

### The American MB Mission and their Relationships with other Denominations

Abraham Friesen during 1897-99 went to America, where he played an important role in encouraging the American MB Church to start the mission work among Telugus. In fact there seemed to be a considerable interest among the MB churches in America for foreign mission work as early as 1883. Moreover, for several years their members had contributed privately and through the conference to various missionaries in India and Africa.[12] The American MB Church therefore was in search of starting an overseas work independently. Subsequently, the American MB Church due to the motivation of Friesen decided to start its own mission. The conference had no hesitation in choosing India and the Hyderabad area as their destination.  Choosing India was made easy by the example of Friesen's successful work at Nalgonda and moreover the Americans had heard of the Dalit (Madigas) conversions under Clough at Ongole during the previous decades.[13]

As a result, the AMB Mission sent their first missionaries, N. N. and Susie Hiebert, to India in 1899. The Hieberts chose Hughestown in the city of Hyderabad to begin their work. But Hiebert, who had an important role to play in bringing the AMB Mission into a meaningful association with the Russian MB Church and the American Baptist Union, had to return to North America within eighteen months of arrival in India due to illness. Though the return of the Hieberts disappointed the American MBs, it did not destroy their resolution to continue the mission they had started in India. Later the Hieberts' son, J.N.C. Hiebert, and then their grandson, Paul Hiebert, continued the Hiebert legacy as missionaries in India.

In 1902 J. H. and Maria Pankratz, and in 1904 D. F. and Katharina Bergthold, arrived in India. At first Bergtholds stayed with Pankratzes at Malakpet, Hyderabad. According to the agreement of "Comity," in and around Mahabubnager District area the mission field belonged to the American Baptists. Albert Chute, a pioneer Baptist missionary in Mahabubnagar District, shared Clough's ideology and policies in his mission strategy. So, Chute of the American Baptist Mission established the first station in the district in 1885 at Mahabubnagar town. In 1904 their second station was opened at Gadwal. Since this was a large area for Chute to handle he invited American MBs who arrived in Hyderabad in 1899 and were looking for an appropriate field to advance their work. As a result, in 1906 American MB pioneer missionary to the Mahabubnager District Daniel Bergthold entered this district. He began his mission by opening a mission station at Nagarkurnool. American Baptists and American MBs simultaneously carried out their activities until 1937.[14] The American MBs in general adopted the strategies of the American Baptists who had preceded them in work among the Telugus.[15]

In 1937 the two large Baptist Mission stations, Mahabubnagar and Gadwal, were added to the American MB Mission. This purchase of Mahabubnagar and Gadwal mission stations also included sixty-five acres of land at Jadcherla. The oldest church at Jadcherla had been started by the SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel). After organizing the church they handed it over to Chute of the Baptist Mission.[16] The Baptist Mission had used the land in Jadcherla for industrial training. The policy of the MB Mission was not to enter into industrial training. Therefore, in 1952 they started medical work there, which still has a famous hospital in that district. Their next mission station was added in 1954. This was the Telugu Village Mission at Makthal and Narayanpet. Within a period of fifteen years of their mission, this station had substantial conversions.[17] With the addition of this Telugu Village Mission to the MB Mission, the whole district had come into their account. Later South India Missionary churches in Adoni area also joined in the MB Mission.

Thus, the present MB Church is the culmination of the work of American Baptists, SPG, Telugu Village Mission, and the South Indian Missionary Church. Though the MB Mission was late to reach the district, today it enjoys the role of a major denomination in the Mahabubnagar District.

### Contribution of MB Nationals

I am one of the products of missionary work here in India… if no missionaries had come to India over one hundred years ago, I would not have been what I am now. To put it briefly, I became a Christian because I believed; I believed because I heard. I heard because someone preached;

someone preached because they decided to come to India with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the strong convictions of the missionary workers that led me to become a full-time minister. And likewise today there are many people whose duty it is to carry on the task.[18]

Karuna Shri Joel and several others credit the work of missionaries for the MB Church in India, but it is equally important to study the contributions and the sacrifices of the national missionaries whose work is no less important.

Here is an example of a national evangelists by name N.M. Mark. Mark, who was from Wanaparthy field, did his theological training at the MB Bible School, Nagarkurnool in 1920s. He was an influential touring evangelist. Once in one of the villages while he was preaching the gospel, the village elders asked him to stop preaching and apologize for preaching the gospel in the village, but Mark refused to do so. As a result, these villagers got angry and wanted to kill him by putting him in boiling oil. While they were heating the oil he was given chance to say his last wish. Pastor Mark expressed his desire to pray one last time. While he was praying, it began to rain heavily, which destroyed their plan. Pastor Mark took it as an opportunity to share the power of God. Some immediately accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. There was a similar kind of experience in A. K. John's life of Gadwal field.[19]

The role and contribution of the nationals from the beginning and throughout the years of American Baptist Mission and American MB Mission was significant. Their commitment and conviction for the growth of the church was remarkable. Bergthold had depended much on the local preachers from the beginning. He writes in connection to their wages that "…we pushed them [Preachers from Madiga background] into evangelism among their own people and paid them to do so."[20] Particularly the evangelists, Bible women, and village pastors were effective witnesses of Christ in and around villages. As a result the MB Church in India was begun and firmly established.

The MB Church in India started a "home mission" in the Avurpally village of Kalwakurthy field back in 1924 with R. Rathnam as their first native missionary. Rathnam and his wife labored for many years with good results. K. C. Krupiah of Akuthotapally, product of the Kalwakurthy Home Mission, subsequently served faithfully in the same area until his death. Over the years the Kalwakurthy Home Mission carried out its mission program in thirty-four villages and sent additional missionaries into the field and selected students for studies at the conference's Bible institute. The native Telugu Convention supported the Kalwakurthy Home Mission until 1959, at which time it was merged into Kalwakurthy Field.

P. B. Arnold, President of MB Church in India, in his inaugural address at the 100-Year celebration of the birth of the MB Church in India in 1989, gave full recognition to national workers, stating that "the sacrifice and selfless service of the nationals was in no way less important. The missionaries gave the support, leadership and guidance, and the nationals worked in the field facing many tribulations. Together they accomplished far beyond their capacity."[21]

Local preachers could make a great impact because they had easy access to their own communities. Like most of their listeners, they were Dalits who had no education or social status and were even forbidden to enter temples. Such "social lepers," now transformed, came to their own people with the power of the gospel, the message of equality, the message that the God they had found would love them all equally. This made a remarkable impact on fellow Dalits as it was not just a verbal message with which they came, but also a message based on personal experience and real change—in clothing (previously denied), in Bible reading (education), in association with missionaries (status) and in reference to a message of equality and love.

The MB missions and churches in the region have resulted in transformation and empowerment. The gospel has brought changes in the religious and socio-economic lives of converts, and has given a sense of meaning, security, status, dignity, hope, and purpose to the believers in the area. Today children and grandchildren of the former preacher say that in the midst of rigid caste system, superstitions, wild animals and evil spirits, their staunch faith in the Lord helped them to be firm in persecutions and sufferings, and it was the power of Holy Spirit that enabled their parents and grandparents to serve the Lord faithfully and thus they become the "great heroes of faith."

**Transition from Mission to Church and Rapid Growth**

The transition from mission to church took place in 1958 when the AMB Mission transferred administrative power to the "Conference of the MB Church of India." In 1976, the properties of AMB Mission were transferred to MB Property Association of India (P) Ltd.

The official membership of the India MB (IMB) Church in 1949 was 12,443.[22] D. J. Arthur, then Chairman of the IMB Church, reported to the 1966 General Conference of the IMB Church that there were some twenty thousand members in nine fields and eighty-one congregations. During same period the IMB Church was able to send two of their members, R.S. Lemuel and M.B. Devadas, into foreign missionary service to Bangladesh and Vietnam respectively with the support of Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India.

In the last two decades, because of increasing emphasis on evangelism and church planting through Church Extension Workers, Inter-Faith Ministries, and Disciple-Making International teams, the church is growing fast and receiving converts from other castes, creeds and religions. The IMB Church has grown strongly in the five districts of Andhra Pradesh—namely Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Mahabubnager, Nalgonda, and Kurnool—in which it is centered, as well as in Gangavathy District of Karnataka state and in the city of Mumbai, in Maharashtra. The IMB currently is also extending its services into the Sholapur area and into North India, particularly in Delhi and Punjab. The growth of the church took momentum with the starting of Lay Ministry in the year 1981with a goal to invite and involve every lay person in the ministries of the Conference. Lay ministers were able to establish a number of churches in the Conference.

Today's approximate estimation of the IMB membership is as high as 200,000 members attending 962 churches in thirty-eight MB Field Associations. While some of the church's ministries have been downgraded or diminished, the following ministries continue to function effectively: the Bible College in Shamshabad; the Medical Hospital in Jadcherla; MB High Schools in eight of the former mission fields; a Junior College in Mahabubnagar; a Historical Commission; a Center for Peace Education; the MB Development Organization (MBDO); the MB Women's Conference; Future MB Church of India (youth), and the Board of Evangelism and Church Ministries. The Board of Evangelism and Church Ministries coordinates a number of ministries, including ministries in evangelism (Church Extension Workers), urban and interfaith ministries (reaching out to Muslims and others), literature (*Suvarthamani*, the Conference's Telugu language magazine), the Partnership in Discipleship-Making International ministry and the Partnership in Global Youth Ministry. Numerous other ministries or departments have diminished in importance or have been discontinued over the years, including radio programs, Kraistava Mahila Vikas (a women's organization), a film ministry, and youth hostels.

As noted above, for the Indian MB Church, mission and evangelism are the foremost important tasks. Apart from the Conference Church Extension Workers (CEWs) who are our native missionaries involved in evangelism with the support of North American MB Mission, many local churches and lay persons are engaged in evangelism in their nearby villages. Many congregations in the Conference have a vibrant missionary activity and are carrying it forward independently. Evangelistic impulses are strong in the IMB Church and have led to tremendous church growth in the area. Some bigger churches are spending at least twenty percent of their income on supporting evangelists, pastors and undertaking missionary activity. MBC Bible

College (MBCBC) in Shamshabad is an important organ of our Conference involved in preparing Bible-centered and missionary-oriented pastors.

## China

Following India, China was the second field entered early in the twentieth century. Henry and Nellie Bartel heard God's call and ventured out as independent Krimmer MB missionaries in 1901. Over five decades of missionary service in China, they established clusters of churches in two provinces in northern and western China. A decade later, in 1911, Frank and Agnes Wiens also ventured out by faith, collecting support as they traveled through Russia. They also established a fruitful cluster of churches in southern China. The North American MB Conference adopted this field already in 1919, and the Bartels' field in western China in 1945. Organized activities in all three clusters ceased in the 1930s and 1940s when the missionaries were forced to leave and the Chinese nationals prohibited them from exercising what was considered a foreign religion. Political unrest, civil war, and the onslaught of communism were oppressive forces during these years.[23]

However, as in so many other countries, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. Following decades of silence, visits in the eighties and nineties revealed that the churches had not only survived, but thrived. A contact with the southern Fukien cluster in 1987 brought information about some 20,000 believers gathering in 40 churches. Another visit to the northern Shandong province in 1999 revealed that during the previous year 1000 new believers had been baptized. The elders of this latter group sent a message to those who had sent the Bartels: "Please thank the churches for sending the Bartels. They brought us the gospel."[24]

In the last decade MBs have once again entered China. Missionaries are serving in different regions of China in Scripture translation, in evangelism and church planting among least reached people groups, in leadership and community development among urban migrants, and in mission capacity-building.[25]

## Japan

The gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings salvation and reconciliation, and about which most Japanese do not know, was proclaimed by the North American Mennonite Brethren (MB) missionaries to Japan beginning around 1950. These missionaries began their mission work in the Osaka area, Japan's second largest city. Today the Japanese MB Conference (JMBC) has 1,500 active members (1,800 members in all) with twenty-six full-time pastors in twenty-nine congregations and evangelistic

stations. Their mission work is centered around the Osaka area and extends into the Nagoya area, the Hiroshima area, and near Tokyo, Japan's capital. In addition to the church planting ministry they have established a seminary and a Christian camp.

## The Birth of the Japanese MB Church

In 1949, four years after the defeat of the Japanese at the end of World War II, Henry and Lydia Thielman were sent by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to provide relief work in the Konohana Ward in Osaka where American bombers had inflicted the most devastating damage. A year later, in August 1950, Ruth Wiens was sent to Japan by the Board of Foreign Missions of the MB Church of North America. In March 1951 Harry and Mildred Friesen together with Harold and Marianna Gaede arrived in Japan. On May 13, they conducted a Lord's Day worship service at a club house in Ishibashi.

### The Early Development

In 1955 a conference of MB missionaries was held and they decided to select the greater Osaka area as their mission field. By 1956 evangelistic activity was in full swing, with meetings in Amagasaki, Nagase, Minato, Tsurugaoka, Ishibashi, and Kasugade, all in the greater Osaka area. Many people came to faith, congregations became active, and men and women dedicated themselves to serve the church. In September 1956 a conference was convened with representatives from the congregations that had been established in the Osaka area. The delegation decided that a church conference organization should be established. The Japan MB Conference was thus formed in 1958. New MB congregations continued to be added to the conference in key cities in the Osaka area and in the neighboring Hyogo Prefecture.

### Gospel Radio Ministry

Beginning in 1954 MB missionaries supported a gospel radio ministry in the area around Osaka. The program was called "The Light of the World." It was produced by a radio evangelist, Akira Hatori, and aired as a fifteen-minute broadcast on Sunday mornings. After 1961, the MBs produced their own radio program which aired every morning, was called "The Light of the Morning," and offered a five-minute gospel message. Follow-up meetings for listeners were held in Osaka City. After 1963 evangelist Akira Hatori was the featured speaker at monthly meetings called "Evening of Praise and Message," which were held in the large Nakanoshima Civic Auditorium located in a central part of Osaka City. These meetings were very well attended. Those who came to the evening meetings were encouraged to attend an MB church near

their places of residence. In 1971, however, the MB outreach policy changed and support for this radio program stopped.

### Seminary Education

In 1957 the MB Biblical Institute was founded in a prefabricated house in Kasugade of Konohana Ward, Osaka City. The purpose of the school was to train leaders. In 1961 the MBs joined hands with two Baptist mission boards and formed the Osaka Biblical Seminary. However, disagreements surfaced between the JMBC and the Baptist groups regarding biblical interpretation and educational policies. In order to maintain unity in faith and practice within the conference, the JMBC dissolved the partnership with the other two missions in 1971 and began to offer its own MB theological training in a school that became known as the Evangelical Biblical Seminary. Harry Friesen became the first president of the Evangelical Biblical Seminary. He taught systematic theology for many years and thereby laid a dispensational foundation within the JMBC. In 1991 Takashi Manabe, pastor of the Ishibashi Church, was appointed as the second president of the seminary. At present the seminary does not have any full-time staff. MB pastors teach Bible, theology, and ministry skills. Gifted church members teach subjects such as music and biblical languages.

Even though the JMBC is a small denomination, it has trained its own leaders in its own seminary. This has enabled the conference to maintain its own identity and to maintain a sense of unity.

## Theological Challenges in Relation to Anabaptism

The sixteenth-century Anabaptist/Mennonite movement took the words in the Bible seriously and expected Christians to live according to Jesus' teaching. This meant, for example, that Christians were to be peacemakers and should not hate or kill their enemies. The JMBC continues to identify with this tradition and therefore chose to highlight three themes as part of its fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 2000. The three themes included Biblicism, evangelism, and peace.

### Biblicism—Dispensationalism

Several specific emphases have emerged within the JMBC in the name of Biblicism, including dispensationalism and Christian education. Because of the exposure to dispensational teaching, Japanese MBs have long believed that God had one program for the church and another for Israel. The JMBC made this teaching a touchstone that became a test for determining whether or not an individual interpreted the Bible

properly. The JMBC often felt that it was more important to hold to a common theological understanding of end times than to insist on agreement in other matters.

### Biblicism—Christian Education

Christian education is a fundamental method by which Christians are led to experience the truth of the Bible and have these truths applied to daily life. Missionary Ruth Wiens had a special interest in Christian education, and was a strong advocate for using Sunday school materials appropriate for various age groups. Shortly after the first MB congregations were formed she developed Sunday school textbooks with the help of a few pastors and seminary students. When the textbooks were published they were used by all of the congregations in the JMBC. In 1980 she organized the Church Education Ministries with the support of MB pastors as well as those from other denominations who agreed with her approach. Ongoing efforts are required to recognize the need to depend on the Holy Spirit, to develop an eagerness to learn the Bible, and to apply its teaching.

### Evangelism—Church Planting

From the beginning it was the policy of the JMBC to plant congregations in urban and suburban areas where congregations might become financially independent in a relatively short period of time. After having planted congregations mostly along private railroad lines in the greater Osaka area, in 1968 MB missionaries started the Fujigaoka church, the second church in the greater Nagoya area.
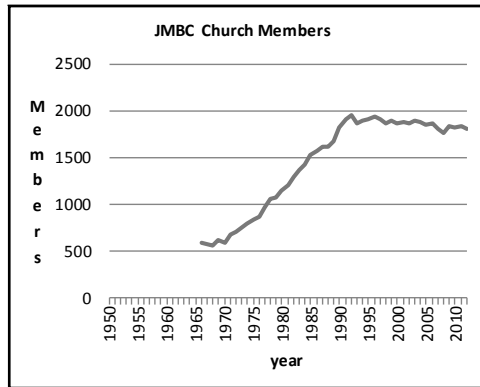


Currently, the JMBC has twenty-six congregations and three evangelistic stations (or church plants). Twenty-three of these were started by MB missionaries and were handed over to Japanese pastors within a few years. The JMBC owes its current stage of development primarily to the efforts and gifts of evangelism by the missionaries.

*Ten-year evangelism plans.* Since 1974 the JMBC has developed three ten-year plans for evangelistic outreach. The first ten-year evangelism project, from

1974-1983, achieved a remarkable increase in converts. The membership of the JMBC doubled from 600 to 1,200. The second ten-year evangelism project, in 1985-94, saw an increase of 360 active members, the result of new church planting efforts. The established congregations did not grow in numbers during the second and the third ten-year projects. In fact, during the third ten-year project, in 1995-2004, the number of active members as well as church membership not only failed to increase, but even decreased slightly.

*External factors.* Each plan emphasized planting new congregations as the center of its philosophy of church growth. A range of both external and internal factors offer an explanation for the recent lack of growth. First, the heartbreaking incident of the sarin gas attack by the Aum group which took place in a Tokyo subway in 1995 increased the negative feelings of many citizens of Japan toward all foreign religions. Second, the recent Iraq war begun by the USA, as well as terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists, has increased uneasy feelings toward religion, and monotheistic religions in particular. Third, it seems that life for most Japanese people has reached the limits of busyness and stress. Church members are also becoming increasingly affluent, which appears to result in a lack of concern for spiritual matters. During the last several decades almost all evangelical Protestant churches in Japan have experienced a plateau in numbers. A few congregations have grown substantially, but conditions in most congregations are generally very difficult.

*Internal factors.* Several internal factors within the JMBC also contributed to the lack of numerical growth. First, despite the ineffectiveness of the second ten-year plan, the Japanese MB congregations did not seriously investigate the causes of the problem in order to come up with an effective alternative plan. The prevailing assumption was that if new congregations were planted, and if they received adequate financial support, then membership in the conference would grow. Second, it seemed that pastors were too busy taking care of problems in their own congregations as well as within the JMBC, and could not find the time and energy to develop more effective approaches to evangelism. Leaders seemed to be content with saying, "evangelism is very difficult in Japan." Third, church members are very busy with their jobs. Many lay people cannot do more than come to church on Sunday mornings. Members have a tendency to think that all they can do is to give their tithes faithfully and that those who have the gift of evangelism should do the outreach work. Fourth, the JMBC has not been able to develop a healthy spiritual leadership. Many leaders have had a strong tendency toward legalism. Others have tried to manage and control their church affairs by employing secular management techniques.

*Evangelism—Overseas Missions*

The JMBC has formed support systems for those whom God has called into missions. Several missionaries serving in cross-cultural settings have been supported by the Conference. These include Takashi and Kazue Manabe, who served with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Papua New Guinea from 1978 to 1989. In 1988, Keiko Hamano was sent by MBMSI as a missionary to Pakistan. Hiromi Takeda was sent by MBMSI as a missionary to the Khmu tribe in Thailand from 1997 to 2003. Currently, JMBC sends Motohiro and Mariya Hamana, and Junji and Hitomi Nukaga to Thailand to work with MB Mission.

Local congregations have discerned and sent missionaries who have received God's call and have taken responsibility for supporting them. So far at least three individual MB congregations have sent missionaries. Takao Nakamura, a former pastor of the MB church in Neyagawa, and his wife Kayoko, serve in San Diego, California as missionaries to Japanese immigrants living in that area. Shigeyuki and Sachiko Yokoi are serving in Raleigh, North Carolina, as missionaries to Japanese people in that region. Hajimu and Kayoko Fujii, from the Tsuchiyama church, are serving as missionaries to Japanese people living in Fresno and Sacramento, California. Komaki Hope Chapel sends Kiyoko Tsubouchi to Mongolia for deaf and blind people mission.

*Peace*

European and North American Mennonites have a strong peace tradition that has included not only the rejection of military service, but also a much broader range of issues. The situation in Japan has been quite different. After World War II Japan renounced war (Article 9 of the Constitution). There is no military draft in Japan. Therefore a link between peacemaking and the rejection of military service did not appear to be necessary. In addition, MB missionaries did not emphasize peacemaking in their teaching. Although the JMBC has proclaimed a commitment to pacifism, it has essentially been theoretical. In 2003 Dalton Reimer, a professor at Fresno Pacific University, lectured at the Evangelical Biblical Seminary in Ishibashi and helped Japanese MBs become more aware of the broader meaning of peacemaking. MBs and other believers in Japan need to learn much more about what it means to be peacemakers in society, in the church, and in the home.

**Gifts from North American MB Conferences**

The JMBC is grateful for the numerous blessings it has received from the mission programs of the North American MB conferences. A total of fourteen missionary

couples and four long-term single women missionaries from North America have labored in Japan to the present.

### Nosegawa Bible Camp

In 1953 the Board of Foreign Missions purchased a piece of property with an old slaughterhouse that was remodeled for use as a Bible camp. The Nosegawa Bible Camp is located near Osaka, in a narrow valley along the Nosegawa River. Every summer campers ranging from elementary school children to young adults come to camp. Many members within MB congregations made their decision to follow Christ when they were young at this camp. In 1973 ownership of the campground was transferred to the JMBC. Seminars, outdoor concerts, and conference meetings are often held at the camp.

### ESL Teachers

In 2006, six individuals from North American MB churches were serving within the JMBC as short-term conversational English teachers. This outreach program was made possible through the generosity of North American churches.

The Japanese people are generally receptive to Western culture and many are eager to learn conversational English. Therefore, the conversational English ministry is an effective way to invite unchurched people into a church building. Here they are introduced to the gospel during chapel times at the end of each class, but Japanese people rarely make a commitment to Christ in a short period of time.

### Renewal Movements

At the outset, the Japanese MB congregations were quite dependent on missionaries from North America for most of their understanding of the church. The missionaries taught to the best of their ability, but their teaching was inevitably shaped and influenced by their own culture. Japanese believers generally accepted what the missionaries taught and tried to maintain it without change. As circumstances changed in North America, church life in North America also changed. Japanese MB congregations were generally not as flexible and were reluctant to accept changes. Japanese MBs sometimes thought that they were superior to other churches in Japan because of their dispensational theology and because of their educational programs. But they were not very good at evaluating their own church lives by biblical standards. They tried to learn church growth principles by watching growing churches. They often tried to imitate such churches without examining and applying biblical principles creatively to their own situation.

***A Time to Reconsider***

In 1998 the JMBC invited Vern Heidebrecht, a pastor from Canada, to be guest speaker at a retreat. Many Japanese were shocked to learn about how open Northview Community Church (Abbotsford, British Columbia) was while still being biblical in its life and ministry. After this conference the MB congregations began to search the Bible to see what it means to be a biblical church. Many felt that they had to discern more carefully which traditions had to be changed and which ones should be kept.

***Recommendations for Renewal***

A Renewal Committee was formed during the JMBC convention in March 2003, using "Freedom and Unity in the Lord" as a motto. Over a two-year period the committee tried to identify church practices and attitudes hindering the healthy development of church life. In 2005 the committee submitted a report of their findings to a JMBC convention. It suggested several basic changes in the organizational structure and management of the JMBC to find a truly biblical MB identity.

The report of the Renewal Committee discussed four areas, beginning with the relationship between local congregations and the Conference. In the past, when serious problems occurred in a local church, the Conference took the initiative to solve it. This system worked well when the young congregations needed strong leadership from the Conference to ensure unity and to guide expansion. Many Japanese MBs now believe that local congregations should be more responsible for their own church affairs, taking their own initiative to solve problems and to develop programs. Churches need to accept diversity among local congregations. Pastors, leaders, and members all have their own personalities and responsibilities. At the same time they are fellow workers for the same faith.

Second, Japanese MB congregations need a new Confession of Faith. While the Confession should be based on the ICOMB Confession of Faith, it should also reflect the unique emphases of the Japanese conference. The Conference needs a more holistic understanding of the biblical concept of peace that will enable members to be true peacemakers.

Third, in earlier years the JMBC Reference and Counsel Committee assumed the power to hire, dismiss, and transfer pastors. Now practices have changed. Each local church has the freedom to select its own pastor and to determine the nature of an appointment, whether full-time or part-time. The Conference role is to support the decisions of the local congregations. The Committee, however, remains responsible for policies related to licensing and ordination of pastors.

Fourth, Japanese MB women may serve as members of committees in local congregations and are invited to serve as representatives in meetings of the JMBC. Future discussions will address the possibility of a woman serving as pastor in accordance with her gifts.

### Challenges for the Future

JMBC leaders anticipate that the next stage of development in the life of the Conference will involve a number of theological questions. First, what does it mean to be "biblical"? How should believers in Christ best live out a biblical model in their everyday lives? Japanese Christians need to strive for a holistic Christian way of life that is filled with the Holy Spirit. They must establish a biblical lifestyle in everyday life, not only a theology that is biblical.

Second, what does it mean to be "evangelistic"? A review of the average rate of church growth of the established congregations during the last twenty years reveals that there has been no growth. Many congregations have few teenagers attending worship services. Pastors have discussed the problem and determined that a growing, radical spiritual reform in our established congregations is the key for our Conference's future outreach.

Third, what does it mean to be "peaceful"? The Christ who establishes true peace on earth must live within people if real peace is to be realized. This peace must be expressed within each member's home, within each congregation, at each member's work place, and at each of the other institutions in society in which our members participate. This is the picture of the ministry of reconciliation that the people of God are called to accomplish.

### Expanding Horizons[26]

The ongoing story of the global Mennonite Brethren family is one of faithful servants, from many different ethnic groups, carrying the treasure of the Kingdom wherever they have gone. Sometimes the story of geographical relocation has been driven by war and persecution, sometimes by migration and new world opportunities, and at other times by missionary vision and passion. By God's grace, the Mennonite Brethren have been involved in telling the gospel narrative to people groups who have either never heard of God's love for them or have not been privileged to hear the message in a way that was comprehensible to them. The following offers a short summary of the most recent developments.

**Mongolia**

Just north of China lies the remote nation of Mongolia. Mennonite Brethren mission work began in Mongolia in 2001 through the ministry of Robert and Marlene Baerg. Their community outreach work through children's and youth clubs has expanded to a broader discipleship ministry within the capital of Ulan Bator. They are currently developing a new horticulture farm and ministry outside the capital to facilitate their growing discipleship ministry.

**Laos**

Mennonite Brethren mission work in Laos began with MB Mission support for a Khmu pastor Phone Keo[27] in his church planting work amongst southeast Asian immigrants in the Fresno, CA area during the early 1990s. The Khmu are one of the larger tribal groups in Laos, numbering some 400,000 people with another 30,000 in Thailand. They are also found in China and Myanmar (Burma).

Since 1996, Phone Keo has been sent by MB Mission to his home region to preach the gospel and to disciple leaders. The resulting network of churches has grown from several hundred believers to over 40,000. This church planting movement meets in 200 church buildings and another 200 house churches. They identify with the Mennonite Brethren and have adopted its Confession of Faith. Many pastors have been imprisoned and tortured by the communist government. Their stories are reminiscent of the early Anabaptists who gave their lives for the sake of the gospel.

MB Mission workers are involved in training and equipping church leaders, as well as assisting churches with development projects to improve their communities and increase sustainability. Much of this takes place at the Changed Life Center in northern Thailand. The outreach in recent years has spread beyond the Khmu people group to include the Hmong. The conference (Khmu Mission) has its center in Thailand and joined ICOMB in 2012.

**Philippines**

Disciple-Making International (DMI), a short-term evangelism ministry of MB Mission, sent its first team to the Philippines in April 1996. As a result of his DMI evangelism experiences and the excitement of helping plant churches for new Filipino believers, Arthur Loewen presented a church planting vision to MB Mission in 2002.

By March 2004 Arthur had found a church planter, Samuel Arcano, through his key contact and friend in the Philippines, Nathan Costas. Arcano had a vision to plant a church among university students in Baguio. Forty young people were soon attending the Baguio Youth Center.

In 2006 Arcano was encouraged to consider starting a second church in the region of Ambiong, adjacent to Baguio City. The church planting work was initiated by two trained disciples from the Youth Center. A small Bible study group grew quickly. In. May 2007 they held the first church service at Redeemed in Christ (MB) Church. In recent years more churches have been planted in Baguio, as well as Bayombong (Luzon) and Palawan Island.

In 2014 the Kalipunan ng Kapatirang Mennonita ng Pilipas Inc. (Conference of Mennonite Brethren of Philippines) was registered.  At present there are eight churches and a growing number of mission outreaches.

### Thailand

Mennonite Brethren mission work in Thailand had its beginning in 1992 when MB Mission missionaries, Russ and Liz Schmidt, arrived in north Thailand to plant churches with the Khmu people in the rural province of Nan. In 1995, MB Mission sent Fritz and Susie Peters to Chiang Mai as church planters. Fritz travelled to the Khmu villages five hours away to minister to the Khmu people group, and Susie taught at a Christian Thai school. The couple served in Thailand until 2004.

TEAM 2000, consisting of three couples (Ricky and Karen Sanchez, Dave and Louise. Sinclair-Peters, Andy and Carmen Owen) and their families, was mobilized in 2000. The team arrived in Thailand in January 2001 for language school. A year later the team moved to Chonburi in central Thailand to plant churches.

TEAM 2000 was actively involved in four church-plants including The Life Center, The Promise Church, The Bethel Church, and the Ang Sila Friendship Center.  They have since spread out from Chonburi to Chachoengsao and Chiang Mai where they continue to evangelize, disciple, and train Thai believers, as well as provide leadership for social ministries. New churches are being planted in these locations, and new ministries are emerging to reach out to Burmese and Cambodians.

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, TEAM 2000 and the MB Mission office mobilized a relief response involving many volunteers from North America. Twenty-five homes were constructed for widows. Following the relief efforts, a new team called Operation 2nd Wave (O2W) was sent to Phuket, south Thailand in 2006.

The Abundant Life Home, an orphanage for HIV-positive children, was opened by TEAM 2000 in April 2006. In March 2008 the Abundant Life Foundation was formed to give TEAM 2000 permission to do social work projects in Thailand. The

Thai Mennonite Brethren Conference was formed in June 2008 to give Abundant Life Home legal status as a religious foundation.

## Other Countries[28]

The suffering people of Afghanistan have touched the hearts of God's people long before September 11, 2001. Already in 1969 Dr. Herb and Ruth Friesen, MB medical missionaries, were residing and serving in the capital of Kabul. MB Mission began in 1971 to partner with International Assistance Mission, offering services of compassion and medical care. While no attempt was made to plant churches, MB and other workers were able to share their faith and encourage the fledgling underground church in that Islamic state. Even after his retirement, Dr. Friesen made repeated visits to Afghanistan to treat patients with eye afflictions, to train Afghan doctors, and to encourage the believers.[29] Hospital administrator Richard Penner, no longer able to live in Afghanistan following 9/11, died in a plane crash returning to his home in Uzbekistan from Afghanistan (2003). The sacrificial services of people like Herb and Ruth Friesen, Richard and Ann Penner, and many others, were undoubtedly motivated by a deep love for God and the forgotten people of Afghanistan.

In Indonesia, a partnership was formed with the Chinese Mennonite Church known as Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI). Beginning in 1975, MB Mission missionaries were sent to train and mentor Indonesian evangelists as they were sent by the GKMI mission agency to the unevangelized peoples throughout Indonesia. Dale and Joyce Warkentin and Dan and Helen Nickel served in this capacity-building ministry for the duration of the ten-year partnership commitment. Additional financial partnerships were carried on through 2001. Many GKMI village churches were planted through these partnerships.

Like Afghanistan and Indonesia, Pakistan is also a Muslim-majority country. MB Mission began ministries in Pakistan in 1981. The initial ministry was medical outreach to Afghan refugees fleeing the Soviet War. A doctor and nurse began serving in Taxila. In 1983, with Dr. Friesen having to leave Afghanistan to resettle in Pakistan, also due to the Soviet War, MB Mission shifted its focus to the eye hospital in Peshawar. In the ensuing years, prayer and discernment led to the decision to begin church planting in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, with a focus on the Baluchi people. The pioneer missionaries in this venture were Gordon and Gwen Nickel, Keiko Hamano of the Japanese MB Conference, and Tim and Janine Bergdahl. Outreach in this strongly Muslim country was difficult. Friendship, literacy classes and short-wave radio were some of many methods used. A small number of Baluchi became followers of Jesus, and eventually there were reports of groups of believers

gathering in small house churches. By 2002, security concerns led to the removal of the remaining missionaries. Formal contact was eventually discontinued with the radio ministry and Baluchi ministry.

Over the decades, through a variety of prayerful initiatives and circumstances undoubtedly orchestrated by a missionary God, many examples could be cited of MB mission work in Asia. In the seventies and eighties, MB Mission and the Indian MB conference worked with MCC in offering medical and spiritual service in Bangladesh. Kazakhstan was mentioned earlier as a Soviet republic where MBs had been forced to relocate from Ukraine. A thriving and missionary church developed in the city of Karaganda. A MB Mission bi-vocational missionary served in Alma Ata beginning in 1997 reaching out to the professional class. Short-term youth and DMI teams have also served in Alma Ata. In Bishkek, Kyrgystan, MB-Baptist believers began the Ray of Hope mission agency, which also received some human and financial resourcing for a time from MB Mission. Mentioned above, the Penners served in social ministries in Uzbekistan for a term until Richard's accidental death in 2003. Former Krimmer Mennonite Brethren missionaries Dr. Maynard and Dorothy Seaman served under MB Mission in medical and spiritual ministries in both Nepal and Sri Lanka until 1994. A ministry to English-speaking expatriates, and another to Pakistanis using radio were conducted by MB missionaries in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, beginning in the late nineties.

## Some Missiological Reflections

Asia not only contains over sixty per cent of the world's population, but may also soon represent over sixty percent of the global MB family. It was the first continent to receive MB missionaries and, for decades, India and China were the recipients of MB Mission's most significant global mission investment. This more than a century-long journey provides an exciting, intriguing and varied story for missiological reflection.

### The Gospel:  Rich and Relevant

The history of MB Mission activity in Asia and interaction with Asian church leaders reveal the richness and relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ for all peoples. Jesus reconciles men and women with their Creator. He is their peace. Jesus offers forgiveness to those who suffer from guilt, freedom and courage to those who live in fear, a new identity for those who suffer under shame, healing for the brokenhearted, meaning and purpose for those who live in despair.

In Asia, over the past century, those who have lived on the margins, excluded from social groupings "worthy" of honor—disgraced because of ethnicity (e.g.,

Khmu, Baluch), caste (e.g., Dalits), economic status (e.g., Burmese), physical illness (e.g., HIV positive orphans in Thailand) or gender (e.g., women of India, China, Southeast Asia)—these have been welcomed into the family of God as full-heirs of the kingdom, receiving a new identity and hope in Christ. These Asians have experienced the overwhelming love of Jesus which banishes shame.

For other Asians, the gospel of peace in Jesus Christ has transformed their lives. For the Japanese, *shalom* in Jesus meets their deepest longings and they yearn for more. In China, active peacemaking has turned seasons of civil war into *kairos* moments of kingdom expansion. In India, the gospel of peace has called church leaders to reconciliation and empowered Indian leaders to proclaim this message of peace to other segments of society. For the Khmu, it has inspired them to forgive and share Jesus' message of love with former tribal enemies.

### Holistic Witness: Word and Deed

Throughout Asia, the verbal proclamation of the Good News of Jesus has been accompanied by acts of compassionate service. Missionaries and national leaders have expressed God's concern for the whole person through healing prayer, educational programs, medical work, orphanages and agricultural projects. These initiatives have not only improved the socioeconomic status of impoverished, marginalized people groups, but also affirmed concretely their value to God and his people around the world. The gospel of the kingdom encompasses all of life.

### National Leaders: Equipped and Empowered

National leadership training is critical for the maturation of young, emerging churches and essential for the long term health of indigenous church networks (conferences). Across Asia, from the outset, MB missionaries invested in leadership training through formal (Bible institutes), non-formal (local church seminars) and informal (coaching, mentoring) training. This intentional investment enabled the newly-born churches of India, China, Japan and Southeast Asia to effectively evangelize, teach and shepherd their own people. MB missionaries were mindful of the confessional, organizational, institutional and material foundations being laid as they served.

The Japan MB Conference has sent missionaries to other people groups in Asia. The India MB Conference has reached out to new regions and other castes of its complex and diverse national milieu. The Khmu are sharing the Good News with other tribal groups in Laos. Could the Asian MB church have received more intentional equipping to be a missionary church in Asia and beyond? Could this

Asian MB church become the major missionary force of the twenty-first century, not only because of its size, but also because of its maturation in Christ and proximity to eighty percent of the remaining least-reached people groups?

## Missionary Roles:  Strategic and Changing

MB missionaries in Asia have strategically proclaimed the gospel to the least reached, discipled new believers, pastored emerging congregations, trained Asian leaders, established schools and hospitals and served as catalysts for innumerable new initiatives. As they have walked alongside the Asian MB church, their roles have changed from evangelists to shepherds to trainers to mentors.

The history of the Asian MB church highlights the need to follow the development of emerging churches and their leaders, transitioning well from missionary-initiated ministries to national leadership, walking together toward an interdependent relationship between churches within conferences and between conferences globally. MB Mission workers continue to assist the Asian churches in the areas of mission sending and leadership training.

## The Church:  Vibrant and Growing

Overall, although struggling in some regions, the Asian MB Church continues to grow numerically, expand geographically and mature spiritually. Asians lead the church. They envision the evangelization of the continent. By God's grace, through the Holy Spirit, they have been granted "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3). MB missionaries continue to walk alongside the church, often in a supportive, coaching role to young Asian leaders, but also learning from their passion for Christ and his kingdom and mindful of the truth that God is more than able to complete his work among and through them. Today, the Asian MB church reflects Christ's likeness to its surrounding communities and, in a uniquely Asian way, to the global MB family.

## Notes

[1] This portion of the chapter has been revised with permission from I.P. Asheervadam, "Die Anfänge der Mennonitenbrüder-Auslandmission: 120 Jahre Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde in Indien" in *In Gott leben wir, bestehen wir und sind wir!: 150 Jahre Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden*, edited by John N. Klassen and Johann Matthies (Lage: Bund Taufgesinnter Gemeinden; Lichtzeiten Verlag, 2012), 223-243.

[2] P. B. Arnold, "Objects of Mission to Agents of Mission" (inaugural address presented during the 150th Birth Anniversary of MB Church, January 17, 2010), 1.

[3] The word *Dalit* means "oppressed" or "broken." *Dalit* has come to be the new identity of the marginalized communities, viz: those who were till recently dehumanized and marginalized by the caste system. The term *Dalit* also affirms and asserts the fact of their distinct identity as a positive notion. See Prakash Louis in preface to *Pain and Awakening: The Dynamics of Dalit Identity in Bihar, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh,* ed. Franco, Fernando (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2002), xv.

[4] See J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movement* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1933). John E. Clough, *Social Christianity in the Orient* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 96-97.

[5] Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Telugus: The MB Mission in India, 1885-1975 (*Hillsboro: Kindred Productions, 1997), 4.

[6] Source: http://archives.mhsc.ca/abraham-and-maria-friesen-photograph-collection.

[7] Friesen's report, *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Vol. LXXII (March, 1892), 84.

[8] Peter Penner, *Mission in India*, 3.

[9] Ravela Joseph, *Samveam of Telugu Baptist Churches: A Brief History and Baptist Doctrinal Distinctives* (no publisher), 33-34; Paul Toews ed., *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 133-140; Paul Wiebe, *Christians in Andhra Pradesh the Mennonites of Mahbubnagar* (Madras: CLS, 1988), 67.

[10] B. A. George, *The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (India: Governing Council of the Conference of the M.B. Church, 1990), 16.

[11] See Peter Penner, "Baptist in All But Name: Molotschna Mennonite Brethren in India," *Mennonite Life* (March 1991), 17-24.

[12] H. W. Lohrenz, *Our Mission Among the Telugus* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Mission of the MB Churh in North America, 1939), 3.

[13] Peter Penner, *Mission in India*, 4.

[14] During this time American MBs established four stations in Mahabubnager district. They were at Nagarkurnool, Wanaparthy, Kalvakurthy and Janampet whereas Baptists had two stations at Mahabubnagar and Gadwal.

[15] As quoted by Peter Penner in *Mission in India,* 141.

[16] See Profile of Late Rev. Jonnalagadda John, India MB Historical Commission, and George, *History*, 109.

[17] A.R. Jaipal, *"*Telugu Village Mission*", El-Shaddai* (no date), 7.

[18] "Karuna Shri Joel preaching extract," in *Witness: Transforming Lives in Mission*, ed. Randy Friesen (Spring, 2010), 4.

[19] See India MB Historical Commission's Profile collection on A.K. John.

[20] Ibid., 147.

[21] P. B. Arnold, *A Festival of 100 years, Souvenir* (no publisher, 1990), 4.

[22] A.E. Janzen, ed., *The Andhra Mennonite Brethren Church in India, 1904-1954* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1955), 12.

[23] For a detailed account of the earlier stories of MB missions in China, see Abe J. Dueck, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in China" in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 119-127.

[24] Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 102.

[25] Due to the restricted access nature of China and security concerns for these missionaries, further details are not available for publication.

[26] This entire section is slightly modified and re-printed, with permission, from Ray Harms Wiebe, "Expanding Horizons" in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 349-352.

[27] For more of Phone Keo's story, see Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission*, 120.

[28] Most of the information for this section is taken from Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission*, 99-119.

[29] Herb Friesen, *A Reluctant Surgeon: Reflections of a Farm Boy Turned Ophthalmologist* (Islamabad: Self-published, 1996).

## Recommended Reading

Dueck, Abe J., ed. *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*. Kitchener: Pandora Press, and Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Ens, Harold. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Friesen, Herb. *A Reluctant Surgeon: Reflections of a Farm Boy Turned Ophthalmologist.* Islamabad: Self-published, 1996.

George, B.A. *The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. India: Governing Council of the Conference of the M.B. Church, 1990.

Lapp, John A. and C. Arnold Snyder, general editors. *Churches Engage Asian Traditions.* Global Mennonite History Series: Asia. Intercourse: Good Books; Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2011.

Penner, Peter. *Russians, North Americans and Telugus: The Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1885-1975.* Hillsboro: Kindred Publications, 1997.

Ramseyer, Robert L. and Alice Pannabecker Ramseyer. *Mennonites in China.* Winnipeg: China Educational Exchange, 1988.

Wiebe, Paul D. *Heirs and Joint Heirs: Mission to Church among the Mennonite Brethren of Andhra Pradesh.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Wiens, A.K. and Gertrude. *Shadowed by the Great Wall: The Story of Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Missions in Inner Mongolia (1922-1949).* Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1979.

## Study Questions

1. The Indian MB Church has enormous potential to reach cross-culturally into the many unreached people groups in northern and central India.  What are some ingredients that will contribute toward realizing that potential?

2. The churches begun in China by the Mennonite Brethren are no longer MB in their identity, but have become part of the government-controlled Three-Self Church or have gone underground. What should be our response to this?  How should denominational mission agencies operate in countries, like China, where denominations are illegal?

3. On the whole, evangelicals in Japan are either declining or maintaining their present membership levels. Why is this? Compare the outstanding growth in Korea and China to the challenges that the Japanese church faces.

4. Much of the story of mission in southeast Asia has to do with migration. Identify how God has used the movement of peoples to bring the Gospel to countries like Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia. What lessons can be learned for your region?

# Africa

# 12 Mennonite Brethren Missions in Africa

Nzuzi Mukawa, Mvwala Katshinga,
Lutiniko Landu Miguel Pedro, Victor Wiens
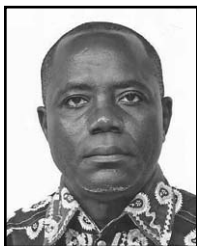
Nzuzi Mukawa (Ph.D., Missiology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA) serves as Academic Dean and Professor of Missiology at the *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie*, Kinshasa, DR Congo. He served for many years as a pastor at the Batela MB Church in Kinshasa. Until recently he was Executive Director of the Missions Department of the MB Conference of DR Congo. He is now the MB Mission Regional Team Leader for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mvwala C. Katshinga (B.Miss., *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie*, DR Congo) is Executive Director of the Mission Department of the MB Conference, DR Congo. He is also a MB pastor in Kinshasa. He recently published his research into the key role of trade language translation in rural community development: *Traductione Et Développement Communautaire En Milieu Rural Congolais* (Editions Universitaires Europeennes, 2011).

Lutiniko Landu Miguel Pedro was born in Angola. He studied in the DR Congo, where he received his Master's degree at the *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie,* and his Ph.D. at the University of Pretoria (South Africa). He returned to Angola to found the *Instituto Bíblico e Missiológico de Angola* (today *Instituto Superior Teológico Menonita em Angola*, ISTMA). He is an ordained minister in the MB Church of Angola and an active pastor. Currently he teaches at *Instituto Superior Politécnico do Cazenga* and at ISTMA.

## Democratic Republic of Congo

Obedience to the Great Commission as mentioned in Matthew 28:16-20, confirmed in Acts 1:8 and accepted by the Mennonite Brethren (MB), had favorable effects in the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter, Congo).

In this context, we describe the MB missionary work in Congo, offering a critical review in order to draw the necessary lessons for carrying out God's work in our generation.

### The Beginning of the Church

The MB missionary work in Congo was a personal faith initiative at a time when mission work was a task for church organizations, and often performed by a team. This was so because Africa was unexplored, its populations unknown, and there were unpredictable missionary difficulties dangerous to solitary operators.

Nevertheless, the Spirit of God in his sovereignty demonstrated his power to conduct an independent missionary work through a pastor and nurse from Minnesota (USA) named Aaron and Ernestina Janzen. Indeed, after serving at Kalamba and Ndjoko-Punda stations in the Western Kasai region on behalf of the Congo Inland Mission (CIM) for eight years, the Janzens assumed in 1920 the heavy responsibility of starting a church planting movement for their own conference, the MB Church of North America.

Their first mission station was erected in Kikandji (Bandundu province), but given the isolation and poverty of the soil, Kafumba was preferred for its openness to trade and traffic, and for its forest and rich soil. The strategy was to plant a church that would rely on self-financing with local resources mainly from agriculture and housing.

**Ernestina & Aaron Janzen[1]**

During their first eight years of missionary work, the Janzens were materially and financially supported by local resources and personal gifts from friends and acquaintances he met during their furlough at home. It was only in 1943 that the North American MB Conference agreed to fully take over the missionary work initiated by the Janzens in Congo. By this time Aaron had seen his two children and his Ernestina die on the field. He remarried Martha Hiebert in 1943.

Thereafter other missionaries were mobilized to join the Janzens in Kafumba and to effectively bring the gospel through its various aspects: preaching, literature, medical services, education, etc. The missionary team work revitalized and expanded the vision: schools were built for the training of future trainers, where reading and writing classes were given for men, women and children from the surrounding villages.

## Development of the Mission

### Around Kafumba

After the full support of the Kafumba Mission Station as the focal point of the missionary expansion as stated by the MB Board of Foreign Missions, other mission stations emerged. In December 1945, a mission station was planted in Matende among Bambunda tribe, fifty kilometers from Kafumba. Then Kipungu station came about in 1947. In 1952, MB Mission acquired the mission station of Lusemvu, planted in the 1930s by an independent missionary.

### In the Region South of Kafumba

Nearly 450 kilometers to the south is located the Kajiji Mission, established by a missionary society called Unevangelized Tribes Mission (UTM). This missionary society, led by Alma Doering, planted several mission stations in the Kwango region. But because of the global economic crisis after the Second World War, this society had no more resources to continue its mission vision. They decided to transfer some of their mission stations to the MBs and others to a Swiss mission agency. Kajiji, Panzi and Kibenga stations were among the ones that the MB Mission incorporated into its mission field in 1952.

Thus the missionary work in Congo by the MB Church was deeply rooted in Bandundu province. The expansion was always a joint effort. National leaders such as Timothy Djimbo, Nzashu Lumaya, Nduku Andre, Tumbula Mbele, Matsitsa Charles, Kadi Beatrice, and Funda Esther were faithful and fruitful co-workers with the missionaries. In the seventies some members moved to the capital Kinshasa and began planting local churches.

Administratively, the Community of MB Churches in Congo (CEFMC in French) was then organized into three ecclesiastical regions: Kwilu (Northern Region), Kwango (Southern Region) and Kinshasa (West Region). Unanimously, the leaders from three ecclesiastical regions adopted bylaws prescribing the rotation between the regions in the management of the leading bodies of the MB Community to prevent the monopolization or the exclusion of any one region.

**Mission Strategies**

As noted, the MB missionary work in Congo was done holistically from its inception with Aaron and Ernestina Janzen. The gospel was preached taking into account all the needs of the people to be evangelized. The strategies included:

- Evangelism and church planting in the villages;
- Medical services through the erection of clinics and hospitals;
- Primary, secondary and vocational education;
- Production of Christian literature;
- Evangelism through radio;
- Community development projects;
- Training of leaders in biblical and theological institutions.

**Important Periods of the Mennonite Brethren Mission Work**

- 1920: Beginning of the mission work by Aaron/Ernestina Janzen.
- 1943: Recognition and adoption of the Janzens' missionary work in Congo by the MB Conference of the North America.
- 1960: Independence of the Congo and departure of missionaries; lack of prepared indigenous leaders to handle missionary work.
- 1965: Political stability and return of missionaries: focus on the major towns and cities.
- 1966-1989: Fusion of the North American mission and the Congo MB Church into a single entity; missionary expansion.
- 1990-2002: Instability in DR Congo; internationalization of the Mennonite Brethren mission; appointment of Congolese such as Pakisa Tshimika and Nzash Lumeya as regional representatives for MB Mission in Africa.

**The MB Church in Congo in the Globalization Era (2000-Present)**

The DR Congo, after recurrent crises since the 1990s, is looking for prospects in areas such as democracy, social and economic development. The church has to take advantage of this opportunity in order to extend its influence to other horizons. Thus, the vision and the work of the MB Church in Congo (CEFMC) is organized according to regional structures, mission vision and certain perspectives:

*Structures*

Structures are managed from the top level (Executive Board) down to the local churches. This respects decision-making by the General Assembly, including the rotation of regional leaders as mentioned above. This creates administrative stability

for the Church. Currently there are fourteen ecclesiastical regions, 700 local churches, and about 500 trained pastors.

### Mission Expansion

Currently, there are new church planting efforts beyond the traditional regions of the CEFMC in the Bandundu Province and Kinshasa. Now, new church planting activity includes the province of Bas-Congo (in the West), the Eastern part of the country (Bukavu region), Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), with a view to South Katanga, Rwanda and Burundi.

Moreover, missionary work among unreached peoples such as Batwa (Pygmies) and Teke is slowly emerging with their own church planting initiatives. Furthermore, the missionary work in South Africa is taking root, as well as prayer groups that are emerging among the MB Congolese diaspora in Europe. At the same time, schools, clinics and hospitals, business and microcredit activities, and agricultural initiatives are achieved to support the ministry of the local churches.

### Perspectives for the Future

1. Going back to the biblical and Anabaptist vision of a community-centered church, peace, reconciliation and mission values;

1. Focusing on disciple-making through Bible studies and mentoring;

1. Strengthening church management structures through formal and informal training;

1. Continuing to work holistically through social development activities while preaching the gospel;

1. Working to promote a new kind of a transformational leadership through multi-sector grants, in both theological and non-theological studies;

1. Continuing to resource pastors and other leaders in rural areas through innovative and appropriate methods;

1. Nourishing partnerships with the International Community of MBs, with Mennonite World Conference, as well as with other mission agencies from the Anabaptist tradition;

1. Taking our missionary responsibilities to be the light and the salt of our society, by bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth.

1. Raising compassion ministries towards vulnerable groups such as women, children, refugees, war-displaced, widows, orphans, retired pastors, etc.

1. Providing the urban churches with modern facilities that can accommodate the professional classes of our society;

1. Using mass media and new technologies to reach youth and the unreached groups with the gospel in this twenty-first century.

## Angola

The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church of Angola (IEIMA) was founded in 1983 as the result of native Angolans returning to their home country from Kinshasa, Congo (DRC). In 1981 a team from the local MB church of Makungu was formed among Angolans returning to their home country. The team was headed by Rev. Makani Mpovi Sebastiao Sikonda. According to Rev. Makani Mpovi, his motivation for returning to Angola was to carry out the responsibility that missionary Arnold Prieb entrusted him with to plant the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church in Angola.

When the team reached the city of Maquela-do-Zombo in the province of Uige, they made contact with many people and from there they became members of the Church of Christ in Angola (ICA). This is understandable because the background of the four local churches within the Congolese MB conference (CEFMC) in Kinshasa had a strong relationship with the ICA.

Two years later, after observing and getting to know the situation of the country at that time, the team moved from Uige and were allowed to enter the capital city, Luanda. Rev. Makani Mpovi by this time was a pastor of the ICA, though with full intention to start the Mennonite Brethren Church. His brother-in-law, Sanda Samuel, translated the Congolese MB constitution into Portuguese and, receiving approval from the Justice Ministry, Samuel offered his yard in the district of Rocha Pinto to start MB church planting in 1983.

At that time they strengthened the local church started at Rocha Pinto and efforts were made to plant new local churches in the capital of Luanda. Cazenga, Hoje-a-Henda, and Mabor were those new local churches planted in the years 1983 to 1984. Lay leaders were appointed as pastors due to the lack of trained ministers.

This was a period of dynamic beginnings, consolidation, and further expansion. In 1984 a delegation from MB Mission (North America) came to encourage the new believers and churches. Similar to the model of Acts 8:14, since Angolans had accepted the word of God there was a necessity to witness about what they heard and to welcome this new conference into the global MB family. The North American representatives were pleased with what they saw on their visit to their sister church and soon decided to send gifts to support the work of God in Angola, as it was a young conference which truly lacked material provisions.

A great conflict arose in 1986 when the conference leader, who had received the gifts from MB Mission, was confronted by another leader for making no effort to

include others to decide what should be done and how the work should continue. Other allegations revolved around lack of accountability and abuse of authority. With both leaders intent on maintaining discipline and respect before their colleagues, communication broke down.

In this way IEIMA fell into a pit of ongoing leadership conflicts. Attempts at mediation and reconciliation have been made by Angolans, Congolese, Brazilians and North Americans. Alternating periods of conflict and peace have been at the center of Angola's story…seemingly more of the former than the latter. This culture of conflict has also been a constant challenge for the MB Church in Angola.

At the same time, the church continues to grow, at least in number. In 1989, a new point of entry was initiated farther east in Malange province. Led by Rev. Jose Ngola Muenga, who had received his ministry call and formation under the tutelage of missionaries John and Sophie Esau, a new church and region of church planting began in the Quinguengue district, Malange. Also due to alternating periods of conflict in both the DR Congo and Angola, many village dwellers have emigrated back and forth across the Congo-Angolan border. This has led to many Congolese MBs being displaced to Angola. Bringing with them a missionary spirit and a desire for worship, fellowship, and discipleship, they have planted dozens of churches along the northern provinces of Angola, especially in the border regions of Malange and Lunda Norte provinces. Smaller clusters of churches have developed in the Uige, Lunda Sul, and Cabinda provinces. Outreach has begun in Cunene and Huila provinces.

In recent years IEIMA has enjoyed a time of peace. Partnerships with MB Mission, with the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), and certain national conferences such as CEFMC (DR Congo), COBIM (Brazil), AIMP (Portugal) and BTG (Germany) have developed and IEIMA has enjoyed a season of consolidation. Capacity-building missionaries from the CEFMC (Masolo/Isaiko Mununga) and from COBIM (Silas/Djane Costa e Silva) have served in Angola. An indication of embracing and being embraced by the global family of MBs occurred in 2014 when for the first time ICOMB held its annual gathering in Angola.

Numerous ministries are in different phases of development for the further maturing of this young conference. IEIMA is organized into six regional sub-conferences. National-level ministries include church planting, community development, women's ministry, a Bible institute in Luanda, and global mission. IEIMA, or member regions or partners, have established both primary and secondary schools.

In 2014, just thirty years after such simple beginnings, IEIMA, in spite of numerous challenges past and present, has experienced special grace to grow in

number and maturity. Presently IEIMA counts ninety-three churches, eighty-four pastors (including some women), and 12,136 members.

Rev. Lutiniko Landu Miguel Pedro, founder of the now inter-Mennonite Bible Institute in Luanda, reflects on IEIMA's vision for the future:

> According to its mission vision IEIMA should reach all 18 provinces within Angola with the gospel as well as reach Portuguese-speaking countries across Africa. What shall we do to help IEIMA to be effective in her mission within Angola and to reach into other countries? We need new churches to transform some older churches, to train leaders, and we need efforts to overcome poverty…This is why training among MBs in Angola is very important for a future with hope, namely, to preach the gospel of peace and reconciliation for the salvation of many who do not yet know about God's saving grace in Jesus Christ.[2]

## Burkina Faso

The MB work in this West African country is an example of inter-agency cooperation. Mennonite Central Committee began the relief and development work of water projects in the early seventies. They were encouraged by contacts with the Christian and Missionary Alliance to send Mennonite missionaries to evangelize and plant churches in the southwest part of Burkina Faso. A mission with which MBs have cooperated over the decades, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) sent two missionary couples as a response to this call in 1978. Since then, a number of missionary-linguists have been sent, each to a different language group to work at Bible translation and eventually evangelism and church planting. Through these efforts the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso (EEMBF) has emerged.

Phillip and Carol Bergen, MB missionary Bible translators, came under AIMM in 1990 to work with the Nanerige people group in the region of N'Dorola, together with AIMM pioneer missionaries Dan and Kathy Peterson. In 1993 MB Mission decided to fully engage with AIMM, thus facilitating the Bergens to be sent out under a joint appointment of MB Mission and AIMM. This also led to a stronger involvement by North American MB churches in this pioneer ministry. Upon a very receptive response by the Nanerige to the portions of Scripture that had been translated and communicated by the Bergens and national workers such as Maliki Ouattara, the need for other workers became obvious. Thus MB Mission sent another missionary couple, Blaine and Michelle Warner, to assist in evangelism, discipleship and planting the new church.[3] The national Mennonite church, EEMBF, also sent pastor couple Madou and Mariam Traore to give pastoral leadership in establishing

new churches. Thus far, three groups of newly-baptized believers and seekers are gathering weekly in N'Dorola, Silorola and Kalifara.

Most of the conversions, baptisms, and new gatherings have begun in the last few years. The first baptism of nine new believers was conducted November 16, 2008. It appears that after many years of sowing, watering and cultivating, the harvest among the 80,000 unreached Nanerige is beginning.[4]

## Malawi

Malawi is a small land-locked country in southeastern Africa, bordering Tanzania (north), Mozambique (east and south), and Zambia (west). It has a population of fifteen million, of which eighty percent are classified as Christian. Of these up to half are evangelical Protestant. One might ask how Mennonite Brethren in general and MB Mission in particular have become involved in mission work in a country that seems to have such a strong Christian presence.

The MB Mission ministry of Disciple Making International (DMI) has sent short-term evangelistic teams to numerous countries, both with and without any MB church. DMI always seeks an apostolic national partner to provide leadership and mobilization of the national church. For a number of campaigns in southern and eastern Africa last decade, DMI partnered with Bonface Machewere of Malawi. In his own city of Blantyre, Bonface and his wife Zelita received a vision to bring spiritual rebirth to the unevangelized of Malawi, spiritual renewal to the many nominal Christians, and holistic community transformation to the impoverished people of Malawi. Their ministry approach would include: evangelism and church planting, discipleship, community development, leadership development, and sending out mission workers.

In late 2006 the Macheweres gathered thirty people into their home and the Restoration Bible Church was begun. Since then, they have invited DMI to come to Malawi to conduct city-wide campaigns in partnership with all denominations in order to sow the gospel widely for a greater harvest. As follow-up is conducted for those interested in truly following Christ, it often becomes evident that either the volume of seekers is too great for existing churches to handle, or there are regions where no healthy church is gathering. In this way the Restoration Bible Church (RBC) has planted at least another seven churches since 2006.

Given our journey of serving and learning together, given our high level of mutual trust, and given our similar vision and philosophy of ministry, when the invitation came from RBC to come alongside and build up this fledgling yet vibrant family of churches, it was not difficult for MB Mission and ICOMB to accept this Macedonian call.

Today the RBC is spread out from Blantyre in the south to the capital of Mzuzu in the north. There is a related group meeting in Zambia as well as connections to Mozambique in at least one church. They also face the same challenges of so many African brothers and sisters, namely, difficult access to education, difficult access to formal employment, the growth of Islam, and the scourge of HIV-AIDS. Here is a small conference with a big vision to bring a gospel of both individual and community transformation to Malawi and neighboring countries.

## Other Countries

Beginning in 1976, MB Mission entered into a partnership with AIMM to work in teaching and training among the African Independent Churches of Botswana. Over nearly three decades MB Mission supplied workers to help develop leadership among these fast growing churches. During this time the HIV-AIDS epidemic became rampant in Botswana, and so workers also engaged in preventative education. When Brian and Teresa Born completed their many years of service in 2004, no more workers were found and so involvement in Botswana was discontinued. No efforts were made to establish MB churches.[5]

In the "DR CONGO" section above, reference has been made to missionaries sent by the CEFMC conference into Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), South Africa. Indeed, today there are small MB churches in these countries.

An MB Church has also emerged rather spontaneously in Namibia, the southern neighbor to Angola. CEFMC member Jules Massakidi while working in the region began a prayer cell among Angolan workers in northern Namibia in 1999. Another Angolan, Pedro Moussongela Marcelino, assumed leadership of the group in 2000 and began planting churches and schools in the Oshakati region. Fraternal visits have been made and assistance given by both Angolans and DMI teams from North America. At present the MB Church is a legally registered church in Namibia, with fourteen churches, ca. 300 members,[6] a primary school and an orphanage. Although fraternal relations continue between the Angolan MB conference and the MB Church in Namibia, as of yet there are no formal partnerships with either MB Mission or ICOMB.

A network of house churches is emerging among Arabic-speaking peoples across North Africa. These have been planted through radio, television and other mass media ministries conducted by MB Mission-supported Egyptian missionaries together with many Arabic-speaking national workers.[7]

Finally, in partnership with other agencies, and through short-term missions, MB workers have served in numerous other countries from Zimbabwe to Djibouti, and from Mozambique to Senegal.[8]

## Missional Reflections

While there is much diversity to the preceding stories of the development of MB missions and churches in Africa, there are also some common themes, and some common challenges. The following comments are not meant to exhaust the depths of such themes and challenges, but rather to identify issues for further reflection and discussion. For now, we will focus on five such issues.

*The spontaneous expansion of the church.* It is noteworthy that in most of the countries cited above, and indeed within the largest conference, namely the CEFMC of the DR Congo, the growth of the gospel and the resulting church has not been strategically planned. True, elements of prayerful and strategic planning are evident: the selection of well-suited fields like Kafumba; the holistic approach including evangelism, education, medicine and literature; and the complex and highly technical tasks of acquiring language skills for Scripture translation and proclamation among groups like the Nanerige. Yet the stories are filled with orchestrations of the Holy Spirit that no human could have imagined. Consider the unexpected acquisition of mission stations at Lusemvu, Kajiji, Panzi and Kibenga. Consider the unplanned flight to Kinshasa for protection, education and employment by younger MB church members which over time has resulted in more than sixty churches in that city. Consider the tragic wars in Angola which led multitudes to the DR Congo, where many were evangelized and discipled by MB believers, only to return to their homeland with a mandate to take the transforming gospel of Christ with them, thus resulting over a relatively short period of time in the planting of over 100 churches. Who could have planned this? Consider the informal family and friendship networking that has resulted in cells of believers in countries where there were no intentions of entering, such as Namibia, South Africa and Zambia, not to mention Muslim majority countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

*The spiritual fertility of Africa*. Today Africa is the continent where Christianity grows the fastest. It is fertile soil for the gospel. Where in many locations in Europe and North America, it may take years for a church to be planted and rooted, it is not uncommon among our African MB evangelists to plant a church in a matter of weeks. The blessing of this amazing receptivity also contains sobering challenges that we present as questions: With such ease of planting (expansion), will the needed rooting (consolidation) receive adequate attention? Will we encourage the making of decisions or disciples? Will young churches find a strong and stable identity in the evangelical Anabaptist family into which they have been born, or will they wander about as orphans and somehow become captivated by marginal movements of which there are plenty? Will African believers in our churches experience only a change of appearance and habits, or will they become transformed at the core and remain both faithful and fruitful?

*The ongoing struggle against poverty and its consequences*. At the macro-level, there are encouraging signs in Africa. The economies of Nigeria, South Africa and Angola show a robustness thus far unknown in Africa. Yet if the wealth is somehow destined to "trickle down," it hasn't happened yet for the majority. The Human Development Index of the United Nations is a widely-accepted measurement of the quality of life, including distance from poverty. Of 187 countries measured, the countries referred to above are ranked as follows: Angola = 149, Malawi = 174, Burkina Faso = 181, and DR Congo = 186. All are in the lowest quarter of the index. On the side of hope, there is a growing understanding among churches, including those relating to the global MB family, that poverty is not merely an economic issue, but a state of mind. Investment in education at all levels and of all types is an essential part of the "renewing of the mind" in the battle against poverty. Equipping not only with marketable skills, but with a creative and can-do mentality (Asset-Based Community Development) is happening *for* and increasingly *from* Africans. This too is the good news of the gospel.

*Peace churches in the midst of conflict cultures.* Common to all countries where MBs are working are young if not unstable democracies, and histories of both social and political conflict. Angola experienced a 27-year civil war. DR Congo has also suffered unspeakable atrocities on a fairly regular basis, and as I write the capital of Kinshasa is once again subject to violent political demonstrations. Add to the political conflicts those involving uprisings of the *haves* against the *have-nots*, tribal conflicts, and religious conflicts especially between Muslims and Christians…much of Africa experiences a culture of conflict on a daily basis. Mennonite Brethren together with all Mennonites believe in a holistic gospel of peace: peace with God…with neighbor… within…and with the creation. Is it coincidence that the largest continental grouping in the Mennonite World Conference has also been placed in the world's arguably most conflicted continent?[9] I think not. However, nominal Christianity will not bring change to a conflicted Africa—consider "Christian" Rwanda of 1994. One challenge is to keep peace with God central and essential when we proclaim a gospel of peace. Another challenge is consider peace with neighbor also essential as part of our peace church identity, including the call by our Lord to not merely *live* in peace, but to *make* peace.

*African missionaries.* It is most encouraging to witness the emerging African missionary movement. Indeed, it is also present among MB churches. Note those sent from the CEFMC to Congo-Brazzaville, to Angola, to South Africa, and to the Congolese diaspora in Europe. Note the Angolan conference's attempts to come alongside the Namibian churches. Note the Restoration Bible Church of Malawi

planting a cell in Zambia, and preparing for outreach to Mozambique and Tanzania. Vision, courage and rising workers are not in short supply. Perhaps the greater challenges will be in matters of adequate training for mission service, adequate sending structures, and viable means of supporting these missionaries that are contextual for Africa. These are not insignificant challenges, yet neither are they insurmountable. The same sovereign God who has orchestrated the spontaneous expansion of his church in Africa, is also able to orchestrate, both spontaneously and strategically, a missionary force from this same church.

## Notes

[1] Photo from Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission. Used by Permission.

[2] Lutiniko Landu Miguel Pedro, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Angola," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 182.

[3] Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections*, 1966-2006 (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 88.

[4] Ray Harms-Wiebe, "Expanding Horizons," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 352-354.

[5] Ibid., 87-88.

[6] Mennonite World Conference World Directory (2012): 6, accessed January 28, 2015, https://www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/mwc_world_directory_w_links_minus_cover.pdf.

[7] Due to the sensitive nature of this ministry to Muslims, extensive information cannot be given in print.

[8] Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission*, 95-98.

[9] MWC World Directory, 35.

## Recommended Reading

Bergen, Phillip A. *Ye faabe: A day in the life of a Nanerige family*. Shafter: Bergen Books, 2013.

Dueck, Abe J., ed. *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years.* Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010.

Ens, Harold. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Hollinger-Janzen, Rod, Nancy J. Myers and Jim Bertsche. *100 Ans De Mission Mennonite En République Démocratique Du Congo*. Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012.

Lapp, John A. and C. Arnold Snyder, general editors. *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts.* 3rd edition. Intercourse and Kitchener: Good Books and Pandora Press, 2006.

Pedro, Lutiniko Landu Miguel. "Mennonites and Peace-Building in Angola." In *Freedom's Distant Shores: American Protestants and Post-Colonial Alliances with Africa*, edited by Drew R. Smith. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006.

Toews, J.B. *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire.* Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975.

## Study Questions

1. Give examples where partnerships among mission agencies or national conferences have played a key role in the establishment of the church. What are some key ingredients for partnerships to function in a fruitful manner?

2. The training of church and mission leaders is a key challenge for the future in Africa. Given other challenges such as limited funds available and limited access to recommended training institutions, what are some alternative options for the development of leadership for African churches and missions?

# Latin America

# 13 Mennonite Brethren Missions in Latin America

Victor Wall and Victor Wiens

The first Mennonite Brethren (MB) stepped onto Latin American soil in 1930, the year in which the MB Church was founded in Brazil as in Paraguay.

Their actions emerged out of the spiritual awakening that came to form the MB Church in Russia and out of the missionary vision that characterized the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. Renowned missiologist David Bosch considers the Anabaptists as pioneers of mission in the context of the church. "They were the first to require of all believers obedience to the Great Commission. This was a direct result of their ecclesiology ... Ignoring all obstacles, they crossed all frontiers of geography, economics, race, culture, and language."[1] Every church in the sixteenth century was an evangelistic center and every believer was directly related to the same.

The story of the mission of the MBs in Latin America allows us to recognize the beginnings of the mission, achievements and successes, as well as the weaknesses of the missionary efforts.

Victor Wall (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary) has served as pastor of the Concordia MB Church in Asunción, Paraguay, as president of the German MB Conference of Paraguay, and as Executive Secretary of ICOMB. Currently he is General Director and professor at *Instituto Bíblico de Asunción*, a member school of the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay*.

## Historical Overview

The first Mennonite missionary enterprise in Latin American soil began in 1917 in Argentina. In the 1940s missionary work began in seven Latin American countries; in the fifties eight more countries were added and in the sixties four more countries were added.[2] Long-term MB missionary work began in nine countries, and short-term missions were conducted in numerous others. What follows is a brief summary of beginnings and developments in each country.

### Brazil

As mentioned in the chapter introduction, the MBs first came to Brazil as immigrants fleeing the oppressive communist regime of the Soviet Union. In 1930, on the ship en route from Germany to Brazil, a group of settlers was led by elders Jacob Hübert and Heinrich Ekk to plan and organize the MB church in Brazil. The first church, named Waldheim after the village they had left in the Ukraine region, began in the Witmarsum settlement of Santa Catarina state in southern Brazil.

Having experienced a certain abundance of spiritual, social and economic life in Russia, the Mennonite refugees struggled in this new reality which was so foreign to them. Although thankful for this new chapter of freedom and opportunity, they experienced isolation and discouragement. The MBs sought and found fellowship and mutual encouragement with other MBs from Paraguay and North America. This mutuality helped them survive, but also renewed their mission vision.

In the early 1940s Jacob and Anna Unruh, initially independent MB missionaries, worked with an orphanage near Curitiba sponsored by the Salvation Army. In 1946 they returned from the USA as North American MB conference-sponsored missionaries with the assignment of beginning an orphanage with cooperation from the MB churches in the Curitiba area. This orphanage, begun in 1947, was the first formal mission project begun by MBs in Brazil. In addition to reaching hundreds of homeless children with the gospel, and inspiring missional vision among the immigrant churches, at least four MB churches were begun as a direct result of this holistic ministry. This South-North cooperation in mission work has continued since then until the present.

As one surveys over eighty years of MB presence in Brazil, a number of periods emerge that describe their development and expansion. First, the initial period from 1930-1946 was one of survival and settlement. Mission outreach was directed to children and youth, as well as to unconverted immigrant Mennonite settlers. Second, a period of organized missional efforts began in 1947. A revival in 1947 in the original Witmarsum church, ignited by a deadly lightning storm, led to a concern for Bible study, conversion, and outreach. This was also the year that the orphanage was

opened in Curitiba, an endeavor that was to stimulate considerable mission interest, opportunity, and practice. This period of beginnings lasted through the decade of the fifties as both MB Mission and local German-speaking churches began churches and schools. Third, the sixties and seventies were decades of prolific expansion. Thirty-five churches were begun, new fields were entered and new methods tested (e.g. saturation evangelism). Mission expansion in these decades could be said to occupy the core of the MB Church. Finally, during the eighties until the present, the focus appears to have shifted to consolidation of younger churches, conferences and supportive ministries.

With the exception of the initial period of settlement and survival, different kinds of mission outreach have been central to the life of MBs in Brazil. Both the German-speaking Association of MB Churches (b. 1960) and the Portuguese-speaking Convention of MB Churches (b. 1966) included mission cooperation in their statements of purpose. With language and cultural differences less pronounced by 1995, the Association and Convention merged to form the Brazilian Convention of Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Churches, or COBIM. It has as its objectives: 1) mutual fellowship; 2) doctrinal unity; 3) evangelistic mission work; and 4) cooperation in social work and education.

The MB Church, in its multicultural Brazilian expressions and in partnership with the North American mission agency (now MB Mission), has sought to take seriously both the Great Commission of Jesus as well as the Great Commandment. As early as the thirties, holistic missional ministries began in embryonic form. Over the last eighty years, these have taken numerous directions, including the following:

- Church planting in six southern and western states. Today COBIM is composed of forty-eight established churches, seventeen emerging churches and 7,317 members.[3]
- Children's and youth ministries such as orphanages, camps and preschools.
- Educational ministries including a number of Christian schools at elementary and secondary levels.
- Health services such as hospitals, clinics, a crisis counseling ministry, a seniors' home, and a mental health outreach.
- Training for ministry and mission: MBs have invested heavily in this area beginning with local Bible schools, then mobile training centers, Bible institutes, and since 2003 an accredited Christian college (named Fidelis).
- Global mission: missionaries have served or are serving in Canada, Portugal, Angola, Senegal, Ecuador, and East Timor, in addition to cross-cultural fields within Brazil.

**Paraguay**

The story of the Mennonites in Paraguay is one of the most fascinating and well-documented stories of migration and mission in the twentieth century. The early twenty-first century result is what is rightly called a "mosaic of Mennonites."[4] In no other Latin American country has there developed such an ethnic diversity of faith communities among those who would identify themselves as Mennonite Christians.

The MB communities, from the very beginning and in cooperation with other Mennonites, have played a significant role in the development of this mosaic. The following summary unfolds the story of a people on a mission in a country that at once has welcomed with open arms needy refugees, yet itself is in dire need of the transforming grace of the gospel of Christ.

As with the immigrants that were able to flee an oppressive Soviet Union in 1929 and find a refuge in Brazil, so approximately 2000 Mennonite refugees also found a new homeland in the Chaco region of western Paraguay. They too arrived early in 1930. They came with three already-established Mennonite identities: the Mennonite Church, the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood, and the MB Church.

*Mission among Germanic Immigrant Communities*

Although there were many characteristics of their identity that united them (a common German language, history, social and civic structures, educational values, etc.), beyond doubt their faith commitment to God as passed down from their Anabaptist forebears was at the center of their identity and existence. As such, it was not long before the MBs gathered to form their first church on Paraguayan soil. This happened on June 9, 1930 in the village of Gnadenheim near Filadelfia.

Alfred Neufeld captures well those convictions shared by MBs and other Mennonites in establishing immigrant churches early on:

> These groups brought at least three common convictions to Paraguay. First, there was a sense of gratitude to God for having given them a new homeland. Second, there was a sincere desire to cooperate fraternally without eliminating each group's own identity. Finally, there was a strong common conviction of a calling to an integral mission which prioritizes evangelization and Christian social service.[5]

In order to continually worship God, to grow with other like-minded believers in discipleship and fellowship, and to keep the faith alive and to give it away to future generations as well as new neighbors, strong congregations would need to be organized. These indeed were organized according to location and the emergence of new immigrant colonies or settlements of MB families. Thus, at present seven

German-language churches have been established in both western Paraguay (Chaco region) and eastern Paraguay. In the west are Filadelfia Church (established in 1930), the East Filadelfia Church (1990), the Blumenthal Church (1960), and the Neuland Church (1948). In the east are Friesland (1937), Volendam (1947), and Concordia in Asuncion (1963). In 1961, five of these came together to form the first MB Conference in Paraguay. While few Germanic churches have been multiplied over the decades, together and individually these "mother churches" have planted numerous churches among both indigenous and Latin populations. The influence of this conference (called *Vereiningung*) is far beyond its numerical membership (currently ca. 1900), in that it provides extensive leadership and support to ministries and partners among the indigenous and Latins (see below).

### Mission among Indigenous Communities

An outstanding feature of the Paraguay story is how the missionary spirit that came with the refugees from Russia was almost immediately expressed in their new homeland.

> On 29 March 1931, the Fernheim colony celebrated the first Thanksgiving festival with a moving missionary message by Pastor Gerhard Isaak. The offering yielded five dollars, two of which were dedicated to missionary work in India, two for Java, and one was left in the box to consider mission work among the indigenous people in the Chaco. Shortly before the outbreak of the Chaco War (1932-1935), a missions commission was formed to promote that purpose.[6]

Indeed, in the same year the war ended, the missionary intention became an expression as the Light to the Indigenous agency was formed. Permission was secured from the Paraguayan government to establish a holistic outreach among the Enlhet (Lengua) people group. Volunteers came forward to carry out the church's and their own missionary vocation. Among these were Abram Unger, Anna and Abram Ratzlaff, and Gerhard and Katarina Giesbrecht. Missionaries from Canada soon joined them in this new endeavor. It took eleven years of sacrificial and persevering service to bring an initial group to conversion and baptism (1946).
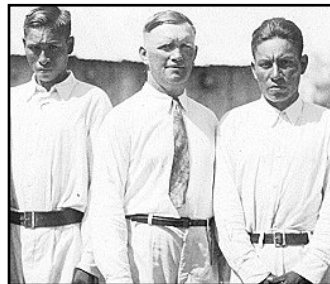


**Enlhet baptism / missionary Gerhard Giesbrecht**

Also in 1946, Jacob and Helen Franz from Canada began a new outreach among the Nivaclé (Chulupi) people group. Later, other indigenous people groups in the Chaco were engaged with expressions of Christian love and the truth of the saving gospel of Christ. Among these were the Ayoreo (Moros, 1958), the Guaraní (sixties), and the Toba (simultaneously with the Enlhet).[7]

The challenges were numerous, among them, the selection of locations for mission stations, radical cultural differences (including the practice of infanticide and a nomadic lifestyle), language learning, and of course the financial need to sustain both workers and a multifaceted outreach. For this reason, it became clear to the well-intentioned leaders of this agency that help was needed. An appeal was made to the mission board of the North American MB Conference (MB Mission) to both assist and indeed oversee this ministry. The request was received and embraced and thus from 1946-1961 the Light to the Indigenous agency partnered with the MB Board of Foreign Missions of North America. In 1961 the supervision was returned to Light to the Indigenous and the three Mennonite church sponsors that initially began the ministry.

The multifaceted nature of this kind of mission also required partnerships with other agencies. Foremost among these was Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) which in fact for many years assisted in numerous ways the settlement and development of the immigrants. Among the indigenous, MCC assisted with their land settlement in nearby Yalve Sanga, with agricultural development, with medical clinics and with schools. Other financial sponsors were the governments of Netherlands and Germany. Currently the Indigenous Mennonite Cooperation Association (ASCIM), the Indigenous Federation of Farming Development (FIDA) and the Light to the Indigenous work together to further social, economic and spiritual development.[8]

The fruit of this sowing and cultivating has been nothing short of miraculous. Lives, families, communities and cultures have been transformed by the gospel. Nomadic and self-destructing people groups have discovered a way of life to survive and to thrive. In 2015 there were a total of 9,320 baptized members in established churches among the Enlhet, Nivaclé, Guarani, Ayoreo, Toba and Zanapaná peoples. The Yalve Sanga Indigenous Bible Institute serves the different people groups to train church workers for the now self-sustaining churches. The Nivaclé churches formed their own conference in 1971 and the Enlhet in 1978. Since then a second Enlhet conference has formed as well as a Guaraní church conference.[9] True, there were and are numerous shortcomings on the part of both immigrants and indigenous, yet there is a clear consensus that the eighty-year relationship has been mutually beneficial.

### Mission among Latin Communities

The missionary spirit that the MB immigrants were blessed to bring to Paraguay also found expression among their new Latin neighbors. Already in 1951, Mennonite associations with support from MCC and the American Leprosy Mission began a ministry of physical relief and spiritual hope to victims of leprosy, at that time a common disease in Paraguay. What is now known as the Mennonite Health Center was established at Kilometer 81 on the road from Asuncion to Brazil. In 2014 an MB church from Asuncion sponsored the beginning of a rehabilitation center for drug addicts at an adjacent location.

MBs have also participated extensively in the Christian Service program, begun by MCC in 1951. Here, young adult volunteers give of their time and talent to serve social and spiritual needs of all Paraguayans. Examples include volunteering at the leprosy hospital, at government psychiatric hospitals, in seniors' homes, and in childcare. Volunteers have also served outside of Paraguay in disaster relief.

A far-reaching missionary advance began in 1955 when the Filadelfia Church commissioned three couples to begin a church planting ministry in Asuncion and eastern Paraguay. These were Albert and Anna Enns, Rudolph and Hilda Plett, and John and Susanne Wiens. Later Hans and Irene Pankratz and other mission workers joined them. MB Mission gave full cooperation to this effort. Over the next twenty years four mother churches were established: Bernardino Caballero, Santa Lucia, Dr. Francia, and San Isidro. The immigrant churches, MB Mission, and the new Latin churches cooperated in numerous kinds of outreach to establish dozens of churches in the decades from 1960-2000. Notable among these was the Messengers of Christ team of "saturation evangelism" which would focus on a town or section of a city with prayer, literature, films, outdoor preaching, visitation, Bible studies, etc.—all toward the planting of a new church. Numerous churches began this way.

These Spanish-language churches came together in 1971 to form their own conference. The first leader was Carlos Chavez. This conference (*Convención*) has been instrumental in the beginning and development of the Spanish-language Asuncion Bible Institute (1964), the Albert Schweitzer School, and the national radio/TV ministry (Obedira). It has sent missionaries to Morocco, Argentina and India. In 2012 this conference included some sixty-five congregations and 3500 members.[10]

Also noteworthy are the approximately twenty-five Latin (Spanish-, Guaraní-, and Portuguese-speaking) daughter churches that associate with the *Vereinigung*. These have been established either by the collective or individual church planting efforts of the immigrant churches. An initiative mostly unique to Paraguay has been

for the *Vereiningung* to establish schools in cooperation with the *Kinderwerk Lima* foundation (Germany). These are expressly Christian schools for lower income families. Through Christian education, on-campus chaplains, and off-campus evangelism and discipleship, many students and families have come to faith in Christ. Three new churches have developed out of this holistic approach.

### Colombia

The initial impulse of missionary work in Colombia came from a group of students at Bethany Bible Institute, Saskatchewan, Canada, where through courses in missiology became aware of the spiritual need in other countries. They felt a special burden for indigenous groups and people in the Chocó region, these being of African descent. By sharing their concern with MB Mission, this body recognized the call of God in this. The first missionaries who were sent and came to Colombia in 1945 were former students of the Bible Institute.[11] These were Daniel and Elsie Wirsche. The Chocó region, where they were, was extremely poor. In that sector was established in 1946 the first MB Church of Colombia in the city of Istmina. In 1947 a clinic was launched. The interest and concern of MB Mission and the missionaries in the early years were focused mainly in this region known as the Chocó.

Pioneering work among native peoples called Wounaan, who were illiterate, was also initiated. Since their language was not yet written, the missionaries worked in the production of a grammar, a dictionary and translation of the Bible stories.

By 1966, most of the mission team was serving in the city of Cali. The focus of the ministry in Cali was evangelism and church planting, but also included nursing, and primary and secondary education. In 1968 a new work began in the city of Medellín. In the capital city Bogotá missionary work began in 1974. By 2004, Bogotá had six MB churches. An important factor in the success of the churches in Bogotá was the presence of a strong missionary team as well as the vision of multiplying leaders.[12]

The MB church in Colombia has become a sending base for missionary teams in Peru, Panama, Mexico and Turkey.

### Mexico

The possibility of sending missionaries into Mexico was not envisioned until the early part of the fifties. Isaac Goertz, who had relatives in the German Mennonite colonies who had immigrated to Mexico from Canada between 1922 and 1927, requested missionary work among these conservative Mennonites who had established their colonies in the states of Chihuahua and Durango. The first missionaries sent in 1950 were David and Elereeca Toews and Edna Thiessen.

From the outset, the mission work in Mexico was at a disadvantage due to legal restrictions. Since the revolution of 1914 the Mexican government had rules that restricted the entry of foreigners, including missionaries. Therefore, the national church needed to be incorporated as soon as possible so it could legally hold land titles acquired by the Mission.[13]

Missionaries soon discovered that the Mexicans were more willing to hear the gospel message than the people of the traditional colonies. In 1960, the decision was made to focus work in Mexico in planting churches among Mexicans in larger cities. Work began in Durango (1961) and Monterrey (1965), but with few lasting results. In 1968, two missionary couples settled in Guadalajara, namely Richard/Delores Wiens and Willie/Betty Heinrichs. With the addition of Leslie/Erlene Mark, who had worked in Mexico for a long time, the work in Guadalajara was encouraged and strengthened. A small cluster of churches has emerged which has formed a national conference.

In 1992 an MB couple, Robert/Anne Thiessen, was sent by their church in Ontario, Canada, to work among the unreached Mixtec people group in Guerrero state. They have been instrumental in planting churches and training indigenous leaders, as well as Mexican and North American missionary apprentices. The network of Mixtec churches will likely remain non-denominational.

In the early twenty-first century a new vision was forged when representatives from the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) and MB Mission conducted a joint review of the work of MBs in Mexico. The vision of a stronger conference of MB Churches in Mexico resulted in sending a multi-cultural team (Colombians, North American Hispanics, and Canadians) of missionaries to Guadalajara in 2003. Their priorities were focused on middle-class church planting and training for the church and missions.[14]

## Panama

The MB Church in Panama began as a result of the early missionary work among the native peoples of the Chocó in Colombia. Between 1955 and 1957, while in Colombia, Jacob Loewen and David Wirsche began linguistic work with the Wounaan. The territory of that ethnicity was not limited to Colombia. They also lived in Panama to which many had migrated. In 1959 in the Darien region, the missionaries conducted a writing workshop with a group of individuals of the Wounaan and Emberá tribes in their respective languages. This experience gave them a sense of dignity, because they could now read in their own language. In 1961 the first congregation was established among the Wounaan. Soon a focus on preparing

leaders helped strengthen the work begun. There was also a concern for reaching Latinos and black Panamanians.

"The agenda for Panama in the decade from about 1970 consisted of a holistic approach to evangelization, continuing the ministry of adult education, teacher training, translation, and Bible teaching, as well as developing the socio-economic base."[15]

Zorrilla and Ens highlight two things that stand out with respect to the Wounaan and Emberá culture:

> First, the relationship of the missionaries with the national leaders was one of prudence and service ... They made themselves available while promoting human development and Christian integrity among the people from the Darien. Secondly, while the teacher-training program was being carried out and solidified, the translations into the two languages of the region were being used in addition to Spanish. As a result, the community discovered a lost identity and a design in the gospel that made them feel proud of their culture.[16]

The MB conference, called the United Evangelical Church of Panama, for quite some time had no resident missionaries in Panama. Finally in 2004, Einer and Girleza Zuluaga of Colombia, were sent by the Colombian conference in collaboration with MB Mission. They are working in a ministry of discipleship and leadership training with the Wounaan and Emberá groups.

### Peru

Since the late 1940s MB missionaries had conducted a ministry among the Campa indigenous people in northeastern Peru. Initially these missionaries came from the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, a conference which in 1960 joined the MB Conference of North America. This work among indigenous groups lasted from the 1940s to the eighties. It was for a time in collaboration with Wycliffe Bible Translators and later with the Swiss Indian Mission. The contribution of MB missionaries has been very significant, but the Campa churches have chosen to form a non-denominational indigenous conference and so no MB church has emerged.[17]

Another chapter of mission work is taking place in the coastal region of Peru. On July 22, 1983, Jorge Pablo Fernandini, Ambassador of Peru in Canada, presented to MB Mission a request for humanitarian assistance for flood victims in northern Peru as a result of the rains caused by the climatic phenomenon called "El Niño." This was the beginning of the current missionary work of the MBs, initially concentrated in

the region of Piura and city of Sullana, located on the northwest coast of Peru, over a thousand miles away from Lima. The first MB missionaries, John/Agnes Penner, arrived in this region with diplomatic visas. The first baptism was performed on a historic day for MBs: January 6, 1985.[18]

In 1996 the Conference of Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Churches of Peru was incorporated. As with most new conferences there have been challenges of growth, consolidation, lack of resources, lack of experience and lack of national leadership. These challenges have hindered the support and guidance needed to advance the work. Meanwhile new churches were planted in other large coastal cities such as Trujillo and Lima, the capital of Peru. At present, the Peruvian Conference of Mennonite Brethren is composed of twelve churches.

### Uruguay

The vast majority of Uruguay's population is of European descent. More than half of the population lives in Montevideo, the capital. In 1948 the first Mennonite immigrants reached Uruguay, most of whom were refugees from Danzig (modern Poland) who fled their homeland during World War II to avoid the advancing Soviet forces.[19] The beginning of the MB Church among immigrants in Uruguay was marked by struggles for survival. Among the reasons for these struggles it is important to mention the smallness of the MB group (a total of 34 members at the beginning), lack of spiritual leadership, not having an ordained minister in the group, their own settlement difficulties, and the distances between the various small groups. Only in 1950 was Tobias Foth ordained to the ministry.

In 1963 they decided to reorganize into three local churches that together had 78 members. They were heavily dependent on aid from North America as well as visits of preachers from Paraguay. For several years in the sixties MB Mission was undecided about engaging Uruguay as a mission field. In the late sixties they finally decided to establish evangelistic works for reaching the Uruguayan population.[20] With this new emphasis in 1968, Daniel and Elsie Wirsche, missionaries with experience in Colombia, arrived in Montevideo to implement this new vision. Other missionaries followed. By 1986, churches had begun in two areas of Montevideo and also were giving classes in a Bible Institute to train pastors and church workers. Although there was still a church in the Gartental colony, the focus of the conference was the work in Montevideo.[21]

Attempts were made by some missionaries to plant a church among the professional class in Montevideo. Many disciples were made, however a church was not established. The MB Conference of Uruguay today has seven churches with a membership of around 200.[22]

Unlike Paraguay and Brazil, where the MB immigrant church gave support and stability to missionary work, offered human resources, accompanying the work with prayer, offerings and spiritual fellowship, in Uruguay the immigrant background increasingly waned since its members immigrated to Europe or Canada. Today there is no MB Church of immigrant background. Other factors in the slow progress of the work in Uruguay relate to the shortage of domestic workers and a highly secularized culture that resembles Europe, with broad indifference to the gospel. The MB Church is not alone in its struggle to develop healthy and growing congregations in Uruguay. Even so, this small conference presses on with faithfulness and hope.

### Other Countries

In Ecuador, the HCJB (Heralding Christ Jesus' Blessings) radio ministry was begun in 1931 by the World Radio Missionary Fellowship. Upon an invitation to the MB Board of Missions to supply missionaries for the German language broadcasts, David and Anne Nightingale in 1953 joined this cooperative effort to spread the gospel and build up the church in Latin America. Many other MB workers from North America and later Brazil have served in this ministry until 1989.[23] The German broadcasts reached an audience especially present in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. In addition to follow-up by the written page, occasional visits were made to regions of high interest. In consultation with the Brazilian German MB Conference, the Nightingales were sent to plant a church among the highly receptive region of Joinville, Santa Catarina state in southern Brazil.[24]

In Venezuela, almost simultaneous church planting initiatives by the (Chinese) Pacific Grace MB Church of Vancouver (Canada) and the (Hispanic) Parlier MB Church in California (USA) occurred around 1990. In 1991 the North American MB mission agency (then MB Missions/Services) discerned the need to send workers to assist these local initiatives. Miller and Isabella Zhuang were sent to assist the emerging Chinese group in Caracas and eventually planted another church in Puerto La Cruz. The Spanish-language church in Maracaibo eventually joined another denomination. The two small Chinese churches continue to this day as MB churches.[25]

Finally, a variety of cooperative outreaches with other ministries, both short- and long-term, have taken place in Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.[26]

## The Beginnings and their Significance

What causes a church to become missionary? Is there a secret or a special recipe regarding the proactive involvement of a church or conference in mission?

The book of Acts, the first missions text, is instructive as to how a mission work starts. Also in terms of the places to which the missionaries or evangelists went. By studying the early MB missions in Latin America we will discover some parallels with the stories in Acts.

First, migration from the beginnings in Acts (8) until today is presented as an effective missionary strategy. Migration includes forced migration for reasons of persecution or social, political and economic oppression, as well as voluntary migration for purposes such as business, improvements in quality of life, study, etc.

Regarding the MB Church in Latin America, migration itself has been central to the mission work. Specifically it is evident in the beginnings in Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. In these countries the immigration of large Mennonite groups from the Soviet Union and Poland has been the key to the start and sustainability, in terms of human and financial resources, and in terms of presence and stability for the beginning and progress of missionary work. The clearest case is Paraguay where they could reach the indigenous groups in the Central Chaco with the gospel effectively and continuously. It is understood that the effectiveness of missionary work does not imply the absence of errors and in many cases lack of cross-cultural sensitivity.

The other side of the coin of migration also has to be mentioned. Migration has often had the opposite effect as described above. That is, thanks to emigration in many cases, churches have been emptied, a small group has struggled to survive having to face all kinds of internal conflicts. This is noted in the case of Uruguay, where MB immigrants have entirely left the country, leaving the young and fragile church in the hands of leaders not very well prepared and depending on one or two missionaries. Also, sectors of the immigrant populations in Brazil and Paraguay have suffered the debilitating effect of emigration.

A completely different facet has been and is the situation in Colombia, where due to terrorism and drug trafficking, internal migrations in the country have presented a great challenge for all Christian churches. This challenge naturally includes in a special way the question of the position of the church regarding these violent struggles. How does a pacifist church respond to violence? How do you respond to social injustice? How do you respond to the displaced?

Second, considering the beginnings of missionary work, it is imperative to mention the central role of institutions of theological and missionary education. Students of Bethany Bible Institute of Canada, studying missions, felt a special burden for Colombia. The result was mission trips to Colombia and later the sending of the first missionaries, former students of these missions courses.

So also it is worth noting that the vision of starting missionary work among the Paraguayan Latino population by MB immigrants was conceived in the Biblical

Seminary of Buenos Aires where young Paraguayan students could be found studying the Word of God and envisioning a different future in Paraguay. Upon their return, Albert Enns, Hans Wiens and others had a well-formed vision and mission strategy. The central role of theological educational institutions in missionary work is by no means limited to the beginnings. The progress and growth of the new mission works have been directly related to the biblical-theological training in virtually all countries. Also the lack of theological education has always meant a reduction for advancing missions.

Third, sending missionaries as church planters, both by MB Mission and national conferences, was another strategy of great importance. This strategy has been more efficient where it was accompanied by other strategies or approaches. In the last decade the traditional model of sending missionaries from North America to Latin America has changed. Where it was possible to achieve a close collaboration with some national conference, this has tremendously enriched the strategy of sending missionaries. For example, the Conference of Colombia has provided missionaries to Peru, Mexico, Panama and Turkey who have been able to make very significant contributions. So also, Uruguayan and Paraguayan missionaries are part of teams in France and India with a mission to reach Muslims for Christ. Considering the history of missions in the countries of Latin America where there are MB churches, one can confirm that church planting was the main strategy in most if not all the countries.

The fourth dimension relative to the start of the missionary work has been the social services. The clearest case is the beginning of the work in northern Peru, where MB Mission responded to the needs of a society who suffered the effects of the "El Niño" floods. This response of mercy and love was manifested as incarnational evangelism. And the result has been that many people wanted to know the God of mercy and love. So many were reached for Christ and the MB Church emerged in Peru.

Clearly, the social-spiritual witness is part of the DNA of the missionary theology of the MB Church. And that's why it has always accompanied the missionary work as an important ingredient in the preaching of God's love. The late MB missiologist Hans Kasdorf states convincingly that social ministry is part of holistic mission, with evangelism being the heart or center of it. The MB Church with some exceptions has generally accepted the biblical balance between evangelism and social-spiritual ministry. A strong illustrative example is the missionary work among the native peoples of the Central Chaco of Paraguay. What God has accomplished in the last 80 years is a very good synergy between evangelism and social work. Anyone who is familiar with this context knows that it is unthinkable to have conducted evangelization without also hard work in the area of social development. On the other

hand, the social-economic development of these communities without indigenous churches would have been a disastrous failure.

A comparison with the stories of Acts shows that the early missionary work in Latin America have their counterparts, and parallels in the mission of the early church: Migration, spiritual and theological formation, sending church planting missionaries, and social-spiritual ministries were foundation stones in the beginning and progress of missionary work.

## Ethno-Theology and the Latin American Context

According to Charles Kraft, ethno-theology is an approach that takes seriously both theology and anthropology. Theology offers the absolute and eternal truths concerning God and his saving act while anthropology offers cultural and relative truths concerning humanity and its cultural environment.[27]

The purpose of "ethno-theology" has four pillars: a) to better understand humanity as God's creation and the *imago dei*; b) to better understand the cultural environment of humanity and its complexities due to its remoteness and alienation from its creator; c) to achieve a more balanced understanding of the way of life of human beings as well as their attitudes and relationships formed by culture and sin; and d) to discover more effective ways to communicate the gospel of Christ.

The ethno-theological approach helps us take a critical look at MB missionary work in Latin America. At times the missionary initiatives for various reasons were not framed within clear anthropological concepts with respect to cultural, religious and political developments of that region or country context. Catholicism, which for 500 years has dominated the Latin American continent, has suffered strong and steady syncretistic influences. These came both from the pagan religions of indigenous peoples as well as the values of the Spanish conquistadors in their effort to take advantage of the wealth and privileges available in the new world. Missionary work was carried out in this context, from the start suffering heavy pressure on the Catholic side, who until recently considered the MB Church a cult. The dominant Catholic culture in Latin America made progress in mission very slow. Upon presenting the gospel of salvation, inviting people to find forgiveness of their sins in Christ, and proclaiming eternal life without purgatory was naturally very attractive to Catholics. But people are usually afraid of the so-called "sects." On the other hand, the "Catholic culture" presented a tremendous challenge in terms of lifestyle, ecclesiology, the relationship with the spiritual leaders, the management of finances, Christian ethics and family life. Thus, biblical pacifism has been taught very timidly in the context of partnerships with military-dictatorial culture.

## Ecclesiology—Blessing and Challenge

Missiology (mission understanding and practice) must be consistent with the theological vision of the church that sends the missionary, affirms Mennonite missiologist Wilbert Shenk. This implies that there should not be a separation between mission and ecclesiology. The Anabaptists practiced this unity in the sixteenth century. The divine mandate to mission and their obedient response caused the church to show its nature through missions and missionary work led to the church. In other words: the nature of the church is mission, and the essence of mission is the church. The church evangelizes, thus fulfilling the mandate of the mission, and through the mission churches are formed. This two-way dynamic has much relevance since the mission field constantly motivates the church to discern the times in the light of God's Word, and to review her understanding of it if necessary.

Upon evaluating the missionary work of the MBs in Latin America one finds that this principle was not always practiced. Two reasons for this were the ethnic-influenced confessions of immigrant groups on one side and the theological formation of missionaries on the other, since they came from diverse theological backgrounds as regards their training. In Colombia, for example, theology in the new church evidenced strong North American fundamentalist tendencies. In Brazil, pacifism was uprooted by the immigrant church since it had not secured release from military service and had adapted to the general position of the evangelical church according to the demands of society and government. It should also be mentioned that, especially in the earlier decades, the overall ecclesiology of the MBs had been influenced by the Baptists as well as the dispensational eschatological view.

A concrete expression of ecclesiology is the governance of the church. In Latin America churches were planted with a congregational approach, which is a Baptist model that is often confused with the concept of democracy. But democracy is a political, not a theological concept. This made many churches fall as easy prey to internal conflicts. At the same time the concept of a low pastoral profile was forged. This combined with relatively little theological preparation of members, and led to a relatively weak leadership in many churches. In reaction to this situation some opted for a model of church government that is pastor-centric that is copied from other churches, especially larger ones with widely influential pastors. As MBs, we need to address this situation obtaining a model that is faithful to our ecclesiology with a strong pastoral leadership based on the principle of giftedness (Eph. 4).

The spiritual formation of the new believer has always been and remains one of the biggest challenges of the church, since on this depends the growth, maturity and stability of the church itself. The strategy of the adult Sunday school has possibly been the most successful. Today this strategy has been largely abandoned which

has resulted in a concept of growth that is more quantitative and experiential than Bible-centered. While celebrating the new emphasis on spiritual and community experiences, we should not neglect the task of basing our experience of salvation radically in the Word and encourage spiritual growth by teaching the Word.

Related to the spiritual formation of the new believer and discipleship is the provision of necessary teaching materials. The lack of written material whose content is guided by the very theology of the MB Church, of high quality print, and covering all areas of Christian life has caused great suffering in the missionary work and church in Latin America. One theme for today that has not received due consideration is the teaching of peace and non-violence. Considering the violent context of Latin American societies the church must seriously ask whether it is willing and determined to follow radically the Prince of Peace and to form communities that are carriers and creators of peaceful relations offering models of conflict resolution.

## Conclusion

The MB Church is called to resist the temptation to seek to be merely an attractive community. Rather it is called to be a missional church, relevant to society with an incarnational missionary approach following that style of her Master. This requires the centrality of an evangelizing discipleship which involves the whole church. That is, an ecclesiocentric missiology and a missional ecclesiology. Embracing the world with the love and mercy of God, and forming ecclesial communities with a strong messianic culture based on the values of the Kingdom of God. This is the Trinitarian approach:

a) The *missio Dei*, sending, the Great Commission.
b) The *missio Christi*, the incarnation as model and strategy.
c) The *missio Spiritus sancti*, the powerful practice, the expansion of the Kingdm of God.

MB missionary work in Latin America, rather than characterized by great numerical achievements, presents a faithful witness both of the churches of origin, as well as the missionaries and the many people reached.

## Notes

[1] David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 127.

[2] Wilbert Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850 – 1999* (Elkart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 87ff.

[3] COBIM website statistics, accessed March 23, 2014, http://www.cobim.com.br/#!historia/c161y.

[4] Gerhard Ratzlaff, "The Mosaic of Mennonites in Paraguay," in *Courier* 4 (2008): 10-12, accessed January 23, 2015, https://www.mwc-cmm.org/joomla/images/files/courier/Courier2008_4.pdf.

[5] Alfred Neufeld, "Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 265.

[6] Ibid., 268.

[7] J.J. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 116-125.

[8] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission*, 120-121; Neufeld, "Mennonite Brethren Church," 269.

[9] Mennonite World Conference World Directory (2012): 25, accessed January 23, 2015, https://www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/mwc_world_directory_w_links_minus_cover.pdf.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission*, 86ff.

[12] Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections, 1966 – 2006* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 142.

[13] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission*, 141.

[14] Hugo Zorilla and Harold Ens, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Mexico," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 78-79.

[15] Hugo Zorilla and Harold Ens, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Panama," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 84.

[16] Ibid., 85-86.

[17] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission*, 154-162.

[18] Rolando Neyra, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Peru," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years,* ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 335ff.

[19] Gerhard Ratzlaff, and Ernst and Ursula Janzen, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Uruguay," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating*

*150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010), 325.

[20] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission,* 54.

[21] Ibid., 163.

[22] Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission*, 161.

[23] Ibid., 163.

[24] Toews, *Mennonite Brethren Mission*, 136.

[25] Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission,* 164-165.

[26] Ibid., 161-165.

[27] Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Contex*t (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), 32.

## Recommended Reading

Bullón, H. Fernando. *Misión y desarrollo en América Latina. Desafíos en el umbral del siglo 21.* Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2000.

Dueck, Abe J., ed. *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World: Celebrating 150 Years.* Kitchener and Winnipeg: Pandora Press and Kindred Productions, 2010.

Eitzen, Hartwig. *Dependent, Independent, Interdependent? A Case Study in Mission Partnership Between North and South America.* Deerfield: Trinity International University, 2003.

Ens, Harold. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission. Observations and Reflections, 1966 – 2006.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Epp, Margaret. "*But God hath chosen ...": The Story of John and Mary Dyck.* Newton: Mennonite Press, 1963.

Janz, Willy and Gerhard Ratzlaff. *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz des Südens: Die Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden in Brasilien, Paraguay und Uruguay, 1930 – 1980.* Curitiba: Südamerikanischen Konferenz der Mennonitischen Brudergemeinden, 1980.

Florentin, Flavio and Marta Florentin, eds. *Iglesia Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas: 50 años construyendo el Reino de Dios en el Paraguay. Documento conmemorativo.* Asunción: Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas, 2005.

Isaak, Sally Schroeder. *Some seed fell on good ground.* Winnipeg: Henderson Press, 1994.

Klassen, Peter P. *Die Russlanddeutschen Mennoniten in Brasilien. Band 1*. Palmeira: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e. V. Bolanden-Weierhof, 1995.

Klassen, Peter P. *Die Russlanddeutschen Mennoniten in Brasilien. Band 2.* Palmeira: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e. V. Bolanden-Weierhof, 1998.

Ratzlaff, Gerhard. *Ein Leib – viele Glieder. Die mennonitischen Gemeinden in Paraguay*. Asunción: Gemeindekomitee, 2001.

Siebert, Dorothy. *Whatever It Takes*. Winnipeg: Enns Family Foundation, 2001.

Siemens, Udo, ed. *Quem Somos? A Saga Menonita: Rompendo a Barreira Cultural*. Curitiba: Editora Evangélica Esperança, 2010.

Stahl, Wilmar. *Culturas en Interacción: Una Antropología vivida en el Chaco Paraguayo*. Asunción: El Lector, 2008.

Toews, J. J. *The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America*. Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975.

Valladares, Jaime Prieto. *Mission and Migration*. Translated and edited by C. Arnold Snyder. Vol. 3 of Global Mennonite History Series, edited by John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder. Intercourse and Kitchener: Good Books and Pandora Press, 2010.

Wiens, Hans J. *Dass die Heiden Miterben seien: Die Geschichte der Indianermission im paraguayischen Chaco*. Filadelphia, Paraguay: Konferenz der Mennoniten Brudergemeinden in Paraguay, 1989.

Wiens, Victor. "From Refugees to Ambassadors: Mennonite Missions in Brazil, 1930-2000." *Direction* 34/1 (2005): 71-92. Accessed January 25, 2015. http://www.directionjournal.org/34/1/from-refugees-to-ambassadors-mennonite.html.

## Study questions

1. Reflect further on the role of migration in mission, especially in regard to internal migrations from the rural to the urban in Latin America. How does one avoid neglecting the rural regions in the midst of obvious population shifts to the city? Are there contexts where MBs should give a greater attention to urban mission?

2. Sometimes Mennonites are seen as isolationist. Has this been our story in Latin American missions? Reflect on partnerships and relationships between foreign missionaries and the national church, between immigrants and nationals, and between MBs and other Christians.

3. Review the mission initiatives in the various countries as described in the first half of the chapter (p.239-250) in light of principles identified in the second half (250-255). Where has MB work adhered to biblical and ethno-theological "best-practice" and where are the gaps?

# 14 Mennonite Brethren Women in Mission

Doug Heidebrecht (*compiler*)

The stories of Mennonite Brethren women in mission are rich and varied. These stories are about people who not only heard God's call but responded with a willingness to serve despite tremendous sacrifice and hardship. The following stories were originally published in the Profiles of Mennonite Faith series and are used by permission from the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission. See www.mbhistory.org for the complete collection of *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*.

## United States of America
### Magdalena Hergert Becker (1878-1938)
*(by Luetta Reimer)* [1]

Through the dark night two figures scurried toward the house. The man carried a lantern slightly ahead of the woman, who clutched a small bundle, a seriously ill Native American child. After three days of patient and loving care, the child died in the arms of the reservation's "mother," Magdalena Becker.

---

Doug Heidebrecht (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Ph.D., University of Wales) served as Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg and as an instructor in biblical and theological studies at Bethany College in Hepburn, Saskatchewan. Currently he is working in South Asia in leadership development. Doug is also the Regional Team Leader for MB Mission in South Asia.

**Magdalena Becker, center front row,**
**A.J. Becker, second left back row**

Preparations began immediately for the child's funeral. Magdalena's husband, Abraham Jacob (A. J.) Becker, went to his shop to build a tiny wooden casket. Magdalena prepared the body for burial. Together they padded the coffin, lining it with soft white cloth. Magdalena worked late into the night, beautifying the little box with a border of fringe. While she worked, she heard the traditional Native American mourning – a haunting wail that expressed the depth of their sorrow. Magdalena tried to comfort them with assurances of God's love. Some believed in Jesus, but many found it hard to give up their traditional fears of death.

The family of the child sat weeping while the Beckers told them of eternal life, and wept again as they viewed the body. Finally the time for tears was past. As was their custom, members of the immediate family dried each other's tears. Each became instantly silent, and the mourners moved to the cemetery. When the coffin was lowered into the grave, several of the women took off their beautiful shawls, draping them over the box. This custom was a token of love and respect for the dead.

The reservation women were willing to give sacrificially to honor the dead, but Magdalena Becker gave sacrificially to help the living. Magdalena and A. J. had come to the Post Oak Mission in 1902. This first Mennonite Brethren "foreign mission field," though located in Oklahoma, was begun in 1896 when Henry and Elizabeth Kohfeld moved to the Post Oak station. During her 37 years at Post Oak Magdalena participated in more than six hundred funerals. She taught first aid, hygiene, sewing, and cooking to the Native American women. For 28 years she also served as a Field Matron for the Indian Service of the United States government, clarifying land ownership, keeping records of government allotments, negotiating rental contracts and distributing government checks. As a government agent she was permitted to

promote Christian practices because the government thought it would contribute to Americanizing the Native peoples.

But Magdalena never lost sight of her first calling – to share the message of salvation. Discouragement came often. From the establishment of the mission in 1894 until 1907, not a single Native American had chosen to openly identify as being a Christian.

Each year the Comanches from the reservation territory camped at Pesenadama, or "Rotten Village," for a month-long government payday. The Beckers packed supplies and followed, setting up a tent for gospel meetings. Unfortunately, interest was low, and there was no response to the call of Christ.

Magdalena missed the three small sons she had left at Post Oak; she was physically and emotionally exhausted. One day she quit trying to restrain herself and went into the woods near the camp to cry. "Why are you crying?" asked Wi-e-puh, a curious woman who had quietly followed her. Surprised by the question, Magdalena spoke from her heart. "I would not care about how we suffer, but your Indian people are tramping my God with their feet; they do not want to be saved."

The Psalmist says that "he who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:6). Magdalena undoubtedly knew the verse, but she probably did not expect the dramatic fulfillment of God's promise that night.

It had been a simple tent meeting, with A. J. Becker sharing the story of Christ so clearly that a child could understand. Magdalena sat near the front silently praying for evidence of God's power. When the audience was invited to come forward for prayer, she was overcome by the large group that knelt near the altar. One or two persons accepted Christ and were baptized each day from that evening until the end of camp. God's promise had been fulfilled. A Comanche Mennonite Brethren Church had been born!

In 1938 when Magdalena Becker became ill a group of Comanches maintained a constant vigil on the hospital grounds. Following her death, local newspapers reported that over 1200 persons attended services in her honor. The inscription on Magdalena Becker's gravestone is a beautiful and accurate description of her life:

*Who at all times and every place*
*gave her strength to the weak,*
*her sympathy to the suffering,*
*her substance to the poor,*
*and her heart to God.*

## India
### Katharina Schellenberg (1879-1945)
*(by Neoma Jantz)* [2]

Dr. Katharina Schellenberg looked about helplessly. Where could they find room for yet another patient? But the Muslim who had brought his critically ill wife to the Mennonite Brethren hospital in Shamshabad was persistent. "If she doesn't recover under your care, then let her die under your care." She stayed.

The trust in the doctor was no surprise: the small foreigner had already spent twenty years in India taking in the ill of all castes and working medical wonders. The ill woman probably noticed that the first person up in the morning to check her was the doctor, and she was the last to make the rounds at night. The patient probably didn't realize how unusual it was for a woman doctor to have been sent abroad by a small denomination as early as 1907.

Katharina Schellenberg was born in the small village of Tiegerweide in South Russia. As a young child she was uprooted as her family moved to North America. Katharina was only fourteen when her mother died and she had to assume care for three brothers and three sisters. Her father, Elder Abraham Schellenberg, more than any other single figure, shaped the Mennonite Brethren church during its first decades in North America. The Elder's world was large. He resided in Kansas, kept in contact with Mennonites in Russia and nourished a new generation that would take up mission posts around the world.

At the age of nineteen Katharina made her first commitment to Christ and joined the Buhler (Kansas) Mennonite Brethren Church. As a young adult she worked in an orphanage and then in two hospitals. When she volunteered for missions she was advised to take a four-year homeopathic medical course. She completed the course before leaving for India in 1907. On the eve of her departure she remarked to a friend that "a woman who goes to the foreign field by herself should be very sure."

It was that sureness that sustained her in very difficult circumstances. Katharina worked as the only American medical doctor in the India Mennonite Brethren mission territory from 1907 to her death in 1945. During those thirty-eight years she took only two furloughs, in 1914 and 1923. For the first twenty years she worked in several locations demonstrating to Indians that the medicines could be trusted. The task was far from easy. In 1917 she wrote her father that "the problems are so severe that one can hardly stand it, and one does not know where it will end. But God sees and knows all, and He can change things!"

With the 1928 completion of a hospital in Shamshabad, she had a more permanent home. During the first year the hospital was open 8,519 patients were treated. They came with all kinds of illnesses, some having waited too long to be helped. Often she worked a seven-day week, making do with limited equipment and medicines.

**Dr. Schellenberg at left with patient.**
**Photograph from the Center for MB Studies, Fresno.**

Since much sickness was related to poor living conditions or hygiene, the doctor tried to stress clean water and adequate sewage. Many cultural differences regarding diet, medicines and methods of health care had to be negotiated. Perhaps her most grateful patients were Muslim women who would not be seen by a male, but could now be cared for by a woman.

Dr. Schellenberg's concern included the emotional and religious needs of her patients and staff. Each morning the hospital awoke to a devotional time for everyone in the facility. On Sunday afternoons the doctor would play her autoharp and sing with the patients. She joined in weekly meetings with co-workers and instructed them in things far beyond medicine.

Beside all of her medical work, Dr. Schellenberg took in homeless infants, supervised a girls' residence for five years, kept a fine fruit and flower garden, raised chickens, turkeys and milk cows and did some farming. She explained that these diversions were like a holiday and she therefore didn't need the annual rest trip to the hills that was customary for many missionaries.

On January 1, 1945, suddenly and without warning, her work was over. John L. Lohrenz, who presided at her memorial service wrote that "I have never been at a funeral where there has been so much weeping. . . . There was much sobbing and lamentation. Strong . . . men who had been helped through her ministry wept like children."

The inscription on the memorial stone in the St. George Cemetery at Hyderabad, India, accurately reflects the life of Katharina Schellenberg:

*She lived for Christ*
*She served others*
*She sacrificed herself*

## China
### Paulina Foote (1891-1968)
*(by Valerie Rempel)* [3]

When Paulina Foote was invited by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions to serve as a missionary teacher in China, she accepted the assignment as confirmation of her own sense of God's calling to serve in a foreign land. During the summer of 1922 she gathered her belongings and prepared to say good-bye to family and friends in Oklahoma. She was eager to go, but uncertain about what God was calling her to do. Her home church was preparing to put up a large tent for an ordination service and farewell festivities, but what would it mean for her to be ordained as a minister of the gospel?

**Paulina Foote**

Paulina recalled those days in her memoir, *God's Hand Over My Nineteen Years in China*. She wrote:

> "The thought of an ordination gave me struggles. Women in our conference do not preach. Why should I be ordained if I could not proclaim the Gospel to those who had not heard it? Women were permitted to tell the Gospel to women and children. What if men would come to my women's and children's meetings? Should I stop proclaiming the Gospel message? Did not the men have a right to hear the Word of God? The church had asked Pastor Jacob Reimer of Bessie, Oklahoma, and Elder Johann Foth of the Ebenfeld Church . . . near Hillsboro, Kansas, to officiate at my ordination. Both were considered to be of the most conservative in the whole conference. What a surprise to me when Elder Foth in his sermon at the ordination proved with Scripture passages that women should preach. He spoke about Mary Magdalene, who had followed Christ to the cross, who also took note of the place where he was buried while the disciples left Him. Peter had even denied Him. She was the first of Christ's followers who was at the grave on the resurrection morning. She was the first to tell the greatest story of all stories that Christ had arisen from the dead. Christ Himself commanded her to carry the news to the disciples, the men, and to Peter who had failed Him. My problem about the ordination was solved. My later experience proved that this was of the Lord."

Paulina Foote spent nineteen years in China preaching the good news of the resurrection. During the first few years she worked primarily as a teacher for the missionary children, but that changed when many of the missionaries were forced to leave their work. The political situation in those years was often difficult. When missionaries faced opposition from communist forces in 1927, she was one of three Mennonite Brethren women who stayed in China when other missionaries were evacuated. Even after the other missionaries returned, Paulina continued her work with the Chinese people. Paulina studied hard to learn the difficult Mandarin language so that she could teach and preach more effectively. She even adopted Chinese dress so that people would not be distracted by her Western clothes. As she traveled from village to village to conduct meetings, she would often ride on rickshaws or sit on top of a large wheelbarrow that held her supplies and bedroll. When Paulina and her companions, often a local Bible woman or evangelist, would arrive in a village, they would ask the children to let their parents know there was going to be a meeting. Then they would start singing. Men, women and children would gather to hear them tell the good news about Jesus. Paulina would ask them questions after her message to make sure that they understood what she was saying. Many people were converted in these meetings and many small churches were begun.

During World War II, the missionaries were caught in the turmoil between the opposing Japanese and Chinese armies. Many of them were put in detention camps. Paulina escaped capture, and for many months helped manage the mission affairs and wrote letters on behalf of the missionaries who were being held. Eventually she decided to go to a part of China where she would be safe. The trip was often difficult but she made it safely and began to work in the mission field there. When the soldiers threatened to disrupt this work, Paulina moved again. This trip took her eighty-three days as she moved through the countryside, trying to stay out of the way of the soldiers. Wherever she went, she found Christians willing to hide her and help her escape. In turn, she held meetings and encouraged people in their faith. God kept her safe and wherever she went, Paulina Foote faithfully preached the gospel message.

## Democratic Republic of Congo
### Anna Bartsch (1897-1989)
*(by Elizabeth and David Giesbrecht)[4]*

Three countries were home to Anna Bartsch. She was born in Ukraine, made Canada her adopted land, and served as a pioneer missionary in Congo. In her parents' household was a bookcase filled with volumes by the evangelists Spurgeon, Moody and Finney. Anna was an avid reader, occupying her mind with Scripture memorization as well as the literary masterpieces available to her. As a ten-year-old

girl she also discovered missionary magazines, through which she learned of the spiritual needs of people in distant lands. Her young mind could not have imagined that a tangled web of events would eventually land her in the heart of an emerging mission field.

Anna's hunger for knowledge led her to attend the Mennonite Brethren Bible School in Tschongraw, Crimea, where she studied with A. H. Unruh. However, the devastating civil unrest in Russia and growing concern for the family's safety convinced her father, Johann Funk, to consider emigration. Facing an uncertain future at best, thirty-year-old Anna fervently prayed for three requests – a passport to Canada, the possibility of continuing her Bible training, and a marriage partner.



**Anne and Henry Bartsch, 1935** [5]

Twenty-five days after leaving her homeland Anna found employment in Canada. The first fall in her new homeland she enrolled in the Winkler (Manitoba) Bible School. The following spring she received a marriage proposal from Henry Bartsch, an aspiring young preacher. Following their marriage in 1928, the young couple settled down to farming in Saskatchewan. During a church service they heard Aaron and Ernestine Janzen, veteran Congo missionaries, appeal for additional workers. The next day, feeling an irresistible call to ministry, the Bartsches knelt in their humble kitchen and committed themselves for missionary service.

In late fall 1930 Anna and Henry left Saskatchewan in their Model T Ford en route to Winnipeg before leaving for Congo. Nearing the Manitoba border they encountered a blinding snowstorm. When a policeman stopped and inquired about their destination in this kind of weather, Henry replied that they were off to Africa. The officer was baffled. "Well Mister," he responded sarcastically, "in that case you better keep driving. You've still got a long way to go."

By 1933, Anna together with her family, were finally at home in Bololo, Congo. In short order they established a church, a school, a farm and a medical clinic. Scarcely a year later the family received word from Ottawa that their Canadian passports were about to expire. The Bartsches considered three options: allowing their Canadian citizenship to lapse, thereby becoming stateless; ending their mission work and returning to Canada; or, for Henry to return alone in order to renew their citizenship. The family chose the latter, and so Henry started walking west on September 23, 1934.

Meanwhile, Anna continued with monumental courage not only parenting their growing family, but at the same time giving leadership to the mission work. Her days were filled with translation, music, church leadership, supervision of the school, medical work and nurturing her three children. During these difficult days she was often sustained by recalling the words of her beloved teacher, A. H. Unruh, "First work yourself to death, then pray yourself to life."

It was now almost a year since she had seen her husband. Her Congolese neighbors began to surmise that Henry had been unfaithful, or perhaps had even died. In any event, they felt that he would not be returning to Africa. How much longer could Anna hold out on her own? Three hundred and sixty days after setting out for Canada, a tired but jubilant Henry returned to his mission post with renewed citizenship papers in hand.

The demanding routine and difficult tropical climate took their toll on Anna's health. By 1937 she was so exhausted that a doctor advised urgent medical leave. He suspected that in her deteriorated condition, Anna had contracted cancer as well. Weary and disappointed, the entire family left for Canada.

In 1942, at the height of the Second World War, Henry returned to Africa upon request of the Canadian MB Conference. The understanding was that Anna and the four children were soon to follow. The Bartschs' support group in Winnipeg was busy raising funds and assisting with preparations for the long, arduous trip. Anna, however, was becoming increasingly uneasy about these plans. After yet another sleepless night she decided to cancel the trip. Her friends in the church community were stunned and disappointed. A few weeks later the *Sam-Sam*, the ship on which she and the children had been booked, was torpedoed by a German U-boat.

Anna never returned to Congo. But many years later she discovered from another missionary, Herman Lenzman, that in an unreached area the children were singing, "Jesus Loves Me." The local Congolese leader explained that Anna Bartsch had taught him this song. Anna was satisfied that she and her family been instrumental in pioneering Mennonite mission work in Africa. The seed that they had planted had grown and was beginning to bear a rich harvest.

## Paraguay
### Myrtle (1917-1996) and Robert (1921-1998) Unruh
### *(by Gerhard Ratzlaff)*[6]

"Robert and Myrtle Unruh were the right people in the right place at the right time." This is how the Mennonites in the Chaco of Paraguay sum up the 33 years of service that the Unruhs gave from 1951 to 1983. Their service has had a permanent impact on all the Mennonite colonies and churches in Paraguay.

The Unruhs came to the Chaco from the United States under the auspices of Mennonite Central Committee. They were graduates of Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, and had grown up on farms in the Midwest – Robert in Montana and Myrtle in Kansas. Robert had a science degree and Myrtle had a degree in home economics. In the Chaco Robert served as the head of the agricultural experimental station and Myrtle as an expert in the areas of nutrition, family education and home economics.



**Myrtle and Robert Unruh**

Visitors to the Chaco today often marvel at the prosperity of the Mennonite settlements in a place once referred to as the "green hell." Today, in this seemingly inhospitable steppe in the interior of Paraguay, the 15,000 residents of three Mennonite colonies produce half of Paraguay's milk and dairy products and 90% of the peanuts for a country of approximately six million people. Thousands of beef cattle feed on well-maintained pastures. The Mennonites who raise beef cattle report with rightful pride that theirs is the tastiest and most nutritious beef in all of Paraguay. This beef is also popular on the world market. Today these agricultural products are the main source of income for the Mennonites in the Chaco.

This was not always the case. In the 1950s the Mennonite colonies in Paraguay experienced extreme poverty and agricultural production was barely enough to sustain their existence. A milking cow produced a mere liter of milk per day, whereas today cows typically produce at least 17 to 18 liters. Robert Unruh wrote in 1984 that in the 1950s it took five to six years to raise a cow to 400 or 500 kilos in the Chaco. Today less than half that time is required. In the 1950s farming was carried out exclusively with horses and manual labor. Today everything is mechanized.

These changes took place largely due to the efforts of Robert and Myrtle Unruh. On the agricultural experimental station set up by Mennonite Central Committee in the Fernheim colony, Robert conducted hundreds of experiments with many different types of grasses for grazing and in the process discovered buffalo grass. Originally from Africa, this grass was ideal for the hot, dry Chaco. He imported hundreds of different breeding calves to improve the local milk and beef varieties. He also pioneered developments in many other areas including field crops, fruit trees, vegetables, flowers and decorative bushes. In order to find help for these tasks, Robert worked closely with research institutes around the world. This was also the case in his fight against diseases and insects detrimental to plants and animals.

Myrtle Unruh's contributions and accomplishments lay in teaching high school, planning and building a school of household management (home economics) and working with native Indian women. She developed cooking classes and wrote a cookbook that remains popular to this day. Always a quiet reservoir of strength and ability, Myrtle developed her full potential in Paraguay. Her cousin described her as "a jewel waiting to be uncovered." In order to keep the memory of Myrtle's exemplary service in nutrition and family education alive, a monument was erected in her memory next to the school of household management after her death.

In all their work, Robert and Myrtle's guiding principle was to help the Mennonites to help themselves so that they in turn could assist others. Their exemplary attitude of Christian service had a positive effect on the churches and their mission as well as on the economic life of the Mennonite colonies. The Unruhs participated fully in the church. Robert sang in the choir, took part in Bible studies and was involved in the missionary settlement projects among the native Indians.

The Mennonites in the Chaco view the Unruhs not just as two Americans who helped the residents adapt to a strange land and climate, but as a sister and a brother in the Lord who gave their all in service to others. Edgar Stoez, who was their Mennonite Central Committee director said, "Bob and Myrtle Unruh deserved the word Christian – Little Christs (Acts 11:26c). With their humble spirit of selfless service, they exemplified what being a follower of Jesus is all about."

Due to health issues the Unruhs returned to the United States in 1983, earlier than they had anticipated. Myrtle died in 1996 and Robert in 1998.

Shortly after the Unruh's deaths the Paraguayan Mennonite paper, *Mennoblatt*, stated: "Robert and Myrtle Unruh will not be forgotten in the German settlements of the Chaco. They simply belong to us."

## Notes

[1] Luetta Reimer, "Magdalena Hergert Becker (1878-1938)," *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, no. 2, Winter 1998, www.mbhistory.org.

[2] Neoma Jantz, "Katharina Schellenberg: Continuously on Call," *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, no. 7, Spring 1999, www.mbhistory.org. Adapted from Neoma Jantz, "Katharina L. Schellenberg," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (June 22, 1984).

[3] Valerie Rempel, "Paulina Foote: Under God's Hand," *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, no. 21, Summer 2002, www.mbhistory.org.

[4] Elizabeth and David Giesbrecht, "Anna Bartsch (1897-1989)," *Profiles of Mennonite Faith,* no. 9, Fall 1999, www.mbhistory.org. Based on Anna's autobiography, *The Hidden Hand.*

[5] Photo taken from www.gameo.org. Used by permission.

[6] Gerhard Ratzlaff, "Robert & Myrtle Unruh: Agra-missionaries," *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, no. 38, Summer 2007, www.mbhistory.org. Translated by Linda Huebert Hecht.

## Study Questions

1. What are some common character traits of the five women that are featured in this chapter?

2. As you consider the journey of faith and service of each of these women, what aspects of their lives can you identify with?

3. What are some of the obstacles that these women overcame to become heralded servants of God?

4. Did the stories of these women remind you of similar women that you know personally? If you are in a group, share these contemporary stories together.

# 15 Church Planting Lessons from the Anabaptist-Mennonite Journey

James R. Nikkel

The 500-year journey of the Anabaptist-Mennonite people from the sixteenth-century Reformation to the twenty-first century included time periods of effective church planting and times of ineffective outreach. In this chapter the writer makes an attempt to assess segments of the Anabaptist-Mennonite five-century journey in terms of church planting effectiveness and Kingdom growth. The scope of this chapter will only permit church planting and outreach observations in broad strokes from the experience of selected European and North American Anabaptist-Mennonite peoples, with special attention to the Mennonite Brethren (MBs). This chapter traces the 500-year Mennonite journey through the different countries of sojourn, makes observations on the conditions for effective church planting, notes the context of each situation and describes the barriers to church planting as perceived through the lens of a church planter.

James R. Nikkel (D.Min., Church Growth and Church Planting, Fuller Theological Seminary) has participated in church growth and church planting movements from 1975-2010. He supervised and assisted in establishing more than 50 Mennonite Brethren church plants in Canada and some others in Ukraine. He was the Disciple Making International (DMI) director for five years at MB Mission, and has served in numerous other MB ministries of pastoring, teaching and administration. He is the author of *Church Planting Road Map* (Guardian Books, 2003).

## Church Planting Lessons from the Early Anabaptists

We start with assessing the sixteenth-century Anabaptist context for church planting. The sixteenth-century Reformation first erupted in 1517 in the small town of Wittenberg when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses protesting the abuses and failures of the church on the church door which was commonly used as a public bulletin board. Because the public discontent with the state church of the time was so widespread, the Reformation spread with incredible speed. The 1525 Anabaptist movement was much more volatile and radical than the Martin Luther-driven reformation. While Luther was about removing the abuses of the existing state church and refocusing it on faith and grace, the Anabaptists were about challenging and changing the doctrines of the church to be more biblical regarding personal conversion, lifestyle issues, adult faith baptism, peace, and the separation of state and church.[1] The Anabaptists also introduced the application of the Great Commission of evangelism and church planting, which was not practiced in the state church since universal child baptism eliminated the need for evangelism.[2] Anyone challenging the doctrines and practice of the state church at that time was considered a heretic and guilty of a cardinal sin punishable by death.

The severity of the opposition to Anabaptists is obvious from the 1529 Diet of Speyer (Holy Roman Empire assembly) which passed a death sentence upon all Anabaptists and ordered that every Anabaptist and re-baptized person of either sex should be put to death by fire, sword, or some other way to stem the tide of Anabaptist growth. In desperation the authorities sent out groups of armed executioners and soldiers to hunt down the Anabaptists and to kill them on the spot en masse without trial or sentence. After increasing the execution squads from 400 to 1,000 the executioners exclaimed, "What shall we do, the more we kill the greater their numbers become." [3]

The Anabaptists were serious and intentional about sharing their faith. Every member was regarded a missionary and frequently left their homes to go on evangelistic tours. In August 1527 the leading Anabaptist brethren met in a missionary synod (later named the Martyrs' Synod) to give this rapidly growing movement some direction. They divided up the land on a large map and sent out witness teams to the various communities. The end result of this Synod was that within five years 600 churches were established. The reason for the Martyrs' Synod nickname was that within two years all but two of the Synod members had died a martyr's death.[4]

For the Anabaptists the Kingdom of God was more important than their own lives. Martyrdom became the hallmark of the Anabaptist followers. The price of their total obedience resulted in estimates of 4,000 to 5,000 Anabaptists becoming

martyr victims of water, fire, and the sword. [5]   In spite of the threat of death of the first generation of Anabaptist leaders, the rapid growth by tens of thousands and the formation of early Anabaptist churches continued in Zurich, parts of Germany and the Netherlands.

In Switzerland, where the Anabaptists have their roots, the new churches or groups emerged under the leadership of Zwingli, Hubmaier, Blaurock, Grebel, and Manz. They organized Bible studies, prayer meetings, held public debates with civic leaders and pressed for a citywide reformation which resulted in a number of city councilors being baptized. When the city of Zurich banned the Anabaptist movement it spread to the countryside, neighboring towns, and villages, east to St. Gall and on to Basel and Bern. Many house churches were established.  By 1527 the scattered Anabaptists gathered in the village of Schleitheim to craft the Schleitheim Confession which recorded the convictions of the Swiss Brethren.[6]  This was followed by severe persecution and executions with Catholics usually burning them and the Protestants beheading or drowning them.

The South Germany and Austria Anabaptist movement lacked the cohesion and biblical basis found in Switzerland.  Here under the leadership of Denck the focus seemed more about social justice, mystical spirituality and eschatological imminence. Denck is, nevertheless, credited for baptizing thousands and planting Anabaptist churches in major cities, towns and villages across South Germany and Austria.  Other notables who contributed to hundreds of baptisms included Hut and Marpeck. [7]

The third region where the Anabaptist movement took root and thousands were baptized was North Germany and the Netherlands under the leadership of Hoffman. It was due to the passionate testimony of thousands of ordinary believers, who considered suffering and death to be normal for believers, that the movement of new churches continued.  The early growth of Anabaptism in the Netherlands was phenomenal. One Amsterdam church had 10,000 members and numerous churches had 1,000 members and more. The rapid Anabaptist expansion had the result that in some communities the Anabaptists began to out-number the Catholics and Protestants. [8]

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century provide a number of church planting lessons. First we observe that they believed and practiced Christ's Great Commission of global disciple-making. All believers were considered witnesses. We observe that a radical commitment to the gospel resulted in power and passion to be effective witnesses. We note also that the Anabaptist leaders worked together and were well-trained theologians and experienced church leaders, making for an advantage in

articulating and leading the Anabaptist movement. Their willingness to die for their faith as first-generation Christians made them fearless and powerful. The general discontent with the historic church made the Anabaptist alternatives attractive. The Anabaptists in many ways resembled the New Testament Church.

By the 1530s and 1540s the persecution in the Netherlands was so relentless and martyrdom so predictable that thousands of Anabaptists began to immigrate or flee to north Germany and Prussia.

## Lessons from the Prussian Vistula, Danzig Challenges

By the mid-sixteenth century many of the Anabaptist Mennonites had settled in Northern Germany and Prussia beginning a 250-year stay. They came there to escape persecution and in search of religious freedom. The fervent missionary zeal which had characterized the Anabaptists had almost been stamped out by the relentless persecution. Continued growth and church planting was no longer realistic given that most of the early generation of the Anabaptist leaders were gone due to martyrdom. The main concerns for these new industrious settlers were obtaining their religious freedom, maintaining their own schools, electing their own preachers, starting churches and schools in their own tongue and gaining exemptions from dues and military services. By now Mennonite churches were established wherever they settled—churches being a normal part of their social structure rather than the result of outreach. [9]

There are a number of reasons why the 250-year Anabaptist-Mennonite sojourn in Prussia and the Vistula Delta did not result in church outreach or church planting. They could be summarized as follows:

1. The State put strict conditions on the Mennonites coming to Prussia. They were not permitted to proselytize or propagate their faith and were subjected to strict discipline if they violated the prohibition. The converts who were cited as having converted from the state church to the Mennonite fold were taken to court to give an account of their violations. The civic religious leaders also warned Mennonite ministers not to accept or seek converts from other faiths and were fined for accepting such converts. The Mennonites also suffered serious opposition and persecution from the three state churches: the Catholic, Lutheran and the Reformed churches.[10]

2. The Mennonites were generally considered to be a rogue radical group of heretics. In the sixteenth century being a Mennonite in many parts of Europe was still considered a capital offense which in some regions practically annihilated the Anabaptist-Mennonites. In Prussia, while tolerated, they were considered second-class citizens and were not permitted to have

church buildings for the first 100 years or to operate inside the city limits. Once churches were permitted they needed to be on side streets so as not to have public visibility. Only recognized State religions were permitted inside the city. [11]

3. The church itself was not attractive to outsiders and not oriented toward outreach. The main religious motive at this time was the preservation of their faith which the Prussian government was granting them. The church was part of the Mennonite culture and among the first things to be established wherever the Mennonites moved. The culture of the church was drab in dress and performance. Sermons were read, songs were long, discipline was firm and baptism was required for marriage. The narrow self-centered framing of church faith and life did not lend itself to outreach. Some of the contentious issues involved: shunning, the ban, wearing beards, buckles, collars, pockets, and black jackets. Internal strife and factions were other hindrances to church expansion and growth. [12]

4. Cultural isolation was another reason church planting was not possible. For some 200 years the Mennonites in Prussia maintained the Dutch language and continued their connections with the Dutch through trade and religious exchanges. For some time Dutch preachers including Menno would visit the Prussian churches and in some instances new converts would be baptized in Holland to escape Prussian detection and persecution. They lived in secluded ethnic villages with little connection to the public world.  Their cultural isolation and lack of public witness resulted in the designation as being the silent inhabitants or the "*Stille im Lande*" which in turn resulted in little more than biological church growth. By now the first generations of Anabaptist fervor, vision and passion for faith sharing and readiness to die for their faith had all but disappeared.

This period of Mennonite sojourn is rife with conditions and examples that hinder church outreach and church planting.

## Lessons from the Russian Church Experience, 1789-1860

When the 250-year faith related sojourn of Mennonite privileges was coming to an end in Prussia and the Vistula Delta, the new destination of religious freedom and promise was Russia. The invitation from Catherine the Great provided a welcomed alternative to the ever-growing threat of losing their Mennonite freedoms in Prussia and also provided a new economic opportunity.

Even though the stated reasons for moving were faith-based, it seemed to be little more than a religious form that was nurtured. Yet the church was one of the first things to be re-established in their new country. They were promised what was important to their faith: open worship, their own local government, schools in the

German language and freedom from military service. The Mennonite Church by now was strongly wrapped in cultural trappings and traditionalism. Every village or group of villages had a church with an elder, minister, song leader and an area bishop.  Here too, the understanding by the Russian authorities was that they would not proselytize.[13]  By the 1850s the number of Mennonite villages numbered several hundred and the total Mennonite population had reached 120,000 with a church in each village or region to look after the spiritual and business affairs of the village.[14]

On the spiritual front the church was operating at a very low level of Christian commitment. Prosperity over the centuries had choked out much of their spirituality and the mix of social, economic and cultural conditions had paralyzed the institutional church. Church legalism, strife and factions over issues of discipline and church spirituality resulted in several breakaway groups like the *Kleine Gemeinde* (Little Flock) in 1820, the Mennonite Brethren in 1860, and later the *Evangelische Mennoniten-Gemeinden* (or Alliance churches).

A number of church planting observations from the Russian 1789-1860 experience can be made.  The Mennonites who immigrated to Russia never completely lost their Anabaptist heritage of evangelism even though for several centuries it remained as smoldering embers. Before the formation of the MB church in 1860 the Mennonite church in Russia had sent out fourteen missionaries to the Dutch Indies of Java and Sumatra.[15]

In terms of church relocation from Prussia to Russia we note that the Chortitza Colony had difficulty developing their church since there were no ministers among the first group of settlers and so they wrote back to Prussia for advice on how to organize a church. They could not find enough committed lay leaders to lead a worship service.[16]  The Molotschna Colony on the other hand had more resources and leadership for their church life but the church was inward focused with little effort being made to reach out. Churches expanded as villages were started. So for the first eighty years of Mennonite life in Russia there seems little evidence of church planting for mission purposes.

## Growth Lessons from the Russian Mennonite Renewal of 1860

In many ways the Mennonite renewal movement of the 1850s and 1860s that morphed into the formation of the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860 was a recovery of the Anabaptist experience of 1525.  In both situations the renewal was from within and involved grassroots leaders. The reasons for breaking away from the mother church were also very similar in that the main church had to a large extent lost its biblical and ethical moorings. Another similarity was that both breakaway groups produced a confession of faith which emphasized biblical lifestyle, conversion

and believers' baptism.   Neither the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 nor the Mennonite Brethren document of secession of 1860 had an article about the mission of the church even though for both groups faith-sharing and mission became their main passion. As the Anabaptist movement of 1525 in Zurich became the mission church planting story of Europe, so the birth of the MB church in 1860 became a church planting story that started in Russia and then moved to North America and on to many countries. The difference between these two movements was that the Anabaptists suffered severe persecution and martyrdom while the 1860 renewed Mennonites suffered mostly spiritual persecution and ostracism. Phyllis Martens has aptly stated "that a mission zeal was born with the MB church which was evident by the immediate evangelism fervor of its members, a focus that has continued wherever the MBs settled."[17] The 1860 renewal set a new benchmark of Mennonite spirituality and became a new reference point and measurement on how the church was doing in witness evangelism and church planting.

The fervor and influence of the Anabaptist witness and church planting that started in Switzerland took them to the Netherlands, Germany and other parts of Europe while the Mennonite Brethren witness fervor resulted in church plants in India, Africa, China, North and South America and beyond. As with the Anabaptists it seemed like wherever the Mennonite Brethren went churches were emerging.

Interest in mission in the new MB church was kindled through Bible studies, revival meetings, evangelism events and mission fests. By 1885 the mission fest attendance had grown to 1,000 participants from six main MB congregations. The Einlage MB church, which was the MB headquarters in Chortitza, experienced significant growth through its ten affiliate MB village groups. In Molotschna, the Ruekenau MB church established affiliate stations in Puchten, Hertzenberg and in Spat, Crimea. Another significant development was the 1872 conference decision to establish an itinerant ministry for evangelism and church extension with five evangelists doing local evangelism, albeit their converts were mostly referred to Baptist churches. A further mission step was the sending of Abraham and Maria Friesen as missionaries to India in 1890 through the Boston Baptist Missionary Union.[18]

There are numerous church planting lessons from the Russian MB churches. The emphasis on new birth and new life in Christ, while controversial for the mother church, gained momentum in both the Chortitza and Molotschna villages with new groups joining this new movement in spite of church opposition. The restored passion for mission of this newly-formed Mennonite Brethren Church soon resulted in the sending of missionaries.  The 1860 MB church had recaptured the Anabaptist vision of making disciples, reaching out and planting churches. The newly-formed MB church was also able to discern and overcome charismatic

extremes known as the *"Froehliche Richtung"* (Joyful Movement) and replace this self-focused experience with outreach efforts. The 1860 renewal set in motion a global church planting movement.

## Church Planting Lessons from the 20th Century

The twentieth-century church planting history can be divided into three periods: the early decades of pioneer church planting, the mid decades of mission changes and the later decades of rapid expansion. From the very beginning MB missionaries regarded the founding and planting of indigenous churches as their goal, based on the New Testament. With this in mind they evangelized, baptized, and established local churches with a simple organization.[19]

### Decades of Pioneer Church Planting

Pioneer church planting in the early decades included missionaries going to India, China and the Belgian Congo. A common approach to the early nineteenth century mission strategy, as advocated by the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, Germany where the MB missionaries were taking their training, was the multi-faceted mission station approach. The MBs not surprisingly adopted this Baptist approach in their pioneer ventures. In India the first step was to build a mission station which included a mother church, a boarding school, educational and medical or hospital services. The missionary pastor of the mother church was also the mission station leader. Converts from the immediate villages would attend these station churches. As the work developed beyond the immediate villages, affiliate congregations were organized in distant villages as more conversions were taking place. The station church would oversee these affiliate churches. Each church would have elders to look after the finances and perform all the functions and responsibilities of an organized church. The converts of one or more villages within a radius not more than three miles were organized into new congregations.[20]

The South China church planting strategy among the Hakka people was somewhat similar to that of India. Missionaries F.J. and Agnes Wiens constructed a substantial mission compound consisting of: a missionary residence, a boys' school, a girls' school, a Bible school, a small hospital, several homes for nationals, a small chicken barn and a large 600-seat church furnished with pews and an organ. With the addition of street meetings and village visitation, eleven mission stations were opened counting 450 Christians by 1920.[21]

In the Belgian Congo, A.A. and Ernestina Janzen from Mountain Lake were the first MB missionaries to Kafumba in 1922. They again followed the MB mission

practice of establishing a mission station with a goal of reaching 300 villages. Their approach was: evangelism, educational literacy, medical work and industry. The evangelism was considered a priority for which they trained nationals to do village visitation. In 1933 Henry and Anna Bartsch came as missionaries to Bololo, 600 miles from the Janzens and also used the mission station approach.[22]   During the first half of the twentieth century, evangelism and church planting was at the heart of the mission even though a holistic mission station strategy was followed.   The missionaries were evangelists with a deep realization of a world lost without Christ. In many ways these missionaries had the fervor and passion of the early Anabaptists.

**Decades of Restructuring and Change in MB Missions**

The middle decades of the twentieth century saw many mission changes. Because the MB mission enterprise was run by Conference boards from North America they were not always aware of the impact that their decisions were having on the field. There were organizational changes, name changes, administrative changes, and field committee changes, etc.  These repeated mission changes by North American Conference decisions had major church planting implications. In 1936 the Board of Foreign Missions was replaced by a five-member board with the office of an executive secretary.[23]   Shortly after India achieved independence in 1948 any remnants of colonialism in India were no longer acceptable, prompting the mission board to issue the "New India Plan "which ended the mission era of American missionary dominance and so handed leadership to the nationals.[24] In 1957 a full board and field administration restructuring was approved, creating further on-field ministry changes and uncertainty. In the 1970s, due to a lack of funds, numerous missionaries were called home from their assignments, leaving huge ministry vacancies.[25]  Also in an effort to give priority to church planting, some of the support ministries like radio work and translation work were cut back. Other changes at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century included the introduction of the relational funding for missionary support, a new MB missions governance structure and a name change.

Doug Heidebrecht from MB Mission notes several specific turning points in the India church planting experience. A major change during the 1950s and 1960s was changing from a white missionary compound-centered mission approach to the Indian church taking responsibility for the church ministry and church planting.[26] This paradigm shift created significant leadership struggles in an attempt to fill the vacancies left by the missionaries leaving. These changes resulted in the Indian church leaders calling for an orientation on how the nationals were now going to do church

planting.  These mid-century decades of mission restructuring and arm's length mission leadership changes, while helpful in the long run, brought uncertainty, instability and some dislocation in the short term.

### Decades of Rapid Growth

After the restructuring decades came rapid growth. India in particular made huge advances in church planting in the last three decades of the 1900s. The introduction of the India Church Extension Workers known as the CEWs was a major growth factor of the '80s and beyond.  Each CEW worker was assigned five villages to develop relationships and share the gospel. The CEW workers were encouraged to identify five villages and then to spend one day a week in each of these villages which over three years usually resulted in two or three new church fellowship groups.[27]

The other important part of the church planting strategy in India was the involvement of the Canadian Disciple Making International (DMI) teams doing door-to-door village evangelism. Under the leadership of John Shankar Rao, the DMI teams systematically covered all of the places where the CEWs were establishing churches.

A significant number of new churches have been established through DMI in India and in other countries. In the Philippines, under the DMI leadership of Arthur Loewen, several churches have been organized. In Mexico City, under the leadership of Victor Davila, a good-sized church has emerged through DMI and joined the MB Conference. In Malawi, Bonface and Zelita Machewere saw a group of churches come into existence due to the ministry of DMI.[28] Similarly in Ukraine a number of churches emerged from DMI evangelism. In some instances churches were started by individuals who then looked to MB Mission for conference affiliation. The DMI direct team evangelism approach with its confidence in the power of the gospel and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit has resulted in significant church planting and kingdom growth among Mennonite Brethren.

Two further factors enhanced church planting in India. First was the MB Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad that trained evangelists and church planters. The second important church planting principle was the use of national church planters who knew the language, culture, mindset and economics of the country. The end result in India was that between 1970 and 2002 the MB churches in villages and towns increased from 666 to 840 and the baptized church membership increased from 18,933 to 103,488. When the church adherents, family contacts and church members are included, the church family numbered 400,000.[29]

Latin America also experienced significant growth toward the end of the twentieth century. When Harold Ens became the General Director in 1996 he raised the question about continuing to expand into new countries without adequate attention

to church planting goals and effective long range planning. This resulted in a country by country evaluation and the formulation of a new document entitled "Global Mission Guidelines: Vision, Priorities, and Strategies for Century 21."[30] These new guidelines shifted the mission church planting activity more toward the so called 10-40 window of Asia and North Africa with a strategic plan to engage long-term church planting teams, Muslim ministries teams and short term Trek teams.

The strategy was to enter least reached fields with long-term church planting teams of five to seven adults who would learn the language and plant churches. The long-term ten-year teams would be augmented by short-term four-week to eight-month TREK teams. Thailand and Delhi were the first to have such church planting teams. In terms of church planting effectiveness, a team approach has many advantages such as group support and diversity of gifting. The disadvantage is the amount of time spent on maintaining group unity, vision-building and language study.

The twentieth century must be seen as the century where the North American MB Conference focused on aggressive international church planting. It was in this century that the official MB mission agency operated under various names including BOMAS, MBMSI, and most recently as MB Mission. Its strength in church planting has been the prayer base and financial support from the MB churches. The MB colleges and seminaries have also had a major role in training and supplying missionary church planters. The church planting committees from the various partner MB conferences must also be recognized as having had a significant part in the multiplication of churches around the world. Mennonite Brethren have always held to the conviction that more can be accomplished by churches working together as a conference than by churches working independently.

The International Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches (ICOMB) has also been a partner in global church planting. Towards the end of the twentieth century there was an increased emphasis on internationalizing MB missions. The North American MB mission agency general director Victor Adrian was one of the champions for bringing the MB leaders from the various countries together with a view to work more as equals in mission and church planting. The MB World Mission Conference (Curitiba '88) in 1988 was a major step forward in the process of including national churches and national workers in global church planting. This was further facilitated by director Harold Ens and most recently by David Wiebe, the first full time ICOMB director. It is encouraging to see that the various MB national conferences have begun sending out cross-cultural church planting missionaries with the India, Congo, Japan and the Colombian conferences leading the way. The North American MB conferences no longer have a monopoly on sending out missionary church planters.

A number of church planting lessons can be identified from MB conference mission work in the twentieth century. Wherever the Mennonite Brethren established Bible schools or seminaries, church planters emerged that were assigned to new areas. A further factor that has facilitated church planting effectiveness has been the involvement of direct evangelism methods such as the Jesus film and the DMI teams. Another important factor in cross-cultural church planting is the use of national workers who know the language, the culture, the economics, and particularly the native people. The nationals also seem to be more passionate about evangelism and committed to direct gospel sharing while the North American missionaries seem to be more cautious about faith-sharing and more committed to relationship-building and engaging in social issues as foreigners. While the North American mission board in the mid-twentieth century was introducing the idea of nationalizing the mission work and replacing Western missionaries with nationals, it seems that MB Mission has in recent decades again moved more to the engagement of Western missionaries, at least when entering new countries. One of the most important church planting lessons is the observation that national church planters seem to be more ready to do direct evangelism and  are more effective in seeing churches planted, albeit North American missionaries are still needed as resource people. The national leadership effectiveness factor may also be related to the fervor of first-generation Christians. It is obvious from the growth decades that the mission passion and zeal passed on from the Russian MB church is alive and well wherever church planting and the preaching of the gospel is continued.

## Lessons from the 20th Century North American Domestic Church Planting Realities

In the first half of the 1900s the churches in North America were better at doing foreign missions than doing church planting at home even though they had brought the passion for witness with them from Russia. Domestic church planting for the first half of the twentieth century mostly followed immigration patterns, which meant when enough immigrants arrived a church was organized. The MBs were not well positioned culturally, socially and economically to do outreach church planting in their home communities. They did not feel secure as German speaking Mennonites to mix with other cultures and so stayed very much in their own church communities. During the first decades of the twentieth century the MBs generally exercised their mission vision by doing missions abroad or by doing church planting "at arm's length," to use Peter Penner's term. In Canada, home missions were known as "*Rand Mission*" or church planting away from existing MB churches. So for a

number of decades home mission churches were started in northern or remote regions away from established homogeneous MB churches. The churches were not ready at that time to risk intermarriage with other cultures.  Peter Penner cites how church leaders gave lectures on dangers in society and he lists their central concerns as: lack of evangelism, materialism, the collapse of spirituality, divisiveness, and even false doctrine. Others added the dangers of worldliness, cultural assimilation, and a materialistic outlook on life.[31]

This church isolation began to change around the 1940s and 50s when churches began to call themselves "Community Churches," and welcomed non-Germanic folk to their worship services. They started to feel comfortable for the sake of evangelism to accept outsiders and cross-cultural marriages between believers. It was around this time also that churches were beginning to switch their worship services from German to English in order to attract community people.

The twentieth century is mixed in terms of North American MB church planting lessons. It must be noted, however, that the vision for mission which was birthed with the MB church in 1860 was nurtured and carried as a vision to be implemented wherever these Mennonites settled. It is also notable that the provincial and district church extension boards did a good job of planting churches in their regions once they became outreach-focused. Switching the worship language from German to English was a major element in accelerating church planting. The MB conferences were generous in budgeting funds for church planting. In Canada the past number of decades also included extensive ethnic church planting. One of the recent emphases has been to encourage existing churches to plant daughter churches.

## The New Millennium Church Planting Movement in North America

The 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century saw the convergence of a number of factors that resulted in the emergence of the North American Church Planting Movement. The Mennonite Brethren in Canada became major players in this movement. The end of the 1990s came with a rash of church planting books, church planting courses and new church planting organizations. Many Mennonite leaders were significantly influenced first by the Church Growth Movement and then by the succeeding Church Planting Movement of the twenty-first century. This new North American Church Planting Movement had a number of contributing influences.

 The Church Growth Movement of the '70s and '80s stimulated by McGavran and Wagner provided optimism and momentum for church planting.[32] Jim

Montgomery with his DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation) ministry was a further propelling influence in the emerging church planting movement by relentlessly calling upon the Christian world to do saturation church planting. The turn of the century also saw the emergence of new global church planting organizations like Dynamic Church Planting International led by Paul Becker which quickly had a worldwide influence. Then there was the new momentum of the 1990s and the turn of the millennium impact when many mission organizations set new church planting goals to be achieved before the year 2000. The new millennium brought a church planting buzz with denominations also setting new church planting goals, seminaries introducing church planting courses and publishing houses replacing the printing of church growth books with church planting books.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders were also very much part of this church planting scene at the turn of the century and made significant contributions in preparation of the emerging movement with books and lectures on church planting with an Anabaptist focus. Stuart Murray in *Church Planting, Laying Foundations* crafts a foundation for Anabaptist church planting. Walfred J. Fahrer in *Building on the Rock* lays out the building blocks for Third Way church planting. Shenk and Stutzman in *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* outline the essentials for creating biblical believers' churches. Nikkel, in his book *Church Planting Roadmap,* describes the character of a biblical church and outlines the steps and stages in church planting.[33]

In Canada the MBs have been in the forefront of this Church Planting Movement by using diverse methods, models and various networking tools. The new millennium also brought new cross-denominational alignments for the sake of a greater harvest. Gordon Fleming, the Canadian MB director of the C2C Network which was begun in British Columbia, expanded it to include church planting partnerships with other provinces and like-minded denominations. This relatively new church planting agency quickly gained momentum as part of the new Canadian church planting movement that focused on aggressive and creative church planting in Canadian cities. The C2C movement focused on suitable spiritual leadership and on intentional development processes. Church planters were appointed based on: their strong sense of call, church planter assessments, covenant agreements, personal prayer life, apprentice training, coaching relationships and strong accountability.[34]  These church planters have a God-sized vision of seeing people come to Christ and to the Lord's church and certainly meet the criteria for successful biblical church planting. Many facets of the C2C movement (www.c2cnetwork.ca) resemble the faith, courage, and vision of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders. The church planter's greatest encouragement is the promise that it is the Lord who builds his church.

## Notes

[1] William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 22.

[2] Wilbert R. Shenk, ed. *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984), 17, 61.

[3] Guy F. Hershberger, ed. *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957), 32-33.

[4] Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner, *Anabaptism and Mission*. (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2007), 101.

[5] Shenk, *Anabaptism*, 67.

[6] Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2010), 141.

[7] Ibid., Murray, 144.

[8] Shenk, *Anabaptism,* 69.

[9] Henry C. Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*. 4th Edition (Newton: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), 237.

[10] Ibid., 25

[11] Ibid., 279.

[12] P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*. Revised Edition (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1980), 31.

[13] Wally Kroeker, *An Introduction to the Mennonites* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2005), 11.

[14] Ibid., 15,22

[15] Friesen, *The Mennonite*, 675.

[16] John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950), 19.

[17] Phyllis Martens, *The Mustard Seed* (Fresno: M.B. Board of Christian Education, 1971), 1.

[18] J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975), 78-79.

[19] Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren,* 269.

[20] Gerhard Wilhelm Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: M.B. Publishing House, 1952), 195-197.

[21] Peters, *The Growth*, 131-132.

[22] Ibid., 270.

[23] G. W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 92.

[24] Paul Wiebe, *Heirs and Joint Heirs.* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 2010), 137.

[25] Peters, *Foundations*, 101.

[26] Doug Heidebrecht, interview by James R. Nikkel. India Church Planting (January 2013).

[27] Heidebrecht.

[28] Victor Wiens, church planting information.  Personal e-mail, (Abbotsford, 2013)

[29] Wiebe, *Heirs*, 257.

[30] Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 60.

[31] Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 41.

[32] Mennonite Brethren benefited  from the variety of seminars offered by the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission on the subjects of church growth and church planting. Donald A. McGavran's book, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), and C. Peter Wagner's book, *Leading Your Church To Growth* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1984), had significant influence on MB leaders.

[33] Stuart Murray, *Church Planting, Laying Foundations* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2001); Walfred Fahrer, *Building on the Rock* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995); David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1988); James R. Nikkel, *Church Planting Road Map* (Belleville: Guardian Books, 2004).

[34] Gordon Fleming,  C2C Network Newsletter, 2013, p.24. https://www.c2cnetwork.ca/wp-content/themes/c2c/pdf/c2cspring2013.pdf.

## Recommended Reading

Ott, Craig, and Gene Wilson. *Global Church Planting*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Estep, William R. *The Anabaptist Story.* Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1975.

Garrison, David. *Church Planting Movements.* Bangalore: Sri Sudhindra Offset process, 2005.

Hershberger, Guy F., ed. *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision.* Scottdale: Herald Press, 1957.

Murray, Stuart. P*lanting Churches in the 21st Century*. Waterloo: Herald Press, 2010.

Nikkel, James R. *Church Planting Road Map*. Belleville: Guardian Books, 2004.

Shenk, David W. and Erwin R. Stutzman. *Creating Communities of the Kingdom*. Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988.

Shenk, Wilbert R., ed. *Anabaptism and Mission*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1984.

Stetzer, Ed. *Planting Missional Churches.* Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006.

Toews, J. A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975.

## Study Questions

1. The author contends that "It was due to the passionate testimony of thousands of ordinary believers, who considered suffering and death to be normal for believers, that the movement of new churches continued." What would you say is considered "normal for believers" today in most churches you know?

2. The first section lists at least six factors of the first generations of Anabaptists that can provide church planting lessons. Review them and discuss their relevance or applicability for modern missions.

3. The section on the 200 years in Prussia and Danzig notes four points concerning the stagnation during this period. Consider what this might mean for church planting efforts in areas today that are highly resistant to the entry of Christianity.

4. The middle decades of the twentieth century church planting missions is characterized by a denominational structure that had high levels of oversight and control from the sending base (North America), resulting in less than favorable results for the missionaries and the receiving churches. Discuss balance between leadership from headquarters with that from the field.

5. The author states: "One of the most important church planting lessons is the observation that national church planters seem to be more ready to do direct evangelism and  are more effective in seeing churches planted, albeit North American missionaries are still needed as resource people." In what ways are North Americans still needed for their resources?

# Section C

# Cultural Perspectives

# 16 The Gospel: Its Content and Communication—an Anthropological Perspective[1]

Jacob A. Loewen

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's good news for all mankind. On the personal level, its aim is to set people free from the power of sin and give them new life under the authority and power of Christ. On the societal level, the Gospel aims to establish a new society of citizens of the Kingdom of God in which justice and brotherhood shall flourish. Thus the Gospel is designed to bring glory to our Creator, enrichment to our fellows, and fulfillment to our own lives.

Jacob A. Loewen, 1922-2006 (Ph.D., Linguistics, University of Washington), was born in Orenburg, Soviet Union. In 1929 he migrated with his family to Canada. With wife Anne, Loewen was a pioneer MB missionary in Colombia from 1947-1953 and 1955-1957. From 1959-1984 Loewen worked as a non-resident "culture broker" with the MB Church in Panama. From 1963-1984 Loewen was a translations consultant with the American and United Bible Societies. In that capacity he lived and worked in South America, the Middle East, and Africa. Among his prolific writings, he is most remembered for his anthology *Culture and Human Values* (William Carey Library, 1975).

Unfortunately, this simple but far-reaching message sometimes gets distorted. Some years ago I came across an unusual example of this when a South American Indian gave me the following testimony: "It is wonderful to be a Christian," he said. "Now we have ever so many more 'hard' words than before. You can heal your friends, or you can kill your enemies, whenever you want to. All you have to do is kneel behind them in a prayer meeting and while everyone else is praying out loud you just whisper the appropriate 'hard' words, breathe on the person, and it happens just like that. For example, if you should say words like *tutechan, wikik, kisimasi* ("temptation," "wicked," "Christmas") or any of the other bad 'hard' words, the person will die like a fly. If, however, you use words like *kang, epong, klaiki* ("God," "heaven," "Christ") or any of the other good 'hard' words, the person will be well before you know it."

How in the world did this indigenous and syncretistic adaptation of Christianity come about? First, the preaching of the missionaries was done in English, with local Indians interpreting from English into their own language. Second, the tribe had a repertoire of "hard" words—magic words—that their creator-culture hero taught them so they could heal the sick. The local interpreters, faced with many Christian technical words which they did not know how to handle in translation, simply made "hard" words out of them. Those words that seemed to be associated with evil became bad "hard" words, and those associated with good became good "hard" words.

Distortion of the Gospel, especially in cross-cultural situations, is more common than many imagine. Every human activity has its difficulties, and the communication of the Gospel is no exception. Furthermore, in the history of western missions, the source of the problem sometimes lies in the messengers themselves.

To what extent can anthropological insights help us overcome such problems?

## Presuppositions

Since success in communication depends to a large extent on understanding and, hopefully, sharing one another's presuppositions, I had better begin by stating my own presuppositions:

***God's good news is for all mankind.*** For me the simplest statement of the nature and the content of the Gospel we are to share with all the peoples of the world was given by Jesus on that historic Sabbath in the synagogue of Nazareth when he unrolled the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and read:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind;
to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people."
(Luke 4:18-19, TEV)

*The life-changing power of the gospel comes from God.* It can never be generated by human effort, no matter how dedicated, how consecrated, or how anthropologically sensitive the messengers may be. On the other hand, no one can stop it no matter how hard he or she tries.

*As in Jesus' day, so today there is more faith among the "gentiles" than there is in "Israel."* I have to confess that my experience with so-called animistic peoples in South America and Africa, and with western missionaries who are bringing the gospel to them, has convinced me that the capacity to believe among animists is far greater than among missionaries who have been conditioned by secularism and materialism, and who today find it almost impossible to believe in a spirit world. I am still chagrined to remember the occasion when a fellow missionary and I were pushed out of a circle of Indian believers who were praying for the healing of a sick person. I will never forget their words: "We're sorry, God's power cannot heal when there are unbelievers in the circle."

Sad to say, western missionaries not only suffer from infection by this virus of unbelief, but they are also carriers of it. In the interests of fighting "superstition," they train national pastors to become similar disbelievers! (See my article in Missiology, Oct. 1976, "Mission Churches, Independent Churches, and Felt Needs in Africa.")

*Anthropology does not have any ultimate answers for the communication of the gospel.* I am firmly convinced that the science of anthropology can provide us with tools to understand culture and cultural problems. It can give us insights into our own behavior and the behavior of people in different cultures. But it can never write *the* foolproof formulae for communicating the gospel. Just as our Lord refuses to be confined to temples built by the hands of men, so his ongoing work will not be confined by any human intellectual structures, be they theological or anthropological.

On the other hand, when we stand in the Great Judgment, ignorance of the insights of anthropology will not serve as a valid excuse for not having done correctly what God committed us to do.

*Communicators of the gospel must have personal experience of its power.* This experience must include both the transforming power of the Gospel in one's own life and in one's own culture. Only persons who can testify how the gospel met their deepest needs, and how "the new spirit" from God provided them with the resources to overcome the personal devils that held them chained, can be believable witnesses on the gospel's behalf.

## The Scope of the Gospel

My use of "gospel" embraces not only the New Testament but the whole Bible, which I accept as the word of God, valid universally and eternally. This broad use of "gospel" may strike some readers as simplistic ignorance. I have been asked, for instance, "Do you mean 'Gospel' (with a capital), that is, salvation through Jesus Christ? Or do you mean the 'gospel' (no capital), that is, the practical outworking of God's word in a specific culture?" Others have been puzzled by the fact that I treat personal salvation and the solution to cultural problems as equally central to the gospel.

Though I am aware of all of these distinctions and more, from my anthropological perspective there is little practical value in maintaining them. In many Third World societies, the solution to a painful local cultural problem can be as much a part of salvation as the individual's forgiveness of sin. For instance, for those African countries which in recent years have undergone their own "exodus" liberation experience, the biblical example of how God formed the nation of Israel out of twelve separate and often competing tribes may, in actual fact, be a far more relevant and meaningful message than one that singles out individuals for "personal salvation." Here, we need to be aware of the sharp contrast between, for example, western individualism and African groups that still practice consensus. For the latter, a highly individualistic approach to salvation may be seen as socially disruptive, rather than contributing in a God-given way to the building of a nation that will provide justice and equality for all.

These are several reasons for highlighting the broadest dimensions of the gospel:

1. The biblical message is, after all, a multifaceted one. Not only did God's people get it over a long period of time, but it was given to men living within differing cultural settings and operating on very different presuppositions and world views.

   In addition to radical differences in world view between the Old and New Testaments, within the Old Testament itself we find that the presuppositions of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were very different from the presuppositions of David and Solomon, or of Ezekiel and the prophets in exile. We also need to recognize that the Bible does not hesitate to emphasize both sides of an issue; for example, in Romans, faith alone without works is stressed for salvation, while in James, faith without works is considered dead and useless. The implication of the multifaceted nature of the Gospel is that not all facets will be equally in focus for one person or one people at one point in time.

Interestingly enough, Africans say that the New Testament has more or less a western worldview, while the Old Testament is founded on a worldview similar to their own. In this light it may be significant to point out that at the present time (1980, *ed. note*) about 75 percent of all Bible translation work in Africa includes the Old Testament. The identification of the Africans with the Old Testament is so strong that up to World War II (after which so many of the African countries became independent and the authority of foreign missions eclipsed) the arrival of the Old Testament again and again split the existing church. Rebelling against what they viewed as the western wrapper in which the missionaries had given them God's message, many African believers started separatist movements boldly proclaiming: "The African gospel—the Old Testament—has finally arrived; the missionaries have kept our gospel hidden and have preached only theirs."

2. Different facets of biblical truth come into prominence for us at different times in our spiritual pilgrimage. The most important thing for me in my boyhood days in the Mennonite Brethren community in which I grew up was "to escape from hell and to be saved." Later, in my university days, I was excited by the insight that God's truth was like a giant piano keyboard, capable of many new chords. Even my unbelieving professors, I realized, were allowed by God's grace to discover some of his truth, while there were church people who insisted on playing in one key only, as though they possessed the whole truth.

Then, as anthropological awareness grew upon me, I became deeply aware of how my western material-oriented culture, with its total cleavage between the material and the spiritual, was actually stifling my capacity to believe in the spirit world. More recently it has been the Incarnation—the truth that God himself, in order to communicate his good news to men, found it necessary to limit himself to human nature and to a specific culture. This is the big truth in my life and thinking today.

3. Different cultures, facing the gospel for the first time, will find different facets of it more meaningful than others. A missionary statesman recently asked Bakht Singh, the beloved evangelist of India, what dimensions of the gospel he found most useful in witnessing to his own people.

"Do you preach to them about the love of God?"
"No," he said, "the Indian mind is so polluted that if you talk to them about love they think mainly of sex."

"Well," the missionary said, "Do you talk to them about the wrath and judgment of God?"

"No, they are used to that," he replied. "All the gods are mad anyway. It makes no difference to them if there is one more who is angry."

"About what do you talk to them? Do you preach on the crucified Christ?" the missionary guessed.

"No, they would think of him as a poor martyr who helplessly died."

"Then what is your emphasis? Eternal life?"

"Not so," he said, "if you talk about eternal life the Indian thinks of transmigration. He wants to get away from it." "What then is your message?" Listen to his answer: "I have never yet failed to get a hearing if I talk to them about the forgiveness of sins and peace and rest. That's the product that sells well. Soon they ask me how they can get it, and then I can lead them to the Saviour who alone can meet their deepest longings" (George W. Peters, "Is Missions Homesteading or Moving?" Mennonite Brethren Herald, April 15, 1977).

4. Differing cultural backgrounds and their concomitant presuppositions will cause people to hear a differing content from the same message. This was forcefully driven home to us when my wife and I tried to serve as resource persons to a group of missionaries and nationals who were trying to develop a Sunday school curriculum "that would really speak to the African people." To our disappointment we discovered that Scripture passages and the truths they were to teach had already been chosen by the parent church in North America. When my wife and I objected, suggesting that we should let the Africans decide which truths should be taught and also let them select which stories taught those truths, the missionaries were incensed. After all, they were seminary-trained people; they knew the Bible and what it teaches!

In order to help them become more aware of how different cultural perspectives cause different people to hear very differently, we reviewed a number of Bible stories, and asked both the missionaries and the nationals to write down what they thought the central message was. The first example was the story of Joseph. The missionaries wrote that here was a man who was loyal to God even to the point of resisting the most fierce of sexual temptations. The Africans wrote that here was a man who, in spite of his brothers' mistreatment, was totally loyal to his family.

5. The believing community in each culture must assume the ultimate responsibility for contextualizing the gospel in its own setting. That is, it must be allowed to develop its own patterns of translating the gospel truth into daily life and worship, applying it to the felt needs, problems, and contradictions of the culture.

However, for a people to be motivated to do this, they need a deep consciousness that God is speaking specifically and directly to them. In my experience, the extensive involvement of the believing community in the translation of the Bible makes just such an impact. It is the awareness of the importance of a contemporary encounter with the inspiration of Scripture that has led the United Bible Societies to shift from missionary translators to mother-tongue speakers as translators. When the believing community undertakes the challenge of Bible translation, it is moved to pray: "God, how would you have said this if you had spoken in our own language in the first place?" Then, when the group experiences consensus in regard to an answer, the people's attitude towards God's Word changes radically. One retired minister in Zambia testified: "For 25 years I have told the people that the Bible is the Word of God, but deep down in my heart there was a nagging suspicion that it was the white man's God speaking to the white man. But that has completely changed now. God has spoken to us and under his spirit's guidance we have made decisions which no white man could make."

These several factors point to the need for seeing the gospel in its broadest as well as its deepest dimensions, rather than insisting on a "one chord" definition.

## The Messengers of the Gospel

Though many people feel called to be messengers of the gospel, there are some prerequisites that should characterize them all:

1. They should recognize that they are the products of their particular culture. Western culture is not unique in creating problems for obedient followers of the gospel. Each culture has its own inventory of problems, and the messengers must become fully aware of them.

2. Messengers must learn to appreciate and to understand the cultural background of the gospel in Scripture. Without an adequate understanding of the cultural settings of biblical times, no one can fully understand the biblical message or make a "dynamic equivalence" translation of the gospel into a new cultural milieu. Working as a translations consultant in East Central Africa, my appreciation for

the Old Testament has grown immensely. In Africa I am working with a people whose culture in many ways is more like the Hebrew culture than my own, and these people find great delight in seeing how God operated within that cultural setting. Unless one is aware of the specific cultural framework in which a given biblical message is imbedded, one can readily fall into the trap of defending nonsense, like when my church some decades ago excommunicated women for cutting their hair on the basis of the Pauline prescriptions to the Corinthians.

3. When messengers of the Gospel have occasion to witness across cultural boundaries, they need to be aware not only of the culture from which they come, but they must have an equally deep appreciation for and an understanding of the receptor's culture. To begin with, this presupposes a thorough mastery of the local language. As a translations consultant I frequently find myself trying to help national churches extricate themselves from the meaningless jargon imposed upon them by missionaries who had insufficient understanding of and respect for their culture. Thus in one African language the missionaries rejected the local words for "spirit" as satanic, and on the basis of the Greek and Hebrew used the local word for "breath" to mean "spirit." But notice what happens, then, with the key theological concept "Holy Spirit": Since the word for "holy" in this language is a homophone for "red," the people tend to hear "red breath." (!) Likewise, "evil spirits" comes out "bad breath," and "unclean spirits" is "dirty breath." During a translator training program in this language, the nationals concluded that "the whole thing doesn't mean anything!" A hundred years of mission work without an adequate vocabulary for some very essential truths of the gospel!

4. Messengers must approach their cross-cultural witness with expectancy. Having recognized the incompleteness of their own understanding of the Gospel, they must be open and ready for the spirit of God to do a "new thing." When Peter experienced the vision of the sheet being let down from heaven and was ordered to eat unclean animals, he, of course, was puzzled by the meaning of this strange experience. But it had so shaken him that he was able to break out of his Jewish restraint and racial prejudice against the gentiles and go to Cornelius' house and witness God perform a new thing—the gentiles also becoming recipients of God's spirit.

In addition to the above principles, which apply universally, there are special words of caution for messengers of the gospel, depending on their cultural background:

***The western missionary as a messenger of the gospel.*** As I have written in "Evangelism and Culture" (*The New Face of Evangelism*), there are a number of negative aspects stemming from western cultural wrappings which affect the way

people from the West present the gospel. I think I am correct in saying that even today many western missionaries still consider the cultural wrapper of their home Christianity an integral part of the gospel. I find relatively few making a conscious effort to free the gospel from its western wrapper and even fewer who are aware of how their culture inhibits their own faith and obedience.

*Local, missionary-trained pastors.* All too often, if the missionaries are unable to separate the gospel from its western cultural wrappings, the national pastors who are trained by them become twice the sons of Gehenna.

Recently a newly-ordained national pastor came to me and asked: "Do you think it is true that spirits of the dead appear to the living?" He went on: "I had been in my congregation for just a few weeks when a man died. There had been considerable trouble, because this man had lent another member of the congregation some money and the debtor was refusing to pay it. On the day after his burial the dead man's soul appeared to his sister and said: 'You must go to the man who owes me the money and tell him to pay it at once. I am unhappy to leave this unsettled. If it is not settled I will not live in the graveyard alone.'"

When the family came to this pastor to ask for his blessing on their new approach to the defaulting debtor, he did not know what to say. As to whether the dead could appear to the living as the family had claimed, a retired lay preacher assured him, "That's exactly what happens." Unsatisfied, the pastor next sought out a fellow seminary-trained minister who reminded him: "We seminary-trained preachers don't believe in such things." The pastor finally told the people that he could not help them.

Then, as if suddenly remembering while talking to me, he added: "When I was living with my parents in the village, such a thing would not have troubled me. I would have believed it. But now I am a seminary graduate." In an effort to help him, I asked if there were any examples in the Bible of the dead appearing to the living. Relief flooded his face as he thought of the biblical examples.

*Third World Christians as missionaries.* It is a healthy sign that many Third World countries are launching missionary initiatives in countries other than their own. But sad to say, in many cases such Third World missionaries are no more sensitive to the cultures to which they are going than western missionaries were in the past.

*Prophets of Independent churches.* Probably the most successful witnesses (in terms of the number of members gained) on the African scene today are the prophets of Independent churches. Barrett recently observed that six out of ten conversions in Africa today are to Independent church groups. To this I would like to add from

my own observation that even the members of mainline churches (Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) again and again fall back upon these groups for healing, "dewitching," and so forth.

The prophets usually operate on the basis of a personal encounter with God who has given them a mandate to preach and teach a given way of worship. They identify very deeply with Old Testament prophets. Culturally they usually are single-mindedly African. This, often coupled with very limited Bible knowledge, leaves them very vulnerable to syncretism. Recently, however, I have observed in Zaire [Democratic Republic of Congo], Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] and Botswana an openness on the part of large numbers of such prophets to receive outside help to upgrade their knowledge of the Bible.

*Culturally aware local leaders.* It is gratifying to see a new kind of leader emerge on the African church scene. These usually are people who are proud of their African heritage but who have had extensive exposure to western cultures and also have gained some understanding of biblical cultures. It is men and women of this calibre who will be able to discern the western wrappings in which the gospel came to them, while at the same time they will be aware of where the dangers of syncretism lie. They are the great hope of the church to develop a truly contextualized Christian faith that will meet the needs of the people and further the growth of God's Kingdom.

## The Communication of the Gospel

God is always ready to meet us at the point of our greatest felt need. This, in itself, goes far in assuring that we will truly "hear" his message. I have been deeply impressed, while rereading the life of Jesus, to see how he put Isaiah's definition of the gospel into practice according to the principle of felt need. Thus, when the four men brought the paralytic to Jesus to be healed, Jesus did not say, "My son, you are healed," but "My son, your sins are forgiven." Then, for the benefit of the Pharisees who took Jesus' statement as blasphemy, he said: "To show you that I, indeed, can forgive sin, I am going to tell this man to get up and walk." The healing almost seemed like an afterthought. Jesus began with the man's yearning for forgiveness—his deepest need. On the other hand, when the man who had been incapacitated for thirty-eight years was healed, Jesus did not even identify himself to him. That came later, and it was not until then that Jesus said, "Go and sin no more."

If we accept Jesus' definition of the Gospel—"good news for all, whatever their problems"—then it behooves us to find out what the pressing needs of a given people are, and to check whether the message we are giving them is indeed meeting their felt need, because, if not, we may be the modern Pharisees who "bind grievous burdens upon people but don't themselves lift a finger to help them carry them" (Luke 11:46).

This is not the time nor place for full-scale analysis of the problems of the communications process. However, it does seem essential to mention two crucial areas, one especially pertaining to the messengers of the gospel and the other to the hearers of the gospel:

**Willful or unconscious misuse or skewing of the Gospel.** Missionaries who accompanied the Catholic conquistadores and the Protestant colonizers did so with the highest motivation and found ample scriptural justification for their "Christian/lord-to-pagan/servant" approach. Today we look back and say their approach was entirely wrong—it made a travesty of the gospel. But the question that we need to ask is: Has that old attitude really died? Or has it merely taken on a new shape?

Racist white people have for generations been using the curse on Canaan quite out of context and completely erroneously to justify the subjugation of black men by white men. This interpretation may be dying out in Southern United States, but it is flourishing in Southern Africa. And what is most tragic about people having such biases is that they often are fervently religious. It is my deep and earnest prayer that the amount of skewing would decrease as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Syncretism.** By syncretism I mean the mixing of the Christian faith and local traditional (non-Christian) beliefs and practices with the result that the Gospel is perverted, distorted, or largely voided in the process. An example is found in the Kako people of Cameroon, who restructured the communion service on the model of their own *sataka* peace-making ritual, resulting in a short-circuiting of repentance and reconciliation in cases of excommunication.

Effective communication is a cooperative effort between the source and the receptor. No matter how good the source is in structuring a message, if the receptor is not receiving properly the communication will be limited. And likewise, no matter how hard the receptor tries to receive the message, if the source severely warps the message for one reason or another, the reception will be hindered or skewed. For this reason a basic attitude of *reciprocity* between the source and the receptor is fundamental. To my mind this involves at least the following areas:

1. **An honest acceptance of the validity of each other's cultures.** While some things may be new, strange, or even difficult, source and receptor will never suspect each other's motives as persons nor as members of a culture.

2. **A spirit of exchange.** Missionaries have often been so preoccupied with the greatness of the message they had to communicate that they were unprepared to learn from their communicants. I can honestly say that during some thirty years in which I have tried to share the good news with people in many languages, tribes, and societies, I have usually been taught more than I was able to teach.

3. ***Personal and cultural self-exposure.*** As they understand each other's personal and cultural reactions more fully, source and receptor will be able to serve as mirrors to each other to help each other become aware of those things that are incongruent with the tenor of the gospel in their lifestyle or in their culture.

4. ***Indigenous "sources of steam."*** When the gospel impinges on a culture, obviously some things in that culture are going to have to change. But culture change is difficult to effect unless there is an adequate amount of push from within. All too often in the past, missionaries have tried to provide the push from the outside, but as soon as they turned their backs, or whenever they had to leave the field, things reverted to the old way. For this reason any genuine change that is to be effected must be linked to an indigenous "source of steam" that will help keep up the momentum after the missionary has disappeared from the scene.

5. ***Cooperative effort in contextualizing the gospel.*** At first blush, this may seem to contradict what was said earlier: "Each culture must assume the ultimate responsibility for contextualizing the gospel in its own setting." But to my mind it does not. Adequate contextualization is a difficult task and the sympathetic outsider can often have a very unique role to play as mirror, source of alternative, catalyst, friend of the court, and so forth.

   The outsider-as-mirror is as crucial to the established churches of the West as it is for the younger churches in the Third World. Contextualization is never a once-and-for-all event—it is an ongoing process. In fact, what was meaningful and right in grandfather's day may be utterly wrong today. I think it is highly significant that church people working overseas become deeply aware of serious problems extant in North American Christianity. For this reason we of the West will do well to consider seriously such mirror reflections as that of the South American Indians who are convinced that money, and not God, is the "axle" of our way of life. (See my chapter in *The New Face of Evangelicalism.)*

6. Last, but not least, ***there must be an adequate interchange between the older and younger churches.*** As a church gets established in a "receiving" society, early on there should be exchanges between it and the "sending" church. This exchange must always be a two-way street. Too often, older churches have found the criticism of younger churches quaint, interesting, or sometimes even annoying; seldom have they done anything about them. When older churches take seriously the challenges given to them by younger churches, their own communication with younger churches will be maximized.

Over and above these requirements, which are equally valid for both the source and the receptor, there are certain specific requirements for each.

In view of the sources' call to be witnesses of the gospel, I feel that they must accept the greater responsibility for effective communication:

1. They must take the lead in cultural awareness, that is, in knowing their own, the Bible's, and the receptors' culture.

2. They must assume responsibility for establishing the proper initial channels of communication, following the communication principles outlined by E. A. Nida (see *Message and Mission,* Harper, 1960).

3. They must begin at the felt need of the receptors. Western missionaries—even the most evangelical—come from a highly secularized church situation in which God and the church have largely abdicated their concern for crop growth, human fertility, illness and health, mental health, social welfare, and so on. In the Third World, however (as in the Bible), these areas are still major religious concerns, and the gospel will be the good news for the Third World only if it includes such basic concerns in its focus. As I have indicated, when mission-founded churches offer no help in these areas, the people fall back on some other religion to cope with their problems.

4. They must demonstrate a humble acceptance of the fact that the receptor will establish an independent relationship with God. Western missionaries have too long held a spiritual-father complex toward people to whom they have been privileged to bring the gospel. (To be sure, this paternal role has often been aided and abetted by the receptor's readiness to accept the "child" role, thereby escaping personal responsibility.)

On the side of the receptors, I would like to underscore the need of an ongoing willingness to put themselves, their culture, and their unspoken world view and values under the scrutiny of the spirit of God. There must be an implicit obedience to the truth as God's spirit gives them new insight regarding the implications of the gospel. In the spirit of the early church, they will submit themselves to the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:28).

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980).

## Study Questions

1. Discuss the author's statement: ". . . I treat personal salvation and the solution to cultural problems as equally central to the gospel."

2. Late in life the author comes to understand God's work as ". . . the Incarnation—the truth that God himself, in order to communicate his good news to men, found it necessary to limit himself to human nature and to a specific culture." Discuss what this might mean to your ministry if you started with this view.

3. The author claims, "Messengers must approach their cross-cultural witness with expectancy. Having recognized the incompleteness of their own understanding of the gospel, they must be open and ready for the spirit of God to do a "new thing." Discuss some areas you can imagine your understanding is incomplete, and how willing you are to see God do a new thing.

4. Do you fit in the author's statement: ". . . even today many western missionaries still consider the cultural wrapper of their home Christianity an integral part of the gospel. . . few mak(e) a conscious effort to free the gospel from its western wrapper and even fewer are aware of how their culture inhibits their own faith and obedience." Discuss further.

5. Why do you think "Third World missionaries are no more sensitive to the cultures to which they are going than western missionaries were in the past?"

# 17 The Bicultural Bridge[1]

Paul G. Hiebert

How does the gospel move from one culture to another? In our day of mass media and modern technology, we are tempted to think in terms of radio, television, and the printed page. Rather, communication of the gospel across the chasms of cultural differences rests upon the quality of interpersonal relationships between human beings—between missionaries and the people they serve. This relationship of people of one culture to people of another culture is what we call the bicultural bridge.



Paul Hiebert (Ph.D., Cultural Anthropology) was born in India to missionary parents. Paul and his wife Frances served 6 years in India with MB Mission. After some years teaching in secular universities, Paul devoted his life to teaching missions and anthropology, first at Fuller School of World Mission (1977–1990) and then Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1990–2007). Many notable MB leaders from all continents were influenced by Hiebert's scholarly and practical approaches to mission. Some of his 10 books and 150 articles serve as standard reading in the study of mission at MB institutions.

## The Biculture

Communication across the bicultural bridge takes place within the biculture: a new culture created by people from two different cultural backgrounds. (See Figure I.) When missionaries leave their first culture to enter a new society, they take with them their cultural maps. They have ideas of what is food and how to cook it, who should raise the children and what values should be taught to them, how to worship properly, and a great many other things. No matter how hard they try, they cannot "go native." The earlier culture of their childhood can never be fully erased. On the other hand, for missionaries to totally import their culture is impossible, even if they try. They are influenced to a great extent by the culture they enter—their second culture.

To the extent local people interact with the missionaries, they too become part of the biculture. They have their own ideas of food, child rearing, values, and worship. Even though they may not leave their country, they are exposed to new ideas and beliefs. In order to relate to each other, missionaries and nationals must create new patterns of living, working, playing, and worshiping—in other words, a new culture. Much of the effort of a bicultural community, in fact, is spent on defining what that culture is. What types of clothes should be worn? Should missionaries and nationals each wear their own type of dress? Should they both wear Western clothes or the clothes of the local culture? What type of food should they eat? What type of house should they build? Should missionaries have cars, and, if so, should national leaders also have them? Where should the children of the two groups go to school, and in what medium of instruction? How should missionaries and nationals relate to each other? These and a thousand other questions must be answered in order to build a stable biculture that enables foreigners and nationals to communicate and work together.

While the biculture may borrow from the different cultures of its participants, it is more than the sum or synthesis of those cultures. New cultural patterns often emerge out of the interaction. In the end, if communication is to take place between people of different cultures, a satisfactory biculture must be worked out in which both sides find a measure of mutual understanding and satisfaction. Without this, for the gospel to cross the bicultural bridge is difficult. The bicultural bridge is only one stage in the multi-stage communication of the gospel from one culture to another. The missionary has been trained by parents, pastors, and teachers before going to a new society. There he or she generally works most closely with national Christian leaders who are part of the same biculture. They in turn communicate the gospel to other people throughout the land. The greatest share of village evangelism and church planting has been done by national workers.

Our concern here is with relationships between missionaries and national church members, for it is here that the gospel and church are translated into a new culture. Whether

people trust the gospel and whether they see the church as foreign or indigenous to their culture depends to a great extent upon the nature and quality of relationships of this bicultural bridge.

## Generationalism in the Biculture

As in other cultures, generational differences emerge within the biculture. There are newcomers—the missionaries and nationals who have recently entered the biculture. And there are old-timers—those who have spent much of their lives in the biculture.

### First-Generation Missionaries

First-term missionaries belong to the first generation of the biculture. For the most part they are idealistic. They have taken an assignment because they have a great vision of the work and tremendous zeal. The goals they set for themselves are high—at times unrealistic. They will evangelize all of India in five years, or, if not all of India, at least Andhra Pradesh. Or they will build a large hospital or Bible school. Moreover, they are ready to sacrifice everything in order to complete their mission. They have little time for family or relaxation.

First-termers are often called plungers because of their willingness to identify more closely with the national culture than do many of the old-timers. If they are encouraged in this identification, they can be bonded to the local culture and people. However, if they are acculturated into the missionary culture, they will acquire the belief that it is impossible to fully identify with the national people.

The success or failure of first termers depends to a considerable extent upon their place within the structure of the biculture. Placed at the top of a new venture, such as opening a new field, starting a new hospital, or building a new Bible school, they can be a tremendous success. They begin with nothing. When they leave there is a church or an institution. No precedents hinder them, and they have the power to build a program according to their own plans. For example, when the first missionary doctor moves to an area, there is often only an empty field. When he or she leaves, there is usually a hospital, complete with operating rooms, admissions offices, and wards. On the other hand, first termers placed at the top of new ventures can be tremendous failures. They have no institutional constraints and often no peers to check their bad decisions. They set the direction for new programs which are often difficult to change later.

When first-generation missionaries are placed at the top of old, established programs, they have a potential for moderate success. They have the power to institute their own ideas, but they inherit a legacy from the past. When they try to change established procedures, they will be reminded that "that is not the way the founder did it or the way we have always done it." Later leaders of the program can never measure up to the

remembered image of the founder whose picture hangs on the wall in the central hall. What the founder established as an *ad hoc* procedure, by the second generation becomes law and by the third becomes a sacred rite. But if first termers can be only moderately successful in initiating their programs, they can be only moderate failures. They are guarded from making great mistakes by the institution which has begun to acquire a life of its own. An institution has a way of staying alive and of tempering the failures of its leaders. By now too many people have vested interests in the institution to let it die easily.

First-generation missionaries placed at the bottom of old programs have little possibility for success or failure. They have little power to initiate change; this, combined with their vision and zeal, generally leads to frustration. A special type of person is needed to serve in such a position and to do so with a measure of joy.

One of the primary characteristics of missionaries' first terms is culture shock. Often for the first time, the newcomers have to come to terms with another culture—to learn its ways and to respect, even love, its people and their customs. The types of attitudes and relationships worked out during the first term will generally characterize the missionaries' ministries for the rest of their lives.

## Second-Generation Missionaries

Second-generation missionaries are those experienced in the work they are doing, Often they are on their second, third, or fourth term of service.

Second-generation missionaries share certain characteristics. First, they tend to be more realistic in their assessment of their work. They have come to grips with the fact that they cannot evangelize all of Japan—or even Osaka—in five years. They realize that it is worth their life to build up a Bible school and to train a number of good leaders or to plant four or five strong churches.

They are more realistic, too, about their own lifestyles. They become increasingly aware that they have only one life to live. If they are going to have time with their children, they will have to do it now, before the children are grown. If they are to have rest and relaxation, they must do so at the expense of some other activities. They are no less committed to the task. In fact, their commitment has become a long-term one. But they are no longer willing to pay any price to attend meetings, classes, and wards. They begin to realize that their children and they themselves are part of the greater work of God.

The second-generation missionaries together with their experienced national co-workers do the greatest share of the mission work. For the most part they have solved the logistics of keeping alive. They know the language and the local customs. Consequently, they are able to give themselves to the long, hard labor required to plant the church.

One of the important tasks of the experienced missionaries is to help first-termers adjust to the field. Even when this task is turned over to the church, experienced missionaries have an important pastoral role in helping the new missionaries to deal with culture shock.

## Third-Generation Missionaries

Third-generation missionaries are sometimes referred to as the old-timers. In the study by John and Ruth Useem and John Donoghue (1963) in which the concept of bicultural generationalism was first presented, the old-timers were those who served abroad during the colonial era. Many of them, with some notable exceptions, accepted notions of Western superiority and colonial rule. They assumed that the missionary should be in charge of the work and live like foreigners with their compounds and bungalows. We are not to judge them, for they, like us, were people of their times. Many of them sacrificed much more than do modern-day missionaries. Missionaries then served seven or more years before going on furlough. Most of them buried spouses and children where they served, and many could not take vacations in the summer hill stations because the journeys by cart or boat were too difficult and long.

But times have changed. No longer do we live in a world in which colonial rule and foreign superiority are accepted. Today, we need missionaries who identify with the people and their aspirations. Consequently, we find a generation gap between those who look back with nostalgia to the colonial era when missions played a central role in the life of the church and those who see the task of missions to be one of partnership in service with an autonomous church.

## Generationalism among National Leaders

Generationalism is also evident among the national leaders in the biculture. The young often have a great vision and zeal for the work. In our day of increasing nationalism, this is often linked to strong convictions that the national church should take responsibility for its own affairs. Like their missionary counterparts, they are usually willing to pay almost any price for the sake of the work. In many cases they have to sacrifice the support of families and kinsfolk who may have planned more traditional careers for them. First-generation leaders given responsibility for important tasks can be great successes—and great failures. Placed in a position of little authority and not allowed to lead, some of the best of them leave to join other (often nativistic) churches or to start movements of their own. Too often we have lost our best young men and women because we have not entrusted them with responsibilities.

Second-generation national leaders are those who have committed themselves to long-term work in the church or mission. Paired with experienced missionaries, they carry out the major share of the work.

Third-generation national leaders are those who grew up during the colonial era. For many of them the rapid movement toward nationalism is frightening and unsettling. They look back with nostalgia to the day when the mission was in charge and there was a great deal of security.



Figure 1. The Bicultural Bridge
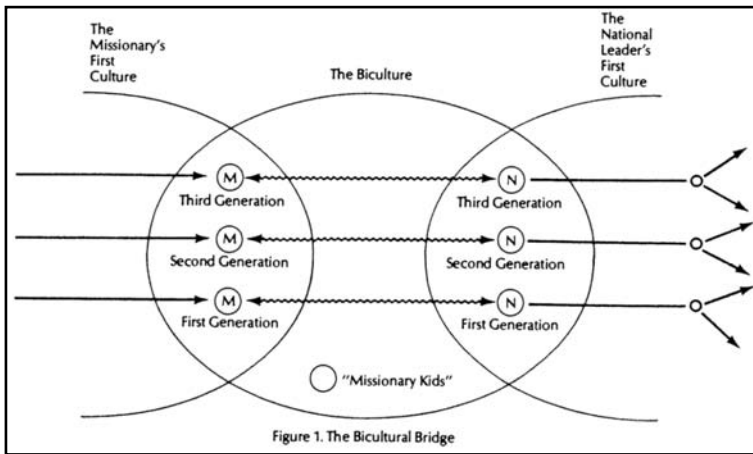
## Stress Points in the Biculture

The biculture is a culture in the making. It has little time depth and is created by people from different cultures who have little or no idea of what the new culture will be like. It is not surprising, then, that there are points where stress appears. Furthermore, stress likely will remain part of the biculture for some time because few areas of the world have changed so rapidly as have international relationships. The shift from colonialism to nationalism—and now to internationalism—and the change in world powers as one nation and then another rises and falls in world power and prestige influence the biculture greatly.

### The Creation of the Biculture

One area of stress has to do with the creation of the biculture itself. What shape should it take? What should be borrowed from each of its parent cultures? Should missionaries and nationals relate as parents and children, as contractual partners, as undifferentiated

equals, or as what? If national leaders in developing countries receive the same salaries as missionaries, will they not be alienated from their people and many be attracted into the ministry by the affluent lifestyle? On the other hand, should there be differences that speak of cultural distance and segregation?

Today considerable emphasis is on the missionaries' identification with the culture to which they go. To the extent possible, missionaries should live within the cultural frameworks of the people to whom they go, for in doing so they are able to bring the gospel most of the way across the bicultural bridge. The distance between cultures is often great, and someone must bring the gospel from one to another. The further the missionaries bring the gospel to a new culture, the more effective will be its acceptance and the less distance the national leaders must carry it to make it indigenous in that culture.

Early attempts at identification often focus on visible cultural practices regarding food, houses, clothes, cars, and lifestyle. Identification on this level is important, although we must recognize the limits of human adaptability. Some people must retain more ties than others to their cultural past in order to maintain psychological balance and effective ministry.

But identification on the level of practices can hide feelings of distance at deeper levels. On the level of roles, missionaries may feel that they should not work under the direction of nationals. On the level of attitudes they may be convinced of the superiority of their culture or race. No identification on the surface nor attempts to cover them will follow.

### Search for Identity

One of the big questions facing members of the biculture has to do with their cultural identity. To a great extent our personal identity is tied to our identification with a society and culture. Bicultural people belong to two sociocultural worlds.

Missionaries are often unaware of the profound changes that take place within them. They think of themselves as Americans or Canadians living abroad for a time. When they return to their first cultures, they expect to assimilate back into the culture with a minimum of adjustment. Often, however, they experience severe culture shock. To the extent they adapt successfully to the biculture, they experience a greater reverse culture shock on their return home.

Missionaries are shocked to find their relationships with their relatives and friends strained and distant. They expect these folk to be excited to hear about their many experiences, but after an hour or two, conversation drifts off to local affairs—to local politics, church matters, or family issues. The people at home have no frame of reference

within which to fit these tales from abroad. Their world is their town and state or province. Missionaries, on the other hand, have lost touch with local matters and have little to say in conversations.

The gap is often accentuated by the altered worldview of the missionaries. They return with a bicultural and worldwide perspective that no longer identifies the home culture and nation as right, one which treats all others as less civilized. When missionaries criticize their first cultures, they arouse the suspicions of their relatives and friends. Missionaries are often saddened to find they are no longer close to relatives and friends. They find their closest friends among other bicultural people—people who have lived abroad. It does not matter much which other countries bicultural people have been in; there is a sense of mutual understanding, a common bicultural worldview that draws these people together.

National leaders, too, face a cultural identity crisis. In their relationships with missionaries they adopt foreign ideas and practices. Some travel abroad and become part of a world community of leaders, but in so doing, they leave their traditional cultures. They may find it hard to live in their native houses, dress in their former dress, eat their traditional foods, or even speak their childhood language. Like the missionaries, they belong not to their first or second cultures, but to the biculture that has emerged. When the leaders return home, they are often treated with suspicion or indifference. In the end, they, too, feel most at home with other bicultural people.

Both nationals and missionaries are people of two cultures. While they may resolve the tension between these externally by creating the biculture to order their lives and relationships, internally they must still face the question of reconciling two often divergent sets of values and assumptions. This internal tension may be handled in a number of ways. Some people attempt to build ghettos in order to preserve their first cultures. Too often, then, external withdrawal from the local culture represents a far deeper rejection of it at the psychological level. The result is a biculture far removed from the people, often ineffective in communicating to them the message of the gospel.

A second and opposite response is to attempt to go native in the second culture. Missionaries, for example, may try not only to identify fully with the people of their adoption, but also to deny their first culture. Similarly, nationals may reject their childhood culture and adopt fully the foreign culture to which they are exposed. This response is seldom successful. We can suppress, but never kill, the culture into which we are enculturated as children. It remains buried, but it will rise someday to haunt us.

A third response is compartmentalization: to accept both cultures, but to keep them separated. One or another is used depending upon the occasion. An example of this is the modern African chief who is a member of the national parliament. In the village he dresses in traditional dress, keeps several wives, and speaks his native language. In the

city he dresses in western clothes, has a modern wife, and speaks French or English. In one such case described by Colin Turnbull, the chief had a two-story house. Upstairs was modern, and downstairs was traditional. But the two worlds never met. Missionaries, too, can become cultural schizophrenics. In the long run, however, the tension between the two cultures is not resolved, and the persons live fragmented lives.

A fourth response to the tension of living in two cultures is to seek integration of the two. Parts of both are combined in a new synthesis---a synthesis that is generally based on a multicultural perspective that accepts cultural variance. Rarely is synthesis fully achieved, but in seeking to bring the two cultures together, the individual strives for internal wholeness.

Most bicultural people, with the possible exception of those who deny one or the other of their cultures, maintain symbolic identification with both cultures. For example, Western missionaries in India tend to talk about Western politics, greet all Americans and Canadians as old friends, and go to Western restaurants when they are in the cities. During the war years they received food packages with cheese, Spam, and Fizzles. These were put away for special occasions, to be eaten with American friends in a sort of ritual meal of identification with America. Upon return to the West, these same missionaries tend to talk about Indian politics, greet all Indians as old friends, and eat in Indian restaurants whenever possible. Suddenly Spam and Fizzles carry no symbolic value at all. The same identification with two cultures is found in Indians who are part of a biculture. This ritual identification with each culture is important, for it reaffirms the different parts of the lives of bicultural people.

### Alienation

A second problem facing bicultural people is that of alienation from their first cultures. In the case of missionaries, this is less of a problem so long as they live abroad where their primary task lies. On their return to their first culture they sense the growing distance between them and their people.

The problem is more severe for national leaders. While they participate in the biculture, they continue to be involved in their first culture. For them to separate the two cultures geographically is impossible. Daily they must shift gears as they move from one culture to the other. Moreover, their task is to bring the gospel to their native culture, so they must retain close ties with it. If they identify too closely with the biculture, they become alienated from their people and are mistrusted as foreigners.

The emergence of a cultural gap between leaders and people is a serious problem in much of the developing world. (See Figure 2.) This is true in politics and business as well as in the church. National leaders are given advanced training in English or French,

travel around the world, and form friendships with people from other countries. They are often more at home in a plane and hotel than they are in their hometowns. With the emergence of this international leadership, broad strategies for world evangelization can be planned. But these leaders often find it hard to minister directly to the people in their countries. They can no longer serve as village evangelists and health workers. The danger in missions is to concentrate on advanced training for national leaders and to forget that the communication of the gospel requires leaders who can identify with the people. The training of indigenous leaders is one of the greatest tasks facing the church around the world.

Alienation in the case of national leaders creates another problem, that of dependency upon outside support. Many of the top leadership positions in developing countries are dependent upon foreign funds. When such funds are cut off—an increasing possibility in our age of political turmoil—leaders in these positions are vulnerable. Missionaries generally can return to their home countries and find other jobs. The national leaders have lost their support, and because of their training and cultural tastes, they find it hard to take jobs within their traditional society. Moreover, they have become politically identified with the West, and if some anti-American government comes to power, they may be marked for punishment or death. Unlike the missionaries, they cannot leave. In planning mission strategies we must be particularly sensitive to the difficult position in which we may place our national colleagues, and appreciate more the tremendous sacrifices they often have to make.



Figure 2. Alienation in Third World Countries
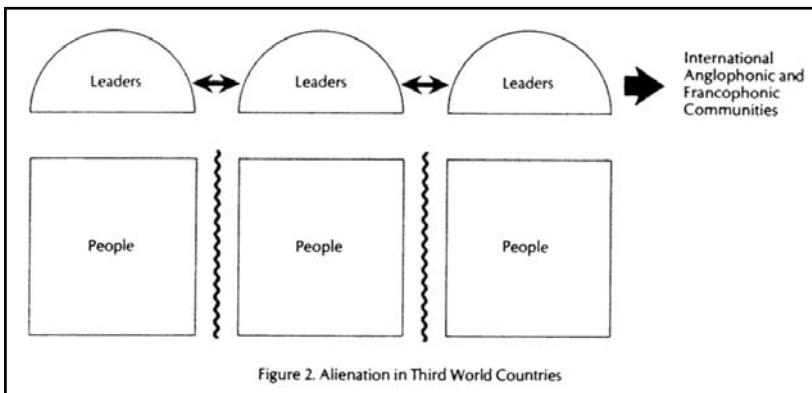
## Missionary Children

Some of the most difficult decisions facing missionaries have to do with their children. First, to which culture do these children belong? Unlike earlier mission

movements when migration to a new country was common, the modern mission movement has been characterized by missionaries seeing themselves and their children as citizens of the missionaries' home country. In times of crisis and at retirement they expect to return to it. They assume that their children will marry and settle there.

Here is a fundamental misconception. Children raised in the biculture do not belong to their parents' first culture. For the children, the biculture is their first culture. Their home is neither the American nor the Indian nor the Brazilian culture, but the culture of the American-living-abroad or the Indian-living-abroad. Consequently many of these children suffer culture shock and problems of adjustment when they go (not return) to their parents' first culture. In many ways to them it is a foreign country. It is also not surprising that many of them try later in life to find vocations abroad that will take them back home. Sadly, that world is gone. However, because of their cross-cultural experience, they are often able to adapt to other bicultural situations. Those who stay discover that the foreign community abroad looks quite different to adults who work in it than to children raised in it. Most missionary kids adapt in varying degrees to their parents' culture, but for them this will always be their second culture. The cultural imprint of their childhood can never be erased.

If migrating to their parents' home culture creates problems for missionary children, so does going native. Foreign children abroad have a special role in the society. They attend different schools, speak a different language, and have bicultural values—all of which set them apart from the local people. With few exceptions, they suffer serious culture shock if they adopt local citizenship, marry into the society, and compete for local jobs. They are still outsiders.

When the decision is made that the children should eventually identify with their parents' home culture, the problem of education arises. Local schools generally do not correspond either in language or in curriculum with that of the children's country. In the past missionaries often left their young children in their homeland with relatives for education. Later missionary children's schools became common. In some instances missionary mothers tutored their children at home. Each approach has had its difficulties.

### Institutionalization

Bicultural relationships are essential if the gospel is to bridge the gulf between cultures. If they are to be enduring and fruitful, these relationships must take place within a bicultural context. But as is true of any culture, institutionalization sets in. What starts as a means to communicate the gospel across cultures becomes an end in itself. Over time, defining and maintaining the biculture occupies

more and more time and resources, for both missionaries and national leaders have vested interests in maintaining it. Effective evangelists and teachers become administrators and builders. The flexibility that allowed early missionaries and national leaders to respond to local opportunities gives way to rules, policies, and hardening of the categories.

To be effective, mission requires a measure of flexibility and mobility. It is the church in action, reaching out to plant the church in worship. The balance between *ad hocness* and constitutional order—between individual initiative and corporate planning—is a difficult one to maintain.

## Implications for Missions

If the success of missions depends to a great extent upon the quality of the relationships between missionaries and the people to whom they go, is there a biblical model to which we can turn for guidance? In the past we have often seen the relationship as parent to child. More recently we speak of partnership. The biblical model is that of incarnation. To bridge the cultural gap between heaven and sinful earth, God became human and dwelt among us, eating our food, speaking our language, and suffering our sorrows, yet without giving up his divine nature. Incarnation is identification, but it does not deny who we originally are. It is, in fact, a bicultural or bipersonal state. Just as God became one with us in order to save us, we must become one with the people to whom we go in order to bring them that salvation.

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *Mission Focus* vol. 10:1 (Elkhart: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, March 1982).

## Recommended Reading

Useem, John, Ruth Useem, and John Donoghue.  "Men in the Middle of the Third Culture: The Rites of American and Non-Western People in Cross-Cultural Administration." *Human Organization* 22 Fall (1963): 169-179.

Wambutda, Daniel N.  "An African Christian Looks at Christian Missions in Africa." In *Readings in Missionary Anthropology 11,* edited by W. A. Smalley.  South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978.

Wolcott, Harry F.  "Too True to Be Good: The Subculture of American Missionaries in Urban Africa." In *Readings* in *Missionary Anthropology 11,* edited by W. A. Smalley. South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978.

## Study Questions

1. The author maintains, "Some people must retain more ties than others to their cultural past in order to maintain psychological balance and effective ministry." Should this affect the missionary's assignment?

2. "If (the national leaders) identify too closely with the biculture, they become alienated from their people and are mistrusted as foreigners." Does this still happen today? If so, discuss why, and what responsibility the outsiders has for it.

3. The author concludes with "The biblical model is that of incarnation. To bridge the cultural gap between heaven and sinful earth, God became human and dwelt among us, eating our food, speaking our language, and suffering our sorrows, yet without giving up his divine nature." Discuss the variety of lifestyle choices that missionaries make in light of this statement.

# 18 Church Pews and Drunk Shepherds: the Precedents, Functions, and Principles of Contextualization

Darren Duerksen

As I attended the Christmas play in south India I noticed two things in particular. The first was a certain and unexpected feeling of familiarity. In the midst of a cultural context *very* different from my own, various things such as the hymns, pews, and other features were strangely reminiscent of traditional church services I had attended in the United States. I later learned that North American missionaries had started the church and the members were highly grateful for the gospel message that the early missionaries had brought to their area. In addition, however, the missionaries also imported various North American church practices and the new Indian church accepted them as part of what it meant to conduct Christian worship.

Darren Duerksen (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; Ph.D., Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary) served with MB Mission as India/North America liaison and missionary to India from 2002-2009. In addition he is author of *Ecclesial Identities in a Multi-faith Context* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), based on doctoral research conducted in north India. Darren currently is Assistant Professor of Intercultural Studies at Fresno Pacific University, USA.

A second impression came in the midst of the Christmas play. The actors and dialogue were following the basic biblical story, and all looked fairly familiar. That is, until the shepherds showed up. As the actors – all from the youth group – came onstage, the church crowd immediately perked up and began to chuckle. The shepherds were acting *drunk*. The youth played it up, staggering and slurring their way through a few lines, to the laughter and enjoyment of the church. This continued until the angels appeared, at which point the shepherds instantly sobered up and continued with dialogue that was once again familiar to me. As a friend later explained, modern-day shepherds in that part of India have the reputation, among other things, of always being drunk on cheap liquor. Isn't it possible that the Jewish shepherds acted similarly? What seemed culturally strange to me made complete sense to their reading of the story.

Contextualization may be one of the most crucial topics for global mission today. In some cases we see pew-type examples where the gospel was too closely combined with a foreign culture. These and other examples have prompted mission workers to consider ways to help Christianity be "indigenous" to a culture and not a foreign religion. In other cases we see how contextualization occurs naturally as Christians read the Bible through their own cultural lenses. Such situations give us the opportunity to reflect on how every culture tends to shape the gospel uniquely, providing both insights and challenges.

In this chapter I will discuss the ways that contextualization is a biblical concept, revealing how God's people—and God himself—regularly contextualized messages and practices. I will then touch on the recent history of contextualization and three particular functions that it serves. I will finally outline several key principles that can guide missionaries, pastors and other mission workers in the process of contextualization.

## Biblical Precedents—God the Contextualizer

Though contextualization is a relatively new term, it refers to an ancient reality. From the very beginning God revealed himself through people's own languages and cultures, "translating" his good news in ways that people of every age and region would understand. In addition, God's people regularly expressed their worship and understanding of God through their own culture. These points have been highlighted by biblical scholarship, which has long noted the various ways the Bible, in addition to being God's revelation, is a cultural book. As evangelical biblical scholar Joel Green notes, "…the biblical texts did not fall out of the sky; they are not facsimiles from

heaven, but arose in particular times and places in response to particular situations."[1] A biblical understanding of contextualization begins with the realization that the biblical accounts and literature that reveal God to us are themselves reflective of cultural contexts and interactions.

Examples of this abound throughout the Old and New Testaments. For instance, many scholars have noted the similarities between the language and forms of the ancient Near East suzerain treaties and the covenant that God makes with Israel at Sinai in Exodus 20-23 and Deuteronomy.[2] In other words, as Hafemann has noted, "biblical covenants did not arise in a vacuum."[3] Rather, when God revealed himself and sought to establish a covenant with Israel, he did so using treaty language common at that time. As another example, when God in Genesis 15:7-18 affirms his promise that Abram's descendants would indeed inherit the land of Canaan, God symbolically moves down an aisle of split animal carcasses. Though strange to those of us unfamiliar with ancient Near Eastern culture, Abraham would have recognized this as a royal land grant covenant, commonly used among kings and leaders in the societies of his day.[4]

The examples of contextualization continue in the New Testament. The Gospels reveal how Jesus contextualized his teachings on the Kingdom of God according to his first century Jewish cultural, religious, and agricultural context. Some narratives, such as some of the parables, are so contextualized that their true meanings only become evident when we study and understand the cultural context they reflect.

Though Jesus' teachings reflect his Jewish context, the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles show how early followers of Christ contextualized their messages for other contexts. For example, Paul's speeches in Lystra and Athens in Acts 14 and 17 demonstrates the ways he interprets the work of God via the stories and ideas of non-Jewish people. In Lystra Paul does not talk about Jewish prophets and their messages – his common theme and starting point for Jewish audiences. Instead he appeals to the Lystrans' understanding of a God who created all things and continues to direct nature and sustain life. In Athens Paul uses the words of local poets and philosophers to further characterize the Athenians' "unknown god" and introduce them to Jesus and his resurrection. Here again Paul foregoes discussion about Jewish patriarchs, prophets, or other concepts he would use with a Jewish audience but that would be confusing to a non-Jewish audience.

From these brief examples it is evident that there has never been and never could be an "un-contextualized" gospel message. God, the ultimate "contextualizer," has always valued and revealed himself through peoples' cultures, and people have always used their cultural and material resources to make sense of and worship God.

What, however, are the limits and potential dangers of contextualization? How does one intentionally and responsibly contextualize the gospel in a new context? These are the questions that have occupied the contemporary discussions of contextualization.

## History of a Concept

Though, as we have seen, contextualization has always been an inherent component of God's revelation, the term itself is relatively recent. When first introduced in 1972, the term *contextualization* was presented as an alternative to terms such as *adaptation* and *indigenization.* Many missiologists felt that these latter terms referred to small and relatively simple changes that western missionaries made to aspects of the Christian faith. Contextualization, however, referred to a deeper process and denoted the ways a holistic gospel needed to engage the cultural, economic and political categories of a people. Though debated and defined in various ways, evangelical missiologists now generally agree that contextualization refers to "the process whereby Christians adapt the whole of the Christian faith (forms, content, and praxis) in diverse cultural settings."[5]

Contextualization highlights and celebrates one of the greatest strengths of Christian mission – the reality that the gospel can be translated and communicated to every culture in the world. But why, then, has this become such a crucial, and even controversial, topic? The irony and reality is that, in the history of the Christian church and mission, the Christian faith often became *so* contextualized that Christians could see no distinction between their faith and culture. Thus, when Catholic and Protestant mission work increased dramatically in the nineteenth century, missionaries could rarely, and only with difficulty, separate aspects of their culture from their faith. The superiority of the Christian faith, so they felt, could be seen in the superiority of European culture, education, technology, political rule, etc. Thus, to bring Christianity to a new culture meant bringing the mix of Europe's faith, culture, technology, etc.

Two important developments paved the way for a different way of thinking about culture and context. First, in the nineteenth century, missionaries started employing the "three-self principle." Introduced almost simultaneously by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, the principle stated that local churches should be encouraged to become self-governing (with their own leadership), self-financing (from within their own churches) and self-reproducing (starting new churches without outside help).[6] As missionaries considered how to help and/or allow local churches to become self-sufficient, they also recognized the need for structures, leadership,

architecture, and even teaching and theology to become "indigenized" and adapted to local cultures.

But the three-self principle did not always employ a deeper understanding of culture and context. A second development that helped missionaries better understand this came in the mid and later twentieth century via missiologists who studied cultural anthropology and linguistics. Bible translators such as Kenneth L. Pike and Eugene A. Nida were the pioneers of this movement, arguing that missionaries should study other peoples' cultures and consider ways the Christian faith could be dynamically expressed through culture.[7] Other missionaries followed, studying cultural anthropology and publishing their insights in books and a new journal, aptly named *Practical Anthropology* (later renamed *Missiology)*. Thus, many missionaries trained in the fifties and sixties learned anthropological skills such as participant observation, emphasized the importance of the "insider's" view of culture (the "emic" view) and began assessing mission work through new lenses.

Two important contributors to contextualization, both Mennonite Brethren, were trained and began their work during this time. The first of these, Jacob A. Loewen, was a MB missiologist from British Columbia, Canada. Loewen served as a missionary in Latin America, studied linguistics and anthropology, and wrote extensively in *Practical Anthropology* on missions and cultural contexts in the sixties and beyond. One of Loewen's principal contributions regarded the need of western missionaries to value and learn from local peoples' cultures.[8]

The second MB missionary of this era to highlight the importance of cultural contexts and develop thinking on contextualization was Paul G. Hiebert. After serving as a missionary in India and studying cultural anthropology in the sixties, Hiebert went on to write and teach on aspects of culture, missions and theology. His writings became highly influential throughout the global mission community. Of particular significance was his concept of "critical contextualization," which will be discussed below. As will be seen, one of Hiebert's crucial points was the need for missionaries to value and seek to understand the local cultural context from the vantage point of the insider using the tools and conceptual frameworks of cultural anthropology.

These two broad developments – an understanding of the three-self principle and the study of local cultural contexts – set the stage for what eventually came to be known as contextualization. Though at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries some missionaries continued (and continue) to uncritically import aspects of western Christianity in their mission work, many others have realized that an understanding of contextualization can facilitate new and exciting movements for Christ, and insights into Christianity itself.

## Functions of Contextualization

Contextualization has occupied a particularly important place in cross-cultural mission and ministry since the eighties, generating lively discussion on its role and purpose. In this section I highlight three particular functions of contextualization as summarized by Darrell Whiteman.[9]

### Communication

The first and perhaps most discussed function of contextualization is to help people hear and understand the gospel. Contextualization seeks to create a good "bridge" for communication. On the surface, this would seem to be a straightforward task. However, as discussed above, the history of missions shows how too often the message of the gospel has included extraneous messages that caused confusion and distracted the audience away from the core message of Christ. This is not only a concern for "traditional" mission settings. Church leaders in the United States have also been distressed by how culturally disconnected churches have become from certain segments of society. As a response churches such as Saddleback and Willow Creek, and even the recent "emergent" churches, have intensely studied and adapted their message, music, architecture, and other things to the cultures of those to whom they seek to reach. Whereas some people wonder if these churches are *too* contextual (a critique I'll address below) the important point is that these leaders believe that a gap exists between the gospel message and people's cultural location. They might ask, "Do we require someone to learn our own language in order to hear a gospel message? We do not. Why, then, do we require people to learn a new (church) culture in order to hear the gospel?" Contextualization, then, is the process missionaries and pastors engage to "translate" a gospel message into new cultural "language" so that people have the chance to more clearly hear and respond. Some people in that culture may still find a contextualized message to be offensive and choose to reject it. However, if they do so we can be more assured that it is the message and not a foreign-looking culture that they find offensive.

A recent and somewhat controversial example of contextual communication is what many call "insider movements." This term refers to people from various religious backgrounds, such as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist communities, who follow Christ while remaining closely connected to or "inside" their non-Christian communities. They may thus identify themselves as Muslim followers of Christ, for example, but read and prioritize the Bible as God's Word and follow Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The reason they do so, they claim, is because many churches around them lack contextualization and require them to reject their culture and

family traditions more than the Bible actually requires. In fact, many people in their context like and could accept and follow Christ, but the local church offends them and keeps them from doing so. If the gospel were more carefully contextualized, they claim, the true message of Christ could be heard more clearly, leading more people to embrace and follow Christ. They would prefer Christ to be the stumbling block, not a Western-looking expression of Christianity.

These examples raise the question: at what point does the gospel become too contextualized? How do we make sure that contextualization doesn't alter core aspects of Christianity? This leads to the second function of contextualization.

### Critique

Contextualization does more than express the gospel in and through culture. There are also times where the gospel critiques and challenges culture. It is in these times that contextualization can be understood to have a role in subverting improper, unjust, or unrighteous cultural norms. Numerous biblical examples illustrate how a contextualized message both aids communication *and* profoundly transforms the cultural categories in question. For example, Jesus and the church in the book of Acts use meals as a context-appropriate forum to teach and disciple others (Luke 22:7-38; Acts 2:46-47). However, Jesus and the church also challenged the way in which Greco-Roman and Jewish leaders would sometimes use meals to reinforce status hierarchies (Luke 14:1-24; 22:24-27; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Jesus thus embraced and contextualized practices such as the meals, but then subverted ways in which those practices did not adhere to the reign of God. As another example, Paul was not content to let the Lystrans' or Athenians' understanding of the gods or God remain unchallenged. While he spoke of God using their cultural categories, he also pointed out areas where their categories were too limited, or even wrong (Acts 14:15; 17:29-31).

Jesus, the church and Paul were aware of and addressed unjust practices. In a similar way the church often has a prophetic role, called to stand up for the poor and oppressed and to challenge unrighteous and oppressive people and structures.[10] In such cases a contextualized message does not seek to reduce the offense of the gospel, but to make it clearer. As Whiteman states, "Good contextualization enables the church to offend people for the right reasons. Bad contextualization, or the lack of it altogether, offends them for the wrong reasons."[11]

### Creating Community

Finally, contextualization leads Christians to have a richer understanding of their faith and a deeper relationship with the global church. If we continue to use the

analogy of a communication bridge, contextualization allows for two-way traffic. That is, when we begin to interpret the gospel in light of another culture, we allow for the other culture to speak to us and to perhaps show us new things about our faith that were latent. Contextualization helps us see that the gospel is universal across all cultures *and* particular to specific cultures and contexts.[12] It helps Christians to not only celebrate the commonality they share with others in faith and belief, but to learn from the various perspectives that each offers.

I am regularly reminded of this when I travel or interact with Christians from contexts other than my own. Christian friends from India teach me how Christ offers hope to poor and oppressed people. Christians from Africa remind me of how the spiritual realm can and does impact the material world and how prayer can bring healing and deliverance. Some Native American Christians speak passionately about the ways God loves culture, including their indigenous cultures, and does not reject it as colonial American Christians have. These perspectives do not add to biblical revelation. Rather, these believers "see" and highlight truths that I, from my cultural perspective, may not always see or experience. When I hear them my Christian faith is enriched and our relationship is deepened.

## Principles of Contextualization

The above has shown that, at its heart, contextualization is a practice that seeks to keep Christianity faithful to its biblical essence while at the same time being "at home" in each and every culture in which it takes root. To do this missionary scholars over the last forty years have developed, with the help of biblical studies and anthropological insights, several important principles to guide the practice of contextualization. The following are some principles that missionaries have found particularly important and that can guide mission workers, particularly MBs and other evangelical Anabaptists.

### Biblical Revelation

Evangelicals, including evangelical Anabaptists and MBs, believe that contextualization should make biblical revelation central to its understanding. This has two components. The first is to affirm that the Bible itself is revealed in and through cultures. While some may see this as relativizing the biblical message, evangelical Anabaptists see this as evidence of the value God places on culture. As Hiebert asserts, God's revelation "is communicated by human cultures without losing its divine character."[13] This gives us courage that it is possible for the gospel to be expressed in every culture. The second component is that contextualization must be

congruent with the Bible. That is, any practice or doctrine needs to be measured "by the degree to which it faithfully reflects the meaning of the biblical text."[14]

### General Revelation

While the Bible is the central and normative authority in contextualization, God also reveals himself to people through creation and cultures. As I discussed above, for example, the apostle Paul himself modeled this in his interactions with the Lystrans and Athenians (Acts 14:17; 17:22-31). In recent decades evangelical missionaries such as Don Richardson have popularized the concept, discussing the ways God has placed "redemptive analogies" within cultures. These redemptive analogies, when discovered and interpreted by Christians, can help people understand the biblical revelation of Jesus and his salvation via one of their own cultural concepts or practices.[15]

### Insider Perspective

Evangelical training has often emphasized biblical studies, but has sometimes created a "gulf" between that and cultural knowledge.[16] As we saw above, however, many missionaries have recognized this and turned to cultural anthropology to help bridge this gap. One of the principal concepts that has emerged from this interaction is the need to understand the local cultural context from the vantage point of the insider. Too often outsiders make quick judgments of a cultural context or practice based on incomplete or inaccurate knowledge. Hiebert and others, however, recommend that missionaries temporarily suspend judgment as they seek to learn the logic and purpose of the practice in question. They should enter cultures as "learners" and remain as such, even when they eventually share the gospel in culturally appropriate ways.

### Holistic and Comprehensive

Once we begin to study and analyze cultures we realize just how complex they can be. Good contextualization should thus attempt to be comprehensive, taking into account the various aspects of culture that may be applicable in a situation. Scott Moreau, utilizing a scheme developed by comparative religious scholar Ninian Smart, argues that mission workers should be mindful of seven particular dimensions.[17]

1. *The Doctrinal/Philosophical Dimension*. Most societies have formalized philosophies, or ways of framing and thinking through problems. Contextualization needs to engage the philosophies and doctrines of a context.

2. *The Mythic or Narrative Dimension*. Myths, or cultural stories, whether true or legendary, carry important cultural messages and values. Thus Christians can

and should evaluate the proverbs, songs, stories, plays, etc. of a culture in light of biblical revelation, and seek to communicate the biblical narratives via the local culture's forms.

3. *The Ethical/Legal Dimension*. Every society has stated and unstated norms by which its members should live. Likewise, the Bible outlines ethics and commands. Thus believers in every context need to consider the various ways the Bible affirms, challenges and/or modifies the ethics of their culture.

4. *The Social or Organizational Dimension*. People often operate within various social groupings, including families, businesses, social organizations, religious organizations, and others. Each has their own forms of leadership and organization, and Christians can find ways to contextualize their own forms of community in light of these.

5. *The Ritual Dimension*. We can see rituals, broadly defined, at work in many different ways. We have initiations for particular stages of life or organizations and we mark these transitions through rituals, some of which are highly defined, such as marriage. We also mark the beginning and end of life with rituals. Christians need to consider their culture's rituals, whether religious, non-religious, or mixed, to see if and how biblical revelation might affirm or critique these, and to see how rituals may be modified to reflect biblical truths.

6. *The Experiential Dimension.* People in many cultures have and value experiences with the supernatural or divine. This could include healings, possession, prophecies, dreams, visions, etc. Such experiences need to be discussed and evaluated to find biblically-based and indigenously understandable ways to address them.

7. *The Material Dimension*. This area, which includes art, architecture, objects, and clothing, is probably what most mission workers think of in regards to contextualization. In what ways can the art forms, music genres, poetry, architecture, etc. reflect biblical truths? What categories do these occupy for people in their lives? These are exciting and sometimes challenging areas for mission workers to consider in contextualization.

### Critical Correlation

Once we learn about the dimensions of a context and its practices, how do we relate the gospel to it? Hiebert notes that missionaries have often gravitated towards one of two extremes. Some may reject the dimensions and practices of a culture wholesale and try to replace them with new "Christian" (often Western-Christian) practices. This often leads to a foreign-looking form of Christianity. Others may

completely accept the dimensions and practices and refuse to critique or change them. This can lead to a highly syncretized or inappropriately mixed hybrid of Christian and non-Christian religious beliefs. Hiebert, however, proposes a third way of "critical contextualization."[18] Recognizing that biblical revelation will both affirm and challenge aspects of the culture, the missionaries and local leaders 1) study the custom and context, 2) study the scriptural teaching on this aspect, 3) evaluate the custom in light of Scripture, 4) and create a new contextualized practice. The critical correlation of Scripture to culture privileges the role of Scripture, but also recognizes that a missionary, pastor, and/or church may see new lessons in Scripture as they study it in light of their culture.

**The Role of Locals**

Trained leaders, whether pastors or missionaries, are sometimes tempted to function as the contextualization experts and tell new believers what practices are culturally appropriate and inappropriate. However, leaders need to empower and trust the ability of the local church community to interpret Scripture and discern appropriate responses. Though missionaries may feel more trained and qualified in biblical exegesis and cultural analysis, it is ultimately the local church that needs to be empowered to discern together the Holy Spirit's guidance in their practices and teachings. It is perhaps no coincidence that two of the early missionary anthropologists to articulate this point were MBs, for whom the priesthood of all believers was an important value.[19]

**Role of Outsiders**

Though missionaries, particularly those who represent power structures, need to empower local believers to interpret Scripture and culture, missionaries still have an important role to play in contextualization. Sometimes local people have a difficult time seeing and analyzing their own culture. Also, church history shows that institutional and theological structures, once established, do not always adjust quickly to changing contexts and new insights. Christians may view changes within their culture as a threat, and are not always willing to adjust or contextualize to those changes. In these instances a humble and culturally knowledgeable outsider might be used to ask questions of local believers, helping them to think on and analyze their own context in new and critical ways.

## Conclusion

Contextualization has been and will continue to be a crucial issue for twenty-first century mission work. However, it is fitting to remember that contextualization

is more than a temporary strategy in missions. Revelation 7:9 shows us that, even in heaven, people will continue to be identified as coming from their own unique cultural contexts. When we contextualize the gospel and learn from the contextualized teaching of our brothers and sisters, we are preparing for the ultimate multicultural community experience ever, when the universal God will be worshipped by people from every tribe, tongue and language.

## Notes

[1] Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

[2] John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels in near Eastern Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 95-107.

[3] Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity,* ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 31.

[4] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 44; Brian K. Petersen, "A Brief Investigation of Old Testament Precursors to the Pauline Missiological Model of Cultural Adaptation," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 3 (2007).

[5] A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 46.

[6] R. Pierce Beaver, ed. *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); Max Warren, ed. *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

[7] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 9; Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper, 1960).

[8] Jacob A. Loewen, *The Christian Encounter with Culture* (Monrovia: World Vision International, 1967).

[9] Darrell Whiteman, "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005).

[10] Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 291-92.

[11] Whiteman, "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization," 55.

[12] A. Scott Moreau, "Contextualization: From an Adapted Message to an Adapted Life," in *The Changing Face of World Missions*, ed. Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van

Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 321.

13 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 33.

14 David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 201.

15 Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 67.

16 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 14; R. Daniel Shaw and Charles Edward van Engen, *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World: God's Truth or Hocus Pocus?*, ed. R. Daniel Shaw and Charles E. van Engen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 19.

17 Scott Moreau, "Contextualization That Is Comprehensive," *Missiology* 34, no. 3 (2006).

18 Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," (1987).

19 Loewen, *The Christian Encounter with Culture*; Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 191.

## Recommended Reading

Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Hesselgrave, David J., and Edward Rommen, eds. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. Foreword by George W. Peters. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.

Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.

Hiebert, Paul. "Critical Contextualization." *Missiology* 12 (1987): 287-96.

Moreau, A. Scott. *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012.

Shaw, R. Daniel, and Charles Edward van Engen, eds. *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World: God's Truth or Hocus Pocus?* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Whiteman, Darrell. "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization." In *Appropriate Christianity*, edited by Charles H. Kraft, 49-65. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005.

**Study Questions**

1. Reflect on the implications of the history of contextualization. If you are a member of the global North, how have you experienced or employed thinking that assumes your culture is synonymous with Christian values? If you are a member of the global South, how have you experienced that assumption impacting you; or where have you made your own assumptions that your culture is synonymous with Christian values?

2. Consider people you believe are good "bridges" between gospel and culture. What can you learn from their approach? How do you achieve balance between "dressing up the gospel with cultural character" and "using the gospel to critique culture" (communication versus critique)?

3. Review the seven dimensions of reading culture by Ninian Smart. Which one(s) might be the most challenging for you? To what degree do all seven come into play as you address your contextualizing challenges?

# 19 Engaging Worldviews[1]

Pierre Gilbert

## Introduction

The work of the missionary consists in facilitating the spiritual birth of new followers of Christ and making disciples out of them.[2] Both tasks involve an element of "science" and mystery.

Announcing the gospel and bringing a person to a point of decision involves the deployment of a sophisticated set of skills, from exegeting a culture, nurturing relationships, building bridges between individuals and the gospel,[3] to leading that person into an encounter with Jesus Christ. A significant deficiency in any one of these steps has the potential to impede the missionary's effectiveness.

The missionary enterprise also entails some elements of mystery. Chief among these is human free will, which denotes an individual's ability to accept or reject the invitation to enter into a relationship with Christ.[4] Another factor is the Holy Spirit, who alone can trigger a sense of need and openness to the person of Christ. Without the intervention of the Spirit and a constant reliance on him, the work of the missionary will come to naught (John 15:26-27; 16:8-11.13).

The same thing holds true for discipleship. It is science in that it entails the transmission of a certain kind of information. It is mystery in that discipleship is about spiritual transformation, which is also contingent on the intervention of the Spirit and the individual's willingness to be transformed.

The transmission of propositional truth, which encompasses Christian doctrine and the basic elements of the biblical worldview, is critical to both outreach and discipleship.[5] While there is no radical dichotomy between Christian doctrine and those concepts that are more germane to a discussion of worldview, for the purposes of this essay, I will focus on the latter. As a starting point for this discussion, I will explore the concept of a biblical worldview by examining the creation account attested in Genesis 1-3.[6] I will subsequently offer some elements of reflection for

the possible relevance of this discussion, first for traditional cultures where belief in magic and spirits is intrinsic to the belief system, and, second, for cultures where modernity is prevalent.[7]

## What is a Worldview?[8]

The Anabaptist missiologist Paul Hiebert defines worldview as the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives."[9] Elsewhere, he adds,

> A worldview is the most fundamental and encompassing view of reality shared by a people in a common culture. It is their mental picture of reality that "makes sense" of the world around them. This worldview is based on foundational assumptions about the nature of reality, the "givens" of life, and clothes these belief systems with an aura of certainty that this is, in fact, the way reality is. To question worldviews is to challenge the very foundations of life, and people resist such challenges with deep emotional reactions. There are few human fears greater than a loss of a sense of order and meaning. People are willing to die for their beliefs if these beliefs make their deaths meaningful."[10]

A worldview constitutes—consciously or unconsciously—a particular perception of reality, especially as it pertains to the divine, humanity, the universe, and the relationship between all three spheres. While a worldview, by definition, will be coherent, self-validating and self-consistent, whether or not it actually reflects reality is another matter altogether. Suffice it to say that any particular worldview is reality for those who embrace it. This is why, as Hiebert intimates, discussions involving worldview issues can be so emotionally intense. This also explains why the worst military conflicts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have and will continue to be rooted in ideological imperatives.

Understanding someone else's view of reality is much more than identifying a list of isolated beliefs. It is an attempt at apprehending how these beliefs interact with each other in order to form a system. In that respect, it would be a mistake to believe that a worldview is something that is always static. Because a worldview is the filter through which experience is interpreted, new phenomena may have a significant impact on how reality is defined. For missionaries, this observation is critical, for it implies that under certain circumstances, worldviews can be reshaped.[11] Conversion and genuine discipleship occur when an individual allows the biblical worldview to reengineer the structural pillars of his or her perception of reality.

## A Biblical Worldview?

### The Nature of Genesis 1-3

Some will no doubt balk at the notion of a coherent biblical worldview.[12] Can we not concoct any worldview we wish by carefully selecting passages that support our preconceptions and preferences? Such an objection is valid and deserves to be addressed. One could, for instance, use the prologue of the book of Job to postulate a universe in which God and Satan routinely meet to discuss the moral virtues of exceptional men and women only to devise painful ways to test their integrity. In such a universe, needless to say, it is highly advisable to maintain a low profile, if only to avoid becoming the target of a divine wager.

While all Scripture is inspired by God and authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16), individual texts address a variety of issues. Moreover, biblical texts must be interpreted in the light of their literary specificity.[13] This implies that any investigation must first begin with texts that address the issue at hand. Identifying such primary texts provides a control factor and a common point of reference for further discussion.

It is my contention that the first three chapters of Genesis offer the best starting point in terms of outlining a biblical worldview.[14] Genesis 1-3, by virtue of its literary genre as a creation narrative, was designed to provide the blueprint of a new worldview. Its primary purpose was to propose an alternative to the Canaanite/Mesopotamian[15] worldview the Israelites had absorbed over 400 years of captivity in Egypt.[16] It should be further noted that the creation account was in fact a polemic text. It was designed to undermine the recipients' worldview and provide them with one that would reflect a more accurate portrayal of reality.[17]

In a manner consistent with a creation story, Genesis 1-3 is specific about issues that are central to worldview and silent on peripheral matters. For instance, it contains no explicit information about the sacrificial system as such, and no allusions to the ritual, sacrificial, or moral laws found in Leviticus and Numbers. There are no exhortations to show mercy and compassion to the poor and the vulnerable. It's not that the type of stipulations associated with the covenant are irrelevant; it's just that these issues more precisely represent derivative trajectories actualized in the specific context of Israel's history. While many of the statements found in the narrative open new horizons on a whole array of social issues, there are few explicit extrapolations as such. The creation narrative was designed to offer critical insights into the basic architecture of reality.

In addition to providing the theological DNA for the rest of Scripture, the creation account was intended to provide the ideological foundation needed to enable the Hebrews to shift successfully from Baalism to Yahwism. As such, it follows that

this foundational text may also represent the most adequate basis to ensure a robust transition from paganism, whatever form it may take, to Christianity!

Ensuring an effective transformation of worldview is one of the most critical issues missionaries face. At the risk of being misunderstood, I would venture to say, in the spirit of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), that conversion is but a first step; new believers must be equipped to resist the temptation to re-embrace their former worldview or live in a syncretistic system.[18]

As Paul Hiebert cautions, new converts must avoid two pitfalls. The first is secularism, which would manifest itself in a growing disregard for the spiritual dimension of the Christian life. The second would involve an inadvertent return to a Christianized form of animism "in which spirits and magic are used to explain everything."[19] A contextualized and thorough integration of the creation account may in fact represent the most effective way of ensuring that the conversion process reaches into the very DNA of a person's identity, contributing thereby to stabilizing and reinforcing the new convert's commitment to Christ.

### An Alternative Worldview

If we can safely assume that the creation story was designed to provide an alternative worldview, it might prove helpful to identify what it was competing with. From the evidence we can gather from the book of Exodus, it appears the Hebrew slaves had, in nearly 400 years of slavery in Egypt, absorbed the major elements of the Mesopotamian cosmology.[20] While many aspects of the Mesopotamian worldview can be gleaned from a variety of sources representing various literary genres, they can most readily be identified from ancient mythology.

The most widely-known ancient Near Eastern myths are the Atrahasis and the Enuma Elish.[21] These stories teach that the universe was created in the context of conflict, war, and violence. Human beings were conceived in order to be slaves in the service of the gods. They had no inherent sense of identity beyond the purpose for which they had been created. They were born slaves and would die as such. The gods were fundamentally evil and unpredictable. Human existence was characterized by uncertainty and fear; there was hope neither in this life nor in the one to come. Men and women had no intrinsic sense of dignity and worth. The life of the average Mesopotamian was devoid of ultimate significance.

Ancients lived in a world where there was little intersection between human and divine justice. Mesopotamians were cosmic orphans who had no one to appeal to. They constantly sought to appease the gods. If calamity struck a man, it was assumed that a god had been offended, or that a demon had been summoned against him.

Not only would he be ignorant of the identity of the god he had offended, he would completely be in the dark with respect to the nature of the offense itself. With a notion of justice that had little commonality with the more fluid and ever-shifting "justice" of the gods, such a man lived in a world devoid of universal moral rules. His only hope to live an uneventful life was to remain off the gods' "radar."

Human beings were the helpless victims of divine cosmic forces. Overwhelming powers determined their past, their present, and would inexorably shape their future. Men and women were entirely dependent on diviners and other such "spiritual" specialists to discover the ever-elusive will of the gods and to protect themselves against their wrath.[22]

This, in a nutshell, describes what Israel's neighbors believed. And this is the belief system the Hebrews themselves came to assimilate during their stay in Egypt. The Genesis creation account was designed to provide a radically different and revolutionary alternative to this particular portrayal of reality.

## Blueprint of a Biblical Worldview

### A Revolutionary Vision of the World

The biblical creation story represents one of the most remarkable texts ever to emerge from the ancient world, and the worldview it embodies is unlike anything else.[23] As a creation account, it is intended to broadcast a number of foundational concepts about the essence of reality, particularly as it pertains to God, humanity, and the universe. Moreover—and in this lies the true significance of this text—not only is it foundational, it is also profoundly subversive of some of the most disturbing characteristics of human culture. Its teachings are intended to act as an acid on the structures of dehumanization and exploitation that all human societies inevitably create and reproduce with every new generation. In that sense, it is indeed *good news*.

While a detailed analysis of Genesis 1-3 is clearly beyond the bounds of this essay, I will nevertheless highlight some of the most important concepts these chapters offer. As a starting point, I will examine two of the story's most seminal intuitions. I will then provide a summary of its major themes and outline some of its theological implications.

### The Demythologization of the Universe: Only One God

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1).[24] This text states that there is only one God, and that he created the entire universe.[25] This deceptively simple statement contains the seeds of the eventual demise of the

entire Mesopotamian mythical universe. It is the bell toll that marked the end of the age of the gods and the beginning of the age of men. Genesis 1:1 affirms the absolute sovereignty of God over creation and distinguishes the person of God from the created order.

One of the greatest theological innovations offered in Genesis 1:3-25 is the proclamation that the universe is "object" and not "subject." Whereas Mesopotamian cosmology portrays the physical universe as the medium of divine essence, in the creation account, the physical universe is purged of any consciousness whatsoever. By repositioning humanity over nature (Gen 1:27-28), the narrative sets the stage for humanity to take its rightful place in the universe: Not as slaves of divine cosmic powers, but as Yahweh's ruling representatives over the entire world (see also Psalm 8).

By its repeated allusions to the goodness of creation, the author declares that humanity lives in a "friendly" universe. This is not to suggest that the world is devoid of challenges (the text, after all, locates its audience in a fallen world). It is, however, a universe in which humans no longer need to fear (or covet!) supernatural powers and those who claim to wield them.

In the very process of eliminating the foundation for magic—by erasing the very existence of the gods on whom the powers of magic depended—this text had a surprising side effect. It set into motion the conditions that would eventually redefine humanity's relationship to the physical world and establish the foundation for the development of science as we understand it.[26]

As long as people believe that the conditions necessary to sustain human life are governed by divine interventions contingent on cultic rituals, as was the case in the ancient Near East and is still prevalent in traditional societies, they will primarily look to ritual to solve the crises that regularly threaten their existence. If, however, there is an authoritative text that eliminates the cosmic space necessary to support belief systems, human beings can acquire a new horizon to negotiate reality. They are free to navigate the challenges of human existence, not by appealing to sacred rituals and magic, but by exploiting the greatest God-given resource on earth: the three-pound brain.[27]

The notion that magic could mysteriously influence human life was one of the commonly-held beliefs the creation account was designed to undermine. In this respect, the text could not have been more explicit. By draining the cosmos of its divine essence, the narrative reveals magic for what it is: a pure fantasy of the mind. It is the formal proclamation that in effect, "A piece of wood is only and always a piece of wood!"

The prophet Isaiah's blunt indictment of idolatry in 44:6-19 represents a powerful contextualization of Genesis 1. Creation theology is also at the core of Paul's confident response to the Corinthians' concerns about eating meats sacrificed to idols/demons in 1 Corinthians 8-10 (see especially 1 Cor. 8:4-6 and 10:25-26). While Paul acknowledges the pervasiveness of the pagan ideology that animates the Corinthians, showing particular concern for the conscience issues with which some of the weaker Christians are struggling, he leaves no room for the reality of magic or attributing to demons effective power over the physical universe. When it comes to these evil entities, the primary concern consistently orbits around the question of allegiance and loyalty (1 Cor. 10:20-22).

### The Nature of Humanity: In God's Image

According to Genesis 1, the creation of the universe is the outcome of God's peaceful and benevolent intent. There is no hint whatsoever of divine conflict, war, or violence directed at humanity. The world is the expression of God's goodness towards the human race and is created for its benefit. Human beings are not created to serve as slaves, but to live as God's representatives (Gen. 1:26-31) and partners in shaping and managing the world (Gen. 2:15-17).

Because they are made in the image of God, human beings are endowed with intrinsic value and dignity (see Gen. 9:6). They are not portrayed as the helpless victims of cosmic powers that inexorably shape their destiny. In this respect, the account of the Fall (Gen. 3:1-24) confirms the intuition inherent to the concept of the image of God. Not only does this text proclaim humanity's freedom and ability to shape its future, but by holding men and women accountable for their actions, it also affirms human dignity and moral responsibility. Human destiny is not written in the stars or the entrails of animals but lies squarely in our hands.

## Summary

The following statements provide a concise summary of some of the basic concepts and implications of the worldview outlined in the creation account.[28]

1. The universe is created good by a benevolent God. It is ordered, predictable, and meaningful. The environment is not something to fear but the very expression of divine generosity (Gen. 1:1-31).

2. The creation of the universe has its origin in the intention of a good God and not in a   primordial violent cosmic conflict (Gen. 1:1-2).

3. Human beings are assigned intrinsic value and dignity (Gen. 1:26-30).[29]

4. Human beings are endowed with free will, an attribute that finds its ultimate expression in the context of their relationship with God (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:15-14; 3:1-24).

5. Human beings are accountable for their actions (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-24).[30]

6. Human fate is in the hands of God, but also in our capacity to choose that which leads to life or death (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-24).

7. While the creation story recognizes the reality of a multiplicity of factors involved in the process that leads to human disobedience (the serpent and Eve's own impulses, for instance—see Gen. 3:1-6), moral responsibility is ultimately attributed to humans. The emergence of sin in history is attributed to human free will.

8. While the act of disobedience described in Genesis 3:1-7 deeply affects every dimension of human existence, by assigning clear moral responsibility to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:17; 3:1-24) and later to Cain (4:6-12) for their actions, the narrative reminds the reader that sin does not entirely rob men and women of the dignity that derives from being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; see also Gen. 9:6 and Psalm 8), and of their ability to choose God.[31]

9. This is not to say that we stand in a neutral position with respect to choosing God and making moral choices. Scripture does indeed point to sin as something that is not simply the outcome of our environment. Genesis 2:17 and 3:7-22 describe sin as a principle that is also ontological, which, following the first act of human disobedience, has infected the very core of human nature, leaving in its wake a fundamental hostility towards God in the human heart (Matt. 15:19; Rom. 3:9-20; Col. 1:21; etc.). Sin is a structural deficiency that forever finds expression in the universal human impulse to worship death and create cultures of death. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit is involved in convicting all men and women of sin and attracting them to the person of Christ (John 16:5-11; 1 Cor. 6:12-13; see also John 12:32).

10. Human beings are called to embrace life (Gen. 1:28; 2:15-17).

11. Human beings do not discern that which is true from false by consulting some guru, drawing a precise list of do's and don'ts, engaging in a cultic ritual, appealing to magic, or immersing themselves in esoteric experiences. Discerning the true from the false is, more often than not, the result of an intentional, conscious, and reasonable process that begins with and is constantly informed by a careful assessment of God's word (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-24).

12. Human beings have the ability to meet the challenges of human existence through the exercise of reason, human ingenuity, and hard work (Gen. 2:19; 3:19).

13. Human beings are created to be in partnership with God. Humanity is given the mandate to be God's "image," i.e., to represent the sovereign God on the earth (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:15-17). This underlines God's willingness to trust men and women. The concept of partnership also entails the expectation that humans will consult God in the course of fulfilling their tasks. The notion of partnership is fundamental to humanity's relationship with God and challenges any secular notion of autonomy.

## Mission, Culture, and Worldview: A Strategic Road Map

At this point, I would like to explore how the notion of worldview can be integrated into the missional enterprise.

First, missionaries should never underestimate the importance of giving sustained attention to the question of worldview in their outreach efforts. I cannot overemphasize the importance of first engaging in this exercise independently of cultural sensibilities. While analytical work *and* cultural respect are both essential aspects of mission, it is imperative to maintain a clear distinction between critical analysis and outreach strategies. The former is a reflective exercise that offers a basic articulation of the biblical worldview, analyzes the culture the missionary seeks to reach, and compares the two in order to highlight similarities and differences. The latter focuses on ascertaining the best strategy to engage the culture with the claims of Christ. The missionary's foremost responsibility is to discern biblical truth and confront the world with its claims. When we fail to fulfill this task, there is no longer any compelling purpose for Christian mission. We become just one more voice in the cacophony of postmodernity.[32]

Second, missionaries must choose to trust in the most basic concepts of the biblical worldview. The relationship between exegesis and biblical theology, on the one hand, and "practice,"[33] on the other, needs to be as linear as possible. When an engineer builds a bridge, there is no doubt as to the load the structure can carry; the process is based on scientific principles that have proven to be dependable and trusted. Missionaries would do well to position their praxis in a similar framework relative to Scripture.[34]

## Worldview as a Bridge to the Gospel

The gospel is God's answer to humanity's sinful condition and need for forgiveness.[35] Unfortunately, points of contacts needed to carry the most critical concepts of the Christian faith are not always readily available. Take the concept of sin for instance. C. S. Lewis once noted that ancient pagans did not need to be

convicted of sin. It was inherent to their understanding of the gods and who they were.[36] That is unfortunately not the case in much of the world today. In fact, one of the greatest challenges Christians face, particularly so where secular humanism is predominant, resides in the near-absence of a clear concept of moral sin on which to peg the invitation to repent.

Reflecting on a culture's worldview may provide the clues needed to identify how *sin* (not just sins) exhibits itself. If, as Genesis 3:8-24 suggests, sin is the expression of the principle of death that is now inherent to human nature, an analysis of worldview may in fact reveal how this principle is working itself out in any given culture.

When Baptist missionary William Carey went to India, he was confronted by the rite of Sati, a custom that forced the self-immolation of the widow on her husband's funeral pyre. Carey knew that this barbaric ritual could not be eliminated by simply appealing to human compassion.[37] The missionary intuitively grasped that in order to eradicate the practice, he needed to understand and address Hindu mythology. Furthermore, he believed that making Hindu traditional texts available to a broader segment of the population would build popular support against the custom. This conviction was one of the major catalysts behind Carey's passion for literacy, the dissemination of Hindu sacred writings, and Bible translation.

**William Carey**

In the same vein, few comprehend the full significance of what the great 19th Century abolitionist, William Wilberforce, accomplished. Eric Metaxas, the author of *Amazing Grace*, superbly encapsulates the reformer's magnificent achievement:

> To fathom the magnitude of what Wilberforce did we have to see that the "disease" he vanquished forever was actually neither the slave trade nor slavery. Slavery still exists around the world today, in such measure as we can hardly fathom. What Wilberforce vanquished was something even worse than slavery, something that was much more fundamental and can hardly be seen from where we stand today: he vanquished the very mind-set that made slavery acceptable and allowed it to survive and thrive for millennia. He destroyed an entire way of seeing the world, one that had held sway from the beginning of history, and he replaced it with another way of seeing the world. Included in the old way of seeing things was the idea that the evil of slavery was good. Wilberforce murdered that old way of seeing things, and so the idea that slavery was good died along with it.

Even though slavery continues to exist here and there, the idea that it is good is dead. The idea that it is inextricably intertwined with human civilization, and part of the way things are supposed to be, and economically necessary and morally defensible, is gone. Because the entire mindset that supported it is gone.

Wilberforce overturned not just European civilization's view of slavery but its view of almost everything in the human sphere; and that is why it's nearly impossible to do justice to the enormity of his accomplishment; it was nothing less than a fundamental and important shift in human consciousness.[38]

The significance of Wilberforce's achievement should not be lost on anyone. He managed to knock an entire wall out of a deeply ingrained worldview and replace it with a new one!

## Conclusion

The study of worldview is to be an exercise where the basic features of a people's understanding of reality are contrasted to the biblical worldview and are effectively challenged in those spheres where the culture most glaringly gives expression to the principle of death that has been part of human nature since the Fall.

In regard to traditional cultures, it will come as no surprise to learn, as Hiebert once observed, that magic and the occult are a source of much vexation for missionaries, who for the most part, tend to have an equivocal stance towards those practices and their underlying assumptions.[39]

While there is still much debate about the extent of occult and demonic influence and power, I maintain that the missionary's primary task, with respect to addressing the predominant worldview,[40] is to draw attention to the portrait of the universe offered in Genesis 1-3. Let people become familiar with the creation account for themselves and let them arrive at their own conclusions! Such an approach would truly contrast with the kind of religious colonialism in which Western missionaries have been vehemently accused to participate (I would add often unfairly so).[41]

With respect to Western culture, while some of the issues are similar to those found in traditional cultures,[42] they find their focus elsewhere. The principle of death that is now an intrinsic part of human nature manifests itself in at least three ways. First, the notion of absolute truth, particularly as it pertains to morality and religious claims, is all but completely eroded. This situation is sadly sowing the seeds of ideological and political totalitarianism.[43] Second, the demise of the Judeo-Christian tradition is giving birth to a terrible erosion of the sanctity of life and a

rapid loss of confidence in the three-pound brain's ability to meet the challenges of human existence.[44] The global consensus with respect to abortion as the great problem-solver is evidence of the former, and radical environmentalism's perception of humans as an out-of-control evolutionary aberration that threatens to destroy the planet underlines the latter.

It is also incumbent on missionaries working in a secular environment to investigate the mythology of their culture. In that respect, evolutionism (or Darwinism as some prefer to put it),[45] which should be distinguished from the *theory* of evolution, virtually functions as a modern myth[46] and can be rightly identified as one of the most powerful factors in the rapid erosion of the notion of human dignity.[47]

Regardless of the culture context, men and women all have one thing in common: they consistently display an innate hostility towards the living God (Matt. 15:19; Col. 1:21).[48] One of the direst consequences of this reality is ideological. In a dazzling display of insight into human nature and history, C. S. Lewis once observed that left to themselves, human beings will naturally gravitate towards pantheism, a belief system the great Christian apologist aptly singled out as the "permanent natural bent of the human mind."[49]

If the propensity towards pantheism is easy enough to detect in traditional cultures, it is no less real in countries where modernity has provided the dominant worldview. One need only think of the rise of belief in the supernatural and the collapse of the ontological distinction between humans and nature.

As Western society increasingly shuns the Judeo-Christian worldview to embrace ever-new versions of pantheism, missionaries have an extraordinary opportunity to challenge a resurging ancient ideology that will only leave death and chaos if unopposed. If Lewis was right and pantheism has "in the long run, only one really formidable opponent—namely Christianity,"[50] then it is incumbent on those who are on the frontlines of the Church's outreach to challenge it by confidently putting on display the portrait of reality found in the Genesis creation account. In so doing, they will not only contribute to the welfare of the culture, but will also be laying a more solid theological foundation to support genuine conversions to Christ and to resist syncretistic impulses thereafter (Col. 1:15-20).

## Notes

[1] Revised from the previously published article, "The Missional Relevance of Genesis 1–3," by Pierre Gilbert, *Direction* (Vol. 43 No. 1), Spring 2014.

[2] While I do not wish to create an artificial dichotomy between conversion and discipleship, in Anabaptism, there has been an unfortunate tendency for the latter to eclipse the former. As C. Arnold Snyder aptly observes, "discipleship

cannot constitute the all-encompassing characterization of the Christian life or, more precisely, its absolute point of departure. The question as to how one is born into the family of God must be asked" ("Bread, not Stone: Refocusing an Anabaptist Vision," *Vision* 13 [Spring 2012]: 64-73).

[3] The book of Ecclesiastes provides an excellent example of such an approach. For a detailed discussion, see Pierre Gilbert, "Fighting Fire with Fire: Divine Nihilism in Ecclesiastes," *Direction* 40 (2011), 65-79.

[4] The Apostle John's characterization of God as love (1 John 4:8) implies that God will never take anyone by force, love being the ultimate and absolute antithesis to coercion.

[5] The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview represents one of the more recent organizations to focus significant attention to this issue and to stress the importance of articulating a Christian worldview.

[6] I have become convinced that an initial focus on worldview may be critical in providing meaningful insights into a culture and facilitate the creation of significant bridges between it and the gospel.

[7] The intent of this discussion is primarily illustrative and suggestive. In the context of such an article, it is impossible to account for the full breadth of worldviews that characterize human societies and for the models of contextualization needed to make the elements of a biblical worldview relevant to them. For a more thorough treatment of these questions, see Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) and Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

[8] For a detailed definition of worldview, see James Sire, *The Universe Next Door,* 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004 [1988]). Hiebert offers a very insightful treatment of the notion of worldview in relationship to the missionary enterprise in his *Transforming Worldviews*, 13-30. See also Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

[9] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15.

[10] *Transforming Worldviews*, 84.

[11] This is particularly true when individuals are confronted with a fact that is so inconsistent with their understanding of reality that it forces a reassessment of their belief system. In such cases, they can either deny the reality of the phenomenon, live with an even higher degree of cognitive dissonance, or allow the new data to modify their worldview.

[12] The notion of a biblical worldview implies the presence of a theological center in both the Old and the New Testament, but scholars are not unanimous on this issue. Elmer Martens makes a persuasive case for the notion of a theological center in regards to the Old Testament in *God's Design*, 3rd ed. (North Richland

Hills: Bibal Press, 1998), 3-19. For an overview of the debate as it pertains to the Old Testament, see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 1-114. For a survey of the issues relative to New Testament theology, see I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17-48.

[13] See Grant Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 149-151; 153-260.

[14] With respect to the significance of the creation narrative, Wilbert R. Shenk's assessment of the text with respect to mission is worth mentioning: "The starting point for thinking about a biblical approach to strategy must be a consideration of God's missionary initiative. Genesis 1-3 forms a prolegomenon to the rest of scripture tying together creation, mission, and redemption" (*Changing Frontiers of Mission* [Orbis Books, 1999]), 105.

[15] I use "Canaanite" and "Mesopotamian" interchangeably, as the Mesopotamian culture was widely diffused in the west. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word books, 1987), xliv.

[16] For more details relative to the purpose of this text, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 60–63; Jean Bottéro, "Le Dieu de la bible," in *La plus belle histoire de Dieu: Qui est le Dieu de la bible?* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); *Naissance de Dieu: la Bible et l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). It should be noted that the majority of critical scholars assign a post-exilic date to Genesis 1–3, viewing any association with the Mosaic period as tenuous. Be that as it may, we need to remember that the dating of biblical texts is, at best, a very imprecise and subjective endeavor. On an early dating of the creation narrative, see K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 423-427.

[17] See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81–102 and Pierre Gilbert, *Demons, Lies & Shadows* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008), 45–50, 54.

[18] In this respect, the book of Hebrews represents an excellent example of an argument designed to persuade Jewish Christians to resist the temptation to go back to Judaism or integrate elements of their old belief system to their newly found faith in Christ.

[19] Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 200. First published in *Missiology: An International Review* 10, 1 (January 1982): 35-47.

[20] For more details, see Gilbert, *Demons*, 46-50.

[21] A Translation of these myths is found in James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University

Press, 1969). See also Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 2nd ed. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997 [1991], 9-18 (Enuma Elish), 31-40 (Atrahasis) and Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 228-277 (Enuma Elish) and 1-38 (Atrahasis).

[22] For a succinct summary of the Mesopotamian worldview, see Jean Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001). See also Gilbert, *Demons*, 50-53.

[23] See in particular Hasel, "Genesis Cosmology," 81-102. Kaufmann more broadly examines the unique character of Israelite religion in his book *The Religion of Israel.*

[24] Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version* (1984).

[25] The merism, "the heavens and the earth," is intended to be all inclusive (see Wenham, *Genesis*, 15).

[26] Christopher Kaiser writes: "An operational faith in God as creator was a vital factor in the development of all branches of science until the late eighteenth century." *Creation and the History of Science* (London: Marshall Pickering; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 273. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the development of science and belief in creation, see Stanley L. Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980), 112-141.

[27] This expression is borrowed from the French historian Pierre Chaunu.

[28] This summary also compares well with Walter Brueggemann's own summary of the worldview attested in Hebrew wisdom literature, which, to a great extent, appears to reflect creation theology. For more information, see *In Man We Trust* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1972), 13-28.

[29] Note the allusion to the image of God as a rationale against murder in Gen. 9:6.

[30] See also Gen. 4:6-7, where the notion of personal responsibility and accountability is applied to Cain.

[31] The calls and exhortations to choose God in the Torah (see for example, Exod. 20:1-17, 22-23; Deut. 26:16-27:8) and the Wisdom corpus (Prov. 1:8-19; 2:1-22; 3:1-18; etc.), the use of the curse motif and the repeated calls to repent found in the prophetic books (for more details, see Pierre Gilbert, "The Function of Imprecation in Israel's Eighth-Century Prophets," *Direction* 35 [2006]: 44-58), as well as the numerous New Testament appeals and exhortations to believe in Christ and remain faithful to him provide ample illustration of this affirmation (Matt. 19:16-30; 28:16-20; Mark 5:1-20; John 3:16; Acts 2:40-41; Rom. 1:16; 3:22; 6:12-14; 12:1-2; etc.).

[32] In this respect, we need to take to heart God's warning to Ezekiel: "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to

dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself" (Ezek. 33:8-9).

[33] I never feel entirely comfortable using the term "practical" to denote praxis. Whether it is explicitly formulated or not, ministry practices and skills always assume, require, and express a theoretical framework.

[34] Epistemologically, I realize that some of the readers may dismiss these comments as unbearably naïve. In this postmodern era, it is no longer fashionable to speak in terms of a body of truth that functions as an absolute point of reference. But, as with many other things, postmodernism will eventually prove to be another fad that will collapse under its own epistemological inner contradictions. Those who wish to pursue this further can consult Alvin Plantinga, "Christian Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century," in *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century,* ed. Sander Griffioen and Bert Balk (Kampen: Kok, 1995), 29-54.

[35] As Mark Baker demonstrates in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) and *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), the New Testament uses a multiplicity of images to parse out the meaning of the cross. While it is not my intent here to rehash the terms of the atonement debate, I do happen to side with those who believe, as the church has from the beginning, that the death of Christ was driven by an ontological necessity. At a most basic level, the biblical witness unequivocally links the death of Christ to an absolute justice imperative that is an integral part of God's very nature (see for instance Gal. 3:13; Mark 10:45; 14:36; 2 Cor. 5:21). For a succinct treatment of the contemporary terms of the debate, see N.T. Wright, *Justification* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2009).

[36] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996 [1940]), 48-62.

[37] In fact, it's surprising to see to what extent ideology will trump common notions of compassion under certain conditions. In a short article where he reflects on the one-child policy introduced by the Chinese government in 1978, Canadian journalist, Mark Steyn, offers a shocking example of the disastrous impact of totalitarian ideology on something as basic as motherly love in rural China in "'Throw it in a Stream'," *National Review Online*, February 25, 2010, accessed August 15, 2013, http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/195450/throw-it-stream-mark-steyn.

[38] William Wilberforce, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), xv.

[39] On this issue, see especially his seminal article: "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle."

[40] As the object of this paper is primarily focused on dealing with the question of worldview, I have purposely avoided addressing the issue of demon possession. I do, however, offer some concrete advice on how to deal with this phenomenon in *Demons*, 103-134.

[41] In this respect, Mark Andrew Ritchie has offered a devastating critique of the position that missionary activity has been fundamentally detrimental for traditional cultures. For more information, see his *Spirit of the Rainforest: A Yanomamö Shaman's Story,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Island Lake Press, 2000 [1996]).

[42] In western culture, belief in magic and superstition has historically manifested itself in an interest in the New Age Movement, and more recently in popular culture's renewed fascination with the supernatural (movies and books on the vampire theme being but one example).

[43] To paraphrase C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton, either we are all ruled by the law of God, or we will be subjected to the tyranny of a few powerful men. Lewis develops this theme at length in *The Abolition of Man*. (Harper San Francisco, 2001 [1944]. Chesterton examines this issue in *The Appetite of Tyranny* (West Valley City: Waking Lion Press, 2008 [1915]).

[44] The French quantitative historian, Pierre Chaunu, wrote extensively about the intrinsic value of human life and man's ability to meet the challenges of human existence without resorting to radical "solutions" such as state- sponsored population control mechanisms or abortion. See, for instance, *La mémoire et le sacré* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1978).

[45] Jaki writes: "Darwin's own admission, that the failure of geological research to yield the infinitely many fine gradations between past and present species as required by the theory … remains as relevant as ever. What most effectively gives away Darwinism is the almost mystical faith voiced by its supporters in facing up to the absence of evidence and even to the contrary evidence (Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator*, 120). With respect to Darwin's own assessment of the importance of the fossil record to confirm his theory, see *The Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (London: John Murray, 1876), 265.

[46] C. S. Lewis discusses at length the myth of evolutionism in "The Funeral of a Great Myth," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 82-93.

[47] Jaki provides an insightful explanation of the cause and effect relationship between the two: "Darwinism is a creed not only with scientists committed to document the all-purpose role of natural selection. It is a creed with masses of people who have at best a vague notion of the mechanism of evolution as proposed by Darwin, let alone as further complicated by his successors. Clearly, the appeal cannot be that of a scientific truth, but of a philosophical belief which is not difficult to identify. Darwinism is a belief in the meaninglessness of existence" (Jaki, *Cosmos and Creator,* 115).

[48] Empirically, this is probably best evidenced by humanity's propensity and never-ending impulse to wage war.

[49] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 101.

[50] Lewis, *Miracles*, 101.

## Recommended Reading

Gilbert, Pierre. *Demons, Lies & Shadow: A Plea for a Return to Text and Reason.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2008.

Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.

_____. *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World.* Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999.

_____. *Transforming Worldviews.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Hiebert, Paul G., and Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.

Hiebert, Paul G., R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou. *Understanding Folk Religion: Christian Response to Popular Religious Beliefs and Practices.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999.

Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Ryken, Philip Grahm. *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.

Sire, James. *The Universe Next Door.* 4th ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Walsch, Brian J., and J. Richard Middleton. *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

## Study Questions

1. Discuss Gilbert's assertion that discipling is both a "science in that it entails the transmission of a certain kind of information (and)... mystery in that discipleship is about spiritual transformation."

2. Do you agree with this statement: "the transmission of propositional truth, which encompasses Christian doctrine and the basic elements of the biblical worldview, is critical to both outreach and discipleship?" Why or why not?

3. Where does God's good news begin, in the creation account or at the cross? Explain.

# 20 Some Leaves are Kept for Later: Adventures in Missionary Anthropology

Phillip A. Bergen

"…I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some."[1]

One can do anthropology and not be a missionary, but one can't really be an effective missionary and not do anthropology. It can be argued that Paul was the first missionary anthropologist. Missionaries following Paul's example (seeking first to understand others—then to make Christ understandable to them), eventually helped to create the science of anthropology, and continue to influence it in fundamental ways.[2] Throughout the history of the Church, the greatest value of missionary anthropology remains the same: paving the way for the signs of new life in Christ to appear where they haven't been before. This is why anthropology is referred to as "the number one study for…missionaries."[3]

Having entered missionary service without first mastering much of what I share here, and therefore having had to learn it the hard way, it is with great humility that I share the following stories and advice. Realistically, there is too much to learn for

Phillip A. Bergen (B.A., Fresno Pacific University) with wife Carol have been MB missionaries in Burkina Faso since 1990. They are serving the Nanerige people group with Bible translation, literacy training, evangelism and church planting. Phillip recently published *Ye faabe: A day in the life of a Nanerige family* (Bergen Books, 2013).

any one person to be an expert in all the things that cross-cultural missionaries must attempt to do in order to take the Gospel into places where the Church doesn't yet exist. Yet with the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, very often, a little bit of advice can go a very long way in helping us to help others to join with and do what Christ asked: obey him.

## Communication

"The task of Christian missions is essentially one of communication…"[4]

The chief, from his strategic spot under the village party tree, saw the arrival of the visiting Canadians that he had been waiting for. Dusty from a morning of fieldwork, barefoot and in ragged work clothes, he broke with protocol and went to greet them before they had come to greet *him*. His gesture spoke volumes.

When I saw the chief coming, I wanted to explain to the visiting Canadians how much they were being honored. But before I could, their leader, also eager to accomplish *his* communication mission, seized the moment. After all, he had come a long way and had little time to waste. He was going to get to the bottom of what was really going on in the work. Without waiting on adequate introductions, the Canadian leader asked me to translate his words for the chief:

"So! What do you think of our guy here?" meaning me.

The question and its timing were jarringly inappropriate. Still, eager to honor my guests, I had to decide what to do about the culture-collision that was unfolding. Do I stop and explain to my guests where they are getting it wrong? Do I choose deception and change their words into other words that will go down better? Knowing the chief as I did, I decided to exegete the relational context for him, and share the guest's question. Producing a wry yet apologetic smile that I hoped would say, "Please forgive my people. They know not what they do as they communicate across cultures—but feel free to be yourself," I translated their words. With a twinkle in his eye, the chief instantly responded: *"Some leaves just fall, rot, are swept away, and we never think about them again."*

I chuckled. The chief grinned. Awed, but not astonished by his wisdom (he wasn't chief for nothing), I thanked him and then shared his words with the guests.

"What the heck!" one of them blurted. The rest sat stunned.

The chief, seeing their reactions, was satisfied. He would take no further steps to help them since he'd chosen his words carefully and had me to help the guests run to catch up. Taking the communication baton that had been silently passed to me, I told the Canadians that I had an idea what the chief meant, but in order to be sure

I would need to ask the chief a question. I first shared the following words with the Canadian visitors, and then, smiling, shared them with the chief:

> "Chief, are some leaves carefully picked, dried, and stored for use later as
> food and medicine?"
> A smile rippled across his face. "Of course," he said.

So how are you doing?  Ready to explain what the chief meant? Someone *was* ready to speak to the chief that day. Some others who wanted to communicate wouldn't be ready until they'd done a lot of work. That's the thing. As it has been said, "The message that really counts is the one received, not the one sent."[5] Knowing, when one sends a message, that it will be correctly understood, is the whole "ball game." People don't start winning at these games just because they want to.

As anthropologists know, the focus in establishing cross-cultural understanding is two-fold: first, collect accurate data[6] on the things that open the doors of understanding in a given culture and second, test the accuracy of that data by using it to build working relationships with other human beings. In my experience, I had an enormous relational advantage in doing this. I hadn't come just to gather data. I was there to offer people the chance to listen to Scripture in their own language. Agreeing with my goal, the chief hoped that I could learn his ways so that I could do this work—it was his intention to see that I succeed at it. Some leaves are kept for later.

The preparation needed to establish good communication for in-depth anthropological research and for mission work is basically the same. People who at first don't know each other must build a common frame of reference for their new relationship. From there, they can visualize the goal/destination of their sharing and come to a mutual understanding of how to reach the objective. The better this preliminary work of relational foundation-building is done, the better the work of learning to communicate goes. This work had been done between us missionaries and the key community people we lived with. As evidence, the chief himself had recently cut the ribbon opening the new Mennonite church building in his village. Now he was feeling free to talk "his way" to some of the people who had paid for the construction, confident that his words would be explained.

Here are some of the principles that had been followed to establish the kind of communication that was taking place in the above case:

1. *Start by explaining the hoped-for results of the work to responsible local people who can help it succeed.*[7] The chief had agreed to the missionary goal of delivering the highlights of the Word of God translated into the chief's own language. That's both how his relationship with the missionaries began, and how the covenant kept him at work helping them. In this way, something crucially important had

begun: reciprocity.[8] The chief and the missionaries were supplying vital things to each other as they were needed. Appreciation was expressed, and communications improved as this happened.

2. *Find a way to hear back from the receiving community what it thinks about the work's (and the missionaries') progress.* The receiving community needs to see sincerity, openness to admit inappropriate behavior, and the ability to learn and to change on the part of their guests. This kind of feedback was standard practice between the missionaries and the chief, and helped build the basis for the crucial establishment of trust in their relationships.[9]

3. *Researchers who are eager examples of life in Christ and happy to explain how they got that way run into fewer interpersonal roadblocks.*[10] The sincerity on the part of the missionaries helped disarm the healthy resistance to foreigners resulting from the fear of damage to the status quo that foreigners usually cause.

In Matthew 10:11-15, we hear Jesus advising those sent out to communicate Good News that if a community rejects them and their message—move on. In other words, he asked them to do some research into the situation—get good feedback from the receiving community as to the general receptivity to the goals of the project, and act on that information. Don't be afraid to do what Jesus said to do. *Use your goals to build a bridge into the life of the community.* Also important: discover as soon as possible whether you will be wasting your time. Nothing will help build the trust that is needed like transparency and integrity in your work—and vice-versa.

Back to the dried leaves: So what did the chief say to the Canadians with his metaphor? Let's see how much anthropological advice we can glean from the words of one community leader on the receiving end of mission:

**On carefully choosing one's words**. Having been abused, the chief's people know how to see it coming. People who are more interested in their own agenda than they are in being warm human beings are often at the front end of some effort to use power to take, rather than give, good things. With adequate respect for the sufferings that his people have already endured at the hands of bad people, a gentle riddle, the use of metaphor, and the patience to let it soak in are a noble invitation to the guests to slow down and try to find their better selves before the conversation, showing signs of going wrong, gets any worse. The chief believed in his guests and their objective enough to show them that patience.

**On humility**. People must fight corrosive pride all their lives. Those most worthy of respect will be astute enough to see through a bit of humorous irony aimed at helping them to win this inner battle. As long as the missionary (and his guests) is

easily teased, his pride is in check and he is still useful to the community. Smiling, when linked to yard sweepings, was a good sign that healthy humility was in action.

*On having fun*. Fearful people often stop thinking clearly and make regrettable mistakes. Irony is the mother of humor, and a bit of humor is what is needed at big moments to call people back from the brink of stress-induced blunders. So, comparing the missionary (and possibly the guest who asked the first question) to yard-sweepings is healthy fun. Strong people, the most useful kind who use their strength to help others, often turn big scary things into manageable, even entertaining, things by using humor to bring the right perspective to the moment.

*On asking a clarifying question*. In the chief's society, any important message will be given important feedback that shows exactly how the receiver understood both the message and any action that it suggests the hearer take. The missionary's response to the chief's use of metaphor was to correctly re-use it, thereby confirming in a way equally as subtle that full understanding had taken place. With his smile and his question, the missionary was suggesting that he and his guests would try to be the kind of leaves that one collects and uses. Some questions put others on the defensive. Some open up the relationship to go deeper. One must learn how to produce the right ones.

*On leaves.*  The chief's people are subsistence farmers and depend on leaves for food and medicine—knowing how best to preserve them for the difficult dry season when no fresh ones can be found. The local way to say, "medicate someone" is "use leaves." The very best leaves are not taken for granted, but picked, dried, and preserved. The chief sees the Word of God this way. The missionaries are helping him get the very best kind of stuff he can imagine. Consequently, both are worth caring for (God's Word and the missionaries). When challenging communication succeeds, it most often has a point to it. Both parties are getting something valuable from it.

A communication bridge had been built that was used that day between two groups of people. The bridge had been built from both ends—at the same time. Missionaries and local people had built it together. The ones who did the work were intent both on seeing reasons for hope found in God's Word, and on continually finding new reasons to *respect* each other.[11] Those are good reasons to invest in the work of communication.

## Stories of Power

Picture this: a child in your care suddenly collapses. It's a life-or-death moment. What do you do?

1. Kneel and pray. Then call others to do the same. That's all.

2. Call for emergency assistance. Try your first-aid skills while you wait.

3. Lift the child's shirt and look to see if the amulet of magic power you bought is still tied around the child's waist. Seeing that it's missing, quickly tie another on.

4. Panic. Able to think of nothing better, throw the child in the back of your pickup truck and tear off home diagonally across a bumpy cotton field  dumping sprinkler pipe along the way as you go since you forgot to unhitch the trailer you were pulling.[12]

This list is drawn from the actual experiences of people that I love. In each case, the child recovered and the caregiver's actions were credited with the child's survival. The common thread that ties these four episodes together is this: at the moment of crisis, none of the different caregivers imagined *not* doing what they *did* do when they *had to do something*. Watching what people actually do as they face life issues is the surest way of understanding what they believe.[13] Behind each person's actions was a story that explained what to do in order to have the power to stave off death. Whatever we do as missionaries to reach unreached people groups, we must gain access to these stories.

The story of power[14] that guided each caregiver's life was both shared with their community and so much a part of life that it went without saying. Since most anthropology is done by newly arrived outsiders, they tend to have a tough time getting to hear these stories. And since they barely speak the language (if at all; many researchers I have met hired a local translator), and since this thing we are looking at—people living inside their own stories of power—is so hard to see from outside people's heads, anthropologists use a technique called "participant observation"[15] to help unlock them. The idea is that by being there to see things happen, one can begin collecting specific, scientific data about who did what, when they did it, and under what circumstances. Over time, with enough of this kind of information, comparing it to the lives of other people who behave in similar ways in places where the inner stories of power are already known, the anthropologist can begin to build the details of the story in the target culture that explains why they do what they do. This process is similar to the way linguists deciphered a previously unknown writing system found together with two other known languages on the Rosetta Stone.[16] Data is gathered in order to do this, but remember the second task in doing good research: evaluating the accuracy of the data. We will never really understand the stories of power that guide people's lives until our understanding has been affirmed by our host community. Building an understanding of our goals when we build our foundations for communication helps enormously when we get to this stage of the work. Here

again, long-term missionaries tend to have advantages over short-term researchers. The first being the time needed to build relationships and learn the language; the second, the intentional nature of the receiving community's efforts to help. If the goal (in my case, sharing the Word in Nanerigé) is worth it, the right people tend to step up and help get the work done—even when it is difficult.

The single most effective way to help me change my life is to change my story of power. To do this, a new story, one adapted to my context so that I see how it affects me, needs to show me how to get better results for my efforts in life than my current story does. When it works for me, then it becomes a story that I can live in. God will prove himself credible to those who put his story into action by obeying his advice.[17] That's why we chose Isaiah 55:10-11 as the theme scripture for our work.  Like the rain that God sends, God's Word, when it arrives, always does the practical life-giving things that he sent it to do. You can count on this.

Jesus, knowing that the Kingdom of God was about to burst the banks of Jewish ethnic experience and swell to include families from every tribe, language and nation on earth, did and said some inexplicable things—at least to those who were there at the time. He knew the stories that his people were telling. And very often, he spoke right over them as if they hardly existed. Why? Because he knew that he had the credibility to speak. He also knew that God's story mattered more than popular opinion. Jesus, like the chief we met above, speaking from a position of credibility, was willing to throw stories out there and let people miss them. He knew his enigmatic statements would not be forgotten, but puzzled over until they were understood, because they came from *him*. In this way, Jesus communicated on multiple levels. It was a way to wake people up and get them moving in the right direction. Some of this will have to happen again wherever the Word of God enters for the first time. When people begin to struggle to understand Christ in the Bible, the Holy Spirit will show up and things will happen. When these special things happen, Jesus' stories begin to have power, and the stories of power that people were telling amongst themselves will begin to be forever changed.

## Culture

My fellow North American Anabaptist history students and I followed the post Sunday service crowd to the fellowship hall at the Singel Church in Amsterdam. We were there that day because it was the oldest Mennonite Church in the world at the time. But it was also decidedly Dutch. What *that* meant we were about to discover!

Entering, I noticed some of my friends stopped at the door—frozen—like deer in headlights. Local church members who had arrived before us were happily

bunching up in animated conversation, sipping wine, drinking beer and lighting up their cigarettes. Having grown up in a worldly environment, I passed an entertaining moment watching my fellow Mennonites, who hadn't, inch their way into the room, searching for something that could hold them there against the reverse-polar-magnetism of the forbidden elements. Maybe, somewhere, there was a dish of peanuts?

Alas, there were no refreshments that weren't on the sin list. The exodus of my comrades was about to begin. Wanting as I did for this intriguing moment to last, I gathered some of my buddies, broke the ice and engaged the nearest Dutch guy in conversation. After introductions, what else was there for us to discuss on a Sunday morning (it seemed reasonable to assume) but sports? I explained to the Dutch Mennonite man that we often rush home after church to "catch the game" on TV. "Are there any good sports on today?" I asked him.

His face clouded over. He put down his drink, crushed out his cigarette, crossed his arms and went to work, "I thought you said you were Mennonite. Are you telling me that you have televisions in your homes?" This moment was getting better all the time! Our new acquaintance had a lot to say about the evils of the media, and went ahead and said it.

Personally, though I experienced a feeling of guilt rising up in me as one by one the harsh details of sin-ridden TV were brought to mind, I loved every minute of that cross-cultural adventure. One Mennonite man's refreshment was another Mennonite man's sin. Think of it! And I did think of it. My thinking led me to the Bible where the question of what it took for Paul to turn his back on the Law in order to become a missionary to the Gentiles began to burst into living color. Neither cigarettes nor TV are specifically denounced in Scripture, but they were a big issue that Sunday. Upon reflection, I began to understand what it cost God's people to open their doors to the uncircumcised who were eating pork and shellfish. Scripture was clear on those issues—but then the gospel was too. Right from the beginning, Christians who were being used by God to "grow the Church" were special people who could tolerate ambiguity and separate their culture from the gospel, see it against the backdrop of the Old Testament, and then see God at work in people with whom they themselves had little in common—other than new life in the Spirit.

Christianity would have remained a Jewish sect if it had never done what the Spirit challenged us Mennonites at the Singel Church in Amsterdam to do—stop judging people based on their actions alone. One's missionary anthropology will be stunted until this transformation takes root. We must learn the difference between critiquing culture and judging people or we become a hindrance rather than a help to the spread of the gospel.

What we say about culture we can also say about people: though there is usually something lovable about each one, none are perfect. Cultures emerge to guide individuals through all of life's challenges together with the people who matter most to them. If we distinguish between rich and poor cultures by their ability to provide graceful solutions to life's many challenges (from what is good to drink, to what is good to watch—for example), we see that some of the world's poorest people live in the richest of cultures, and some of the world's richest people live in cultures that are so impoverished that most of life's major challenges and transitions are marked by trauma. As people try to make their lives better, they develop cultures. Then their cultures develop (or inhibit) them.

With this in mind, culture can be described as the prevailing attitudes and practices resulting from the quest for quality that we go on together with those who matter to us. Culture aims for what's best, but makes room for compromise. All of us, together with our people, in order to find some degree of peace in a deadly world, set up camp on all of the important issues of our lives at various points along the trail that goes up from the valley of vulgar chaos to the peak of blissful perfection. We find a place that feels comfortable, a place where our quest for quality can attain a compromise with perfection that we can live with, and allow that place to suffice as our definition of the measure of quality we can accept. We hate to leave it. TV is there for some—cigarettes and beer for others.

This place we settle in for any given life issue has no fixed point but one arrived at by current consensus (and then afterwards very often by tradition). Our people's levels of quality will of course be different than others', yet always somewhere below perfection. This should help us remain humble when we are tempted to do what comes naturally and sin by judging others.[18]

The indwelling of the very Spirit of God is the gift to humanity that Jesus mediates. When the Spirit comes into us, as Jesus described it, we are "born again" spiritually, and the very power of God flows through us into the dead world around us bringing new life. As Christian communities, the points where we make camp along the trail up to holy perfection can now be placed higher. We actually can do anything that God asks of us—through Christ who strengthens us. We discover this reality as we give it a try. We love the results, and so we share this transformation process with others. Often, the most powerful tool we have for sharing is the quality of our transformed lives. As Shenk puts it, "Each Christian community needs to think through the use of ritual, symbols, and practices which truly express the meaning of the gospel in (their) …cultures."[19] We who have been through the transformation can help others rethink their traditions.

Consider just this one place where Christians and their campsites have changed the global culture: Christian-style marriages are the envy of the world. As Campolo

puts it, "…most of the people of the world long for the tenderness between mates that characterizes our [Protestant Christian-influenced] ideal of marriage."[20] Every other model of family-building has fundamental problems. The character of Christian marriages has become the benchmark to such an extent that many people have forgotten where the ideals came from—and how then to have the power to make them work.

When you are doing missionary anthropology, go ahead and be biased. Analyze culture based on what is possible through Christ rather than on what is doable by ordinary people. You, after all, are the light of the world, seeking to let that light shine into dark places. Some of the light you bring will be seen as you share God's perspective and see lovable people behind (what may be for you) unlovely external features.

Our daughter Maria was four years old when we came back from Africa and she was confronted for the first time with a church supper, held in the basement under the sanctuary. We came down a flight of steps to enter the fellowship hall. From this vantage point, one can see everything at once. Arriving a bit late, the room was almost full. Pausing on the steps, my wife and I scanned the sea of faces we loved so much and had missed for so long—looking for a place to sit. Then we saw our Maria. As we had dawdled on the stairs, she had slipped off and gone straight to her natural, African, first order of business. She was systematically greeting her elders, a job made easier by the fact that they were sitting together in a sort of self-selected "grey ghetto" in the northwest corner of the room. We watched—spellbound. As she moved along, it was like following a bushfire spreading through dry grass. Old grey faces that had been subdued were lit up with hearty smiles. Heads were turning. People were chattering. Before long that entire section of the room was glowing with light and human warmth. Such was the impact that one little girl was having by simply doing what anyone from Maria's village in Africa would normally do.

Sometimes in the spring, old snow pack breaks free from its winter bed on a hillside and suddenly tumbles away—exposing the seed-filled earth beneath that was waiting for the sun. New life springs up. Seeing Africa in my daughter in America, I suddenly saw "that which is of God" in the Africa we had so recently left behind. The culture stress that had blurred my vision was lifting. Not only did I see "common ground" with people who had been a challenge to understand, I now saw reasons to deeply admire them.

What makes missionary anthropologists effective is not so different from what makes any human being admirable: simple respect for others, evident in the way we think and the way that we behave towards them. This respect helps lead us to a place where we can understand each other and then share the very best things we have in a reciprocal way. Like African villagers do when they pick, dry, and carefully

preserve leaves for others, we work at the business of bringing life to each other. God is showing this kind of respect to each of us and invites us to model it in our mission work. If we do, our missionary anthropology will more likely bring the signs of new life in Christ that this world needs.

## Notes

[1] 1 Corinthians 9:22, *New Living Translation.*

[2] "It is noteworthy that anthropologists have been loath to recognize the great debt they owe to missionaries, not only in the early stages of anthropology's development, but even today as missionaries provide hospitality (to researchers), vocabulary lists, and other aids to fledgling anthropologists in the field. It is arguable that the discipline of anthropology would not have emerged without the heavy reliance upon ethnographic data provided by missionaries." Darrell L. Whiteman, "Part I: Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 20:4 (2003): 36, accessed February 13, 2014, http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/21_1_PDFs/35_44_Whiteman2.pdf.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures, Anthropology for Christian missions* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1954).

[5] Petros Malakyan, "Biblical Leadership across Cultures" (lecture presented at the Academy of World Mission, Korntal, Germany, July 4-5, 2013).

[6] Referring to grounded theory, see Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1967).

[7] Matthew 10:11-15.

[8] Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 304-305.

[9] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 55ff.

[10] I Peter 3:15-16.

[11] Mary T. Lederlietner, *Cross-Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 33.

[12] The child, electrocuted by touching a sprinkler pipe to a power line, had his heart "jump started" by the pounding his body took on his wild ride. An example of "automotive respiration?"

[13] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 112.

[14] Some call this "metanarrative." See John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature.* (New York: Garland, 1998).

[15] James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1980).

[16] The discovery of the Rosetta Stone made possible the understanding of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. On it, the same message was written in three languages, two of these were known, one of these, hieroglyphics, was not. "The term Rosetta Stone has been used idiomatically to represent a crucial key to the process of decryption of encoded information, especially when a small but representative sample is recognized as the clue to understanding a larger whole." "Rosetta Stone," Wikipedia, accessed May 2, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosetta_Stone.

[17] John 14:18-21ff.

[18] Matthew 7:1ff.

[19] David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman, *Creating Communities of the Kingdom, New Testament Models of Church Planting* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1988), 114.

[20] Tony Campolo, *Partly Right, Christianity Responds to its Critics* (Dallas: Word, 1985), 17.

## Study Questions

1. The author establishes three aspects necessary for good anthropological insight (and therefore communication) that assume a situation where openness about being a missionary is possible. How do these principles apply in places where a missionary must be circumspect about their real goals?

2. Reflect on the difficulties in communication that exist in your own culture and language in light of this statement: "a communication bridge had been built that was used that day between two groups of people. The bridge had been built from both ends—at the same time. Missionaries and local people had built it together. The ones who did the work were intent both on seeing reasons for hope found in God's Word, and on continually finding new reasons to *respect* each other."

3. When you misunderstand someone, is your first reaction to wonder what's wrong with them? Imagine being a newcomer to a different culture where almost everything initially appears "wrong."

4. Can you think of activities your culture group used to think of as "sin" that are no longer problems? Discuss some of the reasons why, and whether you agree.

5. Do you agree with the author's statement: "This place we settle in for any given life issue has no fixed point but one arrived at by current consensus"? Is sin defined by a culture or something "higher" than that?

# 21 Immigrant Witness in Germany[1]

Heinrich Klassen

Anabaptist Churches in Germany, partly comprised of immigrants from the Soviet Union, had by 2005 established more than 300 churches, and continue to plant even more new churches in Germany. According to the German Christian journal *idea-Spektrum*, worship services of immigrant Anabaptist churches are some of the best-attended services in Germany.

In the following article I will discuss missionary approaches that have played a decisive role in the Soviet Union, what kind of setbacks the so called "Resettlers" have experienced in Germany and what kind of opportunities they continue to have to fulfil their mission calling.

## Lifestyle Witness—A Succesful Mission Method in the Soviet Union

### *Missio Dei* as a Concept for Mission as Witness

God, and not the church, is the one who sends. *Missio Dei* was the main conviction of the Baptists in the Soviet Union. *"Missio dei* as a Trinitarian idea contains the Christological and soteriological center; without it theology cannot exist."[2] Whether the church is alive, or experiences the new life which is promised to her, is evidenced by the ways in which she turns to the people around her who do not yet belong, namely in the direct interest of God. For Gensichen it is clear that sharing in the *Missio Dei:*

> … need not always correspond to methods of a conventional, organized mission. Mission history has always known—beside the great missionaries, the pioneers of operational sending, the "second front" of witnesses, whose mission was not exhausted in appropriate action, but… went much beyond mission and in some cases even happened or happens as an antithesis to the established mission.[3]

This is what the church in the Soviet Union experienced. Without their having any extensive understanding of the theological concept of sending, God caused in these believers a need to witness to a world which was in opposition to Christianity. "Baptists distribute their mission on the shoulders of laypersons," complained the atheist Manuylova, because "each believer has the duty to read the Bible, to memorize Bible verses and to work as a preacher or missionary."[4] This way they lived out (implemented) the *Missio Dei*.

This term was formed in the early 20th century under considerable influence from Karl Barth, then first expressed by George Vicedom and included into the program of the Willingen mission conference of the World Council of Churches. Accepted by the Lausanne Committee in 1974 into the mission program of the evangelicals, is it now a *terminus technicus* (standard term) in mission science. Mission is not only understood as the spread of the gospel and leads not only to the conversion of pagans, but serves the direct order of God to expand his kingdom. Mission is first of all and primarily a matter of the Holy Trinity.

In the USSR witnessing became a life style and as such an indicator for God's work in a person's life, evident in attitude and action. Christian mission as life style evangelism was aroused through God's work, and through persecution *Missio Dei* became reality. People of God lived out their faith and many newcomers became believers.

It appears that evangelical churches in the Soviet Union did not have time and energy for theological treatises on the subject of missions. They had to fight for their daily survival. They only had time to live their faith and so it became their life style. They had to assume that it is God who will build up his church and not them individually. They would agree with Stott that not every preacher should be called an evangelist, but that every Christian has to be a witness: "If God does not call everyone to be an 'evangelist' ... But every Christian is a witness, and every Christian is called to bear witness."[5]

In my studies about missions in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, I came to the conclusion that evangelical churches in the Soviet Union did not write down their mission motives but, like Christians of the first century, they lived missionary lives which started from their experience with God.

The union of the churches and their church magazines were inspiring for mission work, but they played only a small part in the direct missionary proclamation.[6] The same applies to the few theological training centers. Already the effort to introduce God as the Lord of the universe and of the mission comforted the churches that faced

suffering and persecution. They knew that God will lead his work to a successful end. That these churches were still heavily involved in missionary activities is reflected in atheistic publications in the 70s and 80s of the last century.

**Missionary Witness as Perceived from an Atheistic Perspective**

A conflict between communist ideology and religion was unavoidable because Marxism "is not only an overthrowing economic theory, but also a philosophical system, which is the foundation of a worldview, which is pioneering for its followers all areas of the human life—politics, art, literature, religion, ethics and so on."[7] Berdyayev, for example, explains the background of this argument: communism is a replacement religion:

> Atheism always means a transition to some kind of idolatry, to idolization.
> A total devastation of a soul can only lead to suicide… Just because
> communism is itself a religion, it persecutes all other religions and cannot
> be tolerant toward other religions.[8]

Below I will attempt to describe some particular areas of the missionary witness, in order to better understand the spread of the faith in a socialist state.

The communist scientist Belov notices a certain pattern in missionary activity of the Christians. They would first look for some common ground with their co-workers or neighbors in order to invite them to a worship service, but then speak openly and purposefully on the train, at work and in the market about their faith. A successful method is also assisting people with material or financial problems, or those who have lost a loved one. These activities happen with the purpose to win them for their faith.[9]

*Social and political isolation*

Church visitors avoided social meetings common in socialist society, and rather created in their church buildings space for mutual help. They helped each other in cases of sickness, accidents and other problems. This way they experienced a pleasant feeling, which they attributed to their religious attitude.[10]

Another famous writer, Gal'perin, sees the isolation of Christians from the surrounding world as a genuine problem, because in that way they isolated themselves from the communist influence. "Church leaders", writes Gal'perin, "expect a complete separation from the world. Members of the church are not allowed to watch TV, visit the cinema or attend a theatre, in order not to have their souls

polluted".[11] He reports about two young women who were good witnesses at their work. But their only information source was Christian literature, church sermons and Christian broadcasting programs.

### Role of the family in lifestyle evangelism

From an atheistic perspective the most dangerous missionary field was the family. Manuylova shows in her atheistic research how churches grow and increase. She comes up with the conclusion that the main mission happens in the family.[12] In 1976 some Baptist churches recorded an increase of members by 70 percent. The main share of growth was through people with a Christian background. The church conducts its mission, concludes Manuylova, primarily in the family.[13]

Ugrinovich argues in his book *Psichologia i religia*, published a few years before *Perestroika*, that in the religious education of preschool children parents play the most important role.[14] The author points to scientific research of psychologists about the form of the family and their importance for religious education. They come to the conclusion that the new generation of the religiously-minded population was raised and educated in families. The result of his studies can be summarized as: "in the context of the Soviet society, the religious family belongs to the most important channels to transmit religious thinking to the new generation."[15]

Further research also proved the assumption that religious influence on the children was even stronger when both parents displayed the same attitude in these questions. Because of these results, atheist educators came to the conclusion that the teachers' work was futile in their efforts to impress on school children an atheistic formation if they restricted their efforts only to children. To guarantee that children would buy into atheistic influence parents had also to be succumb to it.[16] According to this statement, communists perceived a major threat for society in the Christian lifestyle of families.

Jaschin, a Soviet scholar, described the transmission of the tradition of faith from older people to the youth, who were particularly susceptible.[17] He complains that preachers have recognized the importance of the family and use it to preserve the religious thinking as a missionary possibility. This leads, says Jaschin, to authoritarian education and strict observation of rules for daily life in families, according to the teaching that the family is the first and most important missionary cell.[18]

A new evaluation of the role of women and mothers led to the conclusion that they belonged to the support pillars in the formation of religious thinking and held together larger groups of believers. They were the majority in religious groups and were more religious than their husbands. Many widows compensated for their loneliness and missing social and family ties with intensified activities in the church.[19]

Jaschin also characterizes church activities of elderly women who were never married. To marry non-believers was forbidden for them and so they lived like nuns in the church. They belonged to the non-official group of servants and helped other members. They were involved with the preparation of the service, taught the children some needlework, and in this way were missionaries.[20]

While describing the youth work of Mennonites, Ipatov observes a certain kind of training: "Not only that the Bible is read by old people, but it is also studied by young people in prayer meetings."[21] Interactively, through a question and answer game, they learned the texts of the Old and New Testament; this way having their faith convictions strengthened and being trained as missionaries. "It is characteristic for the questions to advise those who have renounced their faith or went astray so that they would keep commandments of the Old and New Testament."[22] In addition, according to Ipatov, to carry out meetings in the German language was also some kind of a missionary approach, at least among the German-speaking population. Many came to the church not only in order to strengthen their religious thinking, but also to cultivate their German language and to keep up with this culture. But the visitors were influenced by the Christians and found their faith.[23]

## Summary

The communist government knew very well that, in spite of pressures and restrictions, many Christians fulfilled their mission commandment. It did not always need to be words. A changed lifestyle was a proclamation in itself.

The largest missionary power was perceived to lie in healthy Christian families. The family had to be influenced, to be changed and to be retrained, in order to stop the missionary message. The communist government certified that the Christians had an active missionary commitment. In the atheists' view, mission was not understood in the first place as proclamation *expressis verbis* (expressed in words), but as living a changed life. Christianity affected the daily life of members in Christian churches and in this way presented a danger for socialism. Stoner's statement about the mission of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists can also be applied to the work of Anabaptists in the USSR:

> …more impressive was the witness of hundreds of ordinary men and women who were so filled with the life of Christ that their relatives, neighbors, and friends were convinced of sin and attracted to the overflowing life which they saw in these believers.[24]

With some similar-sounding statements the atheist scholar Ipatov characterizes missionary efforts of the Germans in the Soviet Union. According to his statements, Mennonites from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tried to organize effective work with children and young people.[25]

## Facing a New Reality

The most extensive changes in the population of Europe in recent history resulted from migration processes, refugee movements and expulsions of large groups of people toward the end and after the Second World War. Furthermore, changes came as a result of a new distribution of political powers at the conference in Yalta and Potsdam (1945). In his dissertation, John N. Klassen states that since 1950 Germany has received approximately 5 million immigrants, of which 1.8 million are Soviet German Resettlers.[26] Approximately 300,000 of these immigrants have an Anabaptist[27] background, which means they are either Mennonites, Baptists or members of Mennonite Brethren churches. In addition, there are members of Pentecostal churches and the Seventh-Day Adventist churches.

How do these immigrants continue to live their mission of witnessing through lifestyle as the approach and attitude of the Anabaptists who came from the Soviet Union to Germany?

The first generation of immigrants to Germany continued to see their mission also as witnessing, which meant to live a life that would demonstrate their attitude without too many words.[28] But in the new environment in Germany this language was misunderstood. What in the Soviet Union was a good basis for conversation led in Germany to demarcation. For example, the explanation that consumption of alcohol was not permitted for Christians and a sin against God led only to amusement with colleagues and neighbors. To drink much in public and to get drunk was not very popular in Germany anyway. The immigrants came to Germany with a divided church identity.

### A Divided Church Identity

Walter Sawatsky made two interesting observations in 1981 about descendants of Anabaptists who lived in the Soviet Union. First, he mentions the loss of a Mennonite faith identity: "All that has remained is the name Mennonite, their characteristic Low German dialect and traditional cooking," and secondly, the loss of leaders: "Between 1923 and 1929 approximately 20,000 immigrated to Canada and South America, an immigration that included a disproportionately large number of their most able leaders."[29]

A group without experienced leaders soon encounters a crisis, which proved to be true also for the Mennonites in the Soviet Union. This had the consequence that,

> "…the Mennonite remnant now had several important features. A high percentage of the families consisted of mothers with children whose fathers had disappeared while they were small. The children, due to the upheavals of the war and the subsequent ten years in the camps, had received almost no education, and an educated Mennonite became a rarity… Mennonites had refused to issue an official declaration of loyalty and therefore became an illegal denomination after the war."[30]

We need to remember that, after the Russian Orthodox Church was acknowledged by Stalin in 1943, the Baptists also tried to receive an official approval to carry out worship services. They did receive this permission under the condition that the Russian movement of the Evangelical Christians and the Baptists (EChB) would unite and together form one association. After the official recognition of this alliance, they received the acknowledgement from the state and were able to meet openly and perform church services.

But it was hard to live as a German in the Soviet Union after World War II. The population believed that all Germans had a fascist attitude. They did not have permission to meet in their own church buildings. Nevertheless, even Germans awakened to a new Christian life. They often found their spiritual home in churches of the already acknowledged Association of the EChB. With that, their own distinct identity was lost. Heinrich Löwen speaks about "relationships which fell into oblivion" and Johannes Reimer dares to call it "Mennobaptism."

The divided church identity continues to be clearly observed in the controversy about the titles immigrant churches give their churches in Germany. Of the twenty-seven churches that are part of the BTG (Union of Anabaptist Churches), sixteen use different church names.[31]

### Colony (Closed Community) Thinking

One great obstacle for integration and mission is the perception the immigrants have of themselves. They believe themselves to be a minority in the state, the faithful ones who, misunderstood and persecuted, move closer together in a closed community. The order of 1929 with the prohibition of every form of religious and educational work in the Soviet Union and the following persecution caused a development in which every evangelical church became a minority.

Thiessen describes this type of thinking in a new environment as very similar to the old desire of the Anabaptists of the seventeenth century, to have "a peaceful togetherness, far away from the world…, [this] carries away the hearts of the Germans, which came from the Soviet Union to Germany."[32] The immigrants want to stay among themselves and so design some areas of life according to their own principles. This creates tensions with the surrounding society. Thiessen continues his description stating that emerging problems were always "solved" through emigration.[33] Talking, praying and trust in God are replaced by escape![34] On their escape route the immigrants reached Germany and met here churches where they did not find a spiritual home.

## A Confusing Church Scene in Germany

The church scene in Germany in the free evangelical circles is difficult to portray. The population knows well both large national churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran church. Associations such as the Association of Christian Churches (ACK) and the Association of Evangelical Free Churches (VEF) are not very familiar to the general public. Terms like Baptists, Mennonites or Pentecostals are only familiar to insiders and smack of sectarianism.

The abbreviations like FEG (*Freie Evangelische Gemeinde*), BEFG (*Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden*), and AMG (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden*) sound unfamiliar and need an explanation. When strangers visit worship services of free churches they sometimes leave with the impression that the term "free" in this case means an individually fixed piety or spirituality style, and this is unacceptable to them.

For example, many of those who had emigrated from the Soviet Union and did not belong to a church at the end of the eighties and early nineties found their spiritual home in the New Apostolic church. Most of them did not have any religious background, except that they knew their parents had been Mennonites or Evangelical Christians. The dress code and the service order in the New Apostolic church often was considered as one of the persuasive elements to join this church. After two or three visits to the worship service and realizing certain benefits experienced by the members of this church, many immigrants developed the desire to become a member of the church. Theology did not play a role. The outward appearance was formative and decisive.

Visits to FEG churches confused many who had been church members in the Soviet Union. They learned that FEG churches, which were constituted in 1854 in Barmen and in 1874 took the name they have today, had developed in the opposite direction to Baptist churches of those days, which emphasized the necessity of

baptism.[35] For FEG churches water baptism played an important role insofar as they baptized only persons who believed in God, but they also approved of infant baptism in that they accepted people into membership who had been baptized in childhood.

Visits to German Baptist churches helped many believers to join these churches. According to some statistics, there are 7,000 adults of the immigrants who joined.[36] However, soon confusion emerged concerning their theology and they also had to discover that worship order and spiritual formation were quite different in the Soviet Union and in Germany. Some theological discussions estranged the believers and so most immigrant churches distanced themselves from the German Baptists and founded their own churches.

In summary one can say that sometimes it was certain differences in theology, but much more often the great differences in Christian lifestyle irritated the immigrants and they decided to plant new churches—more than 300 churches in the last 30 years.

## Immigrants Witness to their Faith

Faith witness becomes evident when immigrant believers live out their faith in everyday life. It is expected from every member to let his/her Christianity become visible through a changed lifestyle.

1. They bear witness to their faith, as they proclaim the Word of God in and attend worship services.

2. They bear witness to their faith, as they are prepared to bear "suffering."

3. They bear witness to their faith, as they conduct missionary work. Social engagement in Germany and beyond its borders is a well-known way of doing mission. The mission relief organization AQUILA, founded in 1990, can be considered a good example. In the year 2005 they delivered humanitarian aid in about fifty trucks, containing 1,000 tons of goods. In addition they supported more than twenty summer camps.

4. They bear witness to their faith, as they confess their faith in school, at work and with neighbors. Both the verbal proclamation and the social engagement belong for them to the field of church work, the work for the kingdom.

### Active Cooperation with Existing Training Centers and Organizations

Bible school training was used by members of the immigrant community to receive theological training and to advance in the discipleship process. Bible schools, on the other hand, benefited from both the newly-won contacts and from the financial involvement of participants, such as the Bible school in Brake, the city of Lemgo. In

response to my inquiry I was told that one third of all Bible school students at Brake in Lemgo had a background as immigrants.

Members of Anabaptist churches have studied at Mission House/Bible school at Wiedenest (Bergneustadt), in the Bible school at Beatenberg (Switzerland), in the Educational and Training Center at Bienenberg (Switzerland), at the Independent Theological University at Basel (Switzerland), at the Free Theological Academy at Giessen (Germany), at the Evangelical Theological Faculty at Leuven (Belgium), and at the recently-founded Society for Education and Research at Bergneustadt (Germany).

It is interesting to note that leading administrative and teaching positions in some trainings centers are occupied by former immigrants. At the *Bibel Seminar Bonn*, the seminary founded by the BTG in 1993, many board members and school administrators are immigrants of the first or second generation.

In addition immigrants founded their own mission organizations.[37] Furthermore, they founded publishing houses in a number of cities.[38] Every large church has its own book shop in their church building. Often training at a Bible school expands the horizons of immigrants for mission. Many of them are ready to work in existing organizations and contribute to sharing the gospel in Germany and Europe through newly-founded mission organizations and publishing houses—through word and action.

## Voluntary Service

Serving in the church is understood to be voluntary work done by all church members and is preferred against paid employment of a few people. According to the principle that each church structure reflects a theology and defines the faith of the members, most members decide to get involved in voluntary service in the church. All church members are encouraged, according to the following Scripture passages:

> "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11).

> "You know that the household of Stephanus were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints" (I Cor. 16:15-16).

> "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive the inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col 3:23-24).

Through voluntary involvement all members are challenged to support all areas of church life. For this reason each member gets a chance to serve and through this enjoys a discovery and self-actualization process as personal talents and gifts are revealed. For example, out of the twenty-seven BTG churches only five have hired pastors.[39]

### Planting New Churches

Some church planting projects in Germany conducted by BTG associated churches can be listed as follows: Dresden, Nuremberg, Hammeln, and Leipzig.

BTG associated churches also have some church planting projects in other countries: Ukraine, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey, and Kyrgyzstan. In addition they partner with churches in Moldova, Tschelyabinsk, Tulun, and Belarus, among others.

## Conclusion

It is true that immigrant churches experience biological growth. It means the children and family members visit worship services, become Christians, get baptized, and work in the local church. In addition, immigrant churches are a reservoir for thousands of new conversions and baptisms, which would be difficult to conceive in another context. I have been able to present only a brief glimpse of the situation of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Mission as witness—first and second generation immigrants witnessing God's message in Germany—does have its challenges and opportunities, and certainly opens a wide scope for the church!

My prediction for the future is that there will continue to be tensions between immigrants of the first and of the second generation and the line between them will become hardened. The consolidation of positions will lead to the foundation of many new churches. In some cases this will lead to a break with the tradition. Some will rise from this break and start churches with a German personality. Traditional immigrant values will be not very important for them. As new churches they will be shaped by contemporary means of reaching out to people (for example, using concepts of Bill Hybels, etc.). It will not be a homogeneous group.

In addition there will be some churches which foster cultural integration and good member care. These churches will attract people with different backgrounds and bring them into the communion with God and his people. They will hopefully reach out to the hearts of the western population.

A conscious and informed engagement with this complicated subject, mission as witness, and a consensus in many matters will help German immigrants—Baptists, Mennonites, and Evangelical Christians—to be a witness for Christ. A witness where they can live the *Missio Dei* in a European context!

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *Mission Focus* vol. 14 (Elkhart: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2006).

[2] Herwig Wagner, "Das Lutherische Bekenntnis als Dimension des Missionspapiers des Lutherischen Weltbundes: Gottes Mission als gemeinsame Aufgabe" in Volker Stolle, Ed., *Kirchenmission nach lutherischem Verst ändnis. Vortr äge zum 100jährigen Jubiläum der Lutherischen Kirchenmission* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 1993), 161.

[3] Hans-Werner Gensichen, "Ein einziges Zeugnis? Mission zwischen Herausforderung und Hoffnung," *Okumenische Rundschau* 33 (1984): 483.

[4] D.E Manuylova, *Social'nye funktsii religii* (Moskva: Znanie, 1975), 46.

[5] John R.W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 58. The term "evangelist" occurs in the New Testament only three times, but the responsibility to evangelize is for the whole church. See Stott, 55.

[6] Reimer writes about the missing freedom for mission, which emerged due to the stiff structures of the All Union Council in the seventies. See Johannes Reimer, "Mission in Post-Perestroika Russia," *Missionalia* 24.1 (1996), 111.

[7] Alexander Kichkovsky, *Die sowjetische Religionspolitik und die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche* (München: Institut zur Erforschung der UdSSR, 1957), 5.

[8] N. Berdyayev, *Russkaya Religiosnaya Psichologiya I Kommunisticheski Ateism* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1931), 40.

[9] A. V. Belov, *Sekty, Sektantstvo, Sektanty* (Moskva: Nauka, 1978), 83.

[10] D. E. Manuylova, *Cerkov' i Veruyushij* (Moskva: Polititscheskaya Literature, 1981), 58.

[11] B.I. Gal'perin, *Religiosnyj Ekstremism: Kto est' Kto?* (Kiev: Polititscheskaya Literature, 1989), 62.

[12] Manuylova, *Cerkov' i Veruyushij*, 70.

[13] Ibid., 69.

[14] D.M. *Ugrinovich, Psichologia i Religia* (Moskva: Politizdat, 1986), 223.

[15] Ibid., 222.

[16] Ibid., 232.

[17] P.P Jaschin, *Ideologia i Praktika Evangel'skych Khristian-Baptistov* (Char'kov: Prapor, 1984), 74.

[18] Ibid., 76-77. The discovery of the missionary "function" of the family leads Jaschin to call, from his socialist views, for a struggle against the family or a fight for changes in the family tradition of the many religious groups (Jaschin, 75).

[19] Ugrinovich, 242.

[20] Jaschin, 82.

[21] A.N. Ipatov, *Mennonity* (Moskva: Mysl, 1978), 169.

[22] Ibid., 169.

[23] Ibid., 172.

[24] John K Stoner, "Anabaptists Alive" in John K. Stoner, Jim Egli and G. Edwin Bontrager, *Life to Share* (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1991), 27.

[25] Ipatov, 172.

[26] John N. Klassen, "Gemeindeaufbau und –Wachstum bei den Russlanddeutschen Evangelikalen Christen in Deutschland Inmitten der Spannung von Einwanderung und Integration," (Unpublished Dissertation, University of South Africa, 2002), 29; 49.

[27] I use the term Anabaptist in this article as a summary description of denominations such as Mennonites, Baptists and Mennonite Brethren churches; these all practice faith baptism.

[28] Hereafter when speaking about "immigrants" I mean resettlers who came to Germany from the former Soviet Union.

[29] Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 280.

[30] Ibid., 280.

[31] For example, Mennonite Brethren church, Christian Mennonite Brethren Church, Evangelical Christians, Baptists (from the Address List of the BTG, 2005).

[32] Jacob Thiessen, "Die Entstehung Mennonitischer Kolonien: Eine Untersuchung" (Unpublished Thesis, University of South Africa, 2005), 17.

[33] Thiessen, 17. The widely spread immigration of Prussian Mennonites to south Russia started with the Manifesto by Tsarina Catharina II of 1762 and 1763, where she invited west European peoples to colonize the areas around the Black Sea. In the Manifesto she promised the settlers many liberties.

[34] Thiessen, 18.

[35] In the year 1854 the "Free evangelical of Elberfeld and Barmen" was constituted (Erich Geldbach, *Freikirchen—Erbe, Gestalt, Wirkung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2005), 225. In the year 1874 the 22 churches established in Wuppertal the "Association of free evangelical churches and communion societies," which in 1928 took the present name (ibid., 227).

[36] John N. Klassen, 97.

[37] Among these are: *Friedensstimme* e.V. (Voice of Freedom), Logos-International e.V., *Gefährdetenhilfe Bad Eilsen* e.V. (Prison Ministries), *Friedensbote* e.V. (Messenger of Peace), *Christliche Freizeiten International* e.V. (Camping Ministry), Mission

Aid Committee Aquila e.V., *Glaube und Werke* e.V. (Faith and Works), *Internationales Centrum für Weltmission* e.V. (International Center for World Mission), *Herz für Behinderte* e.V. (Heart for Disabled).

[38] Among these are Paderborn, Lage, Gütersloh, Bielefeld, Frankenthal, and Steinhagen.

[39] BTG statistics of 2005.

## Recommended Reading

Begemann, Helmut. *Vom Zeugnis des Christen im Alltag: Materialien für den Dienst in der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen.* Bielefeld: Robert Bechauf, 1981.

Boff, Leonardo. *Zeugen Gottes in der Welt.* Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1985.

Bürkle, Horst. "Mission im Weiteren Sinne." *Okumenische Rundschau* 19 (1971): 406-417.

Gensichen, Hans-Werner. *Missionstheologie.* Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1985.

Klassen, Heinrich. *Mission Als Zeugnis. Zur Missionarischen Existenz in der Sowjetunion Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg.* Lage: Logos-Verlag GmbH, 1999.

Reimer, Johannes. "Mission in post-perestroika Russia." *Missionalia.* Nr. 24.1 (1996): 18-39.

Sawatsky, Walter. *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II.* Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981.

Sawatsky, Walter. "After the Glasnost Revolution: Evangelicals and Western Missions." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16.2 (1992): 54-60.

Stoner, John K. "Anabaptists Alive." In John K. Stoner, Jim Egli and G. Edwin Bontrager, *Life to Share*, 27-34. Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1991.

## Study Questions

1. Discuss the minimal involvement in missions among many churches in light of the author's statement: "evangelical churches in the Soviet Union . . . lived missionary lives which started from their experience with God."

2. Reflect on the implications for children's ministries from the following statement: "atheist educators came to the conclusion that the teachers' work was futile in their efforts to impress on school children an atheistic formation if they restricted their efforts only to children."

3. "Serving in the church is understood to be voluntary work done by all church members and is preferred against paid employment of a few people." This statement is made about the church in an immigrant population. How might it impact cross-cultural missions? Does it speak to practices of paying for the services of local leaders?

# 22 Pastoral, Evangelistic, and Missionary Discourse[1]

Jacob A. Loewen

Is there anything wrong when a missionary just translates a successful sermon he preached as a pastor in North America and then delivers it in India or Africa? Communication specialists say there is, so let's find out why.

Recently, Jean-Pierre van Noppen wrote an essay on religious communication in which he distinguished between what he called "missionary discourse" and "pastoral discourse."[2] He defined the former as discourse which requires the source to make explicit the unspoken premises upon which his/her message is based, such as when a Christian, especially a professional church worker, reasons with a non-believer or tries to teach a catechist who is not yet conversant with the Christian message. However, in situations in which the source and the receptors share the same body of beliefs, as in the case of a pastor and his mono-cultural congregation, the former usually merely reaffirms their shared beliefs or tries to stimulate the parishioners to put these shared beliefs into practice. Communication of this nature van Noppen calls "pastoral discourse."

As soon as I had read van Noppen's definitions, I found myself trying to apply his distinction to missionaries proclaiming the Christian message in cultures other than their own. It seemed to me that if I added cross-cultural communication by expatriate missionaries to the consideration, I would have to distinguish at least three discourse types: pastoral, evangelistic, and missionary.

For the purpose of this essay I join van Noppen in defining "pastoral discourse" as discourse characteristic of situations in which the source and the receptors share both a common culture and a common religious belief system. As already indicated, in such settings the aim of the communication is not to introduce new ideas nor to convince people of a different point of view; it merely serves to reaffirm what the people already believe and to stimulate them to put these beliefs into practice.

I would like to characterize "catechetical" or "evangelistic discourse" as discourse appropriate to situations in which the source and the receptor share a common culture, but not the same religious belief system. In such situations the aim of the communication is to make the message understandable and convincing to outsiders or new converts by making explicit the necessary, but usually unspoken, underlying religious premises. This would apply as much to pastors in a North American setting as to national pastors speaking to their non-Christian tribespeople in Burkina Faso.

In "missionary discourse" situations, however, the expatriate source shares neither the cultural nor the religious belief system of his receptors. Here too, the aim should be to make the message understandable and convincing to the hearers, but in this case the message must include not only the necessary religious presuppositions but also the expatriate speaker's cultural presuppositions. It must further anticipate the different religious and cultural presuppositions of the hearers.

It soon will be four decades since I began observing or personally engaging in preaching in cross-cultural missionary situations. I must honestly confess that I can recall hearing only relatively few sermons by expatriates on the mission field in which the speakers were, in actual fact, engaging in genuine "missionary discourse." More often than not, the missionary speakers were merely "translating" messages originally prepared in pastoral discourse style for home-country congregations. They were making little or no attempt to make explicit either the religious or the cultural presuppositions that undergirded their message. Nor did they take into account the differing religious and cultural presuppositions on which their mission-field audience was operating. The best one could say was that some made attempts to use evangelistic style discourse, but even then they seldom made enough of the underlying religious premises explicit.

At first I wrote off such messages as "stale", i.e., they had not been freshly prepared for the situation in which they were being delivered. Then, as I became more culturally conscious, I described them as lacking pre-programming for the cultural situation in which they were being delivered. But I was never able to put my finger on what was actually wrong. I think van Noppen has done just that when he points out that when speaking to people who do not share one's culture nor one's religious belief system one needs to spell out all the pertinent underlying assumptions in both of those areas. A truly well pre-programmed message by a missionary in a mission setting would go even one step further: it would anticipate the points at which the belief system of the worldview of the receptors would create difficulties for understanding the message.

The rest of this essay will now try to elucidate: (1) what causes well-meaning, highly motivated missionaries to use incongruent styles of discourse; (2) why

a missionary's home country "pastoral discourse" style is so inappropriate in a different cultural setting; and (3) what missionaries can do to achieve more meaningful "missionary discourse."

## Why do Missionaries so often use Home-Country "Pastoral Discourse" Abroad?

The first and most obvious reason, of course, comes from the fact that most missionary candidates have been conditioned to hear and to expect pastoral style discourse whenever people talk about religious matters. If they were churchgoers (and most of them were), they were exposed to this style of discourse every time they went to church. Furthermore, in their training for the ministry or for missionary service they were taught, often even drilled, to use this discourse style. Even during their specialized "missionary" training only a small percentage of the candidates were exposed to any sort of training in cross-cultural communication.

A second, but often less obvious reason, is the fact that very few missionaries have looked at their belief system analytically, and thus they have not become aware of the many premises and presuppositions that undergird the Christian message they preach. In the Bible Institute or Bible College they were taught a body of doctrine which both they and their instructors accepted as right and biblical, usually without even attempting to make explicit the givens upon which the elements of the belief system were based. In anthropological terms, one could say that the degree to which missionaries are unaware of their ethnocentrism, to that degree they will also lack any feeling of need to identify or to make explicit such premises. Missionaries usually accept the Bible as God's word for all mankind, and since they feel "at home" in the Bible they feel that their own unspoken presuppositions about Scripture are universals. Then, because they ignore their own unspoken assumptions, they are also bound to ignore the fact that their hearers are operating on a very different set of unspoken assumptions. They may recognize that the people to whom they are trying to minister often react strangely, but they often do not have the "tools" to discover the cause of the "strangeness" they feel.

## What is so Inappropriate about Missionaries using Home-Country "Pastoral Discourse" Abroad?

As we have indicated earlier, the first thing that is wrong with missionaries using home country pastoral discourse style in a cross-cultural setting is that it is based on the false assumption that the audience shares the belief system and the worldview of the missionary source.

The next thing that is wrong is the fact that pastoral discourse functions to reaffirm already accepted beliefs rather than to win people over to accept the new belief system the missionary is advocating.

Furthermore, pastoral discourse is usually highly doctrinal in content; i.e., usually the source tries to highlight a part of the accepted belief system by stating the content of that belief in terms of propositions and by presenting arguments that "prove" the validity of the propositions.

The next problem is with the use of doctrinal statements or propositional truths themselves. Westerners use them in what they consider "logical reasoning." For them logical reasoning is a tool *par excellence* for convincing others. All too many missionaries are unaware of the fact that few, if any, Majority World people habitually use "logical reasoning" to establish their religious values. People "feel, experience," or they "grow up with" religion somewhat like a child who grows up with a favorite blanket. It may be tattered and torn but it still represents security. E.T. Hall[3] recalls meeting Catholic missionaries who were greatly frustrated in their attempts to communicate the Christian message to the Japanese people. He reports finding only one Jesuit missionary who had discovered that Thomas Aquinas' logical reasoning had no impact whatsoever because religious decisions among the Japanese are not made on the basis of logic but on the basis of feeling; and "feelings," says Hall, "are rooted in a totally different part of the brain." This Jesuit priest was successful because he appealed to his hearer in terms of how wonderful it felt to be a Christian. If Hall is correct, we are here dealing not only with different underlying premises but also with a different physical part of the nervous system and the brain.

In a communication situation such as an expatriate speaking in a cross-cultural setting, the source and the receptor do not share very much by way of cultural context or by way of religious presuppositions. Each proposition presented by the missionary must of necessity, therefore, be embedded in the necessary overt and covert context if it is to communicate the intended message meaningfully to the receptor.

For example, a Canadian Mennonite missionary working with native peoples in Northern Manitoba one day saw an Indian boy running around with a jacket that was literally in tatters. He assumed that the boy probably had another jacket and that he must be wearing this one for special effects, so he jokingly said: "Isn't it a little bit early to be wearing your Halloween costume?" To him his remark represented a casual, inconsequential, friendly gesture; however the next day the mother of the boy knocked at his door and said: "My son tells me that you said you want to get him a new jacket." The missionary was completely taken by surprise and stated that he had said nothing of the kind. From his point of view he had merely engaged in

some unimportant communication. If there was any intent, it was to demonstrate his friendliness. On the other hand, from the Indian boy and his mother's point of view the missionary had indicated that he wanted to do something about the boy's tattered jacket. When the mother then confronted him and gave him the occasion to do something, the missionary not only refused to do anything, he denied that he had said anything of the kind. This left the Indian mother with the feeling that the missionary was neither friendly nor honest, while the missionary came away from the experience feeling that Indians were being totally unreasonable.

## What can Missionaries do to Achieve More Meaningful "Missionary Communication?"

The ancient sage said "know thyself." This dictum needs to be taken very seriously by missionaries because they have come to communicate a belief system that deals with the realm of the nonmaterial. Furthermore, their knowledge about this belief system is largely framed in terms of propositional truth; thus if they want to communicate their knowledge about the spiritual realm, they must understand the basis on which their beliefs and practices rest. If they become aware of the assumptions and the underlying premises of their belief system, they will be in a much better position to know how much of that "given" information they must make explicit so that people who do not share their premises may be able to understand what they are trying to say.

There are several ways in which we can discover some of the unspoken premises of our culture and our religious belief and practice.

First, there is reading about our own culture, its values and presuppositions (see the Recommended Reading).

Next, there is careful observation as to what we find strange about others when observing people or talking to them. By the same token, we must note what others seem to find strange about us. As an illustration of the importance of knowing the receptors' religious premises consider the following experience reported by Don Jacobs.

As a new missionary he was assigned to teach in a seminary for training national pastors and he thought the staff was doing a good job. Then, to his chagrin, he discovered otherwise. During the vacation he joined their graduates in their fields of service and was horrified to hear how seriously they had misunderstood their seminary instruction.

After serious heart-searching, the mission changed its approach to teaching theology. All incoming seminary students were now required to spend the entire first

semester explaining their pre-Christian tribal religion to the members of their class. Since they came from different tribes, there were considerable differences between the views of the Africans themselves. All their differences and similarities were noted. Meanwhile the professors took note of all the points of conflict in content and presupposition between the tribal worldview and that of the Western missionary and also with that of the Bible (since the latter two do not necessarily concord either).

Once the students had made their religious presuppositions explicit, the seminary staff was able to use the presuppositional framework of the Africans to teach Christian doctrine. Points of conflict were anticipated and the adequate context made both the Western and the biblical views understandable. The result was that for the first time their seminary students were getting the presuppositional help they required to understand the biblical instruction they were receiving in the seminary.

In cross-cultural communication, missionaries may need to develop new models at the very beginning of their work just to make it possible for the people in the different cultural setting to understand their message about spiritual verities.

However, we also need to be aware of the fact that the Christian church, like any other institution that has developed a tradition, will have a built-in fear about changing models. In fact, history demonstrates that when Copernicus and Galileo began proposing that the sun rather than the earth was the center of the universe, the church found this new model so threatening that they caused Galileo to recant by threatening to torture him to death.

The same thing, of course, is true in regard to religious models. I remember how an otherwise rather non-orthodox scholar reacted when I proposed that we adjust metaphors like "God as father" and "believers as children of God" in a given totally Muslim context. My reason for suggesting the adjustment was the fact that these Muslims were interpreting these metaphors literally and thus were feeling that the Christians were blaspheming their God by implying that he had a sexual nature. In this way it was not a matter of dropping metaphors or introducing completely different metaphors, it was merely a matter of restating the metaphors as inoffensive similes, e.g., "God our father" could be restated as "God who loves us as a father loves his children." This scholar's reaction was that if one tampers with the father-image of God one is taking out an essential core of the Christian message.

All of us need to recognize that none of the existing models in our doctrine or in Scripture are the reality. They merely provide us earth-bound creatures with understandable earth-bound images that help us grasp supernatural or spiritual reality. If we want to communicate these spiritual realities effectively, we will need to use both language models and discourse types that are appropriate for the situation.

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *Direction Journal* vol. 16:2 (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, Fall 1987).

[2] Jean-Pierre van Noppen, ed. *Metaphor and Religion,* Theolinguistics 2, Study Series of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, New Series No. 12 (Brussels: Wettelijk Depot, 1983), 133.

[3] E.T. Hall, ed. *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 63.

## Recommended Reading

Hall, E.T, ed. *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time.* New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984.

Van Noppen, Jean-Pierre, ed. *Metaphor and Religion.* Theolinguistics 2. Study Series of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, New Series No. 12. Brussels: Wettelijk Depot 2085, 1983. See especially the following chapters: Delbecque, Nicole. "Metaphors in a Feminine Perspective." McFague, Sally. "Metaphorical Theology." Van Noppen, Jean-Pierre. "Interpretation Errors in Theory and Practice."

## Study Questions

1. Can you think of discourses, or even just statements, that you think should communicate the same thing in any culture? Give examples.

2. Loewen wrote the following statements in 1987. Discuss how they might still be true.

   - "well-meaning, highly motivated missionaries … use incongruent styles of discourse … inappropriate in a different cultural setting."
   - "very few missionaries have looked at their belief system analytically"
   - "(missionaries) ignore their own unspoken assumptions"

3. Loewen states in the last paragraph: "All of us need to recognize that none of the existing models in our doctrine or in Scripture are the reality." After carefully re-reading the context, do you agree? Discuss this statement.

# 23 Mission in Postmodern Contexts

Arthur Dück

In the beginning God created heaven, earth, and all there is in it. The perfect creation was soon to experience the Fall. Human beings created as the climax of creation were not satisfied as created beings – they wished to be promoted to Creator status. From Genesis 3 onward we have the great story of God reaching out and going after those he loves and created in his image. His image in humankind was damaged, but not removed altogether. After the Fall humankind would struggle between being created in God's image and the rebellious nature that pulls them away from God's loving purposes.

When people come together and live in community they begin to establish ways of doing things to minimize stress and maximize their efforts. Thus culture is born. Culture again is the product of people created in God's image, but also affected by the Fall. Genesis 4 shows us this ambiguity. Cain murders Abel, and seemingly in search of protection, builds a city (Gen 4:17). Thus, it would appear that the city

Arthur Dück (Ph.D., Intercultural Studies, Trinity International University) served as a youth pastor for over 15 years, and in the last 10 years has served as Academic Dean and Professor at the inter-Mennonite Faculdade Fidelis (Curitiba, Brazil). He was ordained as a pastor in the MB Church in Brazil in 1994.

is the result of human rebellion against God. A few verses later we read that the descendants of Cain are those who apparently institute polygamy, indicating that sin affected all aspects of creation. However, unexpectedly, among the same lineage we have potentially a positive outcome: Jabal, the first of those who live in tents and raise livestock; Jubal, the first musician, and Tubal-Cain, who forges metal tools (4:20-21). This emphasis continues throughout Scripture and history. Thus, culture becomes a real challenge: on the one hand it maximizes evil (due to the consequence of the Fall); on the other hand it also potentially creates the greatest good (due to humanity created in God's image). This means culture will always be the source of tension for the church. Which aspects of culture are to be preserved and which should be challenged? Culture, however, is like the air we breathe. We are a product of culture. So, it is very difficult to create a reflecting stance toward our own culture—it simply is—and thus, is hardly questioned.

Culture, however, is always changing. It seems that at times the speed of change is faster or stronger than others, which makes it possible to divide Western society in several stages for analysis.[1] These divisions are not absolute and are also determined by a certain bias, a lens that looks at history from a certain viewpoint. This viewpoint is culturally determined and thus again, very difficult to evaluate objectively.

## From Modernity to Postmodernity

The Middle Ages were characterized by a clear hierarchy, with God at the top (as the church viewed him), then the Church with its leaders, then the political leaders, then the people. The Church had a strict control on everything in society. All the arts, sciences and cultures were theoretically geared toward God and the Bible. Since tradition became stronger than Scripture, decisions were not always based on a biblical worldview.

The Reformation broke the control the Church had upon society. It also paved the way for the Enlightenment. Mysticism and superstition could not be allowed any longer. Things needed to be explained on a rational basis. Thus, the pulpit replaced the altar. Whereas this change was needed, since people needed to understand what was being taught about the Bible in their own language and not just imagine the meaning of the rituals practiced by the clergy, with time this also took away the mystical element in worship. When everything becomes rational in the Enlightenment sense, God is put in a box and the key is thrown away.

The Enlightenment took God out of the picture. Whereas in the Middle Ages everything revolved around God, the Bible and the Church, and the famous dictum, "believe in order to understand" was the norm, now "you believe only what you

understand" replaced it. Science became the new god of Western society. The church needed to survive within this cultural change. Whereas Catholic universities were stricter at limiting the findings of their research to their own traditions, Protestant universities seemed to let the boat sail wherever it wished to go. The more conservative Protestant movement needed an answer in order to adapt to these changes in society. The systematization of theology, the rise of a new kind of apologetics, and archeology were a kind of a response toward this new worldview. Nevertheless, without noticing, the church also accepted this worldview. In a sense there was no way out: the need to move away from superstition, from dead rituals and the focus on understanding Scripture all pointed in the same direction. On the other hand, there was also a need to reflect critically upon this culture shift. This reflection seems to have come only a lot later. The church has a hard time anticipating some of the cultural trends and preparing responses for them. Maybe this is because the church as a whole would hardly buy in to a prophetic stance against something that seems so good.

When the gas of the Enlightenment ran out, postmodernity set in. The reaction of Evangelicalism toward this cultural shift was fierce. The negative aspects of this change appalled the church. Some of the main points, like relativism, the loss of meaning, hedonism, pluralism, and immediatism shook the church. There were red lights flashing everywhere. Imminent danger and apostasy would be the destiny of the church that would not take a fierce stand against the "culture of the Antichrist." Very few were able to read a bit deeper and see that this new culture was not worse, nor better than, the previous one. The church had learned to respond to the Enlightenment, and would have to find answers now toward this new trend. Every culture has elements that reflect God's image, but also those that reflect our rebellion. It seems though, that the church so easily finds its own culture in the Bible and believes its own tradition equals the Bible.

After a few years the concept of postmodernity became ever more difficult to define.[2] Some would say this was merely the outcome of modernity, or hypermodernity. Others would call it liquid modernity, or even post-postmodernism or metamodernism. However we define this trend is not the most important.[3] What we certainly need to see is that there has been a cultural shift. This shift affects the church and all our evangelistic efforts as well.

The methods we used to evangelize were based upon a certain culture and its epistemology that no longer has the same appeal today. People react in different ways and need to be approached in different ways. A case in point is described by John Burke who was evangelizing on a College campus. Burke presented the gospel with logical steps trying to get Chris to make a commitment of faith. Chris reacted

positively toward the presentation of the gospel so that Burke believed it was time to push for a decision. Chris' reaction surprised him. Chris said that the gospel certainly made sense to Burke, but would not work for him. In other words: what works for you will not work for me. Burke replied that if it was true and made sense, it was also for him. Chris replied: "You know, I guess I just don't want to be like you." Burke comments that this answer has not left him.[4]

What does this story tell us? Before digging deeper into evangelism in today's context, we will look briefly at the Brazilian context where I minister.

## The Brazilian Context

Brazil never really was affected that much by the Enlightenment. The colonization of Brazil began right after the Portuguese ships "discovered" the new southern continent. Brazil was colonized by a country unaffected by the Reformation. Medieval Catholicism mixed with the folk beliefs of the Arabs that had lived for centuries in Portugal was the predominant value system of the colonizers. In addition, the Jesuits, a product of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, were the missionaries to the indigenous peoples. By the system of patronage, the King of Portugal was responsible to evangelize the Brazilian people – in other words, he became the pope of the Brazilian church. The Jesuits, however, were subject to the Pope in Rome. This created a situation full of religious and economic conflicts in the country. In addition, the miscegenation with the native peoples, including their animism, and with the African slaves who brought their own religious pantheon, created a Catholic country dominated by folk beliefs and syncretism.

Since Brazil was a colony, all the valuable resources went to Portugal, who with the riches from abroad did not really care about industrial production – they purchased most of their products from England. In addition, no industry was allowed in Brazil. Initially, education was attached to the Jesuits, then later to the government within the Christendom model. In the nineteenth century however, many intellectuals went over to France, with several Brazilian students bringing some of the Enlightenment ideals back to Brazil. These, however, only took hold in the few universities in the country. The Brazilian people as a whole were never really that much affected by that worldview.

With the advent of communication technologies in the last decades of the twentieth century however, the values of postmodern western societies came into the country at a rapid speed. Several of these values were similar to the Brazilian version of the Middle Ages. Religious beliefs were centered on God, the Bible, and Jesus, but were very flexible, since the mixture of indigenous and African gods (brought in

through slave traffic), and the Catholic saints are also included the "official Brazilian religion": (folk) Catholicism. Tolerance for different beliefs was already in place, as long as the rituals of the Catholic Church were practiced, or at least not opposed. Until the sixties over 90% of the population would have considered themselves Catholic, but mostly nominal Catholic. Since then the percentage has fallen and now is around 65% Catholic, with an outstanding growth of the evangelicals, who today are close to 25% of the population.

The Protestant church was born with missionaries coming from Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. Later, North America began sending missionaries to Latin America and mostly dominated theological training and the publishing companies with a fundamentalist flavor. Since the colonizers were more concerned with heretics entering the continent than with diseases, the first century of Protestant presence was marked by ostracism from the population and mild persecution in some regions, and therefore a sectarian stance toward other faiths, mainly the Catholic Church. This, together with the fundamentalist bent created among Brazilian Protestants an attitude of "whatever is not *like us* is wrong." Our evangelistic efforts with the mostly Catholic population were very aggressive: we would confront them with truth – "they are idol worshippers (they used images of the saints in church and in their homes) and Mary takes the place of Jesus in their religion." Basically we would not even attempt to relate to people. We were so sure that we had all the truth, and they were in error, that we believed that once they heard our truth, they certainly would want to become like us.

In addition to the fundamentalist emphasis on the gospel alone and definitely no social gospel, Liberation Theology pushed the evangelicals o underscore even more the proclamation and distance themselves from any involvement with social issues. This picture began to change in the mid-nineties. Some Brazilian evangelical leaders began to see that we could and should have a different attitude toward people of other beliefs. We should relate to them before we could share the gospel effectively. While several churches are going in this direction, there are still many who are not, and who continue to have a strong militant approach to evangelism—we need to bring these enemies toward our side.

## Evangelizing People within this New Setting

Evangelistic methods are culturally determined. And this is rightly so, at least in part. We need to speak the language of the people, and we need to communicate in ways they might understand the gospel. If in an Enlightenment culture, evangelism focused more on a rational presentation of arguments attesting the divinity of Christ,

this does not work as well anymore in a relativistic context. We need other approaches to present Christ to a post-Christian culture.

Often the missionaries of the past were criticized for taking the gospel tied to Western culture toward the mission field and that the cultural element might have been stronger than the gospel itself. This criticism is at least partially true. However, the interesting aspect is that we hardly look at our own evangelistic methods, nor apply the same critique toward them. We are sure that our methods are biblical and if they are not inspired in the same sense as the Bible, they certainly are close to that. But is that true? Is the presentation of the truth in the Enlightenment sense the presentation of the biblical gospel? Do we want to win people to the church-culture that was strongly influenced by the Enlightenment? Paul Hiebert reminds us: "Our desire is not to win arguments but to persuade people to follow Christ. Our witness must be incarnational in nature. We must go where people are, speak their language, and become one with them as far as our consciences allow and we are psychologically able. People need to hear the gospel in their heart language and see it lived in us."[5] The problem is that we frequently connect the method, not with our own culture, but with the Bible. So we believe the way to bring people to the gospel has a certain method of several steps and that is the right way to do it.

But is the gospel predominantly propositional? Enlightenment church-culture certainly would say yes. Must the cultures that are more relational, and consequently the people born in the postmodern context, become predominantly propositional in order to understand the gospel? John Burke thinks not:

> "Fundamentally, truth is not primarily propositional, but personal. Jesus said, "I am the truth..." The best way to help emerging generations find truth is to introduce them to him…. Generally, emerging generations do not ask, "What is true?" They are primarily asking, "Do I want to be like you?" In other words, they see truth as relational. "If I want to be like you, then I want to consider what you believe. If I don't see anything real or attractive in you or your friends as Christ-followers, I don't care how true you think it is, I'm not interested."[6]

Certainly we can go too far as to remove the propositional element of Scripture. This would be deadly for the gospel. But we definitely should question if we did not go too far in our propositional approach. The new generations wish to see the gospel working in the lives of people, not just propositional truth statements. That is where Jesus becomes so important. Even though Brazil never came to the point of living in the Enlightenment mode, the evangelical churches have been strongly influenced

by some of its elements (those supported by fundamentalism). It is sad to see that Paul has become more important than Jesus. The preaching of Epistles has by far outnumbered the teaching of the Gospels in those churches that we would consider biblically sound.

Since we live in a culture where relationships are so important, there is a need to come back to Jesus.[7] We need to re-read the Gospels and find the Jesus of Scripture, who certainly will challenge the Jesus of our church-tradition. He became one of us, lived in our culture, was influenced by it, and needed to communicate in word and in deed so that people could know God and his purposes for them. We are however, not only talking about content, but also about methodology. Again Burke reminds us that,

> "Even though Jesus had all the answers, he still respected and valued the opinions and free will of others. He often asked questions to get people to search rather than just telling the answer. He taught in parables to pique spiritual curiosity of those truly seeking... Because of all the baggage and lack of trust in our post-Christian world, people need to be engaged in dialogue... If they listen to a message in church, they want to process it. They need to question it and wrestle with it... Creating a culture of dialogue means becoming people who truly respect and value all people as worthy of the love and sacrifice Christ demonstrated. It means being willing to respect their thoughts and opinions, making sure they know we value them, even if we differ in belief. An atmosphere of dialogue requires us to take into account the perspective of the other person, seeking to understand her position as much as we want her to understand ours. It is other-centered communication. It creates a two-way street of conversation. This kind of environment respects the free will of individuals and helps people not be afraid of offending us in their exploration and questioning."[8]

This approach ties in with the way the "other" has been viewed by the church and culture as a whole. In an excellent article Paul Hiebert shows us how the "other" was seen in history. In the Middle Ages, the "others" were monsters, infidels, heretics, descendants of Cain, etc.[9] In the Age of Discoveries, they were considered savages, pagans, immature children. Then the Enlightenment thought of the "other" as primitive, unenlightened ancestors. Today they are considered native, inscrutable, etc. These characterizations of the "other" will not help us in our holistic mission. We were all created in God's image. If these notions continue of the "other," reconciliation will not occur. We are all brothers and sisters and need to learn from each other, even

though we know that the cultural differences between us create barriers that take time to bridge. I am not advocating relativism, where everything goes and we basically learn from the experiences of other people. But we also have to avoid looking at the other as an "object" to be evangelized, to have better statistics.

## Point of Contact

In the past our conversation with those outside the church had mostly a top-down approach. We had the truth and believed people were eager to know the truth and if we could give them the best arguments, they surely would embrace our faith. Thus we would begin with Christ and confront people with the need for a decision: yes or no. This, however, is frequently perceived as an "I am better that you" approach. In addition, because of the strong emphasis on the truth element and the "this or that" approach we understood Jesus as the judge and hell as outcome of the wrong decision people would take. While Jesus certainly is the judge and people need to decide to whom they will give their allegiance and this decision has very long-lasting outcomes, this is not even how Jesus approached people. Jesus utilized this approach only with the religious leaders who intentionally opposed him, even knowing that he had come from God (John 3).

In addition, using this approach showed that we were aware of the consequences of our rebellion against God (the Fall), but not very aware of being created in his image and likeness, and that although this image was affected, some elements of God's image nevertheless are still present in us. Thus, in using Jesus and the cross to begin our conversation with those outside the faith, this closed the door for further conversations and the possibility of getting to know the Christ. If Christ separates people, and he even admitted that would happen (Luke 12:51), we need to start at a different place in order to build a relationship that may point outsiders to Christ.

We are all created in God's image, so creation is what we have in common, and that is a good point to begin, since creation points to the Creator. This could be called a "point of contact." Alister McGrath defines point of contact as a starting point for God's revelation. It is a catalyst, but not a substitute for divine revelation. God shows who he is in revelation, but this revelation has already been prepared where God will give of himself. This point of contact does not anticipate, nor make revelation unnecessary, it simply makes if more efficient when it occurs.[10]

This point of contact is important, because it creates the platform for outsiders to hear the gospel. On the other hand, it points to general revelation that does not reveal everything about God – without the special revelation people cannot be saved. However, in a post-Christian society, special revelation has no credibility, and thus

will not create a platform for a healthy dialogue. If the message does not come across, the Good News of salvation cannot be heard. That is why we need contextualization, which will always raise eyebrows. Lesslie Newbigin explains:

> "Everyone with the experience of cross-cultural mission knows that there are always two opposite dangers, the Scylla and Charybdis, between which one must steer. On the one side there is the danger that one finds no point of contact for the message as the missionary preaches it, to the people of the local culture the message appears irrelevant and meaningless. On the other side is the danger that the point of contact determines entirely the way that the message is received, and the result is syncretism. Every missionary path has to find the way between these two dangers: irrelevance and syncretism. And if one is more afraid of one danger than the other, one will certainly fall into the opposite."[11]

It is far safer to maintain the gospel within our own church-culture, which means the gospel becomes captive to our methods and our worldview, in other words, our cultural understanding of the gospel. But history has shown that this often brings more culture than gospel to the lost. To contextualize the gospel into other cultures must always deal with the danger of syncretism.[12] When the gospel enters another culture it needs to clothe itself with cultural forms in order to be understood. These cultural forms are not neutral – they bring with them levels of meaning that are cannot be brought across by the limitations of vocabulary. When we present Christ to a different culture, we must be aware that what people understand is not exactly what is in our mind, sometimes even very far from what we thought we were conveying.[13] This means that the contextualizing process can never end. In an ever-changing culture, words and concepts change rapidly and the church needs to find ways to communicate the unchangeable message to outsiders so they might grasp it in their ever-changing categories.

Since "truth" immediately closes the door for the presentation of the gospel, but cannot be left out, what alternative do we have? McGrath suggest that instead of asking if the Christian faith is "true" we might ask people if it is "believable." This might open the doors for conversation and diminish the biases against the Christian faith.[14] In this dialogue, certainly the truth of the gospel will need to be addressed, but it should not be the beginning of the conversation. Starting there in most cases ends the conversation.

For some people this certainly may seem like a step back in our evangelistic efforts, since it is perceived as watering down the gospel and adopting relativism.

But this might not be so. It is establishing a point of contact, where the biases can be slowly deconstructed and the gospel might reach outsiders through relationships. McGrath illustrates this point with a story of Greek mythology.

> "Homer mentions mermaids that sang so seductively that sailors would leave   their duties and so their boats were destroyed. Ulysses protected his sailors by stuffing the ears of the sailors so they would not be seduced by their singing. However, Orpheus proposed another alternative. He played the lyre so well that his music was a stronger attraction than the mermaids' singing."[15]

We can present the gospel in such a manner that people will be attracted to it. This means we relate to them before we present truth. This creates an opening so others might listen to us. We serve the needs of the people to create a point of contact. When the doors are open, people in need will know where to look for help when God creates in them the desire for a new life.

Our stance toward defending the truth of the gospel should never lead us to equate "the other" as those who defend the lie of relativism and as such are to be defeated. This does not mean that we will avoid the truth issue, but that we will need to present it in a different way. Bruce Ellis Benson gives an interesting suggestion:

> "The Christian can only offer them [the teachings of Christ] in a spirit of deep humility, precisely because they are examples of being truly humble, of being dependent upon one another, of loving even those who do not love us back. Of course, even these examples must be offered up in political discourse only in a spirit of respect and with willingness to dialogue with the other... The point is that, rather than start by focusing on me, the focus begins on the other. Of course, this is fully in line with what Jesus says. His injunctions are what one does in response to the other— whether the widow, the stranger, the enemy, or the one who demands one's clothing. In regard to these last two, Jesus in effect says "do the opposite of what you would be inclined to do"—instead of hating in return, love; instead of resisting the demand, give freely of even that which is not demanded. In not responding in kind, one changes the entire structure of the relation: it is now structured by love."[16]

Dialogue and contextualization are loaded words. But we have no alternative. Either we go to where the people are, or they will not hear the gospel. Jesus' incarnation gives us the right model for it. The change from the Old Testament to

the New Testament is not just a fuller revelation of propositions and teaching – it is Jesus showing who God is and how to live a God-pleasing life. Jesus clothed himself with our limitations so he could save us. He calls us not only to worship him, but to follow in his footsteps. This is the way to go. We need more models than methods. We need people who live missionally among this culture, people who struggle with contextualization, who are willing to speak the language of the people, relate to them so that they might be reached. But this alone would be too individualistic. We need small groups, even churches that will live missionally, modeling the gospel among a culture that yearns for something that it cannot find except in Jesus.

We need to be missionally minded, then live missional lives, opening doors for the missional message to reach people through our words. The normal sequence in today's culture is this one, but situations are so varied, it might be the other way round. Nevertheless, the light needs to shine in the darkness. The church is called to be in the world. This means it will constantly struggle with not adopting worldly values, but it dare not isolate itself from the world, since it forgets its own calling, and history has shown that a light when it does not shine in the darkness loses its own light.

## Notes

1 For an analysis of the missionary movement applying Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

2 A full-blown definition of postmodernity is virtually impossible. This is because there is considerable disagreement about what modernity really means. Nevertheless, at least a preliminary definition is needed. Os Guinness summarizes postmodern thinking in this way: "Where modernism was a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation, postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair. There is no truth, only truths. There are no principles, only preferences. There is no grand reason, only reasons. There is no privileged civilization, only a multiple of cultures, beliefs, periods, and styles. There is no grand narrative of human progress, only countless stories of where people and their cultures are now. There is no simple reality or any grand objectivity of universal, detached knowledge, only a ceaseless representation of everything in terms of everything else. In sum, postmodernism...is an extreme form of relativism." In *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), 105.

3 I do not mean that studying authors like Grenz, Veith and others is not important, but there is not room to discuss the philosophic changes that occurred in this chapter. What I wish to emphasize is that there are changes and we need to take them seriously.

[4] John Burke. *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come as You are Culture in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 36-37.

[5] Paul G. Hiebert, "Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism," *Missiology: An International Review*, XIX:3 (1991): 273.

[6] Burke, *No Perfect People*, 42-43.

[7] There are many reflections about the need to get back to Jesus as a model for our lives and not only heed his teachings. See readings below by Frost, Hirsch, and McKnight.

[8] Burke, *No Perfect People*, 53-54.

[9] Paul G. Hiebert, "Are We Our 'Others' Keepers?" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22 (1995): 325-337.

[10] Alister E. McGrath, *Apologética Cristã no Século XXI. Ciência e Arte com Integridade* (São Paulo, Brazil: Vida, 2008), 22.

[11] Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 67.

[12] This indicates the real danger of under-contextualizing and over-contextualizing. The dangers are real and affect all involved in transmitting the gospel. As Newbigin reminds us, you tend to fall into one or the other ditch, and ditches on both sides have similar features, although we only see the other ditch as the nasty one. Hiebert's approach toward contextualization should always be kept in mind.

[13] When the gospel entered the Greco-Roman world it was perceived in ways that were different from the Jewish context where it was born. The struggle to understand the gospel will be with us forever. Thus we need to dialogue with people from other theological orientations and different cultures to get closer to the biblical gospel. We need to dialogue with the people of the culture where they are at, not where we would like them to be.

[14] McGrath, *Apologética*, 313.

[15] Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God, and Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 178.

[16] Bruce Ellis Benson, "Radical democracy, radical Christianity," *Political Theology* 10:2 (2009), 53.

## Recommended Reading

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991.

Burke, John. *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come as You are Culture in the Church.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Pós-modernismo: Um guia para entender a filosofia do nosso tempo.* São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1997.

Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come. Innovation and Mission for the 21st-century Church.* Peabody: Hendricksen, 2006.

Guinness, Os. *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994.

Hiebert, Paul G. *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World.* Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999.

_____. *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

McGrath, Alister E. *Apologética Cristã no Século XXI. Ciência e Arte com Integridade.* São Paulo: Vida, 2008.

McKnight, Scot. *The Jesus Creed. Loving God, Loving Others.* Brewster: Paraclete, 2004.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *A Word in Season.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Veith Jr. Gene E. *Tempos pós-modernos: Uma avaliação cristã do pensamento e da cultura da nossa época.* São Paulo: Cultura Cristã, 1999.

## Study Questions

1. Is your culture more pre-modern, modern, or post-modern? Or is it in transition from one to the other? Give examples of these worldviews in your culture.

2. What have been your experiences of late, or those of others, in presenting the gospel using a "propositional truth" approach as explained in this chapter?

3. Give two concrete examples of what a meaningful "point of contact" could be. How can churches establish collective points of contact with their communities?

Section D

# Strategic Perspectives

# 24 Spiritual Authority and Mission

Randy Friesen

The past several decades have seen a wave of books, articles and ministries focussing on the issue of spiritual warfare. It can be treated in almost "fad like" fashion along with issues such as alternative spirituality and the latest renewal movement. However, even a cursory reading of Scripture reveals a significant focus on spiritual warfare in the life of Christ and the teachings of the early church.

How are these teachings to be applied and taught today in our present Western context? How do we prepare our mission candidates and pastors to both practice and teach appropriate principles of spiritual warfare? What is an Anabaptist contribution to the discussion of spiritual warfare?

A survey on spiritual warfare exposure and training was conducted of mission workers from around the world who serve with Anabaptist related mission agencies in preparation for a consultation on this topic in 2001. Of the workers surveyed, some eighty per cent indicated they encountered spiritual warfare in their ministry, while only fifteen per cent felt they had been adequately trained and prepared to face those challenges.[1]

Randy Friesen (Th.D., Missiology, University of South Africa) was the director of Youth Mission International (YMI) from 1989 to 2000, a ministry for the development and growth of mission programs for teens, college-age and early career participants. From 2000 to 2004 Randy was the Director of Short Term Ministries for MB Mission. Since 2004 Randy has served as the Executive Director of MB Mission, the global mission agency of the Mennonite Brethren churches of North America.

When Jesus sent his disciples out "like lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3), he didn't send them out unprepared. They returned with a faith-building story of God's healing power to save and deliver. Our challenge is no different today.

Clearly the scope of the topic exceeds the limitations of this chapter. Therefore, we will limit our focus to a brief background of our Western worldview as it affects spiritual warfare, the importance of proper order in acquiring spiritual "knowledge," an examination of four realms of spiritual warfare, an Anabaptist contribution to the discussion, and finally, the training and discipleship implications.

In his book God at War, Gregory Boyd makes the point that although Scripture provides a clear presentation of a warfare worldview, we have been conditioned in the West to read Scripture through our materialistic and rationalistic orientation. A contrast exists between our Western materialistic and rationalistic bias and the heightened spiritual awareness of other cultures.[2]

MB Mission teams serving alongside the church in other parts of the world have experienced this contrast. During ministry with the MB church in Congo, MB Mission teams have been exposed to clear and practical teaching from the Congo church on how to both resist the works of the enemy and pray for those afflicted by him. Believers openly ministered to those serving the powers of darkness. The fast-growing Mennonite church in Ethiopia (Meserete Kristos Church) similarly trains its young leaders in the "One Year for Christ" program to resist the enemy and see those bound by evil spirits freed. Is this merely an unenlightened throwback to their pre-Christian spiritist roots? Or is it a faithful response to Christ's statement that he has given us authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19)?

Is it possible that our chronocentrism—our tendency to assume that the worldview we hold at the present time is the only ultimately true worldview—is limiting our ability to perceive and apply the teachings of Scripture in this critical area? Boyd makes the point that the early church prior to Augustine had an understanding of evil that included personal spiritual beings with the ability to oppose the will of God. Augustinian tradition (post fourth century) has tended to view angels merely as agents who invariably carry out God's sovereign will. The post-Enlightenment naturalistic worldview rejects such beings outright.[3]

The modern evangelical Western worldview, deeply shaped by both the Enlightenment and Augustine's view of God's sovereignty (omnipotence over all evil), is unable to explain the spiritual beings referred to in Daniel 10, whose resistance of the angel Michael delayed a message Daniel was to receive. Are there territorial spirits and fallen angels committed to opposing God's work in the world?

The much broader issue of evil emerges in this discussion. Is the problem of evil an issue of God's providence as an omnipotent being and thus his character? Or is the problem of evil one which includes fallen angels with free will who oppose the work of God and his church?

Clearly the latter perspective involves a much more active role for the church in addressing spiritual warfare. Rather than a fatalistic resignation to the sovereign will of God in allowing evil, Scripture calls the people of God to "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9).

A passive response to the works of darkness in our lives results in undisciplined thoughts from which flow behaviour and character. Frequently, Christians respond to spiritual warfare from a position of fear, believing that resisting the enemy will somehow encourage his influence in their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. The victory Christ won on the cross establishes our authority over the enemy. Unless claimed and established in daily resistance over temptation, this victory is limited to salvation. Believers have the opportunity to grow in Christ-like character through the renewing of their minds and transformation of their attitudes and behaviour. Spiritual warfare is the first half of this renewing process. The inability to actively resist that which is evil in our lives sabotages the reception of God's truth.

A university student had been a Christian for about a year. During the months following her conversion she experienced great joy and freedom from the episodes of depression and suicidal thoughts that had characterized her life prior to knowing Christ. Then, after about eight months, the manic-depressive periods began to return. She had been immersed in Scripture and a worshipping community but had never been taught that she had to resist destructive thoughts.

As the counsellor listened to her story she suddenly exclaimed, "If one more person tells me I have to believe and apply the truth about how God loves me and accepts me I'm going to scream. I know the truth. It's just not making a difference." The counsellor then urged her to actively resist the enemy of her soul.

As she began to realize that spiritual transformation was more than just a question of embracing truth and also included resisting the enemy, hope began to rise up within her. Many believers like this student have not been instructed in the basics of spiritual warfare including the establishment of who they are in Christ and the importance of resisting evil—not just embracing the truth.

As we consider helpful principles for training disciples of Christ in this area, we will want to consider all that Scripture has to teach us. However, we do well to look first at Jesus' example. His preparation of the twelve disciples in Luke 9 includes a pointed reference to their power and authority over the demonic realm in

the context of sharing the Good News of the kingdom of God. The same authority is acknowledged in debriefing the seventytwo disciples later in Luke 10:17-24. Jesus wanted them to know they had spiritual authority.

However, Jesus goes on to gently rebuke the disciples for focussing on their various deliverance stories. It is human nature to dwell on the more sensational aspects of ministry. To focus on our relationship with the Father and our knowledge of him, however, requires discipline and maturity. This balance between ministering in spiritual authority and power, while not getting distracted by it, is still a challenge for us today.

## Spiritual Knowledge

In Hosea 4:6 God declares through his prophet: "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (NIV, passim). God's people were religious, yet their religion was not tied to obedience. They had more knowledge of evil than good. Similarly, Christians today can become destroyed through a lack of knowledge. And in this area of discipleship, order is important.

We require, first of all, knowledge of the Father and his incredible love for us as his covenant people, leading to the truth about our identity and positional authority in Christ, followed by a knowledge of our hearts (the true nature of our inner life), and concluding with an awareness of the nature of the enemy and his schemes.

### Knowledge of the Father

Jesus points out to his disciples that a relationship with the Father is hidden to the "wise and learned" but "revealed . . . to little children" (Luke 10:21). The disciples were to rejoice, not that the spirits submit to them, but that "your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).Spiritual pride blocks us from understanding the value of our relationship with the Father, but it can also open the door to a fascination with spiritual warfare. In particular there can be dependence upon technique and strategy rather than upon the Father. Biblical knowledge is always tied to obedience and not merely to intellectual assent. To know the Father is to obey him. Jesus reminds us "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The cautionary story of the seven sons of Sceva in Ephesus reminds us of the futility of technique or formula in spiritual warfare when a relationship with the Father is not present.  These seven sons of the chief priest would "invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out'" (Acts 19:13).  This must have worked several times or they would not have repeated their formulaic statement.

However, they did not know the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ. The unclean spirit recognized their lack of relationship with the Father and replied, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15).  A second hand relationship with the Father will not stand up in spiritual battle.

The beating these seven men received from this demonized man and their resulting testimony caused the fear of God (not of demons) to fall on the church in Ephesus. "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly…in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Act 19:18-20).  Those who believed in Jesus were also practicing sorcery. They were expecting to receive God's forgiveness of sins and blessings while still holding on to their occult practices. The same syncretistic reality exists today in churches of first generation Christians coming out of ancestral worship and spiritism. Without repentance for occult practices, new believers in Jesus lack growth in discipleship and the preaching of the word will lack transforming power.

Knowledge of the Father means relationship with God alone. The first two commandments require no other gods besides the Lord God, and no idols in the lives of his followers (Deuteronomy 5:6-10). Our God is a jealous God who promises consequences to those who commune with unclean spirits.

There is nothing the enemy wants to block or disrupt more in the life of Christ's disciples than our daily communication and love relationship with the Father through Jesus. Knowledge of spiritual warfare technique is dangerous without a growing knowledge of the Father expressed in daily dependence and obedience.

### Knowledge of Our Identity and Authority in Christ

The knowledge of our authority and power in Christ flows out of our knowledge of the Father. Before we knew Christ we were following "the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient…gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:2-3). We lived under the authority of the "world, the flesh and devil." "But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...and raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6). Those who are in Christ have been forgiven and given his authority to resist sin and the work of the enemy in their lives. We are called to be overcomers.

Jesus told his disciples, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:19). What is the difference between authority and power?

If someone waving a gun stepped into traffic on a city street, they could force trucks to stop just by pointing a gun. Take away the gun, and they get run over. That's power. Power is simply the capacity to influence others. However, a uniformed but unarmed police officer could step into the same traffic and simply hold up their hand and trucks would stop. Why? The officer carries the authority of the badge and behind that, the state. Society has collectively given them authority to enforce the laws of the land. Authority must be given for it to be legitimate. In Christ, we have been given both authority and power.

Through this revelation of our position in Christ we know the "hope to which he has called" us, the "riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (our value to God), and "his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). These truths put the experience of spiritual warfare in its proper context. It is our relationship with Jesus that is everything. Much of our spiritual warfare is focused on simply maintaining unbroken fellowship with Jesus.

Spiritual authority has been given to the believer through the finished work of Christ on the cross (Matt. 28:18-19; Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 6:10-11). Believers are called to apply this authority that Christ won for us through actively resisting harmful thoughts and the enemy's attacks (Col. 3:5-11; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Jas. 4:7).

Jesus models for us how to resist temptation and the enemy's attacks in Luke 4:1-13. Three times the tempter came to Jesus and each time Jesus responded with "It is written…." Jesus quoted Scripture from Deuteronomy in resisting Satan's attacks. We have been given the Word of God as a sword. Knowing and memorizing specific Scripture related to the areas of temptation and attacks we frequently face, and then declaring them out loud is an effective way to exercise the authority we have in Christ, the Living Word. Memorizing and then declaring specific Scripture that address fear, lust, anger, unforgiveness and pride changes how we face temptation!

In addition to the Word of God, we have been given the name of Jesus. "…These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons…" (Mark 16:17). Jesus has been given a "name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). There is power in the name of Jesus as illustrated in the Ephesus deliverance story (Acts 19:13-20), especially when we know our authority in Christ.

### Knowledge of Our Hearts

With the often used picture of our hearts being a home in which Christ comes to take residence, we are invited to surrender daily every area of our lives to his control. Renovation and ongoing surrender under the leading of God's Spirit are evidence we know Jesus is the new owner of the house.

Humility leads us to acknowledge that our hearts are "deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). If we ask Him, God will show us our hearts and all that limits his glory in our lives.

There are four basic steps to spiritual freedom in the life of a disciple of Christ:

1. **Recognize**. The disciple prays with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way within me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). Is there any repetitive sin, a sin foothold or even stronghold that I need freedom from?

2. **Repent**. Responsibility must be taken personally for our sin issues. Like David we must declare, "I have sinned" (2 Sam. 12:13). We cannot blame the enemy for our own wilful transgressions (James 1:13-15). Bitterness, anger, pride, fear, and lust all involve choices of our will. Repentance involves confession (acknowledging sin against others and God), turning from sin (our will is engaged), and choosing God's way. Jesus linked our forgiveness of others to our own reception of forgiveness (Matt. 18:35). In many cases a person's freedom is linked to their willingness to forgive someone who has hurt them. In repentance we are removing the legal ground of sin that the enemy is holding on to. Here the cross is our most powerful weapon.

3. **Resist**. "Submit yourselves then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9). While we frequently pray petitionary prayers, authoritative prayer is standing in Christ's authority and resisting fear, lust, pride, anger, etc., out loud. "In the name of Jesus, I resist you, lust, and command you to flee." In the battle for our thoughts we "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:5).

4. **Renew**. The process of renewing our minds includes filling our minds with the truth of God's Word (Psalm 119:9), and daily yielding to the Holy Spirit (Ephesian 5:18; Romans 8:5-6). Memorizing and meditating on Scripture, worship, and prayer reorient our lives around God's presence and truth**.**

### Knowledge of the Enemy

Jesus pointed out that, although he came that we "might have life, and have it to the full," there was also the "thief" who comes to "kill, steal and destroy" (John 10:10). Revelation 12 similarly presents the enemy as a devourer, accuser, and deceiver. Jesus' unexpected rebuke of Satan working through Peter (Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33) is an illustration of how subtle spiritual warfare can become. Paul pointed out that unforgiveness must be dealt with in the body of Christ "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11). Jesus gives us knowledge of the enemy and his schemes for our protection.

Believers under the control of the Holy Spirit cannot be "possessed" by the enemy. However, Paul warns that without renewal in our minds and an active, daily "putting off" of the old nature and "putting on" of the nature of Christ, we can give the devil a "foothold" (Eph. 4:20-27) or way of influencing our lives.

"Footholds" can exist in the lives of disciples even though ownership of the house belongs to Jesus. Demonic footholds can be distinguished from periodic sin (everyday house dirt). Footholds are established when we are unable to stop repetitive wilful sin through simple confession. We are instructed in situations like that to "confess our sins to each other and pray for each other that you might be healed" (Jas. 5:16). When we recognize their presence we respond to these sin footholds much as to an unlawful squatter. They must be evicted.

Jesus said when you sweep a house clean and put it in order, it is important that the house is then filled (Luke 11:24-26). The lies of the enemy must be replaced with the light of God's truth. Jesus' warning that demons return sevenfold to retake space they have lost has been documented in countless counselling relationships. It is often much harder in matters of spiritual warfare to hold ground than to take it. It is essential to have a growing knowledge of the Father and of our identity and authority in Christ, as well as regular spiritual house cleaning, to complement our knowledge of the enemy's nature and ways.

## Spheres of Responsibility and Authority

### Personal Sphere

The first and most basic sphere is that of the personal mind and will of each believer. The believer is given spiritual "weapons" to "demolish strongholds" in our minds and to "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Strongholds of fear, lust, bitterness, and anger can be built up in the minds of believers. Without a clear recognition of their existence and an understanding of how to apply the spiritual weapons that have been given to demolish them, these strongholds persist and influence destructive behaviours that limit spiritual freedom, destroy marriages and families, and discredit ministries.

The authority to "bind and loose" in the spiritual realm (Matt. 16:18-19) is given in the context of the advance of Christ's church against the gates of Hades. The enemy's strongholds are no match for a believer who actively submits to Christ and resists the enemy. When Jesus rightly perceived the satanic origin of Peter's resistance to the cross, he verbally rebuked the enemy (Matt. 16:23).

Recently a teenager was brought to me by her youth leader following a youth rally. In a ministry of prayer, I had opportunity to witness the dramatic changes that result from recognizing one's authority in warfare.

The teen struggled with anger toward an absentee father and a variety of other relational issues. Although a confessing Christian from a "successful" Mennonite home and churchgoing family, she was bulimic and suicidal. Her parents and youth leaders were helpless to change her destructive behavior. After gently and repeatedly telling her that Jesus loved her, the teen was finally able to raise her eyes to meet mine. As we asked the Holy Spirit to show us the root of the oppression in her life, the girl was reminded of a prayer she had offered to Satan during a particularly difficult time in her home eighteen months before. This seemingly innocuous prayer in her bedroom had initiated a very destructive period in her life.

She was initially unable to verbalize the name of Jesus and renounce her prayer to Satan. Finally, with the Holy Spirit's assistance, she blurted out, "Can I say something?" and she stood to her feet. With the tenacity of a fighter she declared, "Jesus is my Lord and Saviour and in his name I bind you Satan and command you to flee my life, now!"

The breakthrough was immediate, and strongholds of death, anger, fear, and bitterness were quickly renounced and broken. However, to hold the ground, this young woman forgave her father and repented to her parents for rebellion. The change in this girl's countenance, eating habits, and personality was amazing. She continued to hold the ground through the daily infilling of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and resistance of thoughts that represented old strongholds.

Are all eating disorders demonic in origin? Definitely not. Scripture teaches that we battle the ways of "the flesh, the world, and the devil" (Eph. 2:12; Rev. 12:17). The interrelationship among those three aspects of the battle requires that we be "selfcontrolled and alert" (1 Pet. 5:8). In dealing with the symptoms of spiritual warfare, such as suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is often critical in revealing root issues and incidents, which are the "legal basis" for spiritual oppression. This is less a formula than it is another expression of our dependency on Christ, without whom we can do nothing.

Without personal freedom in Christ from destructive thought and behaviour patterns, believers will have limited authority to engage in warfare in the subsequent three spheres of responsibility.

## Family Sphere

The second sphere of responsibility for spiritual warfare is the family. Christian marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with his bride, the church, and as such is a point of attack for the enemy. Lust and a lack of selfcontrol are referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:5 as a prime target of the enemy in marriages. Similarly, an attitude of dominance or disrespect (1 Pet. 3:7) blocks the prayer life in a marriage

and represents another target. Humility and submission one to another represent a protection against darkness while the "days are evil" (Eph. 5:8-21).

Husbands and wives must pray for each other and even do battle for each other in addressing strongholds when necessary. Instead of living in darkness Paul calls us to live in the light (Eph. 5:11). By bringing strongholds of fear or lust into the light and interceding for each other, marriages are taken to a new level of oneness and freedom. A lack of willingness to live in the light and address strongholds in a marriage can result in vulnerability to spiritual attack in a family. Numerous missionaries, pastors, and spiritual leaders have fallen because of an unwillingness to practice the principles of submission to Christ in one another and resistance of the enemy in their marriages.

I recently had the opportunity to pray with a church elder that was addicted to Internet pornography. His repeated private confessions were powerless to break the foothold. It was only when he brought the issue into the light and confessed to another brother, and together we resisted the enemy, that the power of this foothold was broken in his life. What he did not realize was that his son had also come to me for prayer some weeks previous. The son confessed getting a girlfriend pregnant and then taking her to an abortion clinic where the "evidence" was disposed of.

We need to consider whether the sins of the parents, potential footholds, are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 34:7) even under the new covenant, and what the impact of the spiritual law of "sowing and reaping" (Gal. 6:7-8) might be on generational sin.

### Church Sphere

The third sphere of responsibility in the area of warfare for the believer is that of the body of Christ. However, it must be noted again that we will have limited freedom to intercede for each other at this level if we are living in defeat in our marriages or personal life. Paul frequently called on the churches to pray for him in his ministry (2 Cor. 1:8-11), recognizing that Satan could frustrate and even block him (1 Thess. 2:18). Without intercession and warfare the schemes of the enemy to block ministry at the local church level proceed unhindered.

The final piece of the armour given in Eph. 6:10 is that of intercession and prayer for the saints. We must be on guard for each other. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:16).

Footholds that impact the church include relational sin in areas of bitterness, slander, and gossip (Eph. 4:29-32). Repentance is our most powerful weapon to confront these footholds. The freedom to confront and confess relational sin is

spiritual warfare. The "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10) who often accuses us through each other will be overcome by our application of the blood of the Lamb and willingness to repent. Similarly, a proactive commitment to live "at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18) is a form of defensive warfare that thwarts the schemes of the enemy to divide the saints.

When leadership teams, in particular, apply this commitment to not speak of each other negatively and remain loyal to each other, they are arming themselves against the accuser. Ministries led by personnel who are loyal to each other and guard their tongues experience much freedom from the enemy's relational attacks. Without "relational baggage" we are free to pray together and lay down our lives for each other.

The prayer ministry of the church is one of the ways in which we develop in maturity and responsibility in Christ's kingdom. Jesus is looking for an active praying church that functions as his ambassadors on the earth. Satan is opposed to this role. As he did with the people of Israel, God has allowed the enemy to remain in the land to teach us responsibility and to reveal our hearts (Judg. 2:21-3:4). We are being prepared to rule and reign with Christ in the age to come (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6). This is our training ground. "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

### Societal Sphere

Perhaps one of the reasons the church in the Western world has had such limited influence on the "principalities and powers" is because of our inability to walk in the light in the previous three levels of spiritual warfare. Without freedom personally, in our marriages, and in the church, we have a limited effectiveness or even desire to engage in intercession for our cities and nations. Those who do learn and begin to apply some fresh principles of intercession for their city or nation without walking in freedom at the previous three levels cannot withstand the "counterattack" and fall away from their course of action.

Scripture does not provide clear teaching on territorial spirits. The presence of a "prince of the Persian kingdom" and a "prince of Greece" (Dan. 10:13, 20) who are resisting an angelic messenger sent to communicate with Daniel are indications that the "prince of this world" (John 12:31) has assigned fallen angels to territories. However, rather than knowingly influencing the angelic battle around him, Daniel appears oblivious to it until the angel of the Lord tells him. This in itself should be a caution against creating our own practical theology based on what works somewhere else. What is clear is that we are warned against slandering celestial beings (Jude 8, 2 Pet. 2:10-12), and confronting things we do not understand.

While we are called to drive out unclean spirits afflicting people, there is no such command regarding principalities and powers. Instead, we are called to "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). This defensive posture includes the offensive weapons of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions..." (Eph. 6:17-18). When our attention is on the Lord, and not on the enemy, we will be led by the Lord as to how to pray.

We cannot allow fear to continue to keep us immature about spiritual warfare. Jesus stated, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18). We are to pray that his kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10), precisely because his will is presently not being done on earth. The advance of Christ's kingdom is warfare against a determined opponent: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). When Satan offered Christ the kingdoms of the world if he would only worship him (Luke 4:5-8), Jesus never challenged Satan's ability to offer those kingdoms. Christ's victory, however, would come another way: the way of the cross. "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

While some persons go into great detail delineating the differences in role and function of the various levels of spiritual authority listed by Paul in Ephesians 6:12, what is important for our purposes is that this unseen enemy does exist and that he is organized. His organization along geographical lines seems to correspond to the earthly political and human powers that he attempts to control. Further, it seems logical that prevailing cultural gods or deities, such as the goddess Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19), gain their power to influence a particular region through direct or indirect worship.

These prevailing cultural sins renew the covenants with powers of darkness often through annual festivals or ceremonies. Many who live in the non-Western world can clearly articulate the identity of their regional deity. It must, however, be stated that God and not the enemy has determined the "places where they (the nations) should live" (Acts 17:26).

Given the reality of a geographically organized enemy, we have an opportunity to walk the streets of our cities and intercede for those blinded to the truth of Christ. We have an opportunity to join with the church gathered and to jointly intercede for our regions, as is happening in cities across North America. We can

also intercede together with the church in other parts of the world. When combined with Christian witness and loving demonstrations of Christ's kingdom community, this intercession is powerful.

Our adversary understands power, influence, fame, and wealth. He does not understand death to self and servanthood. There is a role for "binding and loosing" (Matt. 16:18-19) in our proclamation of Christ's kingdom rule. However, this must not be at the expense of our kingdom servanthood and loving community "displacing" the kingdoms of this world. Our proclamation of the victory of the cross must be made in the Spirit with which that victory was won. There is no room for spiritual "Rambos with an attitude" in this area of evangelism, spiritual warfare, and intercession.

Humility, godly character, and a demonstration of Christ's power should provoke the world to ask "the reason for the hope" we have (1 Pet. 3:15). However, kingdom living by itself rarely opens blinded eyes (2 Cor. 4:4). Similarly, intercession without a demonstration of kingdom living is incomplete (John 13:35). Kingdom community, when combined with intercession and warfare against the one who "blinds" the minds of unbelievers from the light, has the ability to powerfully advance the kingdom.

## An Anabaptist Contribution to Spiritual Warfare

While this is only an introduction to the discussion, there are several theological emphases that Anabaptists can offer to the broad topic of spiritual warfare.

As Hans Kasdorf and others so clearly pointed out in *Anabaptism and Mission*, the theological core of the early Anabaptists was radical obedience to the Great Commission's call to go and make disciples of all nations. H. W. Meihuizen states that these early evangelists were commissioned as "Christian Knights," borrowing a term first used by Erasmus.[4] When captured and flogged before magistrates, these evangelists publicly stated their forgiveness of their enemies. These "knights" were clearly in a war. However, they were not battling flesh and blood in their proclamation of Christ's kingdom rule.

Paul stated "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). Others have noted that if we do not wrestle against "principalities and powers," we will fight against flesh and blood. This has been the history of the church through the ages. And here we should include Mennonite churches. In our battle against unjust societal structures and systems in the pursuit of peace, we have too often opted for battling in the "flesh and blood" dimension. We have failed to invest in the warfare of intercession and prayer.

The example of Christ invites us to be active in both the spiritual and physical realms. The kingdom proclamation is of an anointing to "preach good news to the poor... freedom for the prisoners... recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus addresses the physical and spiritual nature of both the problem and the cure.

The early Anabaptist evangelists were warriors who integrated both the seen and unseen nature of the battle. The present spiritual warfare discussion could benefit from a greater emphasis on this integration. The seen and unseen nature of the battle was evident at the cross with both the demonic forces of hell and the Roman soldiers surrounding the crucifixion.

At the cross we also see the paradox of the suffering servant and the victorious warrior who "led captives in his train" (Eph. 4:8). Anabaptists have tended to focus on the suffering servant and not on the victorious warrior. Both are accurate in a fuller understanding of Christology and its importance for the church.

We now have an opportunity to call the larger church to an engagement using Christ's way of addressing evil. The church's proclivity towards triumphalism and a prideful attitude in spiritual warfare will be challenged as we remember that Christ's greatest victory over Satan occurred through obedience to the Father unto death. We will cease warring against flesh and blood as we take up the weapons of love and forgiveness.

The Lamb of God will lead us to battle against the real enemy who seeks to block the rule of Christ in our lives, marriages, churches, and world.

## Training and Discipleship Implications

1. While numerous churches and leaders within the Anabaptist churches have participated in training seminars dealing with spiritual warfare on a personal level through ministries such as "Freedom in Christ" (Neil Anderson) and others, we have not systematically trained our missions personnel or pastoral candidates in this important area of discipleship. Where fear of excesses has held us back we must acknowledge the far more serious consequences of sending unprepared "knights" to the frontlines. Every worker should receive systematic training (biblical, anthropological and prayer based) in spiritual warfare prior to commissioning for assignments.

2. We have much to learn from what the Lord is teaching our brothers and sisters in Latin America, Africa and Asia about spiritual warfare. Our Western worldview colours how we read Scripture with regard to this area of teaching and discipleship and limits the kind of freedom the Lord wants in our mission efforts. Too

many mission efforts are being blocked by relational brokenness at a personal and conference level, depression amongst workers, unexplained sickness and other seemingly "reasonable" issues that could have their origin in the enemy's kingdom. Unfortunately, we are all too easily "unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11). We have unique opportunities in this generation to learn at the feet of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world in this critical area of discipleship.

3. In light of increasing interest on the part of individual congregations to get involved in short term missions, we should encourage/facilitate intercession and prayer teams from local congregations to visit various established and emerging church planting and mission locations. These prayer ministry teams can serve to "soften the spiritual ground" and augment the present evangelism and service mission efforts. Some level of local congregational discernment would be important in determining the spiritual maturity and composition of these teams. Factors such as freedom and right standing in the four areas of spiritual authority and responsibility listed earlier would be more important than age in determining "maturity." Similarly, the need for a common understanding of the principles and practice of intercession as well as cross-cultural ministry on the part of the members of an intercession team are important. A common orientation alongside someone with experience in cross-cultural mission and intercession immediately preceding the intercession trip could help facilitate this preparation.

## Conclusion

Spiritual warfare is a reality for those who follow the Lord Jesus, particularly those who seek to live and share his gospel amongst the least reached of this world. Similar to any other area of discipleship, Jesus is our best teacher in spiritual warfare. The danger is that we either ignore this topic to our peril, or we fixate on it and take our eyes off of Jesus. Our primary focus must be living and sharing the gospel amongst all nations in word and deed. When we face spiritual warfare, we don't run. We stand and fight with the weapons Christ has given us. When in the course of living on mission with Jesus we find those in bondage to the enemy, we don't need to look for a deliverance ministry down the street, or seek to start such a ministry ourselves! Proclaiming freedom in Christ is part of the gospel. We are called to stand in our authority in Christ as we recognize, repent, resist and are renewed. Seeing new followers of Jesus find freedom in Christ is a privilege. Living under Christ's authority and with his blessing in our thought life, families, the church and broader community is part of our kingdom inheritance and witness. Jesus has given us all we need to be more than conquerors and overcomers. Let's live it!

## Notes

[1] Stanley Green, "Survey of Anabaptist Mission Workers on Spiritual Warfare" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Council of International Ministries, Chicago, IL, January, 2001).

[2] Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 18-29.

[3] Ibid., 61-62.

[4] Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1984), 89.

## Recommended Reading

Anderson, Neil. *Victory Over the Darkness.* Ventura: Regal, 1990.

Arnold, Clinton. *Powers of Darkness.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

_____. *Three Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.

Boyd, Gregory A. *God at War.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters.* Revised Edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982.

Shenk, Wilbert R., ed. *Anabaptism and Mission.* Scottdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1984.

## Study Questions

1. Have you been around people who seem "over-engaged" regarding spiritual warfare? Do you think you might have been too "unengaged" in this area? Discuss how you can take the author's advice in this article while being honest about your fears and ignorance.

2. Identify at least one area of sin in the four spheres that the author outlines: personal, family, church and society. Find someone who can discuss this with you.

3. What impact do "societal sins" have in our ability to resist evil (for example, the acceptance of slavery in past generations)? What can or should be done about these?

# 25 Missionary Formation through Non-Formal Training

Rob Penner

At 21 years of age I set foot in Hong Kong for the first time, embarking on what would turn out to be over three decades (and still counting!) of service in the Chinese world. Two years earlier I had sensed a call to missions, the next year attended a five-month Youth With a Mission (YWAM) Discipleship Training School (DTS) and then traveled to Hong Kong for a short-term (six months') missionary experience. Back home in Canada other friends were also answering calls to service in church or missions, all of them choosing the more traditional route of Bible schools and seminaries. While I landed in a cross-cultural context quickly, my friends spent 5-7 years in classrooms before arriving at their destinations.

In 1980 short-term missions were becoming popular, but the path to long-term missions typically passed through Bible school and seminary. I sometimes felt like a kid who had skipped school and that, with only a year in an unaccredited Bible school and a YWAM DTS under my belt, I had bypassed some important step in missionary preparation. Moreover, it was tempting to feel inferior to the "real missionaries" I was meeting, the ones who had endured years of classroom training to be deemed qualified by their sending agencies.

---

Rob Penner (D.Int.St. candidate, Western Seminary, USA) and wife Joy have served for over 30 years in pastoral and educational ministries in both Hong Kong and Canada. He is currently serving in theological education, community development and mission capacity building. Rob is also Regional Team Leader for East Asia.

In the late 1960s, the term "non-formal education" began to find use as a way of describing something between formal education and socialization.[1] Eventually, I would benefit from further formal education as well, but in those early years my own missionary formation was largely non-formal and informal (socialization). In hindsight I realize that, along with many short-term and intensive training modules and seminars, some of the classrooms that prepared me well for missionary service were backstreet noodle shops, local homes, and meetings in Chinese churches.

According to Educator Ted Ward, in the past 200 years since the Industrial Revolution the creation of "education factories" has led to the mistake of making the term "education" nearly synonymous with "school."[2] Ward asserts that since much learning occurs outside of traditional structures a better approach to describing education would be to differentiate between formal, non-formal and informal approaches to learning. He offers a simple description of each category.

Formal education is most often accredited, occurs in a recognized institution, and is "organized, planned, budgeted, staffed and deliberate." Informal education is not intentional in the same sense, but occurs in many social contexts as naturally as a child learning to walk and talk. Between these two is the category of non-formal education which is also deliberate but, unlike formal education, is usually not linked to degrees in accredited institutions. Rather, non-formal learning tends to be intensely practical, seeking to provide "functional knowledge needed for contemporary life."[3]

While each approach to learning can play an important role in missionary formation, this chapter will outline the nature and benefits of a non-formal approach. As we are most accustomed to institutional learning, it is helpful to describe non-formal education by comparing it categorically to its formal partner. In the continuum chart below, veteran missionary Tom Bloomer outlines the differences between the two approaches by comparing 10 aspects of training.[4] We shall then employ these categories (lumping some of them together) to illustrate some of the benefits of non-formal missionary formation.

## Time Orientation

First, formal and non-formal approaches to education may be distinguished by their respective orientation towards time. Whereas formal education tends to be future-oriented, preparing a student for an eventual role in society, non-formal education focuses on equipping a learner with competencies required for the present. This difference may be illustrated through the act of language learning, one of the first missionary tasks.

|  | **Formal** ⟷ | | **Non-formal** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Time** | Formal | Future/Present | Immediate |
| **Teacher** | Certified, expert | Facilitator | Co-learner |
| **Learner** | Dependent | Self-directed | Has knowledge within |
| **Modes/ Methods** | Rigid, competitive, hierarchical | Loosely structured | Informal |
| **Evaluation** | Summative | Formative | Non-existent |
| **Authority** | Institution, state | Community | Learner |
| **Context** | School itself | Wider culture | Local community |
| **Orientation** | Subject, content | Serving others | Local problems, community |
| **Outcomes** | Degrees, professional qualifications | Diplomas | Skills, practical competence |
| **Focus** | Narrow, deep | Going deeper | Broad, shallow |

Language acquisition is actually one of the first *human* tasks, a basic skill gained on a mother's lap and while at play with other toddlers, the most informal of all educational settings. The motivation to learn is simply that of being able to engage in current relationships, and the learner instinctively realizes that greater levels of competence in language lead to better communication and deeper relationships. Basic language acquisition, such as that experienced by a child, is largely the domain of informal education or socialization, and thus formal educational institutions offering language courses often do so with limited success.

I am typical of western Canadians in that I studied French in high school for three obligatory years but have never been able to carry on even the simplest conversation in the language. When I moved to Hong Kong and discovered that language schools were outside my budget, I bought books and tapes and began learning on my own.

But the biggest help came from a two-week LAMP (Language Acquisition Made Practical) seminar given by Tom and Elizabeth Brewster of Fuller Seminary. The Brewsters normally taught this course to prospective missionaries in a classroom at Fuller. While their students would certainly have benefited from a semester of learning how to learn a language (and at some later date pull out their class notes when they eventually arrive on the field) I was able to apply their instruction immediately. Indeed, LAMP encouraged me to learn a language like a child, to say what I could, hear the responses, imitate and make childlike mistakes until I was able to converse like an adult. I began applying the concepts on the very day I learned them, and used this method to learn Cantonese in my early 20s and then again to learn Mandarin in my late 40s. At the same time, I met many missionaries who had spent several years learning language in a classroom but, while they could pass a test, were unable to develop meaningful relationships in the language of their host culture.

The LAMP training I received is an example of non-formal missionary formation. It illustrates the importance of immediate application of lessons learned for the purpose of acquiring skills needed in the present. Indeed, in the intensely practical (incarnational) life of a missionary, skills in cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, contextual analysis and so on are best acquired while on the job in non-formal settings.

## Teacher and Learner

Some missionary skills such as, for example, the linguistic knowledge needed for Bible translation, are best transferred in a classroom by an expert. The training given in educational institutions is generally provided by teachers who have become certified experts in their fields through doing research for many years in accredited institutions. By correlation the learner is a non-expert, entirely dependent on the expert's knowledge.

Non-formal training, on the other hand, ties together the teacher and student in the task of learning. The trainer generally has the advantage of more age, experience or even book learning, but does not consider himself an expert. Moreover, in non-formal education, the learner is continually self-directed, taking the cues from within for her own educational needs. Whereas in a formal training context, the student may be one of hundreds listening to the teacher's lectures, non-formal training tends to emphasize a more intimate relationship between the two. Today we customarily refer to this as a mentoring relationship.

Although rabbinic schools existed in the first centuries and the apostle Paul had apparently attended one prior to his conversion, neither he nor Jesus chose to advance

their work by starting a formal school. However, both of them were "teachers" who considered the training of others to be essential for the advancement of the work. They developed highly personal relationships with their students, traveling together and experiencing gospel proclamation with them in a variety of contexts. When Paul dispatched Timothy and Titus to continue the church planting work they had begun together, he maintained this mentoring relationship.

The biblical training pattern as seen in the ministries of Jesus and Paul (not to mention the Old Testament examples, such as the Moses/Joshua and Elijah/Elisha relationships) is relational and both non-formal and informal. Kingdom workers will benefit greatly from having mentors guide them through a myriad of new situations. Jason (not his real name) is a Westerner who has lived in China for nearly two decades, and for the past few years has focused on reaching out to Muslims. (In one major Chinese city alone there are over 70 mosques compared with just 17 registered Christian churches.) Jason studied about how to dialogue with Muslims about Jesus through reading books and attending seminars. At the same time, he began applying this acquired knowledge by visiting mosques and learning to dialogue with Muslim believers. Before long, he realized that if he could equip Chinese Christians they could reach out to Muslims more effectively, sharing a common heart language and being less obviously different than a Caucasian. Jason has recruited some local friends, given them some basic orientation in small groups, and then takes them by ones and twos with him into the mosques. Though he acts as a catalyst and mentor, he relates to his Chinese brothers and sisters as a co-learner. Through intentional but non-formal training, these young Chinese Christians are being formed as missionaries to Chinese Muslims.

## Locus of Authority

In placing a high emphasis on accreditation, educational institutions must comply with criteria determined by the agency and/or state, institutions that define best educational practices. The educational package, then, is delivered to the student without consultation with him. On the first day of class the students receive a syllabus (for which the teacher must also receive approval before handing it out) that describes or dictates the content and process of learning.

By de-emphasizing the need for accreditation, non-formal training is able to place the locus of authority on the learner. Rather than become a repository of information that another party feels is needed, the learner recognizes along the way the skills needed for accomplishing certain tasks. Necessity is the mother of invention. Experts are to be consulted, but the student must recognize the need for such expertise.[5]

One of the surprises of the Gospel story comes in Luke 11 when, having already followed Jesus for some time, the disciples make an elementary request: "Teach us to pray." We may think of prayer as being among the basic of lessons in spirituality, and indeed is usually one of the first chapters in discipleship training curricula. Jesus, however, was not as interested in covering a list of topics as he was in helping his students truly learn. Their request arose naturally as a result of spending time with their teacher and observing him at prayer. Through this process over time they realized that they too needed to learn how to pray. This story illustrates the principle that learning may occur at the initiative of the learner.

It was the practice of Jesus to cultivate true learners, and not leaders who were merely able to follow rote instruction. Focusing on external credibility may easily become "authoritarian" or top-down heavy-handedness, whereas Jesus-style authority comes from within. In discussing the teaching methods of Jesus, Robert Pazmino makes the distinction between "authoritative" and "authoritarian."[6] Those who listened to his teaching remarked on Jesus' authority (Mark 1:27) for Jesus' teaching was "authenticated by who he was as a person."[7] However, he was not "authoritarian," in that his teaching was never forced upon anyone. It was the recognized religious "authorities" of the day, the ones who had external credibility and who practiced authoritarian teaching (Matthew 23:1-11), who failed to recognize Jesus' intrinsic authority (Mark 11:27-33). Let me suggest two ways that missionary formation will benefit from following Jesus' style of teaching.

First, it leads to humility from which true authority flows. Missionaries arrive in a cross-cultural context as "tellers," those entrusted with proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. However, they must also keep in mind their role as learners in a new place and culture. Moreover, though they have received training in whatever form their sending agency has required, they arrive in a new culture with more questions than answers. Being encouraged to ask questions and then having opportunities for those questions to be answered is crucial for long-term missionary health. Again, the role of the mentor or co-learner is vital for many new missionaries. It is in response to the myriad of questions raised while on the field that new training programs may be developed, specific to the needs of missionaries in a particular place and time.

Indeed, maintaining the role of the learner enables the missionary to develop relationships from a posture of humility. When I learned Cantonese in my early 20s I had previously received little post-secondary formal education. In my late 40s I began learning Mandarin using the same LAMP method, but by this time I had accumulated two Master's degrees, was partway through a doctoral program and had decades of experience in church and on the mission field. It would have

been tempting to feel that God's gift to these people had arrived in the form of me, and to build relationships from above, as a teacher and leader. However, starting work on a new language forced me back into the position of learner, and I was able to develop relationships with people in the host culture from a place of humility and dependence.

Second, a non-authoritarian approach to training provides a kingdom alternative to the top-down approaches of many cultures. Asian and African cultures especially tend to revere the teacher, and may too easily ascribe authority to a title rather than to a godly life. As we seek to help the next generation of missionaries from such cultures, it will be helpful to use forms of education that will build kingdom character in addition to expertise. This will require humility and mutual submission especially among the veteran missionaries as they choose to become co-learners with younger co-workers.

## Modes, Methods, and Evaluation

Mission agencies of the 1800s may have required less in terms of formal training, but for missionaries to actually get from their homes to the mission field took considerable time and effort. Today the years of formal training required by many mission agencies is another kind of investment missionaries may make before arriving at their destination. These sorts of investments to attain to one's call may provide the psychological advantage of strengthening long-term commitment. One of the potential downsides of non-formal training is that in requiring relatively little in terms of time and finances, coupled with today's ease of air travel, the actual call to the mission field may be treated more lightly. Indeed, the leader of one mission agency that specializes in short-term missions and training likened his organization to a freeway, easy for participants to get on and off. As non-formal training is often modular and short-term it may be difficult to encourage long-term commitment. Moreover, because non-formal training is less concerned with knowledge obtained than with knowledge applied, evaluating the student's progress may become a more ambiguous procedure.

It is sometimes said that we are not to seek success as much as faithfulness. Veteran church planter Tim Keller suggests that it is better and more biblical to evaluate kingdom workers on the basis of fruitfulness. "Successfulness" may be biased by cultural perspectives and "faithfulness" actually requires too little, but the criterion of fruitfulness seeks to determine how God has been at work through his servant.[8] Whereas formal training may evaluate the success of students based on things like

tests or essays, non-formal training is often in danger of requiring too little in terms of evaluation. Indeed Bloomer's chart uses the word "non-existent" to describe the evaluation procedures of non-formal training. The question we must answer about any kind of training and ministry is, simply, is it effective for the kingdom?

In 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, Paul describes how a kingdom worker is to be evaluated.

> [5]What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. [6]I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. [7]So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. [8]The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. [9]For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

The missionary is a servant partnering with God, the one who is making things grow. The Lord has assigned tasks to each of his servants, neither for boosting the ego with testimonies of success nor for proving the missionary's faithful character, but ultimately to effect growth in the church he is building. For this reason we must evaluate our missionaries and missionary formation primarily on the basis of fruitfulness.

The Chinese church is poised to become one of the great missionary sending churches of the 21st century. However, among those who have been sent out to this point there are few encouraging stories. Most return home within a relatively short period of time having neither acculturated nor accomplished the thing they had set out to do. Recently a group of fifteen was sent long-term to a Middle-Eastern country but within a year all but one individual had returned home. They all went with enough passion to dislodge from home and thrust themselves into a strange culture but without a great deal of prior training. The "freeway" to the Middle East was relatively easy for them to access and, as it turned out, even easier to exit. Unfortunately the difficulties encountered by people arriving from a monocultural setting into a vastly different culture were insurmountable for nearly all of these passionate disciples.

As we evaluate the lack of "success" of those who have tried their best to be "faithful," we must ask the question of fruitfulness: what fruit has been borne as a result of the going? And if we identify that they bore little fruit, other questions must be raised. Why did they become discouraged so quickly? Did they lack skills that could have been learned in some kind of formal training? What further on-the-job training could have enabled them remain faithful to their call and to bear kingdom fruit?

There are increasing opportunities for potential Chinese missionaries to receive formal training, and certainly these ones would have benefited from a longer time in the classroom. But as the culture shock for these workers and loss of direction was truly felt while on the field it is unlikely that prior classroom training could have addressed adequately their emotional turmoil and discouragement. It is on the field that they most needed the mentors and on-the-job training that would enable them to make sense of their experience and be faithful to their call.  Currently a Western couple, fluent in Chinese and with over 20 years of experience in the Chinese world is strategizing with Chinese missionaries, and planning to accompany them into a cross-cultural setting for at least a year. This multicultural team, including veteran missionaries who have actually experienced crossing into a culture, will be a group of "co-learners," with the older couple mentoring the younger missionaries.

## Context and Orientation

The context of formal education is the school itself and the orientation is the subject matter of each class. We sometimes refer disparagingly to the "Ivory Tower"—cloistered institutions of higher learning—as being out of touch with the real world, though most students have benefited greatly from receiving formal education. However, as ideas are sparked in a classroom, the school sometimes seems to encourage further study for the sake of study, and doctoral dissertations become increasingly specific and relevant to only a few others who share a particular expertise.

Non-formal training, on the other hand, is sparked by the perceived needs of the broader community. The incarnation event is sometimes seen as an incentive—and even as a general approach—to the missionary task, especially by Anabaptists.[9] An incarnational approach to missions conceives of ministry strategy and training from within a certain community, as missionaries live among those they serve and perceive needs from within the community itself. In coming to a new culture, missionaries take both an etic and an emic approach.[10] The former seeks to understand a people from without, and much from gained from an external analysis. The latter, however, requires the missionary to deeply engage in the host culture and to understand from within.

In a major Asian city, Susan returned to her homeland after eight years of studying in the United States. While in America she met Jesus and received a "missionary" call back to her own country but to a people quite unlike her. Susan had been raised in a modern city with relative wealth and a good education. She felt, however, the Lord was calling her to serve urban migrants, poorer country folk who had migrated to the city. Upon returning to her country, Susan moved into a migrant community, and quickly

discovered that the culture gap was even greater than what she had experienced in the United States. She had much to learn about the needs of these people and how to serve them. Her equipping for service has come through a combination of informal means (simple but radical socialization) and non-formal means, as she has attended courses and seminars pertinent to the ministry among urban migrants.

## Outcomes and Focus

It would be an overstatement to list the sole outcomes of educational institutions as "degrees" or "professional certification," as if these outcomes are somehow opposed to skills and competence. Indeed, in highly regulated professions such as medicine or accounting, certification and competence generally go hand in hand. However, though a medical college may at times graduate an incompetent doctor, it is even more common for graduates from seminary to feel that they lack ministry skills. A Master's degree in Intercultural Studies is no guarantee of a successful missionary career.

The Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians partly to answer criticisms leveled against his ministry qualifications. In that letter he describes himself and his team with the term "ministers of a new covenant" (3:6). They possess the skills necessary for kingdom work because their "competence is from God" (3:5). Moreover, Paul stands in contrast to those who "boast in outward appearance" (5:12) and believes that he is "not in the least inferior to these super-apostles" (11:5). New covenant ministers de-emphasize the significance of external degrees and worldly credentials, recognizing that these in themselves do not insure competence for kingdom work.

As mentioned earlier, some aspects of missionary service require specialized and even technical expertise, such as the linguistic skills needed for Bible translation, certain community development work or teaching subjects such as English. But most missionary work (indeed, most church work) requires a breadth of competence that must be learned over time. Whereas formal education trains students in an increasing narrowness and depth (so that a doctoral dissertation may be written on a single Hebrew verb!), missionaries must learn broadly from language acquisition to methods of evangelism to contextually appropriates forms of the church to training local co-workers to implementing social development programs.

The fruitful missionary, partnering with God for the growth of his church and kingdom, has grasped significant outcomes from the Builder's perspective. All training—formal, informal or non-formal—must be for the purpose of preparing fruitful ministers of the new covenant.

## Notes

[1] Philip Coombs, *The World Educational Crisis: A Systems Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 1968).

[2] Ted Ward, "The Teaching Learning Process" in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the 21st Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 121.

[3] Ward, "Teaching Learning Process," 121. Informal education comprises learning through life's daily activities, including such things as having conversations in a new language, pumping gas, scanning items at a supermarket check-out and learning table etiquette in a new culture. Non-formal education generally refers to non-accredited systems of learning, such as preparing for a driver's test, craft lessons and Sunday school classes.

[4] Tom Bloomer, "Dimensions of Variability of Nonformal Education," copyright 1997 by Thomas A. Bloomer (paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the comprehensive final examinations for the Ph.D. in Education Science, Trinity International University).

[5] Educator Jane Vella lists twelve principles for effective adult education. The first principle, "Needs Assessment," calls for dialogue between the teacher and learner, so that the teacher shapes the content around the learner's needs and questions. See Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 5-8.

[6] Robert Pazmino, "Jesus: The Master Teacher," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the 21st Century*, ed Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 114.

[7] Pazmino, "Jesus," 114.

[8] Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 13-14.

[9] Ross Langmead defines incarnational ministry in detail using a biblical, theological and historical discussion, and he cites Mennonites as a group marked by such ministry. See *The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology* (Lanham: University of America Press, 2004). Mennonite anthropologist Paul Hiebert's work *Incarnational Ministry* (co-authored with his daughter, Eloise Hiebert Meneses) is a more practical work that applies principles of incarnational ministry to church planting in a cross-cultural context. See *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

[10] Hiebert and Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 14-15.

## Study Questions

1. Discuss some of the types of non-formal training in your community. In what ways are these different from formal education models?

2. Besides language acquisition, can you think of other aspects of missionary formation that would be best received while "on the job"?

3. Do you agree with the author's assertion that specialized aspects of missionary service like Bible translation require formal education? What does this imply for non-Westerners who want to translate the Bible?

4. Discuss your experience of giving or receiving mentoring? What makes a good mentor? Why is mentoring especially important for new missionaries?

5. Consider the "locus of authority" in your culture's typical approach to education. How closely do you feel it aligns with the methods of Jesus?

6. What specific fruit should we look for when evaluating the missionary's effectiveness?

# 26 Missionary Formation through Formal Education

Elmer A. Martens and Nzash Lumeya

A young man dashes into a mission's office with the news that God has called him to be a missionary. He is excited and eager. How soon can he be sent…anywhere! How will his request be received? Will he be told to get a passport, raise some money and plan for departure? Or will he be advised to get himself to a seminary for a four-year training stint? Is formal education optional … or necessary?

Elmer A. Martens (Ph.D. Religion, Claremont Graduate School) has served as pastor of the Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church (1958-1966), and as Professor of Old Testament (1970-96) and President (1977-86) of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary). He has written extensively on Old Testament and the theology of Christian mission. He has taught in colleges and seminaries, including MB institutions, in Russia, DR Congo, Paraguay, Japan and India.

Nzash Lumeya (M.Th., *Faculte de Theologie Evangelique de Vaux-Sur-Seine*, France; Ph.D., Missiology, Fuller Theological Seminary) has served the Mennonite Brethren and many other Christian churches through ministries of church planting, shepherding and teaching. He founded the *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie* in Kinshasa, DR Congo, as well as the Fresno School of Mission (USA) where he is now Director. He is a member of the Butler Church (MB).

The issue of the importance of formal education for missionaries is not foreign to Mennonite Brethren [MB]. The early MB missionaries, whether from Russia or United States, were surprisingly well educated. In Russia, Abraham and Mary Friesen felt called to missionary service in 1885. They studied at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Hamburg for four years before leaving for India in 1989 as the first MB missionaries to go abroad.[1] In North America, Aaron and Ernestina Janzen from the Mountain Lake Church in Minnesota headed for Africa in November of 1912. They were the first MB missionaries to Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). She was a nurse. He was a graduate of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and had attended the German Baptist Seminary in Rochester, New York.[2] The MB founding missionaries in Japan in the 1950s were Ruth Wiens and Harry and Millie Friesen. Wiens was a graduate of Wheaton College; Harry Friesen, upon completing Tabor College, attended Dallas Theological Seminary (1945-49).

For MBs and other denominations in North America the Bible school movement was critical in the early 20th century for the enlistment and training of missionaries. Nyack Missionary College was established in 1880; Moody Bible Institute in 1886. The two schools, Nyack and Moody, were pioneers in mission education. George Konrad reports that by 1961 the number of Bible colleges and institutes in the United States and Canada totaled 234.[3] Among these was the Herbert Bible School in Saskatchewan (1913-1957), the first MB school in Canada and among the first in western Canada.[4] In the United States, Pacific Bible Institute (Fresno, California) was established in 1944. These Bible schools were recruiters of missionaries and also provided substantive training. J. B. Toews notes that "Seventy-five percent of the missionaries sent by the Mennonite Brethren Church [between 1913-1963]… studied at these Bible institutions."[5] While not all Mennonite Brethren missionaries in more than 150 years of history have had formal education, many have.[6]

## Modes of Leadership Training

One may think of leadership training in three modes: informal, non-formal, and formal education. *Formal training* refers to organized institutional education, as in a Bible College, recognized by society (e.g., Colombia Bible College, Canada; MB Centenary Bible College, India; University Missionary Center, Democratic Republic of Congo; and also online courses). *Non-formal* refers to semi-organized training, such as workshops and seminars, which takes place outside the formal structures. Currently [2013] the Matthew Training Centre in Guadalajara illustrates the non-formal model, though it seems to be moving to the formal model.  *Informal* education

takes place in the normal activities of life. Mentoring of a junior missionary by a senior missionary would be an example.[7]

The focus of this essay is on formal education and so will concentrate on institutional instruction. The stage is set by a brief historical survey of MB missionary education. Following is a list of factors that prompted attention to formal education. We comment on the pluses and the minuses of formal education. A case study in formal training in the majority world concludes the essay.

## MB Practices in the Formal Training of Missionaries

Whether or not mission sending agencies required formal education for their candidates, the Bible Schools and Bible Institutes assumed, as is evident in their general purpose statements and in their course offerings, that formal education for missionaries was necessary. The following examples leave largely unmentioned the Canadian MB Bible schools, themselves engines in missionary recruitment and training. Their story is told elsewhere.[8]

Tabor College, founded in Hillsboro, Kansas in 1908 offered itself as a training place for missionaries. Tabor's *Annual Catalogue 1909-10* (p. 4) states in the German language that the purpose of the school is to offer to the supporting constituency a place where one can be prepared for the teaching profession and for ministry, including work (*Arbeit*) in domestic and foreign mission fields.

Similarly Pacific Bible Institute (PBI), founded in Fresno, California in 1944, lists among the aims of the school, "to train and equip students for pastors, evangelists, S.S. workers, missionaries and personal soul winners."[9] Its catalogue for the following year lists the "History of Missions," which is required both for the two-year general Bible course and for the three-year graduate course. Students in the three-year program were required also to take a course in "Non-Christian Religions."

The Mennonite Brethren Bible College, founded in 1944 in Winnipeg Canada, lists two specifically mission-related courses in its inaugural year: "History of Missions" and "Principles and Practice of Mission."

The Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, founded in 1955 in Fresno, California, was "dedicated to the training of Christian leaders as pastors, evangelists, missionaries and Bible teachers." The first catalogue lists eight course offerings in the Department of Missionary Training, including "History of Missions," "History of MB Missions," "Philosophy of Missions," and "Principles and Practices of Mission." The training of missionaries took an emphatic forward turn with the addition in 1978 of Dr. Hans Kasdorf as Professor of World Mission. "For some twelve years starting in 1976, Hans Kasdorf led a six- to nine-week summer missionary training

school for MBM/S candidates called Church Mission Institute or CMI."[10] The Seminary Board of Directors and the Seminary faculty designated the decade of the 1980's as the "Decade of Mission."[11] With the addition of faculty member Dr. Henry Schmidt, course offerings in the mission department in the 1981-82 catalogue numbered eighteen, including a course on "Church Planting and Church Growth." Through a joint effort by the Seminary and the denomination's mission agency, the Center for Training in Mission/Evangelism was established in 1984. In the decade of the 1980s and somewhat beyond, eighteen students graduated with a Masters in Mission, most of whom entered missionary service; others had a major in missions for their Master of Divinity degree.

Over the past one hundred and fifty years of MB history, the post-secondary schools of the denomination have been more than hospitable to the concept of formal training for missionaries; they have provided that training. The mission office has sometimes rigorously mandated formal training, but at other times formal training has been less emphasized.

## Factors Prompting Formal Education

Several considerations account for a focus generally on the formal training of missionaries. These arise out of the denomination's commitment to Scripture, the on-the-field experiences of missionaries, the rising profile of social sciences, the felt need for apologetics, the existential reality of church growth with the issues that such growth brings, and the emergence of fresh thinking on missionary methodology.

### Theological Orientation

Justification for the formal training of missionaries could readily be rooted in Scripture. Moses, if not a missionary in technical language, was certainly a leader who, as Stephen points out in his sermon, was trained in the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). Moses received his formal training thanks to an African scholarship! In the period of Israel's divided monarchy there were schools of the prophets where, one infers, some formal training took place (e.g., 2 Kings 2). Jesus trained his disciples before sending them out. Paul, the peerless missionary of the church, was formally trained (e.g., Acts 22:3).

Missionaries, as in India, bumped up against other religions. It was quickly apparent that effective missionary work entailed more than simply declaring the gospel. For example, one must know the appropriate cultural/religious contact points in presenting the gospel. To cite one example: there are different understandings of the human predicament. The Westerner sees the human problem as essentially that of

sin, which generates guilt; humans need salvation from sin. So the gospel is preached with the invitation to bring God into one's life, to accept Christ's forgiveness and to follow him as Lord. But some complications emerge. One is that in the West the understanding of sin is largely disobedience to God's command. However, when Congolese are asked to list sins, they routinely itemize social taboos.

Consequently various concepts of what salvation entails are in circulation. In the West "salvation" is about freedom from burden of sin; freedom from self, freedom from aimlessness in life. In Africa, salvation would be cast in language of power. The spirit world is real, always impinging on decisions and behaviors. The human predicament is defined as living in fear of the spirits; hence salvation is in terms of power. The gospel then becomes good news because Christ has overcome the powers; it is understood that there is a God more powerful than any other power.

For Hinduism the human predicament is that of ignorance. Salvation comes through learning. For Buddhism the problem is suffering, which is said to come as a result of desire. The solution is to numb the desires through meditation, and to follow the eightfold path. In Asia the human problem is centered on an honor-shame axis. Salvation then would be the redress of shame. In the light of these various understandings of salvation, the seminarian who was overheard in corridor conversation to say, "What I want from my years here is a clear and crisp understanding of the Gospel message" was right on target.

**Missiological Studies**

The social sciences affected the training of missionaries in several ways. Psychology, for example, propounded that people learn in different ways. Cultural studies pointed out that the significance of certain events, such as marriage, vary from culture to culture. Research in communication made clear that the message sent is not necessarily the message that is received because the message passes through mental filters. If this is so within a culture, how many more complications might there be in the transmission of a message cross-culturally? A book like Paul Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* showed the importance of being conversant with current research and theory in these areas.[12] By the latter half of the twentieth century, knowledge of social sciences was hardly optional for missionaries.

It is a given that the gospel message does not change. It is also a given that culture and world conditions do change. So the challenge is to know the gospel, know how it addresses a culture, and know what changes in methodology may be required over time. There must be an intellectual space for the sorting out of philosophy and practices. Time for such reflection while engaged in ministry is scarce; hence the legitimacy of setting aside time to devote energy to study, reflection and readjustments.

Reflection on missionary approaches, on holistic mission, and on leadership training calls for some concentrated formal education. The building of hospitals and orphanages, the experiment of building dairies, the development of skills for future employment, while laudable in their own right, certainly need evaluation from both practical and theoretical vantage points. At the very least, missionaries need the benefit that comes from knowing the literature in these fields, and that knowledge is best imparted and analyzed in formal settings.

New methods of financially supporting the missionary effort keep emerging. New policies are put in place by mission agencies that require, for example, that missionaries raise their own financial support. The missionary needs to learn new skills, must learn how to forge and cultivate strong personal relationships, and much more. To be sure, much can be learned "on the run," but instruction, analysis and supervised practice are weighty plusses that argue for formal education.

### Missionary Experiences

Very quickly Mennonite Brethren encountered the mindset of peoples in other cultures.  Facility in language was necessary to grasp the contours of foreign cultures, but so were sensitivities to cultural matters generally. Missionaries felt inadequate in communicating the message in ways appropriate to the culture. Though they certainly meant well, their good intentions were often misinterpreted. The missionaries' lack of understanding served as a goad for formal training in cross-cultural communication.

In the Catholic-saturated culture of the Congo, for example, where the Jesuits had set up schools, the missionaries' efforts in establishing schools soon became the object of governmental investigation: what educational degrees qualified the teachers to set up schools and teach? What was being taught?  If one desired credibility in that foreign setting, educational degrees were not a luxury but a necessity. Field experience was a powerful motivator to send even returning missionaries into institutions for formal training. Missionary J. N. C. Hiebert, for example, long ago said that Indian Brahmins could "talk rings around him" in philosophy.

Teaching new believers also represented a challenge. The missionaries, understandably delighted at responses of adults and children to the message of the gospel, were not always adept in training disciples. As one missionary statesman explained, there are levels of complexity that need to be taken into account in the transformation work that follows conversion. For example, one can urge change in clothing patterns: nakedness is not acceptable.  Drinking intoxicating drink, whether *toddy* in India, *cerveja* (beer) in Brazil, or *primus* or *skoll* (two kinds of beer) in Congo, is disallowed. These overt actions can be observed, adjudicated and corrected.

But there are more substantive matters often embedded in the culture that are unchristian. The practice of polygamy is an example. If a husband with many wives becomes a Christian, should he be required to undo the marriages by choosing one of his wives as the permanent wife? So what then happens to the remaining wives? If they cannot return to their home of origin and need to resort to prostitution, has a truly Christian solution been achieved? Such questions have persisted through the centuries. What are the acceptable answers that are aligned with the gospel? The experience of long-term missionaries may be helpful, but close classroom analysis is indispensable.

## Key Ingredients for the Formation of Missionaries in a Formal Settting

When the question of which subject areas were necessary for the formal education of a missionary was put to the founder of Schools of Missions in four countries, he supplied a list without hesitation: Bible, mission and evangelism (content), church history (the story of mission in the church), cultural anthropology, and world religions. The list is a good beginning.

### Knowledge of the Bible

In learning the Bible, emphasis should not only be given to the New Testament (NT), though it contains the missionaries' core message. The Old Testament (OT) deserves careful exploration, partly because its background makes the NT message intelligible. When missionaries shied away from the OT narratives of war and violence, they thought they were protecting listeners from problem areas of interpretation. Instead they found that once introduced to the tribal conflicts recorded in Joshua, Judges and other OT books, the indigenous folk in Africa became excited, if a little incredulous. "This," they said, "is our story." Connections between their own story and the Bible's story were quickly made, and that to good effect.

Clarity about the gospel's message is essential. Not only must the heart of the gospel be identified and embraced by missionaries, but also the role of indigenous leadership, the place of education, and financial subsidy must be incorporated and prioritized.

### Knowledge of Mission History and Foreign Cultures

The value of church history is the glimpse it provides of God at work. At the same time a review of the practices of missionaries can forestall mistakes in current endeavors. We have already alluded to the value of cultural orientation.

Generally speaking, the more the missionary understands the culture in depth, the more effective will be the preaching of the gospel and the training of leaders. Much the same can be said for an in-depth understanding of the indigenous religious beliefs and rituals.[13]

### Skills in Spiritual Formation and Leadership Training

To these subject contents there should be added a course on spirituality. The missionary is not simply a conduit for the verbal articulation of the gospel message. The missionary will flounder, if not fail, if his/her own spiritual life does not remain vibrant. Cultivating intimacy with God is not alone a means to an end; in some sense, it is the end (Jer. 9:23-24; Phil. 3:10). If the role of the western missionary is conceptualized as a trainer of leaders in addition to, or even as supplanting evangelism, then another set of courses come into play: pedagogy, leadership styles, functions of leaders, and much else. If the conviction is that the mission of God should inform any theological training, then Andrew Kirk's essay on the subject is a helpful starting point.[14]

### Knowledge of the Times and the Trends

Course content, however articulated, is shaped by trends and vision. Paul Hiebert, noted Mennonite Brethren missiologist, after examining historical trends, offers a discussion on the content of missionary training for the next half century. The section has the title, "Training Missionaries for a Global World." A simple list will stir the educational juices.

1. We must move from discussing theology and the social sciences to a discussion of a biblical world view.

2. We must move from indigenization and contextualization to inculturation.

3. We must move from a stress on the autonomy and independence of national churches to interdependence and partnership in mission.

4. We must move from a stress on the church and world, to God and God's kingdom.

5. We must move from positivism and instrumentalism to a critical realist epistemology.[15]

Clearly the times and seasons, not to mention theorists, philosophers, missionaries and administrators, will influence the curriculum for missionary training.[16] Such a curriculum, once devised, will not remain static. A fast-changing world demands

depth perception and flexibility. These suggestions for subject-area courses are by no means exhaustive.[17]

## Perceived Benefits and Liabilities of Formal Education of Missionaries

In addition to gaining some tools for ministry, there are other benefits that come to missionaries engaging in formal education. As with most endeavors, there are also risks and lurking liabilities.

### Benefits

On the benefit side, one might think of the advantages accruing both to the missionary and to the institution. One large benefit to the missionary taking a year or more for formal study, aside from gaining knowledge and skills, is meeting fellow students. The value of camaraderie which such study engenders cannot be assessed in material terms. Dialogue, debate, vision-casting and much more happens as colleagues engage with one another. Many will testify to the career-long connections which make for spiritual maturity, mutual encouragement and much else. For example, the students who become pastors have a series of options in selecting speakers when they plan for mission conferences. Networking is even more needed as our society becomes global in orientation.

But the institution also benefits, especially in the ethos which emerges with the presence of prospective missionaries. More than one seminary administrator will bear testimony to the strong and positive influence which students in the mission programs had on an entire student population. If the calling of Matt 28:19-20 represents a major aspect of the church's preoccupation, then all ancillary endeavors of the church should buttress or in some way aid the fulfillment of the missionary mandate.

A distinct benefit of formal education for the missionary is the stretching of horizons. The Kingdom of God is larger than any one denomination. In school the missionary should be helped to become a lifelong learner, not taking himself/herself too seriously, and able to flex with changing situations while remaining stable in his/her principled convictions. Such flexibility will be necessary for the missionary "on the ground."

### Liabilites

For all the positive elements that formal education brings to prospective missionaries, one should not be blind to some liabilities. Some who enter a training program excited and energetic, tend over time to become less enthusiastic about their

calling. Or they may find that the academic study of the issues is so intriguing that they pursue professional degrees; their missionary career is sidelined. Though it may also be that their calling shifts to an academic ministry of research and writing. It is a mistake to think that non-ending schooling will qualify the candidate finally to embark on missionary service.

One of the dangers is that the theoretical base of studies may not be relevant to present needs. Overwhelmed with ideas and theories, and inundated with information, the student may find it is easy to minimize the work of the Holy Spirit. Personal character and especially the experience of the empowering of the Holy Spirit are more than a supplement to education; they are foundational to the formation of a missionary. For all the importance of anthropology, cultural studies and world religions, the missionary must remain rooted in Christology: God reached out to the human race through the incarnation of his Son; Jesus Christ is the world's savior.

Another potentially negative outcome of formal education is that theoretical knowledge may be put ahead of practical engagement. Some years ago, one of the MB missionary executives observed with sadness and concern that seminary graduates, even with majors in mission, were inept or fearful of witnessing one-on-one to Jesus Christ as the Savior. He pleaded for more hands-on experience. With that plea firmly etched in the minds of seminary administrators and department heads, changes were initiated.

## A Case Study: Formal Education in the Majority World

### A Perspective

Formal mission training is shifting from the mainline traditional school to new approaches to processing the Great Commission within diverse cross-cultural settings. Dr. Nzash Lumeya from Africa is founder of missionary training schools in several regions: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Jamaica, and Fresno, California. He observes that more local churches would participate in sending their members to spread the gospel if there were careful dialogues between mission trainers and local church leaders. Drawing on his experiences both in Africa and in North America, he says:

"Church leaders that I have been in touch with in most of these coun-tries have not fully practiced the Great Commission because they believe they must have the finances required before sending anybody abroad. Nowhere in the Bible can we find this prerequisite. On the contrary,

loyalty to Yahweh is the engine that motivates Israel to be the light for the nations. Obedience to Christ will send His followers as His Spirit-filled messengers to the end of the world."

## Some Stories

The School of Missions in Bangui, Central African Republic, came into existence in 1988 when local pastors determined to move from ethno-centrism to Christo-centrism. They trusted the Lord to use them among pygmies and other French-speaking Africans within the region. A call to be trained formally in a Bible mission school was put before local Christians, and many answered that call. Questions were raised about which courses should be taught for a mission certificate; also what time of day was best. An appointed academic committee proposed that biblical studies, evangelism, history of missions, cultural anthropology, African belief systems, survey of church history, and studies of sects be considered as the core of the mission degree. The classes were held at 6 p.m. in order to accommodate professionals such as the national director of transportation and high school teachers. The school was recognized as legitimate by the denomination. At the end of the program students were encouraged to reach out to their neighbors in the forest and beyond. Central African churches are now sending missionaries to the tropical forest (where there are now more than 7000 Christians), to the DRC, and to Burkina Faso. This school is still training trainers today (2013).

In 1990 a mission school was founded in Kinshasa, DRC, to train local Christians to be witnesses of Christ in their country and around the world. The five-year program entailed introductory courses such as Introduction to Theology, Biblical Geography, Survey of the Old and the New Testament, World Religions, Panorama of Church History, African Belief Systems, Cultural Anthropology, African World View, African Initiated Churches, African Theologies, Pluralism, Exegesis of OT and NT, Biblical Hebrew and Greek Grammar, Pastoral Theology, Hermeneutics, Research and Methodology. At the end of this program students defended a thesis to obtain a Master's degree in missiology. Some former students of this school are serving within cross-cultural settings in the DRC, the Republic of Congo, Burundi, South Africa, Angola, Canada and the US. In Burundi and Angola, similar efforts in the formal training of Africans to spread the Gospel locally and globally are being made. Angolan missionaries are sent into Cabinda and Namibia. Burundians are spreading the Gospel among pygmies.

The Fresno School of Mission was started in 2005 to equip local leaders in cross-cultural ministries within Fresno, where more than one hundred languages are spoken, as well as abroad. A program targeted to African-Americans and Latinos

offers a diploma in mission. It includes such courses as biblical theology of mission, biblical studies, language acquisition, Christian counseling, church history, Old and New Testament survey, and women in mission. Graduates are ministering in short-term mission trips to the Philippines, Haiti, Jamaica, DRC, South Africa, Russia, Colombia and Australia.

Students are reminded, as should all who are involved with the formation of missionaries, that  a degree does not make  a faithful  missionary, but a sensitive missionary needs a transformational training to assist him/her to  make balanced disciples of Jesus Christ across cultures (Mathew 28:20).

## Notes

[1] Hans Kasdorf, "A Century of Mennonite Brethren Mission Thinking, 1985-1984" (Ph. D. diss., University of South Africa, 1986, vol. 1), 276.

[2] J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), 43.

[3] George Konrad, "Institutional Education and the Mission of the Church" in *The Church in Mission. A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews,* ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), 210.

[4] Bruce L. Guenther, "Training for Service: The Bible School Movement in Western Canada, 1909-1960" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2001), 124-128.

[5] J. B. Toews, "In the Mission of the Church Around the World" in A. J. Klassen, *The Bible School Story 1913-1963. Fifty Years of Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools in Canada,* (no listed publisher), 13.

[6] J. Dudley Woodberry notes that "Traditionally these groups [Evangelical and Charismatic churches] have had less concern for the formal education of their leaders than their main-line colleagues." *Missiological Education for the Twenty-First Century,* ed. J. Dudley Woodberry, et al (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 8.

[7] For details on these distinctions see Robert J. Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader* (Altadena: Barnabas Publishers, 2003).

[8] For details see the well-researched work by Guenther, *Training for Service.* For a brief historical sketch of these schools, see also Klassen, *The Bible School Story, 1913-1963.*

[9] Leaflet introducing  *Pacific Bible Institute Course Offerings* (Fresno Pacific University Archives, 1944), 2.

[10] Harold Ens, *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission. Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 41.

[11] The Seminary's vision statement is set out in Hans Kasdorf's booklet, *It's Sunrise in World Mission* (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1984).

[12] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

[13] Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010). The chapter "An Evangelical Theology of Religions" (191-226) would be a good starting point.

[14] Andrew Kirk, "Re-envisioning the Theological Curriculum as if the *Missio Dei* Mattered" in *Theological Education as Mission*. Ed. Peter Penner (Schwartzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 15-38.  For a look at courses of study at the School of World Mission, a decade after its establishment, see *The Means of World Evangelization: Missiological Education at the Fuller School of World Mission,* ed. Alvin Martin (Pasadena: The William Carey Library), 1974.

[15] Paul G. Hiebert, "Missiological Education for a Global Era," in *Missiological Education for the Twenty-First Century,* 34-42. His list is found on pp. 37-41. As a follow-through of his first point, Hiebert has written, *Transforming World Views: An Anthropological Understanding of how People Change (*Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

[16] Kenneth Mulholland lists the courses The Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) regarded as essential  in mid-century: History of Missions, Principles and Practices (including the Indigenous Church), Bible Basis (Philosophy) of Missions, Anthropology, Non-Christian Religions, Languages (Phonetics and Linguistics), Area Study, and Hygiene and Sanitation. "Missiological Education in the Bible College Tradition," in *Missiological Education for the Twenty-First Century,* 43-53 [51].

[17] Missionaries on furlough frequently engaged in formal studies and even pursued degrees. Three examples are: J.N.C. Hiebert (1929-56) completed a thesis for his M.A degree, "The Role of the Princes in the Constitutional Development of Modern India" (University of Southern California, 1947); Victor Wiens wrote a doctoral dissertation for the Inter-Cultural department at Fuller Theological Seminary: "From Refugees to Ambassadors: Mennonite Missions in Brazil,1930-2000;" and Andy Owen, missionary in Thailand, completed his MA degree (2013) in Global Leadership at Fuller Seminary with a thesis, "The Glory Train: A Model for Developing Individuals and Teams in Christian Organizations."

**Recommended Reading**

Bonk, Jonathan J., ed. *Between Past and Future: Evangelical Mission Entering the Twenty-first Century.* Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003.

Ens, Harold. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission:Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006.* Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985.

_____. *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Fleming, Dean. *Rediscovering the Full Mission of God. A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013.

Moreau, A. Scott. *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012.

Peters, G. W. *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions.* Hillsboro and Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984.

Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

Tennent, Timothy C. *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010.

Terry, John Mark and J. D. Payne**,** *Developing A Strategy for Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Cultural Introduction.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.

Toews, J. B. *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire.* Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, 1978.

Woodberry, J. Dudley, ed. et al. *Missiological Education for the Twenty-First Century.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.

## Study Questions

1. What were some of the factors that prompted giving more attention to formal education in the past? Are there any that you think are especially relevant for today? Why?

2. Discuss the timing of formal missionary training as it relates to cross-cultural experience (i.e. before, during, after). When do you think is the best time for formal training? Why?

3. The article raises the caution that students undertaking formal training are inundated with ideas, theories and information which can result in minimizing the work and role of the Holy Spirit. Suggest some ways that this concern could be addressed.

4. The authors explain how formal education provides "intellectual space" for ongoing missionary training. Reflect on your own journey regarding this matter.

5. In the opening paragraph the author raises the question of whether or not formal education is optional or necessary. How would you answer that question?

# 27 Personal Evangelism and Discipleship

Phil Harris

In Luke 10:2, Jesus said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." When Jesus looks out at the world, he sees a lavish harvest. In John 4:35, he said, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." This means that there are people everywhere who are ready to hear Christ's message and respond to his grace. This news should excite us to go out and find them. However, not everyone finds this idea of a plentiful harvest easy to believe.

When we see so much corruption in the world, we wonder how people could be open to the idea of Christianity, the Bible, and surrendering to Christ. When we see how people have been immersed in their own religious systems for centuries and even millenniums, we wonder how they could ever switch to Christianity especially when it could result in being ostracized, persecution or even death. We hear stories of those who have ministered in foreign countries for years and maybe their whole lives with little or no results. We see churches in decline despite the availability of

Phil Harris served with MB Mission as Director of Disciple Making International (DMI), a short-term evangelism program that has been instrumental in leading thousands to following Jesus, and planting dozens of churches in many countries. Now as Pastor of Congregational Life at an Evangelical Free church in Surrey, Canada, Phil still participates on DMI trips and in training others in evangelism.

abundant resources and the dedicated efforts of many and wonder why there's little or no harvest. It's true that the harvest is abundant in some parts of the world, but unless people see it can become a struggle to believe. Either Jesus' statement of a plentiful harvest is untrue and he's just trying to put a positive spin on an impossible situation—or it's true and people everywhere are hungry for God's message of love. Of course it has to be true.

So what's needed to experience this bountiful harvest if it's not happening in our own contexts? Thankfully, we don't have to try to come up with the answers. Jesus himself has given them to us. See in Luke 10:2 – "… the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

## First Key to the Harvest: More Workers

Jesus is clear that when it comes to building God's kingdom - the issue is people. Jesus underscores this repeatedly:

- Matthew 28:19 – *You* go and make disciples of all nations.
- Mark 16:15 – *You* go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.
- Acts 1:8 - But *you* will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses
- Romans 10:14, 17—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? … Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 5:19-20—And he has committed to *us* the message of reconciliation. *We* are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through *us*.
- John 15:16—You did not choose me, but I chose *you* and appointed *you* to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Building God's eternal kingdom always has been and always will be based on people. So what kind of work is required to ensure a bountiful harvest? Acts 1:8 reveals this: … *you* will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The work assignment Jesus calls us to is to be his witnesses.

**Discovering the Ministry of Witnessing**

*The Definition of a Witness*

A witness is someone who testifies about certain events or truths relating to the past. What are the things that Christ calls us to bear witness to? They're found in Luke 24:46-48: He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are *witnesses* of these things." Simply put, to be Christ's witnesses involves declaring the truths pertaining to Christ's life, death and resurrection and preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. There are many ways to connect with the world, but this is most important to Christ. This is key of there is to be a bountiful harvest.

Consider also Isaiah 55:10: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." It's important to realize that our mandate is not to win people, but to witness. God is one who does the winning and brings in the harvest.

*The Cost of being a Witness*

While Christ has made his calling clear, there's still another dimension to it. Notice that the Greek word for "witness" is *martus* from which we get our English word "martyr." When Jesus chose this word to describe our calling, he was careful to use one that not only communicated our function, but the depth of commitment involved.

So here's how we should understand this call to witness—to go out and bear witness to his life, death and resurrection and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name—even if it means having to suffer and even give up your life. These are the workers that Jesus says there are few of and are key for the harvest.

**Some Examples of the Disciples and Witnessing**

Let's see how this ministry of witnessing unfolded with the disciples. Let's consider Peter in Acts 2:22-24; 29-41: "'Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs … and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.  But God raised him from the dead, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact' … When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter

and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

After God poured out his Spirit in Acts 2, people were ignited with a new fire and declared the wonders of God. Then Peter stood and gave the first clear gospel witness in this new chapter of God's story. All the elements Christ had asked him to testify were there—acts relating to Jesus life, death and resurrection and the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. He hit the mark! The harvest was bountiful.

Not only were they faithful to witness, they also continued even in suffering. Note in Acts 5:40-42: They called the apostles in and had them *flogged.* Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus … Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, *they never stopped* teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

It was no different for Paul. He recounts his ministry to Ephesian elders in Acts 2:20-24:  "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus … I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Paul saw his task as simply to be Christ's witness—no matter what the cost. He, too, saw an amazing harvest. Over and over we see this partnership of witness, suffering and abundant harvest in the witnessing accounts of the disciples (Acts 3:11-26; 4:1-22, 32, 33; 5:17-42; 10:1-43; 26:1-29).

There are some other things we can learn from the disciples in their witnessing ministry. First, for them witnessing was not an option. There was no choice in the matter. We read in Acts 5:27-32: Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.'" Peter and the other apostles replied: "'*We must obey God rather than men!* We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.'"  In many Christian circles, witnessing the way Christ advocates has been presented as optional. The need to witness is declared, but people are given the freedom to decide whether it's their calling or their gifting. This inevitably results in fewer workers and a smaller harvest. For the disciples, there was no option. If they didn't witness, they were disobeying God. Note also these verses that speak of our mandate to witness:

- Matthew 4:19 – "Come follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men."
- Luke 5:10 – ""Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.'"
- Mark 16: 15 – "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'"
- Acts 1:8 – "'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..'"

Second, the disciples didn't wait for opportunities to witness, they went out and created them. In Mark 16:15, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Why does He call us out? It's because that's where the harvest is. It only makes sense that if a farmer is going to get a harvest, he must leave his barn and work in the fields. The same is true for the church. If we are going to experience a harvest, we must leave our church buildings and work in the fields of the world.

Third, the disciples didn't take long periods of time to first develop relationships before they witnessed. There's nothing wrong with developing relationships in order to create opportunities for witness, but it should be noted that the majority of the disciples' witnessing opportunities were with people they didn't previously have relationships with.

### The Rationale for Witness

Why does Jesus call us to this costly ministry of witnessing? The possibility of people having to leave their families, to suffer public shame and humiliation, to experience physical and emotional suffering and possibly even death is such a heavy burden.

First is because testifying about Christ's life, death and resurrection and preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins is the means through which the seed of eternal life is planted into the heart of an unbeliever. The Holy Spirit then causes that seed to grow until it produces the fruit of salvation. This message is the basis of conversion. Doing good things like letting your light shine, demonstrating the love of Jesus, giving to orphanages and other humanitarian causes, praying for missions, going out on short-term missions trips, having mission conventions, restructuring church governance, advertising your church programs and even building a new building will never in and of themselves bring salvation. Somewhere in the process the seed has to be planted if there is going to be a harvest. It's this message that pierces the heart and brings about repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." One of the greatest tragedies of modern-day Christianity is when we strategically organize people, resources and finances to meet the physical needs of people, but fail to declare the message of eternal life to meet their greatest need—salvation. This is why Paul was so bold to testify about Christ's message. Romans 1:16 declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

The second reason why our role in witnessing is so important is because Jesus has no backup plan for getting the message out. If we don't testify about the work of Christ and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins, the seed won't be sown. If no seed is sown then there can be no harvest. Consider Romans 10:14: "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?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Witnessing may cost much, but it's key if people are going to hear and then come to faith. The consequences of someone not knowing Jesus is a far greater tragedy than the suffering we might endure in getting the message out. Jesus has no other plan. If we don't do it, there'll be no harvest. This is why Jesus says that there is a need for more workers.

## A Framework for Witnessing

### The Method for Catching Fish is Similar to that of Catching People

Notice Luke 5:4ff:

> "He said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break … When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' … Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.'"

Jesus' metaphor of fishing is one that helps us to understand the process of catching people—bringing in the harvest. If we are going to catch fish the obvious first step is to go to where the fish are. Going anywhere other than the lake, stream, river or ocean will not produce a catch. The same is true with regard to fishing for people. We must go to where the people are—out in the world where they work, live, play and socialize.

If we are going to catch fish, it's important to have a baited hook. Without bait, there's nothing to attract the fish. The same is true with witnessing. We need to make the message attractive. Just approaching someone and launching into the message could do more harm than good. We need to work with the Holy Spirit to guide us to how to create that interest so that will open the door for people to want to hear. Christians often tell me that no one seems interested in the Lord and so they give up trying. The problem is not that people are uninterested; it's that we're not using the right bait to make them want to hear. Jesus was a master at using the right bait. He used statements that made people want to hear more:

- John 3:3 – "You must be born again."
- John 4:13-14 - "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst."
- John 6:35 – "I am the Bread of Life."
- John 8:12 – "I am the Light of the world."

He also used stories and parables like The Wise and Foolish Builder, The Prodigal Son, The Rich Man and Lazarus, and The Wedding Banquet to open many doors.

Yet the bait he and the disciples used most was miracles. People were quick to listen when they experienced the clear manifestation of God's power. Miracles were a significant part of Jesus' witnessing ministry. Matthew 4:23-24 says:

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering with severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them."

Miracles were also a large part of the disciples' witnessing experiences (Acts 4:29-30, 8:7; Romans 15:19).

While there were clear benefits for those who were touched, miracles were powerful "baits" that broke down barriers of resistance to the gospel:

- See in John 12:9-11 after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. "Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, *for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him* (see also Mark 1:27-28 and Mark 3:7-8).
- Peter and John healing the cripple, Acts 3: 9-11: "When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man

who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were *filled with wonder and amazement* at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, *all the people were astonished and came running to them* in the place called Solomon's Colonnade."

- Philip in Samaria, Acts 8:6-8: "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs that he did, *they all paid close attention to what he said*. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many and many paralytics and cripples were healed. *So there was great joy in that city."*

- Peter in Acts 9:40-42: "Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. *Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up!' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.* Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord"* (see also Acts 9:33-35).

Throughout the gospels and the book of Acts, miracles are everywhere. They opened doors no matter what the religious background or culture of people. God is still doing it today on account of Christ's promise in John 14:12: "'I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.'" Just imagine, Jesus says that we can do this too—even greater things! This should inspire us to pray that God might display his power through us so that many doors would open in our ministry of witnessing. On a recent trip to the Philippines, I was overwhelmed to experience exactly that and see God open many doors for a great harvest.

Here are some guidelines when praying for God's healing touch for others:

- Pray with authority and faith. Jesus did. "While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. 'Your daughter is dead,' he said … Jesus said to Jairus, 'Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed' … They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, '*My child, get up!*' Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up" (Luke 8:49ff.). See also Luke 5:24, 9:10. The disciples also spoke and healed with authority (Acts 3:6ff.).
- Be open to pray more than once for a situation (Mark 8:22–26).
- Sometimes it's necessary to fast and pray (Mark 9:17-29).
- Be sure to have people profess their healing to others and give God glory (John 9:1-5).

One of the greatest joys of my life is to be part of God's miraculous work. You can be part of this work too if you truly believe and trust him to do the impossible.

Not only do we need to go to the fish and use the right bait, we also need a good sharp hook. If there's no hook, there's no fish. The same is true in the witnessing process. We need to go out to the people and work with the Spirit to create ways to open doors, but we also need to communicate the sharp message of Jesus so their hearts will be pierced with the transforming message of Jesus. So what are the truths that create this sharp message?

- That everyone has broken God's law (Rom. 3:23).
- That because of our sin, we are separated from God (Isa. 59:2) and therefore under the punishment and penalty of God's wrath (Rom. 6:23; 2 Thes. 1:8,9)
- That God established a plan to rescue us from his penalty of death (Rom. 6:23) and to wipe out the entire debt of our sin (Rom. 5:8; I Pet. 3:18).
- That knowing about God's rescue plan is not enough. A person must recognize their need for forgiveness and reach out and humbly receive Christ's gift of eternal life through faith (John 1:12; John 3:16).

This is the sharp hook that pierces the heart, plants a spiritual seed and brings about eternal life.

Finally, if a person is going to catch fish, there needs to be a reel. It's the mechanism that ultimately brings the fish into the boat. The witnessing process also requires the function of a "reel." People need to be guided through a process that would bring them to become a committed follower of Jesus.

In the fishing context, there are three steps to reeling in a fish. First is setting the hook. Second is reeling the fish in. Third is netting and finally catching the fish. These same steps apply to the catching of "people." The setting of the hook is finding out if someone is interested in receiving Christ's gift. The reeling in step refers to the explanation of what it means to be a committed follower of Christ. For example:

- They need to be told that receiving Christ should not be done as a favor to the one doing the witnessing.
- They should understand that receiving Jesus means more than believing in a system of truth—it also involves the miracle of actually receiving his Holy Spirit into their lives (1 Cor. 2:12).
- They need to be challenged to repent of any known sin in their lives (Acts 2:38).
- They need to realize that receiving Jesus is more than just embracing what he has to give, it also involves surrendering their hearts to his lordship and making him their Master and King (Luke 9:23).

The netting step refers to the final decision where the actual commitment to Christ takes place through prayer.

To be an effective worker in the ministry of witnessing, all four of these elements must be present if a plentiful harvest is going to take place:

- going to the people,
- developing ways to attract them to want to hear the message,
- sharing a clear account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and
- giving people an opportunity to respond by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

### *An Example of the Four Elements of the Witnessing Process*

When we study the disciples, we see these four elements are evidenced. Consider the example in Acts 3:1-20. The first element of the witnessing process is "to go to the people." In this account Peter and John go out to the people in the temple (3:1). The second element is the "bait" which refers to the process through which doors are opened for a witness to take place. In this context, God's miracle of healing the crippled beggar is the bait (3:9-11). Notice how this miracle attracted people to come and hear. Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples used a number of different "baits" that were effective in opening many doors. They gave testimonies, made cultural connections, discussed the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, as well as others. But as we've stated already, miracles were the most common. The third element is the "hook" which refers to the testimony of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Notice how Peter shared the message with sharp clarity (3:13-16). Finally, there is the element of "reeling" which relates to the calling of people to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins. See again how Peter incorporates this into his witnessing ministry (3:19-20).

These four elements were always part of the witnessing accounts in the book of Acts. See these other passages:

- Acts 2:1-41 – birth of the church
- Acts 8:26-40 – Philip the Evangelist
- Acts 10:1-48 – Peter and Cornelius
- Acts 16:11-15 – Paul in Philippi
- Acts 17:1-4 – Paul in Thessalonica
- Acts 17:16-34 – Paul in Athens
- Acts 18:1-5 – Paul in Corinth
- Acts 26:1-32 – Paul with King Agrippa

When engaging in the witnessing process, typically the first two steps come more easily than the last two. This often results in the witnessing experience going no further than the first two steps. Clearly, Jesus wants his workers to incorporate all four steps:

- going to the people,
- developing ways to attract them to want to hear the message,
- sharing a clear account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and
- giving people an opportunity to respond by preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

All four may not happen all at one sitting, but they need to come at some point in order for us to hit the mark of what Christ is calling us to do and to lay the foundation for a great harvest.

May God ignite our hearts with fire to engage in this full witnessing process for his glory. Such was the heart of David Brainerd. He was born in 1718 and was a missionary to the Native Americans in New York, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania. His service meant great sacrifices which eventually led to his early death (of tuberculosis) at the age of twenty-nine after only five years on the mission field. Listen to his passion: "I care not where I live or what hardships I go through, so that I can but gain souls to Christ. While I am asleep, I dream of these things; as soon as I awake, the first thing I think of is this great work. All my desire is the conversion of sinners, and all my hope is in God."[1]

**David Brainerd**

According to Jesus, there is a shortage of these kinds of workers. This is why the harvest is small. So how can we see more armies raised up to boldly go to the front lines of battle? Again, Jesus gives us the answer.

## Second Key to the Harvest: More Prayer

Jesus said that the workers are few, but then in the same verse (Luke 10:2) he gives the other part to the solution: "… Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." According to Jesus, just ask the Lord of the harvest to make it happen.

### The Rationale for Prayer

Why is there a shortage of workers? Why is prayer needed when it seems obvious that we should just go out and witness? It's because the hurdles that hold us back are spiritual in nature. The only way they can be overcome is through prayer.

The main issue that stands out is fear. Before the Spirit was poured out on the disciples, they were seized with fear. The same is true for so many today. We fear not knowing the right answers; not knowing how to talk to people about their sin and the justice of God; not knowing how to speak clearly and relevantly; being rejected and the threat of suffering.

This fear has such a strong grip on us that we become more concerned of what the unsaved will think if we share than what God will think if we don't. We have a greater fear of people than of God. The result is that we excuse ourselves from the ministry of witnessing—the result being only a few workers and a small harvest. There is no program, strategy or leader that's going to eliminate this wall of fear—only prayer! When the early church prayed, God poured out his spirit and set them free to become bold witnesses and the harvest was plentiful.

### The Right Way to Pray

So what kind of prayer is needed? Notice, the Greek word for "ask" is *deiomai*, which literally means "to beg or to ask earnestly." This same word is also used by the demonized man in Luke 8:28: "When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God. *I beg you*—don't torture me!'" The word *deiomai* is translated here as "I beg you." It's a prayer of desperation, not a casual one like what we might give before dinner.

So when Jesus talks about raising up more harvest workers, his answer is that we need to pray the same way. It starts with us being broken over the tragedy of there being such few workers to bring in a ready and plentiful harvest. Then realizing our helplessness to change the situation, we cry out to the only one who can help, the Lord of the harvest, to send forth more workers who will boldly testify about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. This is the kind of desperate praying that will move the mighty hand of the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers and bring in a bountiful harvest.

### The Results of Prayer

When we pray, not only does the Lord of the harvest send forth workers, but prayer also opens the door for the Holy Spirit to take charge of the witnessing process.

See Acts 4:31: "*After they prayed*, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."  So important was the Spirit's involvement, Jesus told his disciples to wait before starting the witnessing process even though the need was there, "I am going to send you what my father has promised; but *stay* in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Without the Spirit's involvement, our work is worthless: "'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do *nothing*'" (John 15:5). "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in *vain"* (Ps. 127:1).

So we need to pray. This will remove any and all barriers that keep workers from the work of witnessing and open the door for the Holy Spirit to empower the process of witnessing.

What kind of ministry can we expect the Holy Spirit to have in the witnessing process? Here are some examples:

- He helps us to overcome fear: "After they prayed … they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31).
- He helps us know what to say: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! … Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'" (Acts 4:8ff.).
- He opens doors of opportunity: "They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people the full message of this new life'" (Acts 5:18ff.).
- He directs us to where God is at work: "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch … the Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'" (Acts 8:26ff.).
- He prepares hearts to hear the witness of Jesus: "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius … one day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius! … Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter'" (Acts 10:1ff.).

- He gives visions to help us know where to do the work of witnessing: "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia … they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to … during the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us' …we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:6ff.).

It's easy to see why we need God's Spirit. What a wonderful world that opens when we cry out to the Lord and God's Spirit takes over. He ushers us into a new sphere of power that is unattainable through our own human strength. That's why Paul encouraged witnessing in Philemon 6, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

God brought the disciples from the paralysis of fear and through his Spirit set them free to proclaim Christ which resulted in an amazing harvest. Do you believe God can do this in you today? The answer should be yes. The disciples were no different than we are. May God touch our lives in such a way that we rise up with a new passion and anointing for the work of witnessing so we may see a great harvest for the glory of God.

## Some Comments on Discipleship

When we think about the harvest, it's important to see it within the larger picture of making disciples. In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus outlines three parts to the discipling process. The first relates to the "going." This is largely what we have been talking about in our discussion so far regarding witnessing and the harvest. The second part has to do with 'baptizing." As people become committed followers of Jesus and experience his life, death and resurrection in their lives, they are called to bear testimony to it through the waters of baptism.

The third part is "teaching." This relates to the mentoring and training of new believers. The goal is to give them a strong foundation in the word of God and equip them to become ministers to the body and witnesses of Christ. Teaching becomes the agent through which people mature spiritually for the glory of God.

While God wants us to make disciples, an important component often forgotten is for disciples to reproduce themselves. Why? Because the possibility of world evangelization (bringing in the harvest) is greater as people who are reached become people who reach others. There is a place for mass evangelism (casting of the nets),

but the greater impact comes as individuals reproduce themselves. Although it begins slowly, the power of multiplication brings more fruit in the long run. It's the difference between bearing fruit and planting fruit trees.

Success in making disciples then is not just seeing people make a decision to follow Jesus, it also involves having them declare what Christ has done through baptism and sitting under the teaching of the church so they can be grounded in the word of God. One of the key indicators that they are maturing in their journey is when they come to the place of being able to reproduce themselves.

## Conclusion

It's a great honor to be called upon by the king of kings to work for his eternal kingdom. While this calling may cost us, it's worth it. Why? First, because the blessings are immeasurable: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29).

Second, because the need is so great: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). There is no greater tragedy than for a person to enter eternity without Jesus. The weight of this truth should cause us to want to lay down our lives if we can but see one person saved. This is why Paul said what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:19, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."

Third, because Jesus is so wonderful. When we love someone deeply, there's nothing too great that can be done for them. Listen to how the disciples describe their deep, deep love for Jesus after suffering for him: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:40-42).

May our love for God be so deep that serving him as his witnesses will not be a burden but a great honor as a representative of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

## Notes

[1] David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards (ed.), *The Diary of David Brainerd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xxviii.

## Study Questions

1. The author compares the ministry of verbal witness to the activity of fishing. Is fishing common in your region of the world? Are there other metaphors from Scripture regarding witnessing that might be more familiar?

2. Discuss the benefit of miracles as a "bait" for attracting others so that witness to the gospel can be given. Does your group of disciples experience miracles regularly or occasionally? Should more space be given for the "telling of miracles" in our gatherings?

3. Would you say we have given adequate attention to the ministry of prayer before the attention given to the ministry of evangelism or discipleship? Is prayer a recognized ministry in your church or conference? Discuss.

# 28 Short-Term Missions
## Randy Friesen

## Importance of Short-Term Missions

Short-term missions are a subset of the larger missionary effort. The term "missionary" comes from the Latin word *mitto*, which means, "to send." Christian missionaries are those who have been sent out to share the gospel of Christ, a gospel which declares that creation can be reconciled to its Creator God through the substitutionary and completed work of Christ on the cross.

There is nothing short-term about Christ's call to mission. His "*missio ecclesiato*" (God's mission for the church) is that we go into all the world making disciples by living and proclaiming the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). This mission is the church's contribution to the much broader "*missio dei*" (God's mission) of reconciling his creation back into a relationship with their Creator. Within the broader call to a life of mission, there are many acts of obedience with a particular purpose and time frame which, when viewed in isolation, appear "short-term." The methodology of "short-term" must be connected to the long-term "*missio ecclesiato*" and must be seen within the even broader "*missio dei*."

Jesus' model of discipleship included a variety of intentional short-term mission (STM) assignments for his disciples. The pre-trip preparation for these assignments included communicating a clear goal, a clear message, and practical methodology training. The STM was connected to Jesus' broader mission and was only possible because he had called, trained and sent these disciples.

Short-term mission practitioners today point to the need to get disciples off the beach (or the pew) and onto the water of active ministry. Disciples in churches today have heard sermons about fishing for men, have studied the best techniques of using "nets and boats," but have never been taught to "fish" through actually fishing. Short-term missions can offer the "hands on" discipleship in mission needed to augment the excellent teaching found in churches and theological classrooms.

## The Growing Short-Term Mission Phenomenon from the West

Within the past generation, the Western Protestant church and increasingly the church from the Global South have experienced the explosive growth of STMs. While statistics are not readily available for the growth of STM participants from countries like Korea, China, South Africa and Brazil, the church in Asia, Africa and Latin America is increasingly sending short-term teams to support their growing number of long-term workers.

The *Mission Handbook* indicates that the numbers of reported STM workers from North America grew from 97,272 in 1998 to 346,270 in 2001.[1] That figure is an amazing 256% increase in three years. More recent estimates by Dr. Robert Priest, missiology professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, indicate the number of U.S. Christians taking part in trips of a year or less leaped from 540 in 1965 to an estimated 1.5 million annually today (2014), with an estimated $2 billion spent yearly.[2]

Considerable disposable wealth, inexpensive and efficient air travel, and excellent communication resources have aided short-term missionaries living in the West. In addition to the thousands of churches sending teams, there are now hundreds of specialized STM organizations that facilitate every aspect of the mission experience.

With increasing human and financial resources within the North American church shifting to STM, it is important to understand the impact of these phenomena on the participants who are going. Perhaps of even greater missiological importance is a better understanding of the impact of these many STM teams on the recipient churches and communities. How do we improve the long-term impact of the STM experience for all involved?

## Compelling Questions for Short-Term Missions

While most acknowledge the STM phenomenon is here to stay, the movement has attracted considerable scrutiny and even concern within the broader missions community. Concerns have been raised about the ethnocentrism, relational shallowness, self-serving impact, and overall cost of STMs.[3] With the groundswell of interest in STMs have come many poorly organized and missionally weak cross-cultural assignments that often do more harm than good.

Consequently, questions must be asked such as:

- What is the long-term value of the growing STM phenomenon?
- Does STM experience have a significant and lasting impact on a participant's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours?

- What impact do variables such as length of assignment, level of pre-trip discipleship training, and location of mission assignment have on the degree of positive spiritual change in the lives of STM participants?
- How does the composition and structure of the team impact the participants?
- In what ways are discipleship and the process of growth in spiritual maturity advanced through STMs?
- What influence does previous STM experience have on a participant?
- Do repeated STM experiences increase a participant's interest in serving full-time in missions in the future?
- What effect do STM participants have on the receiving communities, churches and host families?
- Are there principles of best practice in STM from the life and teachings of Jesus?

## Current Short-Term Mission Challenges

Short-term mission for North Americans has described everything from poorly planned local church youth group forays into Mexico for a week, to well-planned programs incorporating hundreds and sometimes thousands of young adults all divided into well-trained smaller teams and sent around the world. Perhaps the most serious charge being brought against STMs today is that they feed the already prevalent Western tendency toward ethnocentrism and cultural myopia. Ethnocentrism is the practice of viewing alien customs by applying the concepts and values of one's own culture. Ethnocentrism is viewed by some as an extension of the cultural imperialism and benevolent paternalism of the Western modern missions movement of the past century. The limited time frame and Western need to accomplish something adds further pressure to the meeting of cultures and leads to what some have called the "edifice complex" where buildings and projects become the focus and not people.[4] The recipients of mission, who Slimbach calls "culture brokers," interact with their STM guests in a "staged tourist space" marked by disparities of power and levels of stereotyping that would not exist between neighbors or peers.[5] These recipients of mission can also be treated as unfortunate objects to be rescued, rather than as equals to learn from and walk alongside.[6] Unequal relationships like these can lead to "benevolent colonialism,"[7] or even worse, "disabling help" or "malevolent generosity."[8]

Most of these critiques of poor missional practices are coming from current or former STM practitioners who are interested in strengthening the quality and long-term impact of all mission strategies. It is from these critiques that the "Code of

Best Practice of Short-Term Mission"[9] and related quality control efforts have been developed as a resource for churches and mission leaders.

## The Example of Jesus

The training and sending of the twelve and the seventy-two disciples in Luke 9 and 10 are frequently cited as examples of STM discipleship training in the life of Jesus. These STM participants were focused, well prepared, empowered and then debriefed on their return. The abundant harvest Jesus describes in Luke 10:2 is engaged by far too few workers. Most would agree that the workers are still few today. Why is that? Has the professionalization of ministry raised the entry requirements beyond the level of most disciples? Perhaps the Anabaptist teaching on the priesthood of all believers can find new expression through the accessibility to ministry afforded by STM opportunities.

Jesus prepares his disciples by teaching them they are being sent out like lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3). This vulnerability and exposure could be a deliberate effort to increase their dependency on faith and prayer. How do self-sufficient Christians grow in their dependency on Jesus? Jesus raises the stakes further by requiring that they take no "purse, or bag or sandals…" (Luke 10:4). This creates a ministry of need not sufficiency, of dependence not power. Can current STM workers leave their technology gadgets, money, and educational prowess at home? Jesus's own interaction with the woman at the well in John 4, in asking for a drink, indicates the disarming effect of approaching relationships from a position of need, not sufficiency.

Before their mission trip, Jesus further instructs his disciples that they are to accept hospitality without complaining. As recipients of hospitality we can either compare and complain or consider and compliment. It is our pride or humility that is being exposed. These practical character building opportunities can occur every day in STM assignments when there is intentionality about discipleship training.

Interestingly, the primary ministry focus of the disciples sent on short-term assignments by Jesus in Luke 9 and 10 seemed to be on healing sick people and driving out unclean spirits. Their preaching of the Kingdom of God and the gospel of the Kingdom was to be demonstrated by the authority of the King who had sent them. Jesus specifically tells his disciples to proclaim peace to the homes that welcomed them. This ministry of peace in the midst of their vulnerable, dependent and faith-filled lifestyle was to also witness to the rule of the Prince of Peace in their lives.

How does the current Western STM building project focus fit into Christ's teachings? In what ways do inequities in wealth between those who are sent and

those who receive affect the ability of STM participants to learn and receive in mission assignments?

Jesus debriefs his disciples upon their return from the STM in Luke 10:17-24. The disciples returned excited they had successfully driven out unclean spirits from those they had prayed with. Jesus wisely redirects their attention off of demons to their relationship with the Father. He points to the humility and teachability of children as an example of how revelation and growth occur in his Kingdom. Without this kind of careful debrief, STM participants can return as "experts" on ministry, other cultures and even the church. When their perspectives are not appreciated they leave their sending churches frustrated and disillusioned. An extended debrief with the purpose of discerning transferable principles from the STM experience is essential for all participants.

## Short-Term Mission Research Study

In response to the challenges and growth of STMs an extensive research study was conducted on the impact of these factors on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of STM participants.[10] While other studies have been done on the impact of STM on host cultures and communities, this research is focused on the participants themselves. The study focused on 116 participants from five different STM programs and four different mission organizations. The participants were measured for twenty four beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in three stages of data collection: before they went on the STM, immediately after they returned, and one year following their return. The purpose of the study was to observe the impact of a number of differences or variables between the programs and the impact of these variables over time on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of participants. The study included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Here are some of the outcomes and recommendations from that study.

### Pre-Trip Training

Discipleship training before and after an STM is critical to the overall impact of the mission experience on the participant. The pre-trip discipleship training can prepare both the heart and the head of a participant to be teachable throughout the mission experience. A teachable attitude gives participants the grace to work through relational conflict, cross-cultural misunderstandings, assignment difficulties and many other challenges which characterize most STM assignments.

Potential STM participants, parents of potential STM participants, local churches and schools should look for STM programs that do discipleship well. Participants in

organizations that did not emphasize pre- and post-trip discipleship training were consistently lower on most positive beliefs, attitudes and behaviours change scores. The anticipation of an STM experience provides a unique teachable window in the life of a participant. To miss this discipleship training window is an irresponsible use of the STM experience.

### Program Length

Short-term mission programs, local churches and colleges are encouraged to develop longer programs beyond the several week varieties which are so common today. The longer programs of several months up to a year allow participants to engage more deeply with the host culture, develop deeper team relationships and understand the heart of the local church. Research data indicates that longer assignments (ten months versus six weeks) have a significantly positive impact on participants' experience of teamwork, relationship with the local church, and value of social justice. Once they returned home, participants who served on a longer program had a growing interest in global issues.

### Serving in Teams

Whenever possible, organize STM assignments in small teams (less than eight) if you are interested in significantly strengthening participants' value of Christian community.

The team provided participants with a place to process their experiences and continue to take positive steps in their walk of discipleship. When these teams were multicultural in composition, the experience of true Christian community was enhanced, despite the obvious challenges of overcoming cultural barriers and communication issues.

### Family and Church Support

Cultivating families and home churches that are supportive of STM participants and their experience is important in participants' retention of positive change in their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours once they return home from their assignments. The family and home church need to be an integral part of the whole STM experience. Their discernment, prayer, support, encouragement, and counsel are essential to ongoing positive change in the life of an STM participant.

The relational skills that are essential in all cross-cultural mission experiences are learned at home and in a home community. The family and local church have

an essential role in nurturing the qualities of a healthy missionary in young adults, long before they consider serving in STMs. This nurturing role is far deeper than communicating missionary vision, but incorporates the qualities of a missionary life.

### Debrief

Short-term mission programs, local churches and Christian colleges are not doing enough to debrief and follow-up with STM participants. The significant decline in positive beliefs, attitudes and behaviour-change scores a year following the STM experience is an indication that there is a battle for the hearts of our STM alumni. We are not allocating enough resources to coordinate the discipleship follow-through at the local church level after the STM experience is over. The discipleship baton is getting dropped on the track as the local church assumes it is the STM agencies' responsibility to follow up with participants, and the agencies believe it is the responsibility of the local churches.

### Ongoing Spiritual Development

As graph #1 points out,[11] in the year following the STM experience, there seems to be a spiritual "crash" related to participants' personal devotional life, including prayer and Bible study. The post-trip scores are much higher than pre-trip scores, as participants return on a spiritual "high." However, one year later these same participants record scores that are lower related to their value of the Bible as a guide for life than before they left for the mission experience! This potential regression in the experience of a relationship with God must be profiled by mission agencies and prepared for by returning STM participants.



**A3 - The Bible as a Guide for Life**
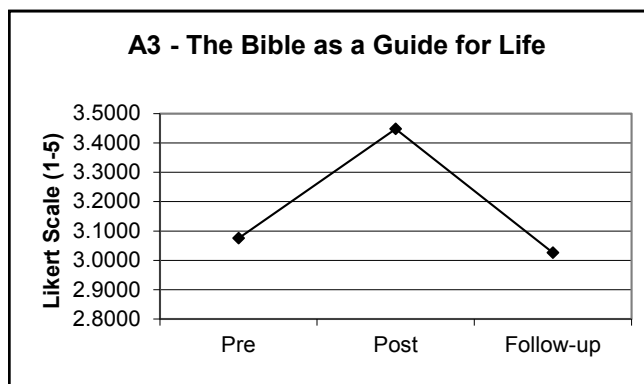
**Battle for Purity**

As graph #2 indicates, the aggregate total of all participants in the STM study actually recorded an overall decline in their practice of purity from the time period before their mission experience through to a year following their return home. Had they just become more sensitive to sin in their lives and more honest in reporting the true nature of their battles for purity? Or do young people who seek to serve God in this generation face increased spiritual attacks and temptation when they set their hearts on living on mission with Him? It seems that STM agencies, local churches and Christian colleges are not engaged enough in the battle for purity in the lives of young adult STM participants. The most spiritually committed and gifted young leaders in the church are struggling with issues of personal purity.

**A4 - Purity**
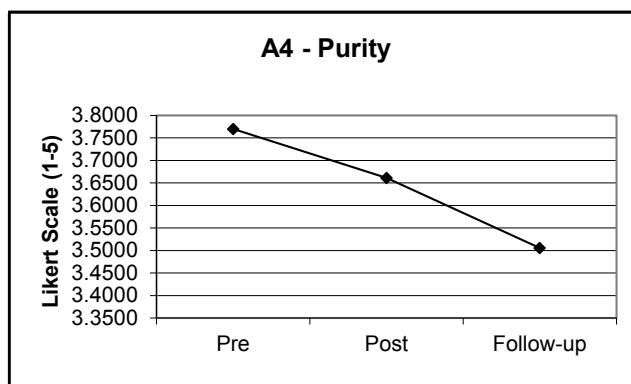
The experience of focusing on mission and service, often within an intense community experience with other spiritually committed young adults, is somehow not helping the battle. Mission organizations and local churches can be more explicit in outlining the nature of the battle for purity and can provide safe places to talk about it and pray together. Additional resources might be needed for those working through significant purity issues.

**Repeat Assignments**

Encourage STM alumni to continue serving in longer assignments and to continue serving with greater responsibility. Repeat STM participants experience positive change in a wider number of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and retain these positive changes better than first-time participants. Repeat participants are also more interested in future full-time mission work.

**Interest in Future Missions Work**

When STM participants were asked about their feelings toward long-term vocational mission work immediately following their STM experience (the "post" data collection period) and the same question was asked one year after their return from STM (the "follow-up" data collection period), an interesting trend emerged in the data. A year after returning from their mission assignments, half of all STM alumni in the study became more interested in future full-time mission work, and half moved away from future mission work as an option for their future. This polarization of responses a year after their return from STMs was a perfect distribution graph with almost equal numbers moving away from an "average" response to either "great extent" or "hardly."
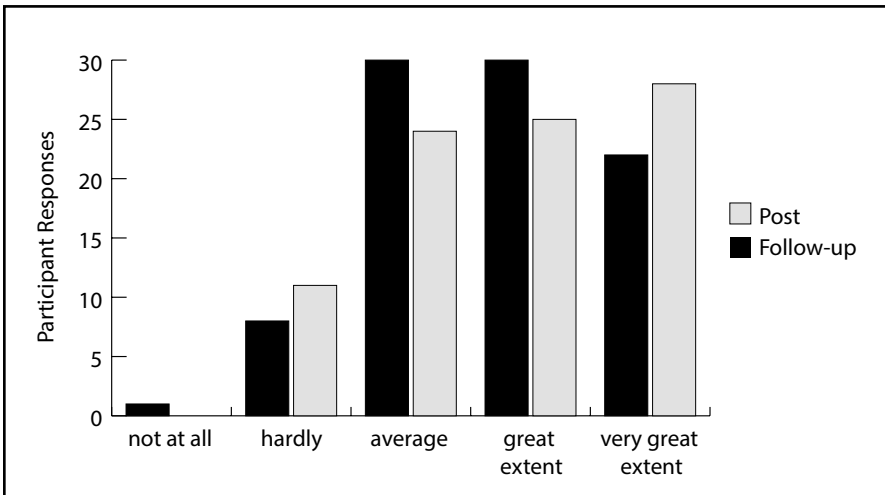


**Full-Time Missions Work**

Discovering and following up STM alumni who are moving toward deeper interest and involvement in future full time mission work is an essential task for local churches, schools and mission agencies. Staying connected with those alumni whose interest in future full-time mission work is growing, is a strategic investment of time toward mobilizing the next generation of full-time cross-cultural workers. This connection could be accomplished through effective use of debrief retreats at the end of a STM program where follow-up visits to participants' home communities, alumni parties, and other reconnecting strategies could be planned. Staying connected with

alumni in supportive relationships is an obvious and essential way to both support their application of the STM experience into their lives, as well as explore future mission training and service experiences with them.

## The Impact of Short Term Missions on Host Communities

While much research has been done on the impact of STM on participants who go, what is the impact on communities who receive these participants and teams? Some studies have been done of the "rice Christians"[12] in Baja California who are impacted by the thousands of STM participants from North America who visit that peninsula each year. STM assignments in the Baja are inexpensive, accessible and marked by exposure to poverty. Many Baja residents are already refugees from other parts of Mexico or Central America who are looking for a new life in the "North." This orientation—"North"—coupled with significant needs for shelter, church buildings and the sheer number of STM participants who travel to the Baja each year make this a unique mission environment. Given the uniqueness of this STM mission context, Baja STM trips are not a helpful benchmark for STM experiences. Nor should those STM experiences be used to critique the impact of STM on host cultures in general.

As we consider what our MB Mission family (mission agency) has learned about the impact of STM assignments on host communities over the past twenty five years, a number of lessons emerge.

- All of MB Mission's STM assignments are hosted by long-term workers and national churches in church planting contexts throughout North America and in forty countries around the world. In all these assignments STM teams serve within the long-term mission strategies and goals of local churches. The STM teams provide short term programs and outreaches (planned by the local hosts) which raise the visibility of the gospel and the church in their communities. The long-term local hosts continue the follow up once the short term teams leave. Short-term missions is best located in the context of long-term missions.

- All our STM participants serve in teams and are hosted by long-term workers who understand both the recipient culture and the sending culture. Some national pastors who host STM teams don't feel the freedom to communicate with Westerners, even if these are younger, about cross-cultural sensitivities, lifestyle standards and discipleship outcomes. Having an assignment host who understands and can communicate freely to both

the sending and the host cultures is important. Our STM teams function under the authority of this local mentor and assignment host.

- One of the essential outcomes of a good pre-trip training program for STM participants is a teachable attitude and respect for the host culture. Without this humility in learning and service, much damage can be done through insensitivity. Jesus was clear in instructing his disciples before they left on an STM assignment in Luke 10 that they were to eat what was set before them (Luke 10:7-8) and not to move around from house to house looking for better accommodations (Luke 10:7). Receiving hospitality with humility is an essential relationship-building quality and communicates respect for the host culture and community.

## Essential Components of a Healthy Short-Term Mission

After extensive comparative research of the discipleship impact of STM programs on participants and analysis of the effectiveness of STM assignments within the broader context of long-term mission strategies and outcomes, a number of components of a healthy STM program can be summarized.

- Healthy STM programs have a well-designed pre-trip discipleship training orientation focused on clear outcomes and essential teachings.[13]
- Healthy STM programs have an outreach assignment that is well planned and hosted by churches or communities with a long-term mission strategy.
- Healthy STM assignments are hosted by a local mentor who understands both the sending and host cultures (if they are different) and who is actively engaged in the discipleship and mission outcomes of both the STM program and hosting ministry.
- Healthy STM assignments occur in team (which can include both sending culture participants and host culture participants).
- Healthy STM programs emphasize the essential role of the sending church and the recipient church or community as participants in the STM experience.
- Healthy STM programs practice participant and team debriefs which both process the mission experience and prepare participants (including assignment hosts and sending churches) for ongoing application of what they are learning.

## Recommendations for Mission Organizations

In addition to the general recommendations, the following recommendations are intended to assist organizations involved in hosting STM programs:

- Most of the present resources of STM organizations are invested in planning quality assignments, preparing participants, and ensuring the assignment experience goes well. Relatively few resources are going into debriefing participants and preparing them for re-entry back home. Virtually no resources are going into following up with these participants and their home churches to ensure that the positive changes that participants are reporting translate into ongoing change. It is counterintuitive to invest discipleship resources on returning STM participants; however, the data indicates that is where the most significant discipleship challenges are found.
- For this ongoing follow-up of STM alumni, there must a rethinking of the relationship between STM agencies and sending churches/schools even before participants arrive on the mission program.
- Short-term mission organizations cannot see themselves as the totality of the mission/discipleship effort. They must see themselves as part of a larger discipleship process that includes families, churches and schools.
- Mission agencies must view local churches as essential allies in the discipling process and should build accountability requirements, including obtaining "life-coaches" into their application process to ensure that participants are invested in local church discipleship and mentoring relationships. Mission organizations could suspend acceptance of STM applicants pending the approval of participant's home church pastor.
- Many mission organizations have established "member care" staff positions who ensure that the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of their long-term missionary staff are being looked after. Short-term mission agencies require the same level of follow-up interest in their mission alumni.
- For "lasting fruit" and limited regression of positive changes in participants' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, mission organizations should invest additional resources in the follow-up and coordination of ongoing discipleship of STM alumni. This follow-up coordinator would relate both to participants as well as the pastors, "life coaches" and school staff who have an ongoing relationship with the participant.
- Staying connected with alumni and discerning those who are moving toward deeper interest and involvement in future full-time mission work is an essential task.

The data indicates that STM participants are becoming increasingly disconnected from their local churches both during and after the STM experience. Part of this trend could be because the study sample group were all young adults who often move to new communities for further schooling or work opportunities. However, mission organizations can work toward countering this data by intentionally calling STM participants to integrate, serve and participate in the local church.

The investment of resources after the assignment is over is counterintuitive, but the research data suggest that this is the most critical gap in the present STM strategy.

## Recommendations for Schools

An increasing number of Christian colleges and private high schools are investing in experiential learning through STMs as a way to learn from other cultures, learn service values, disciple students and practice the Great Commission.

- Maximize the potential of pre-trip discipleship training and post-trip discipleship debrief. The ten-month academic calendar provides a great opportunity to augment the STM service assignment with lots of campus-based discipleship training, pre-trip orientation and post-trip debrief. The challenge of spacing this pre-trip training out is that the cumulative and transformational intensity of a training camp is potentially lost.
- Work closely with sending churches and families from which your students are being supported. They will long outlive your school as an influence in your students' lives. Look to home churches and families for ongoing discipleship support, life coaching and follow up.
- Look for local service/mission opportunities in your community to both prepare for the cross-cultural mission trip, and as a follow-up service location once your participants return. Mission must be more than a location; it must be way of life!

## Recommendations for Local Churches

In addition to the general recommendations, the following recommendations are intended to assist local churches involved in STMs:

- Local churches need to hear the message from STM agencies that the church is essential to the spiritual health and ongoing discipleship of STM participants.
- Local churches should take leadership in discerning suitable STM participants, assisting these participants in building a support team and

offering "life coaches" or mentors to participants who are serious about mission and discipleship once they return.

- Local churches could define the profile of an equipped "life coach" and offer training so that potential STM applicants have trained coaches to draw on.
- Local churches could work with potential STM participants to draw up a "discipleship contract" that defines the relationship and expectations between the participant and the life coach. This discipleship contract could be included in a participant's application file so that STM organizations receive a copy and have a contact to follow through.
- Local churches must understand the importance of their role in regards to re-entry and follow-up with participants.

This kind of follow-up of STM participants communicates care. The data indicate that participants are struggling with their relationship with the local church upon their return home. They are also struggling with their devotional lives, personal purity, evangelism and social justice. The period immediately following a participant's return home is a critical time of re-entry and follow-up.

Some STM strategists are recognizing the critical need for follow-up of returning STM participants. They recommend that local churches adopt a participant re-entry strategy that includes both private and public debriefing opportunities, counselling for issues which surfaced on the assignment, career-path and educational counselling, practical service opportunities both within the community as well as one's home church, mentoring and personal discipleship, and resourcing opportunities for future mission work as well as mission training.[14]

Many returning STM participants commented on how their view of the local church was positively transformed by personal involvement in a local church while serving on their mission assignments. Their expectations rose in terms of community, vision and impact. They now see the local church through new eyes. Will local churches also seize the opportunity to continue developing these emerging young leaders and harness this enthusiasm and passion for the impact of the local church in the world?

## Recommendations for Participants

In addition to the general recommendations, the following recommendations are intended to assist STM participants:

- Short-term mission participants require a new understanding of the challenges they face following their return from missions.

- Participants need a new awareness of the challenges of re-entry culture stress, temptation and loss of spiritual vitality.
- Participants need to be prepared for a new level of isolation and lack of accountability once they return home.
- Participants need to see the benefits of a life coach who can help them navigate some of the potential re-entry minefields.
- In an experience-driven culture, STMs can become another experience to add to the list. Re-entry means more than washing the laundry and repacking for the next assignment. The body, soul, and spirit require restoration after challenging cross-cultural and spiritual experiences. Short-term mission participants must hear this message.

The high regression in positive change scores related to personal spiritual disciplines suggests that participants are taking a holiday from the building blocks of a relationship with God once they return home. Without the accountability and support of a daily schedule and team life, many participants are ignoring personal communication with God and Bible study.

The importance of STM participants re-investing in spiritually accountable and supportive relationships in their local churches and schools seems self-evident. Returning mission alumni can be encouraged to take the initiative in helping their local churches understand the impact and outcomes of the STM experience. By getting involved in their local churches, they have an opportunity to apply some of what they learning in the mission experience.

## Notes

[1] Someone who converts to Christianity not out of personal conviction but in order to receive benefits such as food, medical services, education, etc.

[2] The Global Discipleship Training Alliance is a global alliance of over 200 discipleship in mission training programs that all adhere to agreed-upon STM standards. A minimum of one third of the overall program length is spent in pre-trip training and post-trip debrief. Eight essential teachings are covered in the training programs. Assignments occur in teams and are focused on mission outreach alongside long-term ministries. See www.globaldisciples.org and www.globaldisciples.net/wp-content/.../06/Global-LEAD-Brochure.pdf. The Standards of Excellence in Short-term Mission offer another similar list of seven standardized components of healthy STM programs (www.soe.org).

[3] R. Peterson, G. Aeschliman, and R.W. Sneed, *Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission,* (Minneapolis: STEM Press, 2003), 144-145.

## Recommended Reading

Barnes, Seth. "Ten Emerging Trends in Short-Term Missions." *Mission Frontiers* 1, (2000): 13-15.

Borthwick, Paul. "Short-term youth teams: are they really worth it?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 32, (1996): 403-408.

Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself.* Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012.

McDonough, Daniel and Roger P. Peterson. *Can Short-Term Mission Really Create Long-Term Career Missionaries?* Minneapolis: STEM Ministries, 1999.

_____. *Is Short-Term Mission Really Worth the Time and Money?* Minneapolis: STEM Ministries, 1991.

Tuttle, K.A. "The Effects of Short-Term Mission Experiences on College Students' Spiritual Growth and Maturity." *Christian Education Journal* 4NS (2000): 123-140.

Zehner, Edwin. "Short-Term Missions: Toward a More Field-Oriented Model." *Missiology* 34, no. 4 (2006): 509-521.

## Study Questions

1. Think about the reports you have heard about STM: Was the long range impact upon the receivers contemplated?

2. In what ways do inequities in wealth between those who are sent and those who receive affect the ability of STM participants to learn and receive in mission assignments?

3. The author indicates that respect for the local culture is of great importance. How will you know what communicates respect in a different culture?

4. How many people do you know that were drawn into long term missions through STM? Can you discern anything about what kind of STM they had?

# 29 The "Tentmaker" Missionary

Jonathan P. Lewis

The term "tentmaking" is derived from Acts 18 in which the apostle Paul carried out his missionary work in Corinth while earning his keep with Aquila and Priscilla in a tentmaking business. In his writings we discover a number of reasons why he did this, besides meeting his financial needs. He argued that it enhanced his credibility (1 Cor. 9:6-7, 12, 18). He wanted to let the Corinthians know he didn't preach for money. He also didn't want to be a burden to others (1 Thess. 2:9). By working with his hands for a living, he also provided an example to new believers (2 Thess. 3:7-13).

Tentmaking is widely used today as a term to designate those who serve in ministry while earning their living through "secular" jobs. In missions it can be portrayed as less than ideal since secular employment robs the missionary of "ministry time." But it is seen as a necessary part of deploying missionaries to countries that do not issue visas to missionaries. To others, it is simply a way to be independent in ministry.

Jonathan P. Lewis (Ph.D.) was born in Argentina of missionary parents. He has helped establish missionary training programs in Latin America and around the world. He served as editorial director of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, and has authored and edited at least three missionary training manuals, including the well-known 3-volume set in Spanish, *Mision Mundial* (WEA Mission Commission, 2006). He is a member of the Good News Fellowship (MB) in Ferndale, WA, USA.

Tentmaking, however, is not a poor second choice, a necessary inconvenience for sending missionaries into restricted access countries, or a choice for independent people. At the core, it is a mindset and a way of life that is the key to transformational mission at home and abroad. Its importance for reaching the uttermost parts of the earth with the Good News is incalculable because, in essence, it is an invitation for every genuine disciple of Christ everywhere to advance God's rule where they are currently working and to be open to using their skills and occupations wherever God may ask them to serve in the world.

While, in fact, "tentmaking" is no doubt the most widely practiced support structure for pastors and other ministers of the majority church in the Global South, for the sake of our discussion on missions, we define tentmakers as *committed disciples of Jesus who intentionally cross frontiers to be his witnesses in and through their occupations, but whose principle identity is not that of religious workers.*[1]

The fact that this definition excludes the need for formal theological training, ordination as clergy, or formal service through an institutional church agency, may indicate a severe flaw for some. Although these may be legitimate concerns, if tentmaking can be understood as a way of life, it opens the door for millions of committed follower of Jesus to serve as effective witnesses wherever they live around the world. With thousands of unreached people groups and millions without a living witness for Christ, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the remaining task of reaching the vast unreached segments of the global population can't be achieved by the few thousand that comprise the less than 10% of the regular missions force dedicated to reaching the unreached. On the other hand, with an estimated 800 million faithful followers of Christ around the world, unleashing the inherent potential of the so-called laity as missionaries seems imperative to the size of the challenge, particularly as many are close neighbors of the unreached.[2]

## Overcoming Conceptual Barriers

Tentmaking strikes at the heart of the age-old dichotomy between professional clergy and lay witness. While most of the clergy exist primarily to administer the structures and programs of the institutional church, tentmakers often see their task as ministering directly to the lost that work and live around them. When engaging people of other faiths who are not likely to even consider "conversion" to another religion, they have a distinct advantage over paid religious workers who may be perceived as primarily seeking their conversion to Christianity.

We tend to forget that for its first three centuries, the church persisted, prospered and propagated widely with a significant absence of formal churches and no greater Christian identity than that of "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2). As a faith, it literally

conquered the Roman Empire. When the church was institutionalized by Constantine, it was somewhat successful in propagating itself by using what Ralph Winter has denominated as "sodalities" or mission-focused orders to expand Christianity largely among pagan populations in Europe. But it failed utterly to address missions to other parts of the globe. When thirteenth-century Christian explorer Marco Polo was asked by Kublai Khan to request that the Pope send 100 ordained priests to teach China to be Christian, the papacy responded seventy years later with one priest[3]. The Chinese had to wait till the nineteenth century to receive a significant number of missionaries, but it was after their expulsion in 1949 that the underground house church movement emerged. Led by lay (tentmaking) missionaries and ministers, it has won a reported 80 to 130 million followers to Christ in mainland China.[4]

When Islam arose in the seventh century, its primary instrument of expansion was *Jihad* (holy war). But the cornerstone of their overall success during succeeding centuries has been the concept of lay clergy. Islam expanded its teaching throughout Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa through Muslim merchants, not its armies. Its emphasis on loyalty and obedience, rather than understanding doctrine, holds entire societies captive. In fact, most Muslims believe that they are Muslim by birth and can never convert to another religion.

Even though the work of professional missionaries serving through agencies has enjoyed great success during the past 200 years, it has historically met with strong resistance and poor results in countries with strong societies with integrated religious/cultural foundations. These typically denounce Christianity as a foreign religion (which of course it is) and a real threat to their cultural identity. It is reported that sixty percent of the world's countries do not welcome Christian missionaries. Although Christians as a whole have understood that God's kingdom is not to be achieved by military or political conquest, they have not backed off of the concept that the mission is to be achieved by "religious conquest." We continue to emphasize conversion to our religion and have often realized too late (as in Rwanda) that we have made converts to Christianity but not disciples of Jesus.

Is it not time to move past some of the concepts that hold us back from seeing mission work that introduces a transformational paradigm to those who dwell in darkness and do so without confronting their cultural identity and heritage? To bring the transforming gospel to millions of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, we must fly under the radar of institutional religion while still advocating the lordship of Christ for all peoples. And we need to unleash hordes of disciple makers—women and men who now sit in our pews on Sunday—who are passive because they have been taught that the faith requires primarily their attendance at meetings and that success in witness is mostly about getting someone to attend church. We will never introduce

the world to the Lord and his transformational work by focusing on getting people to church. It will come as a massive outpouring of God's grace through millions of vibrant disciples scattered in their neighborhoods and workplaces around the world, operating spontaneously under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## Tentmaking is the "Normal" Way to be Missional

Tentmakers are women and men who have had a fundamental, transformational shift in their loyalty from themselves, and any other primary allegiance, to the person of Christ by accepting his offer of salvation and his lordship. They pledge to keep Jesus' commandment to love God totally, and to love others as themselves. They dedicate all their occupations to him. They are willing to go to other countries or cultures and perhaps feel an authentic call to do so. They live a disciplined life in a genuinely loving and coherent manner as a spiritually alive, Spirit-filled people. They don't necessarily pursue getting people to join a church or to make converts to a new religion. But they are intensely interested in making disciples of Jesus.

According to the apostle Paul, the missionary calling is to turn people away from darkness to the light of God's loving truth in order that they may experience his forgiveness and transforming power through a relationship with Jesus (Acts 26:18). Taking this lead, tentmakers demonstrate in practical ways God's love and fulfill Christ's purposes in everyday life. They unleash his power in lives through obedience to Christ, intercession, and the Word. Since this activity is not necessarily *an overt attempt to change a person's religion*, it also flies under the radar of proselytism. This is particularly important for those whose residence status depends on signing documents asserting that they won't engage in the illegal activity of proselytism in countries where the local population, by law, cannot renounce their own religion nor change affiliation to a foreign religion.

Perhaps this is why tentmaking resonates with many. It is a way of extending witness to other parts of the world without all the baggage of religious trappings. Tentmakers can join with God to bring light into a cross-cultural context rather than focusing on expanding the institutional church or denominational structure. They are intent on influencing others towards God as a natural activity of being who they are—witnesses of Christ's love, power and lordship. That witness will bear fruit and some of the persons with whom they share their lives will no doubt become followers of Jesus, and these will no doubt want to band together for mutual support, joining existing churches or gathering informally (and perhaps in secret) in homes or "house churches." But these initiatives, if taken, will come from those whom they've introduced to Jesus, not because a foreigner has seduced them to change their religion.

## A Case Study

Jason and Christine are a young married couple who decided they wanted to serve overseas on a short-term assignment amongst a Buddhist people group. They had taken a popular missions course that motivated and challenged them to be a witness where there is little witness for Christ. Both of them were teachers and they were counseled to get certified to teach English, an occupation that could get them placed quite easily almost anywhere in the world. They found an online TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification course and started it while they continued working at their regular jobs and saving for going overseas. They shared their plans with the missions group from their church, which then encouraged them to work through a manual on "tentmaking."[5] This helped them to understand how to prepare spiritually and emotionally for their assignment and develop a lifestyle that would allow them to be effective as Christ's witness during their time overseas.

About a year after initiating the process, they were ready when an opportunity presented itself that "felt right" to them and their support group. They accepted a two-year contract teaching English in a private high school in an Asian country. They arrived and settled into a routine. They soon made friends with their students and invited them into their home. In this context, they were able to share their lives and witness in a natural and conversational way. They gained the trust of the students and were able to pray for their needs. God responded and after a few months, some of the students made a commitment to follow Christ. The group grew as these invited their friends to join them. Aware of the fact that their contract would soon come to an end, Jason and Christine encouraged leadership as it emerged from within the student group. They focused on simple meetings around the Word, open discussion, mutual accountability and prayer. They used Scripture to seed the thought that they should form other small bands of believers around God's Word and taught on how that could be done. At the end of their contract, the couple did go back to their home in Canada and were greatly encouraged when they heard that the group they left behind had expanded into seven house gatherings, largely among students and their families.

## Why Tentmaking Works

The above is derived from a true story, and similar stories are continually unfolding around the world. Although it is not a "classic" missionary approach and might even be criticized by some from a missiological perspective as "short term" or because English was used as the medium of communication, it was nevertheless effective in discipleship terms for a number of reasons.

First, Jason and Christine were intentional in their mission and went prepared. There are tens of thousands of Christians that go overseas for work reasons, but they are not effective witnesses for Christ. Their primary interest is the work or the overseas experience, not the witness. They may not feel they are qualified to be missionaries so the thought never enters their minds. They may not even be intentional in their own discipleship. Even though some others may believe they are missionaries, they are often unprepared, going without thinking through issues that keep Christians from being effective witnesses in overseas contexts. They may be genuine in their faith but haven't developed the lifestyle essential to being and making disciples.

A few years ago, this author went to the Philippines to help the national missions movement with a particular opportunity. The Philippines "exports" eight million Filipino contract laborers overseas each year. With an estimated 6% of the nation claiming to be evangelicals, there were potentially 480,000 Filipino evangelicals working in the Persian Gulf nations and around the world. Leadership was asking itself how to mobilize this enormous potential missionary task force. As a result of this work a manual was published to help give orientation and training to churches and individuals called *Worker to Witness*[6]. Laudable as this effort may have been, the larger question is: why was this special effort at training these workers necessary? Why aren't we as a global church equipping *every member* of our congregation to minister confidently as able, spiritually ordained people in their communities and the workplace?

Jason and Christine went prepared. Through their tentmaking course, they had become aware of the spiritual and emotional challenges of working in an overseas context. They dealt with personal issues and took on disciplines that produced growth in their lives. They knew the difference between being a witness (living naturally as committed followers of Christ) and proselytism (attempting to convert someone to their religion) and that gave them great freedom. They knew discipleship was the key to leaving any permanent fruit and understood the importance of small groups to achieving this. They understood themselves as spiritual people and their priestly role. They focused principally on blessing their students and this opened the door to direct spiritual ministry by interceding for their needs before they had even proclaimed the gospel to them.  They focused discipleship on loyalty to Jesus and obedience to his teachings (not just doctrinal assent). They helped new believers grow by addressing their questions and issues through open discussion, studying the Word to find answers, praying together spontaneously, and mutual accountability. They also knew that long-term success in helping the church develop depended on modeling a simple, reproducible encounter led by the new believers.

Their work was their ministry, not simply a way to be in the country to do ministry. They were good at what they did and were a blessing in and through their work. This was the venue where they were developed relationships naturally. They practiced their priestly role. Their students were their "parish." They prayed *for* them and, when opportunity permitted, prayed *with* them. They were seen as spiritual guides without the trappings of religiosity. That broke down many barriers that regular missionaries in the same region had faced as religious workers who were perceived as propagating a foreign religion that threatened their social traditions and stability.

## The Heart of Tentmaking

The heart of tentmaking lies in its doctrinal emphasis on relationships, the disciple's spiritual identity, total loyalty to Christ, recognition of integral vocation and gifting, and the sacredness of work.

*Relationships:* God exists in relationship as modeled by the Trinity. Because we are designed in God's image, humans also exist in relationship and seek fulfillment through these. But sin has broken our relationship with God and marred our human relationships. Ultimately, human fulfillment only comes by breaking the sin barrier and entering into relationship to God through Christ (who breaks the barrier for us). Restoring our relationship to God enables us to live in grace-filled relationship with others.

Only through this spiritual relationship with the Father can women and men be empowered to experience the fullness of life (John 10:10). This is essentially the Good News that tentmakers share with the world. And the primary way they communicate it is by living a life that expresses this truth by blessing those around them in word and deed. Knowing someone with a loving, godly lifestyle is the most compelling reason for anyone to desire to know God.

*Spiritual Identity:* Because of their sinful self-centeredness, men and women are spiritually dead (Rom. 3:23). The good news is that if they repent of their sins and change their attitude (conversion), they can receive Christ's gift of salvation and be made spiritually alive through the agency of God's Spirit (Col. 2:13; John 6:63). This requires a fundamental, transformational shift in loyalty from one's self or any other primary allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. From that point onward, the believer's primary identity is as a son of God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:14), follower of Jesus, and citizen of the Kingdom. Only through this process will a person's worldview be changed and all other loyalties come into alignment.

*Vocation:* Humans are created in God's image and are designed to express his glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Our vocation is intimately related to whom he designed us to become (Ps. 139:13-15) and reaches its maximum human fulfillment when his design

is allowed to develop fully. As humans follow this internal design and develop their interests, gifts, and talents into abilities and skills in service to others, they fulfill their human vocation. This pleases and glorifies God who created humans to be able to serve each other and to excel in what they do. As Eric Liddell, champion runner and 1924 Scottish Olympian is widely quoted as saying, "God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure." Liddell went on to become a missionary in China and there made the ultimate sacrifice for Jesus.

*Spiritual Gift and Role*: Knowing God is essential to discovering who we were meant to be spiritually. New believers are given a spiritual gift that motivates them to service as part of Christ's body (Eph. 4:7-8). When they develop this gifting into wholehearted service for God, this is true worship (Rom. 12:1-2). In the exercise of their service, they also become a part of God's royal priesthood (2 Pet. 1:9). The priesthood has a mediating role between men and God—interceding for the needs of others and explaining the ways of God to them. This universal priesthood of the believer is a role vested by God, not by human agency, and should be exercised by all believers (not just by trained clergy). This is the doctrinal cornerstone of tentmaking.

*Workplace*: Work is not a curse. God blessed Adam with meaningful work by appointing him steward of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:19-20). Sin and the systems of this world have corrupted creation and distorted this role (Eph. 6:2; Rom. 8:19). Work can be hard and not always humanly satisfying or rewarding. Nevertheless, our work is sanctified (or not) by our attitude (Col. 3:17-18) and we have the opportunity to be agents of transformation in the workplace.  When with God's help we do the best we can in God's way as an expression of our love for him, God's will is done and his Kingdom does come to the workplace. When we follow God's design for us and do it unto him, it results in personal fulfillment. This in itself is "witness" and brings glory to God.

## Obedience

For tentmakers, it boils down to disciplined obedience that is manifest through a lifestyle that pursues God's agenda with excellence, whatever we do, wherever we are. No matter whom we are or what we do, if this lifestyle is adopted, God will use us in his "kingdom come" agenda and perhaps to the "ends of the earth."

A friend who works placing tentmakers claims that if you are good at whatever you do, he can definitely place you. He cites the example of a young man fresh out of high school who was passionate about goats. He loved goats, raised them, and knew all about them. But he felt he wasn't really qualified to be a missionary, supposing he needed formal theological training or perhaps a university degree which he wasn't able

to pursue. Nevertheless, he felt prompted to make himself available as a tentmaker and was eventually placed in the most inaccessible country to foreigners in the world! There he helped start a center dedicated to goat-herding. He ran a breeding program and was successful in increasing the productivity of local stock. His work was greatly appreciated. He lived a simple lifestyle that demonstrated his commitment to love God and to love those around him. He also erected a prayer tower where he went each morning to intercede for his people and where eventually, he was joined by some of his co-workers who had experienced God's love and grace through his life. Through his simple obedience and good work, he brought light to a very dark place.

It is this kind of simple obedience that will bring the light to the peoples of the world who still live in darkness. It will happen as the result of millions of candles burning rather than isolated bonfires or occasional fireworks displays. And it starts right here at home with family, schoolmates, work companions, and neighbors. We are spiritual people who love God and love others as best we can. We begin bearing fruit and God equips us with greater insight and opportunity. We consistently intercede with and for others, making it as natural as breathing. We are genuine and consistent in our walk and talk. We speak the truth in love as the Spirit moves us. We do so without judgmental attitudes since that is the Holy Spirit's work. Our work is to look for opportunities to join God in what he wants to do and work with him by blessing others, interceding with them and speaking God's Word into lives when invited to do so. Fruit follows.

## Conclusion

Beyond a second-rate way to get to the mission field, or a strategy to get our regular missionaries into countries who don't want them, tentmaking is a mindset—a way of life. It calls for genuine disciples—those who have fully acknowledged the lordship of Christ in their lives—to work with God in being good news to those around them. They develop this lifestyle at home and are open to God's leading for service in a cross-cultural context. They are effective in leading others to Christ and forming small groups of believers who start other groups.[7]

Although many Christians work and live overseas, many have never awakened to the opportunity they have to be on mission for God. Why? What needs to happen in our churches to promote a revolutionary lay movement to the ends of the earth? May God grant us the insight and vision to see a vast number of "laymen" sent forth who are selected for their intentional tentmaker lifestyle and go equipped to be effective in a cross-cultural context! They are already out there sitting in our pews. Are we up to the challenge?

## Notes

[1] Much discussion has revolved around whether or not all of a tentmaker's support is derived from their secular occupation but in this author's opinion, this is a secondary matter. For most tentmakers, God's provision for their livelihood and ministry will come in a variety of ways.

[2] Much of the support for these assertions can be found summarized with references accessed July 31, 2014 at http://www.aboutmissions.org/statistics.html

[3] Accessed July 31, 2014. http://www.livescience.com/27513-marco-polo.html

[4] Accessed July 31, 2014. http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/20/christianity-china/

[5] The WEA Missions Commission developed a manual for tentmakers available as a free download from www.globalopps.org/downloads/working.pdf

[6] Jojo Manzano and John C. Solina, *Worker to Witness Church Strengthening Ministry* (Makati City, Philippines, 2007).

[7] The importance of "small" vs. "large" groups to generate movements to Christ among the unreached has been well documented by David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World* (Monument: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

## Recommended Reading

Canadian Tentmaker Network.  http://www.tentmaking.org/

Church Planting Movements. http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/

Global Connections.  http://www.globalconnections.co.uk/

Global Opportunities.  http://www.globalopps.org/

Intent eMagazine Quarterly.  http://www.intent.com/

Missionary Training Service.  http://missionarytraining.org/

TENT.  http://www.tent.no/

Tentmakers International.  http://www.tentmakersinternational.info/

## Study Questions

1. The author states "Tentmakers can join with God to bring light into a cross-cultural context rather than focusing on expanding the institutional church or denominational structure." If you represent a denomination, what do you think of this? Is he saying that you shouldn't start churches linked formally to your denomination?

2. Can you think of people around you who are good at what they do and also like to share their faith and enjoy being around different people? Could they be tentmakers? Are you one of those?

3. Would the leadership of your church circles affirm a "tentmaking" missionary going out from the church? Would they allow that person to baptize and serve Communion to new believers?

4. How many of the missionaries you know are tentmakers? Reflect on the differences between their qualifications and those of "formal" missionaries.

# 30 Healthy Missional Church Leadership Teams

Ed Boschman

*"I will put together my Church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out." Matthew 16:16 (The Message)*

About 100 years ago, a London newspaper asked is readers to respond to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" The brilliant theologian G.K. Chesterton wrote back to the editor: "Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton."[1]

Because the church is led by people who are "imperfect," it is good to begin by admitting that reality. Equally important is the declaration that Jesus himself is the Chief Shepherd and guarantor of the church. Still, Scripture makes it clear that God's plan includes the leadership service of appropriately gifted and called believers. As Sanders clarified, the fact that "the Son of God became the servant of God to do the mission of God,"[2] provides the leadership model for the church.

In brief, the mission of the church is to bring glory to God by delighting in him and making disciples. The chosen apostles discovered early in the life of the church that they would need to build and equip teams of leaders with various service mandates to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in their mission.

Ed Boschman (D.Min., Church Leadership, California Graduate School of Theology) is a pastor/teacher/discipler at heart who enjoys being a coach/mentor for church planters and leaders of church renewal. He has planted and pastored MB churches for decades, in both Canada and the USA. He served as Executive Director of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, a position from which he just retired. He also serves on the Executive Committee for ICOMB.

Paul commends those who aspire to leadership (1 Tim. 3:1). Biblical history bears out that both good and bad leadership have inherent consequences, and that lack of leadership is not helpful. The biblical teaching also assumes plurality of leadership. Because there is only one Lord of the church, under-shepherds are intended to serve in teams.

The spiritual energy which has the power to accomplish the mission of the church has its source in none other than the Inaugurator of the church. The coordination of the multiple expressions of that spiritual dynamic has been assigned to leaders. The context for those servant roles has varied through the centuries. As leaders have made themselves available to the indwelling Spirit's power, their influence has facilitated God's mission within and through the church. However, as Sanders laments, "Real leaders are in short supply."[3] How then do we develop healthy missional leaders? And how will we build effective leadership teams for our churches?

## Followers of Jesus

*"Come follow me…." - Jesus*

*"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." - Jesus*

It was not complicated at first, but it was costly. Jesus' simple call to his early disciples was to follow him…to reprioritize their lives by putting him first. As that followership was increasingly understood, it was coupled with a high order of committed love and obedience.

Christian leaders are followers of Jesus first and foremost. In biblical terms that means denial of self, and cross-bearing. It means that Jesus has full authority over the follower. Jesus' Kingdom way of doing things is radically different from alternate possible plans. Greatness is pursued through service (Matt. 20:25-28). Effective partnership is achieved through kindness, compassion, forbearance and submission (Eph. 4:31-32; 5:21). Relationships are preserved through speaking truth in love and generous forgiveness and the carrying of one another's burdens (Eph. 4:15, 4:32; Gal. 6:1-2). Additionally, the costs of leadership, such as criticism, wounds, failures and persecution are to be considered part of the calling (1 Pet. 2:19-23).

Following Jesus has the predictable outcome of becoming more and more like him. When the followers of Jesus were first called the equivalent of "little Christs" in Antioch, they were getting followership right—not perfectly, but right nonetheless. So it is possible for 20th century leaders as well.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to a radical and daily faith-follow relationship with Jesus.**

## Guided by the Bible

*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." – Jesus*

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." - Paul*

The Bible clarifies some ways in which the quality of a disciple's followership may be measured. The gospels clarify three clear core value commitments of Jesus: 1) that he loved and obeyed the Father, 2) that he loved and sought to save the lost, and 3) that he loved and cared for the found. In each case, the love he demonstrated was without consideration of cost. All Jesus' followers then, and especially those who lead under his authority, should be known for those same values.

Scripture is the message of God's salvation story. The Bible's Holy Spirit inspired and therefore completely trustworthy message becomes the principal text by which church leaders are schooled, and that by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

That same Spirit is the one who guides leaders into all truth and into communion with God through Bible reading, meditation and both speaking and listening prayer.

Wisdom is a central pursuit of leaders. It's striking that Scripture makes clear that wisdom resides in God, and that he is generously inclined to share it with his followers—if and when they ask for it. Andy Stanley's book, *The Best Question Ever*, makes much of the importance of a good connection between leadership and wisdom. He suggests, in fact, that the best question ever is: "What is the wise thing for me to do?"[4]

More specifically, Scripture identifies a series of qualifications applicable to those who serve as church leaders. In the face of that, it is startling to observe how often churches put into positions of leadership individuals who are clearly not qualified by biblical standards.

Though not specifically identified as a church elder qualification, it is self-evident that leaders are in attitude and action loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind, and neighbor as self. If that isn't obvious, discernment need go no further.

The specific listings of qualifiers are found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9. What is particularly noteworthy in these texts is that most of the checkpoints are relatively easy to make determinations about. God has not made it extraordinarily difficult for the church to determine whether a potential leader is qualified.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to seeking insight, wisdom and direction from the Bible.**

## Committed to the Same Mission

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." – Jesus*

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself thorough Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." - Paul*

At one point in his teaching ministry Jesus clarifies that he is looking for those disciples who are willing to take up their own crosses and follow him. "Whoever wants to save his live will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." (Matt. 16:25).

And as we know from reading more of the story, the cost of discipleship is significant, and only those willing to pay that price are worthy.

So it is in the church age as well. Those who are satisfied with playing church or playing at church will not be able to endure for the Kingdom cause. There have been many would-be followers in today's churches who have counted the stewardship costs too great. They have left the Kingdom mission because they have loved the world and its pleasures more than the treasures of heaven's Kingdom. Clarity about the Mission, and commitment to it, are critical in the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to the church.

The mission of an organization is often described as "the reason it exists." When an institution has an identifiable inaugurator, it is imperative to learn from that initiator what the reason for starting that organization was. As noted earlier, Jesus clearly indicated that the "ecclesia" was called to be on a mission which even the gates of hell could not stop. Broader readings of the gospels, and the New Testament round out the reasons for the existence of the church—more correctly described as an organism than an organization.

Jesus institutes the church to bring glory to God. How is that accomplished? God is glorified when those who believe in Him worship and take delight in Him, both individually and in covenant community. It is in the context of the latter that the baptism, teaching and equipping of disciples take place. And while there may be occasions where people come to faith in Jesus in the context of the gathered church, it is more often true that the witness of the scattered believers results in people who are seeking peace with God, respond to the invitation to place their trust in Jesus, to repent of their sin, and to commit to a life of joyful, loving obedience to the Lord.

So it's clear enough that the mission of the church is to be making disciples. Faithful obedience to that commission brings glory to God. The last things that Jesus said to his disciples before his ascension make that unmistakably clear. In

Matthew 28 a literal and contextualized translation of verses 19 and 20 would be "going, disciple the people groups, baptizing and teaching…" The only imperative in that text is the word "disciple."

Additionally in the moments before Jesus is "taken up" he declares that the Holy Spirit would come upon the disciples. The results of that anointing were evidenced in their witnessing about Jesus, starting in Jerusalem, and carrying on into Judea and Samaria, and, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The reason the church is on the earth is to partner with God in his mission to be reconciled with mankind, yes, and even with his created world itself (2 Cor. 5:11-20; Rom. 8:18-22; Rev. 21:1).

It is noteworthy that this described mission is not unlike what Jesus clarified as the greatest and second greatest commandments before the church was born. Loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind, and loving neighbor as self is really an old way of saying glorify God by making disciples. When Jesus called the twelve, he told them that he would turn them into "fishers of men." It is entirely appropriate to assume that he intends that same agenda for us.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to the inherent missional cause for the existence of the church.**

## Living Integrous Exemplary Lives

*"If you love me you will obey what I command." - Jesus*

*"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.  Do what it says."  - James*

In Harper Lee's classic book, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* young Scout is driven to defend accusations that her father is a closet racist. The line she chooses is that "he is the same at home as he is in the public streets."

Because duplicity appears so effective on the surface, hypocrisy finds its way into our lives with insidious ease. When Jesus was on this earth, he was patient and gracious with human strugglers, except hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the result of knowing better but living wrongly. It is pretense: the display of piety without purity of heart.

This is the challenge that Hybels addresses in his book, *Who You Are When No One's Looking.*  He correctly points out that "It takes a great deal of old-fashioned courage to be a Christian."[5]

Additionally, because doubters and skeptics, and more generally, the unbelieving crowd often uses the line, "The church is full of hypocrites" as cause for their resistance to God and their unbelief, it is imperative to be alert to its temptation.

While it is impossible for leaders to be perfect, it is our proper response to grace to strive towards that goal. It is equally important that we are appropriately transparent about our sins and failures, and confess them in order to keep short accounts and whole relationships.

Small accountability groups where confidential transparent authenticity is practiced are highly valuable. One-on-one coaching, mentoring, and discipling are also effective in the pursuit of integrity.

Because leaders are expected to "embody" the mission of the church, the lifestyle and behaviors of leaders are "on display." The Apostle Paul was brave enough to say, "Imitate me," while he did add, "as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The focus in this arena of concern is often on being sure that leaders do not set bad or inappropriate examples. That is a valid matter, and biblical criteria need to be applied. The caution is to be sure that the Bible gets to define sin and draw the boundaries. That is not the privilege of other groups or individuals.

The other side of the coin is that the power of leadership is well invested as it models God and neighbor loving missional behavior. It is very unlikely that a church family will live with a missional outreach focus if the leaders are not modeling evangelistic living. Church families become like their leaders. If church leaders are discipling, training, equipping and deploying the saints, it is reasonable to expect that Kingdom mission results will occur. When leaders practice hospitality, it is likely to catch on. When leaders love their neighbors to faith and welcome and assimilate them into the church community, people will learn that living on mission is not out of reach for them. When leaders intentionally invest in healthy marriages and family life, the examples they set have the power to become the impetus for multiplication of those commitments.

The spiritual health that is the result of closely following Jesus needs to be matched by emotional health. Peter Scazzero effectively points out that growing up emotionally is not a default reality. It requires focus, decision and discipline. This process involves understanding that it is important to grow through emotional infancy, childhood, and adolescence into emotional adulthood. One of the key indicators of emotional maturity is having "the capacity to resolve conflicts maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspective of others."[6]

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to living appropriately transparent authentic lives as models for those they serve as leaders.**

## Committed to Team-Play Partnerships

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." - Jesus*

*"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart." - Peter*

Sports teams are the obvious illustration. Assigning a stocky defenseman into a goal-scoring position is never wise. Asking that same defenseman to be the goalkeeper is not any wiser. Team players are gifted for and further trained for specific roles on the team, and the collective impact is best when each is in their proper position.

So it is with leaders in the church. The most effective leadership network is one in which the individuals are partnered with others to build a complementary grouping of abilities and gifts. The lead team in the early church was soon a partnership of those who were assigned to roles including apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Eph. 4:11). Some were assigned to prayer and teaching of the Word, and others to meeting tangible needs (Acts 6:4)

This kind of team play is also applicable in the larger church. In his book, *Winning on Purpose*, John Kaiser suggests that accountable leadership partners correctly when "the role of the board is to govern, the role of the pastor is to lead, the role of the staff is to manage, and the role of the congregation is to minister."[7] While it's true that the lead under-shepherd has a unique role as leader among leaders, the missional impact of the church will depend on each member of each team, and each team, leading in harmony.

In order for this to occur, there are some basic biblical guidelines that need to be followed. These God-given imperatives are in place to guard against sinful human inclinations to which all leaders are susceptible. Pride is to be averted by not thinking more highly of oneself than one ought (Rom. 12:3). Ego is to be kept in check through pursuing humility by "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Our immature aggressive inclinations are to be replaced by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Our unforgiveness and grudge-bearing are to be rejected by choosing instead to make peace with other members of the team (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15, 17). Even something as subtle as impatience is to be conquered by "bearing with one another" (Col. 3:12-14).

When this kind of Godly partnership is defined, committed to, and pursued, effective partnership results. At the foundation of a maximized team is mutual trust, which both believes in and frees each contributor. Patrick Lencioni suggests

that healthy and effective teams will need to experience the following in sequence: vulnerability-based trust, productive ideological conflict, authentic agreement, peer-to-peer accountability, and attention to results.[8]

**Healthy missional leadership teams are together because they need one another to maximize their individual and collective impact.**

## Affirm and Pursue Common Vision

*"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." – Jesus*

*"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God." – Jesus*

A vision is a picture through the lens of faith of a preferred future in a particular place. It takes into account yourself, your ministry, your environment, and your God.

Scripture clarifies that lack of vision among people results in that people perishing (Prov. 29:18). Alternate translations indicate the meaning of "perish" is lack of restraint or focus and therefore inability to develop cohesion and effective togetherness.

We have clarified that the vision of Jesus for his church is success in the Kingdom mission he has assigned. That success however can be defined in multiple ways. It cannot be assumed that all those who share in the service of leadership in a local church are committed to the same picture of a preferred future condition. Some may be dreaming of a local body that multiplies itself by birthing daughter churches; others may be envisioning growing to mega-church size. Some may be committed to being the number one Bible teaching church in the area, and others may prefer being the most effective evangelistic church in the region. Some may dream of making inroads into the upscale professional community, and others of focusing on ministry to the disadvantaged and underprivileged.

It can be particularly frustrating and difficult when key leaders differ in their priority vision for the church. Collaborative processing in the direction of common vision is imperative for the maximization of impact.

**Healthy missional leadership teams are unswervingly banded together in pursuit of increasing glory for God through the genuine expansion of his church.**

## Committed to Effective Meetings

*"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…" - Luke*

The game is not played in the huddle. But the huddle is ultimately important. Players who choose to skip the huddle will not be able to do their best on the team.

Patrick Lencioni warns of "death by meeting," and though some leaders are energized by meetings, many more are not. The effective practice of teams has often resulted in efficient plans that can allay the burden of leadership and significantly moderate fatigue factors.

Developmental meetings of 1-2 days' duration should be scheduled three or four times per year. Strategy meetings are best when they are topically focused and should be limited to 2-4 hours in length. This kind of meeting may best be held monthly. Additionally, weekly staff meetings of approximately one hour in duration are best utilized for tactical planning and team member coordination. Finally, daily or as needed administration check-ins should be limited to 5-10 minutes as needed.[9]

**Healthy missional leadership teams enthusiastically invest time and energy in the various kinds of meetings needed to maximize individual and collective ministry impact and results.**

## Bound Together by Covenants

*"If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God." -Paul*

Clarity of partnership expectations and personal roles is essential for cohesion and strong collective impact. Macchia suggests that it may be helpful to put in writing a team member commitment document.[10] Healthy missional leadership teams are willing to agree to partnerships which includes accountability.

We must be careful not to lose our souls in the service of leadership. It is of absolute importance that leaders, both individually and together, choose to enter "into encounters with God in the places where you need it most in the context of your leadership."[11]

Finally, leaders must always serve with a full alertness to the reality that getting things done, even great and noble things, and yes, even Kingdom things, will be worthless, except they are sourced in love.

One of the most effective covenant promises that team members can make to one another is to speak the truth in love as they work together. In my own experiences of leadership team-building it has been my practice to let each partner know that I would never talk about them in an unhealthy way behind their back, and that it would be my commitment to absolutely avoid getting hooked into a critical triangle conversation in their absence. Nor would I ever withhold from them a grievance or hurt that I was experiencing in my relationship with them. The net result of that

promise was that they could always assume that my partnership with them was fully up to date and spiritually and emotionally healthy.

Upon clarifying that, it was my privilege to ask them for the same commitment in return. That kind of covenantal loyalty binds teams together in loving relational partnerships and returns big dividends in Kingdom impact.

**Healthy missional leadership teams are willing to strengthen clarity, cohesion and impact by documenting and signing on to their commitments to one another and their ministry.**

## Notes

[1] Mel Lawrence, *Spiritual Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 99.

[2] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 125.

[3] Ibid, 77.

[4] Andy Stanley, *The Best Question Ever* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 160.

[5] Bill Hybels, *Who You Are When No One's Looking* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1987), 15.

[6] Peter Scazzero, *Emotional Healthy Spirituality* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 179.

[7] John Kaiser, *Winning On Purpose* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 170.

[8] Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 19-71.

[9] Ibid, 175.

[10] Stephen Macchia, *Becoming A Healthy Team* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 165.

[11] Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening The Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 17.

## Study Questions

1. "God has not made it extraordinarily difficult for the church to determine whether a potential leader is qualified." Discuss how difficult this might actually be when choosers come from a different culture than the chosen leaders.

2. Have you seen problems like the author indicates in the following statement? "It can be particularly frustrating and difficult when key leaders differ in their priority vision for the church." Discuss how you would respond if you were: a) one of the leaders, b) a missionary counselor, or c) a concerned member.

# 31 The Call to the World's Least Reached: An MB Mission Response

Ray Harms-Wiebe

## Mission Vision

Proponents of the "Least Reached People Group (LRPG) Movement" consider the primary impetus of global mission to be the yearning to see Christ worshiped and followed among every people group. "The essential missionary task is to establish a viable, indigenous church planting movement that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies. It is viable in that it can grow on its own, indigenous meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a church planting movement that continues to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group."[1] This is understood to be the primary imperative of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and the essence of God's purposes for humanity (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).[2] This demographic conceptualization of LRPGs, galvanized at the 1974 Lausanne Congress and disseminated through subsequent conferences and publications, is probably the most significant contribution to missionary strategy from the 20th century. As of August 2014, the International Mission Board (www.peoplegroups.org) identifies 11,235 people groups among earth's 7 billion inhabitants. Of these, 6541 (4 billion people) are LRPGs and 3004 (205 million) are unengaged LRPGs. Unengaged groups are those LRPG where no church planting strategy is being implemented.[3] At the same time, the Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net) lists 9755 people groups in the world. Of these, 4082 are considered to be unreached (42% of the world's people groups).[4]

Differences arise due to the classification criteria employed, but the missionary task, whatever the criteria used, remains both engaging and daunting. Because of geographic, linguistic, political, religious, social and spiritual barriers, LRPGs live isolated from the impact of Christian witness and community. It is understood that

for these peoples to hear and understand the message of Jesus, they will most often depend upon the investment of long-term, cross-cultural workers, at least until there is a viable, reproducing, indigenous community of faith among them.

## Theological Foundations

This missiological movement to the least reached finds its theological grounding in the Abrahamic promise. God's promise to Abraham is to bless all the families of the earth through his lineage (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8). The Old Testament prophets foresee a time when all peoples will behold God's glory (Isa. 66:18-19) for "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). In the book of Revelation, each people group will carry its expression of the glory of God to the throne (Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-10; 21:22-26).

Jesus, who came through the line of Abraham, commissions his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The Greek word for "nations," *ethne,* refers to ethno-linguistic people groups, "the languages and extended families which constitute the peoples of the earth, not modern nation-states."[5] So, the call to LRPGs is understood to come from Jesus himself.

The conversation surrounding LRPGs is often flavored with eschatological overtones. Some evangelical leaders would say, we can be "the generation that brings back the king!"[6] The same word, *ethne,* is employed by Jesus in Matthew 24:24, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." It appears that the final consummation of all things, the second coming of Jesus for his bride, is tethered to the faithfulness of God's people in its witness to all peoples. God has entrusted to his people "a task that can be completed."[7]

Although the Christian Church has grown remarkably over the past 2000 years, with one in eight people actively practicing his or her Christian faith, approximately 40% of the world's population finds itself within communities culturally removed from Christian communities. They do not have a viable, reproducing Christian fellowship within their people group. Religious beliefs are usually disseminated within people groups, but they rarely transfer across cultural boundaries (e.g., from Jews to Gentiles) without intervention. The expansion of the gospel to all people groups, then, requires the contextualization and active proclamation of the gospel from one people group to another.

The message to be proclaimed among all people is the "gospel of the kingdom." This gospel is centred in the person and work of Christ, who through his death and resurrection, triumphed over evil. He offers to his followers the removal of guilt and

shame, liberation from sin and evil powers, healing for the broken and alienated, and meaning and purpose for life. Disciples of Jesus are liberated so that they may live obediently under his lordship and blessing.

For proponents of the LRPG movement, the most persuasive display of kingdom reality is the body of Christ incarnated in a people group; that is, a community of faith that lives in God's presence, experiences loving covenant relationships, submits to and shares God's truth, and reaches out to the neighbor with words and acts of love. This community understands the gospel within their context and, as the primary agent of the kingdom, reveals God's glory like no other body.

## Definition of Terms

Mission thinkers tend to refer to people groups through five lenses: (1) Majority Religion Blocs, (2) Affinity Blocs, (3) People Clusters, (4) Ethno-linguistic Peoples, and (5) Unimax Peoples.

### Majority Religion Blocs

LRPGs  are often grouped along the lines of religious identity. The majority religion blocs of LRPGs are Muslim (22.6%), non-religious (14.8%), Hindu (13.7%), ethno-religious (10%) and Buddhist (6.5%).[8] The ethno-religious can be divided into three categories:  (1) literate ethnic such as Taoist, Confucian, Shinto and Sikh, (2) smaller global religions like Judaism and Baha'i, (3) traditional ethnic such as animist, shamanist and spiritist. Most LRPGs live in the Muslim, non-religious, and Hindu majority religion blocs.

### Affinity Blocs

An Affinity Bloc is a macro-region where people groups share language, history, culture, religion and, sometimes, politics, even though one finds in nearly every bloc linguistic minorities that are widely dissimilar from the dominant body. The world's peoples are grouped into 15 blocs. The eleven blocs that comprise the majority of the LRPGs, with percentage of unreached, are the following: Sub-Saharan African (19%), Cushitic (37.5%), Jews (97.2%), Arab World (64.4%), Iranian (91.6%), Turkic (81.7%), South Asian (88.6%), Tibetan-Himalayan (55.7%), East Asian (43.4%), Southeast Asian (73.5%), and Malay (27.3%).[9] These 11 blocs are located in or near the 10/40 window. Most LRPGs in other parts of the world are migrants from these 11 blocs. To recognize them is helpful for broad-based gospel sowing through radio, TV, internet and literature ministry.
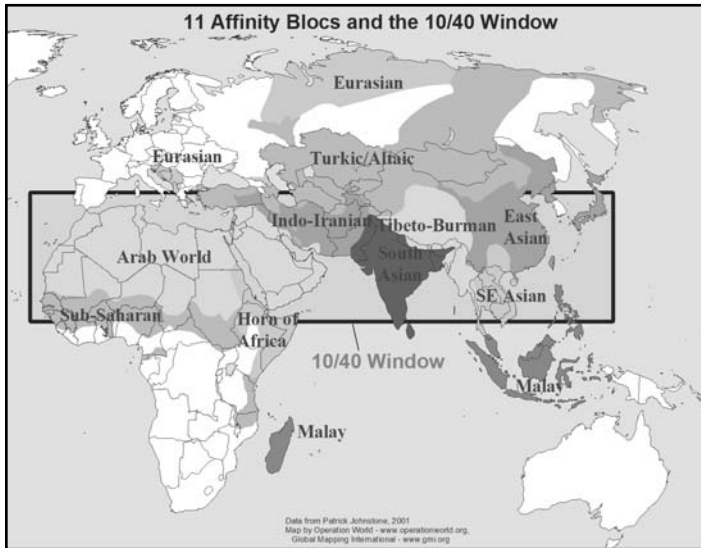
## People Clusters

Within the 11 affinity blocs, which comprise the majority of the LRPGs, are 251 people clusters. People clusters are closely related ethno-linguistic peoples, sometimes divided by political or dialectal boundaries, usually numbering more than one million. For example, the Arabic World is made up of the following people clusters: Hassaniya, Maghreb, Libyan, Egyptian, Arabian, Levantine, Sudanese and Yemeni. Within the Turkic World, we find the Turkish, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uighur and Ural-Siberian people clusters. These smaller groupings are significant for strategic initiatives to reach related peoples.

## Ethno-Linguistic People Groups

An ethno-linguistic people group is "a people distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs and language."[10] So, ethnic identity is rooted in shared community, shared heritage and shared culture, even though sub-divisions according to dialect or cultural distinctives may still exist. This ethno-linguistic model is helpful for evangelism and discipleship when language barriers override comprehension and acceptance barriers. However, when the language barrier is superseded by other acceptance factors, this approach is less appropriate. For example, in many South Asian contexts (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) the language barrier is not the paramount obstacle to gospel communication.

**Unimax People Groups**

A *unimax people group* is "the maximum sized group sufficiently unified to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where 'unified' refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the gospel."[11] In 1982, a broad representation of mission thinkers gathered in Chicago, sponsored by the Lausanne Strategy Working Group and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, to provide further clarity for the remaining missionary task. The following definitions emerged from this meeting:  A *People Group* is "a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or combinations of these . . . it is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."[12] A *unimax people group* comes closest to this 1982 definition.

Ideally, usage of the term "people group" would always imply that all members of the given group understand each other linguistically, relationally and culturally. The 1982 Lausanne Strategy Working Group agreed that "for evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."[13] For example, the *Unimax Nanerige People Group* are part of the *Senoufo Ethno-linguistic People Group* within the larger *Gur People Cluster* (Mossi, Senoufo, Gourma, etc.) that is found within the *Sub-Saharan Affinity Bloc*, comprised of primarily animists and Muslims.

**Least Reached People Groups (LRPG)**

A LRPG is an ethno-linguistic people group within which there is no viable, reproducing, indigenous community of Jesus followers with adequate resources and critical mass to evangelize their own people group.[14] Although somewhat arbitrary, a LRPG is defined as a people group with a population over 10,000 and under 5% Christian or less than 2% Evangelical.

**The 10/40 Window**

The 10/40 Window is a rectangular area housing North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia between the latitudes 10 and 40 north of the equator and between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, encompassing the region of greatest concentration of LRPGs. This is also the region where the major non-Christian religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) predominate. Some countries situated on the borders of

the 10/40 Window that possess high numbers of LRPGs are also included, such
as the Muslim-dominated nation of Indonesia. 95% of those who have never had
an opportunity to hear the gospel in their own language live within the 10/40
Window.[15] "An estimated 4.56 billion individuals residing in approximately 8,625
distinct people groups" are found in this geographical region.[16]

## The MB Mission Response

### Overall Mission Vision

The focus of MB engagement in world mission has been on the least reached
since the beginning, when Abraham and Maria Friesen were sent from South Russia
(modern Ukraine) to the Telugu of South India in 1889. When the North American
Mennonite Brethren Mission Union formed in 1900, the first of four purposes for
the new ecclesial organization read as follows: "To bring and to preach through
missionaries the gospel to all nations without the gospel of Christ in home and
foreign lands."[17]

The strategic vision pamphlet, *Vision for the Future: Goals for the 90s*, published in
1990 by MB Mission, gives specific reference to the unfinished task. "Until the gospel
of salvation in Jesus Christ has been brought to all nations and peoples, the missionary
task has not been accomplished. Today over 2.2 billion people have not had access to
the gospel and live under severe de facto religious restrictions. Thousands of people
groups of unique language and cultural identity do not have Christian churches in
their midst."[18] A subsequent MB Mission document published in 1997 called *Global
Mission Guidelines: Vision, Priorities and Strategies for Century 21* reiterates this call
to the unreached people groups within the 10-40 Window: "Until the Gospel of
salvation in Jesus Christ has been brought to all people groups, the missionary task
will be ongoing."[19]

The *Global Mission Guidelines* document outlined a strategic transition in prayer,
finances and personnel from Latin America to Asia, where the majority of the least
reached were found among the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist religious blocs. This
global re-positioning was motivated by the focus on sending more church planting
workers to serve among the LRPGs. In alignment with this strategic adjustment, since
2005, MB Mission has as its strategic vision statement: "holistic church planting that
transforms communities among the least reached."

**Examples of MB Mission to LRPGs**

*Empowering Mission to the Least Reached: Mission Capacity Building service (MCB)*

MB Mission believes that followers of Jesus from all people groups are called to join Jesus in his mission to the LRPGs. Based on this understanding, the mission agency comes alongside member conferences of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) with its Mission Capacity Building service in the areas of leadership training, community development, and mission sending. The intent is to equip, empower, and release mission workers from all members of the ICOMB family for global mission.

*Telugu People Cluster.* Abraham and Maria Friesen arrived in south-central India in 1889, working with existing American Baptist mission agencies. A decade later, in 1899, MB Mission initiated its work among the Telugu people cluster of Andhra Pradesh. Today, the India MB Conference numbers between 150-200 thousand members and 965 churches. The Telugu People Cluster, however, numbers 66.5 Million and remains largely unreached (0.01%). Many Muslims from the Urdu People Cluster also live alongside them in Hyderabad and smaller towns. Presently, MB Mission understands its current role to be one of encouraging and equipping this large indigenous church to reach other people groups of Andhra Pradesh, North India, and beyond.

*Bantu People Cluster.* MB Mission officially began its church planting work among the Bantu peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1943. The church family is now comprised of 110,000 members, 468 congregations, and 1056 cell churches. At the time of writing, 193 ministry students, supported through MB Mission, are enrolled in secondary to graduate levels of study. Through distance education approximately 450 more students are being trained in rural regions, as well as in the new church cluster in Bukavu (eastern Congo).

The DRC MB Conference carries a dynamic missionary vision for church planting and the LR in their home country and beyond. Within the DRC, they are planting churches among the Teke and the Batwa Kiri people groups. Beyond the DRC, they are planting churches in South Africa (Durban) and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville).

The Angolan MB Conference is also a child of the DRC churches. Seeds were initially planted as Angolan refugees came to faith at MB medical clinics in the DRC. As Angolan converts returned home in 1980, they began to

form new church communities. The conference now numbers around 12,000 members in 93 congregations. Both the DRC and Angola are resourced through MB Mission's MCB service.

*Khmu People Group.* In 1990, MB Mission initiated its work among the Khmu, an ethno-linguistic people group numbering approximately 814,000 in four Southeast Asian countries. As of 2013, the Khmu MB Conference numbers about 36 thousand members, 32 churches and 180 house churches. While 8-10% of their population is Evangelical in one of these countries, their people group is between 0.1% - 0.7% Evangelical in three other countries.[20] Other unimax groups within the Khmu people group are also largely unreached (e.g., Keun, Lu, Me, Rok, Nguan).

The Khmu are beginning to plant churches among other ethno-linguistic groups within their people cluster (e.g., seven churches among the Mnong) and neighbouring people clusters like the Mien and Lao. The vision is to see churches planted across the Khmu world and in neighbouring people clusters in Southeast Asia. Workers from North America support the evangelistic efforts of these church planters through prayer and the MCB service.

*Latin American Affinity Bloc.* The Latin American conferences of the ICOMB family are growing in their mission vision for the LRPGs. The Matthew Training Center in Mexico equips Latino works for mission among the LRPGs in Mexico, Latin America, and beyond. Brazilian missionaries are planting churches among the Mandyak people group of Senegal. Uruguay and Paraguay have sent long term workers to North Africa and North India, respectively. MB Mission offers itself as a resource to the mission leaders of these national churches.

### Going to the Least Reached: Church Planting Service

*Turkic Affinity Bloc.* In October of 2008, the MB Mission Board adopted the Turkic world as an Affinity Bloc within which church planting teams would be placed. Over the past five years, three multi-ethnic and multi-national teams have been mobilized to the Turkic world.

*Arabic Affinity Bloc.* MB Mission supports mass evangelism initiatives (e.g., satellite TV programming, radio, and internet evangelism), discipleship, and church planting in seven countries across the Arabic world.

*Tibetan-Burmese Affinity Bloc.* MB Mission has workers within the Tibetan-Burmese Affinity Bloc engaged in Scripture translation, evangelism, and discipleship among at least three unimax people groups.

*Sub-Saharan African Affinity Bloc.* Since 1990, MB Mission has had workers among the Nanerige people of western Burkina Faso. Ministries include Scripture translation, provision of oral Bible teaching tools, evangelism, and church planting.

*Latin American Affinity Bloc.* In the past, MB workers have translated Scripture for and planted communities of faith among indigenous peoples such as the Lengua, Nivaclé (Chulupí), Ashaninca, Chocó, Wounaan and Embera. MCB work continues in Paraguay and Panama. Church planting is beginning among the Mixtec, a LRPG of approximately 400 thousand in Mexico.

### Summary

75% of MB Mission's global missionary force is focused on church planting among LRPGs. 25% of its workers are engaged in MCB work, which also has as its goal the mobilization of missionaries from the ICOMB family to the LRPGs. 25% of the LRPG force is focused on ministry to Muslim people groups. The LRPG Movement has had a tremendous impact on MB Mission's self-understanding and, as a natural consequence, its strategic planning.

## Some Mission Reflections

### Some Cautions

#### Metrics

While recognizing the tremendous benefits of increased awareness of the missionary task, strategic planning across denominational and agency lines, focused energy on the least reached, and global intercession for the LRPGs, we must give attention to our means of measuring success. Do we value the contextualization of the church in human contexts more than the contextualization of the gospel among the LRPGs? What are our metrics in global mission? Quantitative measures (e.g., numbers of converts and gathered fellowships) can become more important than biblical measures such as knowledge of God, faithfulness, holiness, and suffering. The work of the Holy Spirit in history and the fulfillment of the Great Commission cannot be reduced to a mathematical exercise.

#### Foundations

Proponents of LRPG strategy should recognize not only the biblical foundation for people group language (*ethne*), but also the influence of social anthropology on their missionary perspectives. In the 1920s, British social anthropology was the first to compare social systems (i.e., families, clans, tribes, and peasant communities) from around the globe, usually focusing on small-scale societies.[21] This scientific endeavour revealed the power and functionality of social systems. Some of the foundational concepts such as the social dynamics of homogeneous groups, social receptivity (or resistance), and the existence of social barriers have social anthropology as their source. The LRPG Movement drew language from this early twentieth century development.

### Reductionism

At the same time, the focus on LRPGs through social analysis can make one vulnerable to a certain reductionism, where the application of social principles to strategic evangelism and church planting become more important than God (theology), divine guidance, holiness, ecclesiology, spiritual encounter (with opposing spiritual realities), and prayer. The LRPGs are not won for the Lord simply through strategic planning, human ingenuity and hard work. It behooves mission workers to walk in submission to God, asking for the nations (ethne) as their inheritance (Psalm 2:8), yielding themselves fully to his sovereign plan, sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, ready to cooperate with him, awaiting his empowering and blessing to go to the ends of the earth.

### Objectification of the Other

Care must also be taken to not only see LRPGs as groups to be identified, categorized and evangelized, but also to see them as people who share a common humanity. On the most profound level of human identity we are one (Gen. 1:26). As followers of Jesus, all ethno-linguistic groups are called to form one new people (society, humanity) for the glory of God (Acts 10:34; Eph. 2:12-20). True conversion to Jesus and incorporation into his body (church planting) will lead to social transformation through the assimilation of a new kingdom identity.[22]

This profound spiritual unity does not demand uniformity, but our shared life in Christ challenges our divisions according to ethnicity, language, social class, and gender, and urges us to allow the Holy Spirit to draw us together into one body (John 17:22-23). Discipleship in Christ should always lead us to understand the new kingdom identity as the primary and eternal identity, not the ethno-linguistic identity. In some parts of Europe and Africa, where ethno-linguistic identity has superseded kingdom identity, brothers and sisters have killed each other in the name of Jesus.

### Intra-People Group Animosity

We must also remember that ethno-linguistic people groups, usually identified by language and common descent, are often divided by religion, class distinctions, education, politics, ideologies, and enmity between clans or tribes. Neighboring groups often hate and fear each other because of their interrelated histories. Within a people cluster, least reached unimax people groups may resist the movement to Christ in a related unimax group because of inherited enmity. The proclamation of the gospel should bring peace, reconciliation, and healing to these intra-people group relationships (e.g., Egyptian and Maghreb Arabs).

### *Global Forces: Migration, Urbanization and Globalization*

Much of the LRPG strategy was originally developed in rural, small-scale societies rooted in shared language, community, and heritage. Forces such as migration, urbanization, and globalization, however, are altering the composition and identity of people groups. People groups are being dispersed around the globe (e.g., Turks in Germany and Austria) at a rate never before seen in human history. As a consequence, the world's peoples often cannot be grouped into distinct, non-overlapping, bounded sets of families with impermeable boundaries. What is the relevance of LRPG thinking in globalized urban contexts? Can there be people group movements in complex urban societies? What do we do where there is a fusion of horizons, where different ethno-linguistic identities are blending to form a new hybrid identity?

Ethno-linguistic people groups, in urban contexts, often live with multiple identities and allegiances which evolve over time. For example, a person may compartmentalize his or her ethnic identity and then identify primarily with middle levels of social organizations; such as networks, associations, or institutions (e.g., religious identity). The same person may also identify with upper levels of social organization like nation-states and transnational organizations. So, the same person has many different cultural frames and loyalties. For global mission, the question is, "What are the primary relationship networks of the people being evangelized?"

At the end of the twentieth century, 51% of the world's population was urbanized with twenty super giants (over ten million inhabitants), seventy-nine super cities (over four million), and 433 megacities (over one million). If current trends continue, by 2100 only ten percent of the world's population will be rural. The twenty-first century will be an urban world:

The cities are even more vital for mission strategy than they were in Paul's day. Pioneer missions in the 20th century had been characterized by the need to reach unreached peoples—a process within sight of conclusion. The 21st century will be characterized by the need for pioneer missions in the great cities of the world—a much more complex and multi-layered kaleidoscope of needs. Mission frontiers in the 20th century were perceived as rural, but we must switch our thinking to the urban challenge as the frontier of the future.[23]

The world's cities present a formidable challenge to mission and, at the same time, a tremendous opportunity for kingdom growth.

### *Triumphalism*

We must be careful in the tone of our language when we begin to postulate that we can bring Jesus back in our generation. In some settings the triumphalist language

can be quite disconcerting. Thankfully, human history and the return of Jesus are in the sovereign hands of the father, not ours.

## Positive Impetus

### *Strategic Planning*

As Ralph Winter argues, the consideration of unimax peoples is possibly the most valuable framework for strategic planning in mission.[24] The geographical distribution of LRPGs does not follow political boundaries in the majority, so strategizing along permeable political lines is usually not very helpful (e.g., Kurds are found in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Azerbaijan). The unimax people grouping offers the largest people group definition without crossing boundaries that hinder the spread of the gospel. It does so without neglecting those smaller groups which may be insulated within a larger group and sealed off because of prejudicial boundaries (e.g., the Bolon and Nanerige peoples are part of the larger Jula people group cluster in Burkina Faso). This strategic focus can be, and has been, the basis for many inter-agency partnerships among the LRPGs.

### *Intercession*

Planting viable, reproducible, indigenous churches among the LR requires focused intercession, for "we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). The LRPG Movement has produced unparalleled resources for global intercession through the publication of *Operation World* and related materials. Through the painstaking work of dedicated mission workers, increasingly accurate data on nations, people groups, religious movements, significant mission challenges, and informed invitations to prayer have been provided for the global church and have encouraged many to pray for not only LRPGs, but whole people clusters and affinity blocs. Many mission workers first felt called by the Lord of the harvest to serve among the LR as they prayed through this mission literature in personal devotional times, student groups, and church families.

## Notes

[1] Ralph Winter, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader,* Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., 4th Edition (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 538. Some of the first proponents of this focus on people groups were Donald Anderson McGravran, through his influential book, *The Bridges of God:  A*

*Study in the Strategy of Missions* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), and his protégé, Ralph Winter.

[2] Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th Edition (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 17. This missionary motivation is also espoused by the *Issachar Initiative* (www.issacharinitiative.org) and *Finishing the Task* (www.finishingthetask.com).

[3] *International Mission Board*, last modified January 27, 2015, www.peoplegroups.org.

[4] "Joshua Project," www.joshuaproject.net, accessed January 27, 2015; the most comprehensive people group listings are provided by the International Mission Board, the Joshua Project and the World Christian Database (www.worldchristiandatabase.org).

[5] Winter, *Perspectives*, 533. See also Wilbert Shenk ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

[6] Mandryk, *Operation*, 27.

[7] Winter, *Perspectives*, 533; Ralph Winter and David Taylor, "Seeking Closure: The Story of a Movement from William Carey to Tokyo 2010," *Mission Frontiers* 31.5 (September-October, 2009): 19-23.

[8] Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 168-169.

[9] Mandryk, *Operation*, 25.

[10] Mandryk, *Operation*, 958. Ethnicity is commonly understood to be a primary force in the shaping of socio-psychological identity, see Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 62-63.

[11] Winter, *Perspectives*, 535.

[12] Ibid., 536.

[13] 1982 Lausanne Committee Chicago Meeting, as quoted in "What is a People Group?," *joshuaproject.net*, accessed January 27, 2015, http://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/what_is_a_people_group.

[14] Winter, *Perspectives*, 536; Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net).

[15] Johnstone, *Future*, 548.

[16] "10/40 Window," *joshuaproject.net*, accessed January 27, 2015, http://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions#10_40_Window.

[17] G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Hillsboro: Kindred Productions, 1984), 216.

[18] *Vision for the Future: Goals for the 1990s* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Brethren Missions/ Service, 1990), 15.

[19] *Global Mission Guidelines: Vision, Priorities, and Strategies for Century 21* (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services, 1997), 9.

[20] "Khmu," *joshuaproject.net*, accessed January 27, 2015, http://joshuaproject.net/ people_groups/18878.

[21] Hiebert, *Gospel,* 89.

[22] Ibid., 71-75.

[23] Johnstone, *Future*, 556.

[24] Winter, *Perspectives*, 536.

## Recommended Reading

Conn, Harvie M., ed. *Reaching the Unreached: The Old-New Challenge*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984.

Ens, Harold. *Mennonite Brethren in Global Mission: Observations and Reflections, 1966-2006*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010.

Hiebert, Paul G. *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

Johnstone, Patrick. "Affinity Blocs and People Clusters: An Approach Toward Strategic Insight and Mission Partnership." *Mission Frontiers* 29:2, (March-April 2007): 8-15.

_____. *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

Mandryk, Jason. *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th Edition. Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010.

Shenk, Wilbert R. *Changing Frontiers of Mission.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999.

Snodderly, Beth and A. Scott Moreau, eds. *Evangelical and Frontier Mission: Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011.

Taylor, David. "Discipling All Peoples: Today's Imperative and the Vision of Tokyo 2010." *Mission Frontiers*, 31.5 (September-October 2009): 6-12.

Winter, Ralph and David Taylor. "Seeking Closure: The Story of a Movement from William Carey to Tokyo 2010." *Mission Frontiers,* 31:5, (September-October 2009): 19-23.

**People Group Movement Websites:**

Finishing the Task (www.finishingthetask.com)

The International Mission Board (www.peoplegroups.org)

The Isaachar Initiative (www.isaacharinitiatve.org)

The Joshua Project (www.joshuaproject.net)

SIL Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com)

World Christian Database (www.worldchristiandatabase.org)


## Study Questions

1. Is the concept and language of "least reached people groups" new to you? List three new insights you have gained from reading this chapter.

2. Given the author's definition of an LRPG, are there such groups in your area? Who are they? Who is reaching out to them?

3. How might one respond to the affirmation, "Why go to the ends of the earth when we have lots of unsaved people all around us; leave those mission fields to the older and larger mission agencies!"

# 32 The Bible Translation Strategy for Evangelism: From Vision to Call, One Mennonite's Experience

Phillip A. Bergen

Out at the far-flung corners of the world, there are some dusty boxes sitting in storage sheds. The sad part: they're full of Bibles.[1] The reasons that these boxes remain unopened are many and varied, but the reality is just as painful in each case. As a result, the question of how new translations will actually be *used* has become the first consideration for the viability of most Bible translation projects. Where once the primary focus for many was that "Every man, woman, and child would be able to read God's Word in their own language,"[2] it has now become "Scripture in Use."[3]

Today, in order to launch a new Bible translation project under one of the better-known agencies, certain conditions must be met that encourage the use of the finished product. For example: it is preferable that competent people be in place to teach the new Scripture, that there be a sizable group eager to apply what they learn from their teachers,[4] an excellent relationship between these two groups, a solid literacy program, and signs of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the project.[5]

For this reason, few translations are done anymore without an established church asking for them. When the right conditions have been discerned, committees are formed, prayer support organized, budgets made, funding found, qualified people trained, professional supervision established, resources allocated, quality control measures put in place, schedules written, the project launched, and things start to happen. Today, virtually from day one, Scripture that is translated goes into operation, teaching people as part of the translation *testing* process, one of the standard quality control measures. Also, first edition printings of translated Scripture now tend to be much more modest in size. People are using their storage sheds for others things.

## The Vision

But what about using the word of God as an evangelism tool in unreached people groups? Might it be the case that the Bible itself can unlock doors that have been closed to evangelistic sharing? Could there be places where the word itself has more credibility than mere ideas heard during brief evangelism events put on by outsiders (usually in trade languages—not in the mother tongue)? For conservative, stable communities, wouldn't the authorized version of God's story of the saving of this world through Jesus Christ need to be clear before the authentic leaders there would choose to meet Jesus themselves? When Scripture selections (not the whole Bible) are translated to meet these needs, this approach is called "The Translation Strategy."[6]

It's not particularly popular. A lot of hard work has to be done just to get it off the ground, with no guarantee of success. The missionaries must establish a home in the new community. The language and culture must be learned. Good relationships built. In order to deliver God's Word and not just someone's personalized version of it, good translation procedures must be followed. This puts a heavy load on all involved from those who send to those who go since there are likely few local people to initially share in the work. It's very hard to attack all of these challenges at once—yet they just don't come any other way. This strategy may run no risk of producing unopened boxes of Bibles, but it can still come to a dead end.

Those who do this work need to have a rare combination of gifts and training. They must be well trained linguists, good language learners, computer "geeks," anthropologists, missiologists, educators, storytellers, socially astute, ministers of grace, survivors, and usually, really good with tools—since they often have to fix all of their own stuff. Many of the unreached peoples of this world live in some hard-to-reach places. The missionaries must also be team players since no one person can do the job alone. And, since we are truth-telling here, these mission workers need to be good at forgiving themselves for their inadequacies. The fact is, there really aren't many people to be found (or even teams of people) with this entire special skill set. Certainly there are fewer than those of us who are actually trying to do the work!

Consequently, those who send these people must be faithful to support the work in any way that is necessary—and not just for five years, but until it is finished. This can take a lot longer than one would imagine since, by definition, it is something that has never been done before, in a new place, and therefore will entail many unforeseen challenges. And what does "finished" mean? Since the mission is translation for evangelism, "finished" doesn't just mean translating selected parts needed for sharing the gospel—it means actually sharing the entire gospel and making disciples!

As daunting as the Translation Strategy is, it is actually being used by some mission agencies. New Tribes Mission is one group that specializes in this work.

What usually keeps these people at their task? A determination to do for others what they appreciate others having done for them—the opening of the Bible to their understanding. When we first share who Jesus is, and then how and why to obey all that Jesus commanded—by listening to God's words and not just ours—some doors that were closed do open. You will see that, at least in our case, though you don't have to be a Mennonite to do this work, it was an enormous advantage in one important area: explaining who we really are, and why we would do this work.

## The Application

Sirigi sat in his cane chair, in the small patch of afternoon shade cast by his mud brick house. He smiled. Opening his hands to "the sky"[7] in an attitude of prayer that he learned from "believers," he said, "Thank you God." It was a thank you for a gift that had been over twenty-five years in the making. He had watched and waited for the day when this gift would be ready for him to enjoy. His first plan of action: share his new gift with one of his old friends. That's what good people do with the very best of things that come to them—share them with those they love.

Sirigi has always tried to be this kind of good person—focused on sharing good things with others. Close to forty years ago, he was one of the young men who came back to Burkina Faso from his migrant work in Ivory Coast with something to help his village. Something that was more than just money. Being one of the chief's sons, and having been initiated into the secrets and covenants of his people at an early age, he had always been dedicated to fulfilling the call on his life to be a real Nanerigé[8] man. It was this focus that was pushing him now to attempt something difficult. He would ask for change to come to his town, and as he well knew, change doesn't come easily for his people.

It would take real work to accomplish what he and some other young men had in mind. Deeply conservative, committed to unity at all levels of their society, his people were convinced that they were already on the right track with "the powers," and needed no new religious ideas and practices. But Sirigi was convinced there was something that the village needed in order to be even stronger—a mosque. Of all the new religious traditions coming into the area promising peace with God and the key to good living, Islam simply felt the most *right*. Simple. Respectful. It took people as they were and helped them to live together as colleagues in faith and service to God. It gave them daily, public, powerful ways to show their respect for God and each other. The young men had seen the good results of Islam during their time away. They wanted these results to be seen in their own village.

Sirigi's work to bring positive change to his village succeeded beyond his wildest expectations. Now, forty years later, he could look back on this thing he had done that had gone so well. With his dedicated help, its coming had not torn the village into factions that struggled against each other. His own brother, when he became chief, remained Sirigi's close companion, even though as chief, he would never compromise his devotion to the ancestors and the village fetish that they had set up for the good of all, and follow Islam. Though Kuluzé, the chief, would never join the mosque, neither would he resist it, nor his brother with his new devotion to Allah. Allah, after all, was Kle (God).  Kle was already a part of everything that was going on. Nothing could succeed outside of his will. Men reciting memorized Arabic incantations five times a day while kneeling on a mat and facing east hurt nothing. The ancestors and the fetish powers (things they believed that God had created) seemed to approve. Over time, the vast majority of the men of the village had joined the mosque.

Members of other religious groups asked for and were given permission to hold "evangelism campaigns." They were given a hearing. And then they went on their way. Through this, a few people around town had latched onto the idea that Jesus was somehow important. But these people had trouble explaining how Jesus was better than God alone, and easier to follow than Islam.

And then someone different came. AIMM[9] missionaries Dan and Kathy Petersen asked to speak to Sirigi's brother, the chief. Dan presented Kuluzé with an option: should the village leaders approve, Dan and his family would move to their village, learn the Nanerigé language, and get the main points of the word of God translated into Nanerigé so that people could hear them for themselves. Would Kuluzé arrange a meeting with the village council at which this idea could be presented? It was done. The council heard Dan and his idea. They approved of it. Kuluzé then took on the job of hosting the visitors—helping them find a place to live and someone to help them do the work they were planning to share with others. He put the Petersens on a plot of land near his brother Sirigi. The year was 1985.

Today, Sirigi's prayer of thanks to God is for the story he had just heard in the Bible: the story of the Messiah, the one foretold in the first book of the Bible (Gen. 49:10) whose authority would be recognized by all and last forever; the "Son of Man" who would be called "the Mighty God" and would rule over God's people (Isa. 9:6-7); the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53) whose death would pay the debt for mankind's sin and open the door to the healing of all that is hurting us; Jesus, whose character and purpose were seen in his prayer, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."  Jesus, who came back from the dead to release God's Holy Spirit to inhabit his people and to take his rightful place at the head of the church, guiding it into

eternal life.  Sirigi's simple prayer, "Faabe Kle" ("Thank you God"), was a prayer of gratitude for this saving work that had been done by Christ.

The moment of Sirigi's understanding, and the expression of his gratitude, had been long in coming. Dan Petersen was no longer there to hear Sirigi pray it. Neither was he there to see three of Kuluzé's adult children be baptized into the new path that is so clearly stated in the Bible. Dan wasn't there when Kuluzé cut the ribbon across the doorway of the new Mennonite church building, declaring, "What goes on in this house has my complete blessing." Over the years, another Mennonite missionary had replaced Dan and had kept the work going. Like Dan, it had taken me well over a decade to get to the place where I could do what I had just done—sit with Sirigi and listen to the panoramic Bible story in Nanerigé, making useful comments and explaining things along the way.



**Burkinabe translator and Phillip A. Bergen**

This is what Sirigi now thinks: something wonderful is taking place in his village. Not only is there godly religion, but now people are getting to hear the very word of God for themselves in their own language. He is content. But he is also puzzled. In many respects, what he has heard in the Bible doesn't match what he has heard at the mosque. More work needs to be done to get to the bottom of this. There is no way that Sirigi can conceive of God giving his word to the world and then not being strong enough to protect it from being tampered with by bad people.[10] The assertion that God would have failed in this regard and then need to give his sacred word to mankind a second time in a vastly reduced form (the Koran) just doesn't hold up. The original word takes precedence. How did this happen that Islam appeared?

Could it be that someone powerful has once again tried to change God's message (as happened in the Garden of Eden, and as was the case at the time of the Protestant Reformation)? In explaining myself to Sirigi before sharing God's word with him, I had told him the faith story of my own people—a people born out of persecution as they claimed the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus they could now read about in a translation that they understood (thanks to Martin Luther's translation). Sirigi was prepared to ask the crucial question: "Could it be that today, as in the past, some

authority has emerged that resists ordinary people simply listening to the original word of God?" Is the serpent of Genesis still with us today, coercing people into accepting *his* ideas over God's? Now, since the Bible message is available, people can begin to make judgments on this issue based on understanding rather than hearsay. The Nanerigé have waited a long time for the message to be delivered. With some key Scripture in hand, it is time to figure out where to go next—life with God, or life with the serpent. This is huge stuff.

Sirigi wasn't thanking us missionaries for what he had just heard as he listened to the panoramic Bible story over the course of two weeks. He was thanking God. The story in the Bible never once mentions Mennonites. We don't wonder at that. But, should there ever be Mennonites that can't tell the Bible story, can't joyfully explain what it means to obey all that Jesus commanded, or Mennonites that don't depend on the "Living Water" in order to serve, or Mennonites who aren't directly engaged in the great task of bringing others to understand what God has done to help us as recorded in Scripture, then we should wonder what the name "Mennonite" has come to mean.

Sirigi listened to the Bible story partly because of who it was that shared it with him. Though we'd been friends and neighbors for years, now that it was appropriate to do so, I could go deeper in sharing who I was. Before listening to Scripture together (by his invitation), I eagerly shared my family's Mennonite story with him. I showed him illustrations from *The Martyrs Mirror*, including one depicting the horrible aftermath of a mother having been burned alive for simply obeying the Word of God without compromise. The picture is of Maeyken Wens's[11] young son Hans, holding the cruel tongue screw that had been driven into his mother's palate to stop her from sharing her faith as she died. I explained to Sirigi that I am a spiritual descendant of such people. That because I have greatly benefited from the blessing that God has given me in his word, I will be a part of sharing those blessings with others until they have them too. God gave us his word so that we could understand it. Sadly, some religions ignore it, or worse, want to silence it by replacing it with a word of their own.

We didn't come to Sirigi's people preaching the Mennonite church. We came "preaching" like Mennonites. We ask others, "Would you like to hear what God's word says?" And when they say, "Yes," we deliver that message.

I wasn't raised Mennonite. I chose to become one. Why? Based on their definition of themselves and the testimony of their origins, Mennonites love God's word, understand it, follow it without compromise, and share it with others so that they too can benefit. The Kingdom of God has begun. Jesus is ruling. Mennonites put no

other authority above his. I agree with the Mennonite perspective: if others would only listen to the Jesus of the Bible, wars would cease, power from God would flow into this world to change it (John 7:37), and people could all be blessed by a loving God who would help them to do his will until "the end of the age." There will never be a real Mennonite, or a real Christian, that takes good things away from Sirigi's people by force—like the French had done during their colonial rule, a rule that only ended after World War II, when Sirigi was a little boy. The French army, who supported the building of a Catholic mission station in Sirigi's village in the 1950s, without asking anyone if they wanted one, left few friends behind among the Nanerigé when they left.

## The Call

We all need the Translation Strategy—whether the Bible is already translated into our language or not. Are you a mature Christian? Are there people that you love that aren't celebrating the blessings of the new life in Christ that God promises to us all? Go to work. Read them the right parts of the story that they need to hear. If the Bible isn't available in a language that they understand, or if you don't know how to use it to help others, change this situation.

The Translation Strategy, putting Scripture to use as God intended (see Isaiah 55:10-11), is bearing fruit once again, this time in Burkina Faso, West Africa. And that is why Sirigi, sitting in his cane chair beside his mud brick house, looked up at the sky and said, "Thank you," and then he turned to his friends and invited them to listen with him. The translation of the word of God into Nanerige will not end up as unread books in dusty boxes. It is going to work, drawing communities to Christ, as God intended.

## Notes

[1] Darrell L. Whiteman, "Bible Translation and Social and Cultural Development," in *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The Last 200 Years*, ed. Philip C. Stine (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990), 136. Also, from a presentation made by Ed Lauber, SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) director of Burkina Branch in 1996 in the village of Tin, Burkina Faso, West Africa. He shared that one of his first jobs as a new missionary with SIL was to try to get Bibles that had been published for a language in Ivory Coast out of the boxes and into use. He had little success.

[2] "Our History," *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, accessed May 2, 2014, https://www.wycliffe.org/about/

[3] "Notes on Scripture in Use," *SIL International*, accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.sil.org/series/notes-scripture-use.

[4] "A rule of thumb has often been to see a possible distribution of at least 500 New Testaments and at least 2,000 Bibles before resources are committed to a New Testament or Bible translation project." "About UBS Translation Work," *United Bible Societies*, accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.ubs-translations.org/about_us/. The conditions referred to here assume that there are people who can read the translation and can be trained to do translation work. This situation is typical of a church community in which evangelism, church planting, and literacy work having already been successful.

[5] Margaret M. Bendor-Samuel, et al., *A Manual For Strategic Planning and Review For Language Programs*, (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1987), vi.

[6] Wayne T. Dye, *Bible Translation Strategy: An Analysis of its Spiritual Impact* (Dallas: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1980), 19, 166.

[7] "Sky" and "God" are the same word in his language: Kle.

[8] "Nanerige'," the name of his tribe, means "the real men." It was given to this people by their neighbors as a result of their reputation for hard work and manly commitment to self-control.

[9] Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.

[10] Such is one common explanation for why Allah needed to send the Koran.

[11] "Maeyken Wens: One face of Early Anabaptism," *Young Anabaptist Radicals,* accessed May 2, 2014, http://young.anabaptistradicals.org/2006/11/11/maeyken-wens-one-face-of-early-anabaptism/

## Study Questions

1. In your own words, explain how the Translation Strategy for evangelism is different than other strategies.

2. In this case study, the author has much to say about the relationship of the messenger to the message. What is this relationship? What does it mean for the ministry of Bible translation? What does it mean for preaching and teaching?

3. By doing some of your own research, try to find out how many languages in the world still have no Scripture portions.

<div style="font-size:3em; color:gray; float:left;">33</div>

# Mission to Animists
### Robert and Anne Thiessen

The story of witness to animists is both glorious and tragic. Animists have responded more quickly than other major religious groups to the gospel and launched the most extensive church planting movements of history. On the other hand, churches among animists can sink into the most distressing syncretism and dependence. How do we reach out to people who are so different from ourselves?

My wife and I have worked for over twenty years among an animistic group in Guerrero, a state in southern Mexico. To this day the Mixtecs in our adopted village, Yuvinani, make their way up the mountainside every June 25th in a long procession guided by shamans, Catholic catechists, and the town's loud brass band. At the rain god's altar, drinking heavily, they worship, sacrificing a chicken or turkey, doing divination using mirrors, and speaking to the dead. They hope to manipulate the capricious spiritual powers centered at that altar to act in their favor, all the while considering themselves faithful Catholics.

Yet in this small village, twenty-five years ago, one man, Felipe, a returning migrant worker who had converted through hearing people singing evangelical choruses sung

Robert and Anne Thiessen are missionaries serving with MB Mission among the Mixtec indigenous group of southern Mexico since 1992. Their work includes church planting and mentoring other missionaries among the indigenous. Anne has lived among two different indigenous people groups of Honduras. Anne has studied International Development at Wheaton College and Robert served a three-year apprenticeship in church planting in Honduras. They are members of St. Ann's Community Church, an MB church in Ontario, Canada.

in Spanish, a language he hardly understood, began to speak of Jesus. He claimed Jesus brought joy and forgiveness and healing. On the testimony of this one man, many of the village turned to Christ and formed the first church in this unreached ethnic group of fifty thousand people. The group experienced transformations you would read about in Acts 2: healings, changes in their economy and their relationships. Two leaders were martyred for their faith within the year.

Over the next twenty years, the church in this small town weakened and fragmented into three congregations. Although we were able to help them value their language in prayer, we had little input into many of the early decisions they had made about church. They used Spanish instead of their own Indian indigenous tongue for worship and teaching Scripture, depending on the public reading of an antiquated Spanish version of the Bible that required translation for them to understand. They imitated the practices of the Latin church in the nearest market town for leadership, prayer, doctrine, and music. Until recently, they had stopped reaching out with the gospel to other unreached Mixtec towns around them.

Many churches from animist backgrounds have a similar story, its causes tracing back to the way the church was established, adopting the externals of the culture of the missionary without allowing the gospel to indwell and transform on its own. Roland Allen, an Anglican missionary in China, writing in the early twentieth century, describes unfavorably the pleasure of Western Christians, who when worshipping in foreign countries, found everything--the liturgy, seating, music, instrumentation, leadership--so familiar.[1] Unfortunately, the culture of the West is so different and so dominant that such wholesale adoption of this culture can stunt the growth of local leadership and creativity for years to come.

Often, the missionary's first instinct when faced with the challenge of reaching animists is to change their culture, which amplifies the problem. So much of mission history has been about attempts to change "them," and less about how "we" also need God to change us and our culture. So let us look at the difficulties of witnessing to animists, but let us look also at our own baggage.

## What is an Animist?

By popular definition,

> Animism (from Latin anima "soul, life") is the religious worldview that natural physical entities—including animals, plants, and often even inanimate objects or phenomena—possess a spiritual essence. Specifically, animism describes the religion of indigenous tribal peoples, especially prior to the development of civilization and organized religion.[2]

Two things derive from this definition and our experience: One, animists believe that the "spiritual essence" needs to be moved to do things in people's favor, or to not do things against them, and two, their identity and survival is found in fitting into the group and is expressed in terms of relationship.

Ascribing a spiritual essence to physical entities appears to be a fallen human instinct, as Paul describes in Romans 1, and I believe it is the default worldview into which we constantly lapse. For example, I recently saw in an airline magazine an advertisement for an expensive gold "guardian" angel on a chain. Even for those within the church, the ease with which daily devotionals turn into a talisman for garnering God's protection indicates this propensity. When we refer to Muslims or Christians as "folk-Muslims" or "folk-Christians," we mean they are mostly animists. But the classic animist is also indigenous and tribal, making him especially susceptible to the dominant culture that envelops him. Here are some quick comparisons:

| **Animist Worldview** | **Western Worldview** |
|---|---|
| • Without direct revelation from God and his purposeful intervention in history, animists ascribe spiritual power to what they see. Time is cyclical, without ultimate purpose. Nature is a fixed sum, a limited good. | • Western thought, influenced by divine revelation, takes for granted a God (if he exists) that is just and good and purposeful, making time linear and progress possible. Creation reflects a God of order. |
| • Spiritual beings are amoral, sometimes good, and often malevolent.[3] The community survives by manipulating these capricious spiritual powers through rituals and traditions that do not have to be rational, and are passed down through experience and orally through stories. | • Though culturally we relegate God to the role of distant "clockmaker," our worldview enables great achievements in engineering, art, medicine, and learning, all of which we pass on through formal education. |
| • Individuals standing out and breaking with tradition threaten the survival of the entire community. | • God's revelation of Himself to individuals enables a strong sense of "self" and the ability to analyze, classify and act independently. |
| • With no strong separation between the spiritual and the physical, the supernatural pervades life. | • The spiritual is suspect and is greatly separated from the physical. |
| • Allegiance to God requires a power encounter with the spiritual powers who have governed all aspects of community life. | • Allegiance to God requires intellectual assent by the individual. |

Of course we can't lump all animists together. Like Westerners, they can be educated or illiterate, poor or wealthy, democratic or despotic, peaceful or warring, huge groups of ten million or tiny pockets of ten members. But our worldviews separate us, and so in describing them here, we should remember we are doing something animists rarely do. They hardly know they are such a rarefied creature since they have never labeled their worldview and are not as obsessed with classifying everything, analyzing it, and then pronouncing upon it. On the other hand, their worldview gives them insights we often lack: they intuit the nearness of God, the influence of evil spirits, the power of prayer, our dependence on nature, and our need for community.

Jacob Loewen tells this story about the faith of Wounaan (indigenous Panamanian) believers praying for healing:

> I began to realize that they were appreciating something about the gospel narrative that I could not, or at least did not, to the same degree as they… When the pastor's wife came down with fever (Choco: fever-spirits), I suggested the laying on of hands and prayer. When she suffered a relapse next day, I noticed the Choco Christians praying for her again, but this time without me. My cautious inquiry as to why I was not included brought the ego-deflating answer, "Because you don't believe…" Since they had been so very conscious of the evil spirit forces as non-Christians, these new converts were now equally conscious of the Spirit of God.[4]

## Ethnocentrism

In past generations, even among anthropologists, different peoples were evaluated on scales of primitive to civilized, or from pre-logical to logical. It was only at the very beginning of the twentieth century that Franz Boaz, the father of modern anthropology, saw that approach as "ethnocentric and arrogant" and moved away from such pejorative assumptions. He introduced the neutral term "culture…" [5]

While anthropologists may have moved towards neutral analysis, at a popular level, a deeply "ethnocentric and arrogant" attitude persists. I still remember vividly my conversation with an older Presbyterian pastor, a Latin Mexican, about the indigenous people that lived in the mountains above Acapulco, where we worked at the time. He had two categories for the mountain dwellers, "civilized" and "uncivilized," which he explained meant those who spoke Spanish, and those "*Indios*," who by his standards, didn't even have a real language. Ask a Mexican what differentiates Spanish from indigenous languages and he will likely say, "The Indians speak dialects—they

do not have formal languages." Even when missionaries encourage new believers to express their faith in their own way, the dominant culture often dismisses the effort.

The Latin pastor who first visited Yuvinani (before our time there) after the conversion of the village did help establish the first church and point the Mixtecs toward Christ and his Word, but he also brought in much Western influence. He did not interact with the village elders but focused on individual believers. He quickly took over leadership of the group, becoming the specialist in the new religion and introducing the practices of his own Latin denomination. He taught doctrine as a set of propositions, in Spanish, that the Mixtecs needed to learn. He urged them to stop participating fully in village affairs. As a result the Mixtec believers distanced themselves from their community and their language and looked to leaders who could teach doctrine in Spanish. Thus, although they had risked their lives for their newfound faith and experienced its power in healing and character, they felt little qualified to take it to others.

## Historical Observations

The history of Western expansion and missions among animists tells a similar story. Obviously God has brought much redemption through Western missions in all spheres of life. Spiritual and family life has certainly improved. Life expectancy and education continue to increase. The economy has grown, and arts and leisure never contemplated before have become possible. Arguably, even governments have benefited from Western thought. And the church among the "two-thirds world" has grown larger than its counterpart in the West.[6] Missions have served animists well, but the church among animists has not always been healthy or indigenous.

The ideal of a healthy, indigenous church, called the "three self" church by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson[7] in the mid-nineteenth century (self-leading, self-funding, and self-reproducing), was dealt a deathblow by the Student Volunteer Movement (which relied heavily on Western learning) in the following century. The idea that new believers in non-Western areas could respond to the gospel in ways that reflected their culture, doing their own jobs of leading, training, supporting and extending the Kingdom, was replaced by the idea that Westerners were leading these cultures into the advancements of the twentieth century, advancements which relied on formal education. The Western assumption that people need, individually, to read the printed Scripture to forge a strong, private relationship with God was never recognized as a product of a particular culture. This blindness led missionaries to dismiss local leaders that would have been well qualified by Paul's standards. Western missionaries stepped in to fill the gap, stunting the young church's indigeneity.

Dependency, then, characterized churches started by Western missionaries throughout the world. "Rice Christians," a dismal byword today referring to people who convert only to receive a handout, summarizes much of Western efforts. Dependency on Western rituals, finances, training methods, structure and leadership became the norm. Even now, after some fifty years of having identified this weakness, we find too few churches that clearly demonstrate creative and financial distance from their parent churches. As a result we find animist background churches often struggling to reproduce across cultural lines to the unreached that surround them or to extend even among their own people.

## Jesus and Mission to Animists

Surely this is not the fruit Jesus intended for our labor. He gives direct advice to missionaries twice.  Once, he instructs his evangelists to take nothing and to stay in the home of peace (Luke 10:5-7). The second time he warns cross-cultural workers, "Yes, how terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn him into twice the son of hell as you yourselves are" (Matthew 23:15, NLT). Both Jesus' instructions and his warning can help us serve animist communities more effectively.

Let us return to the dominant characteristics of animists. First: *the "spiritual essence" needs to be moved to do things in people's favor, or to not do things against them.* Animists have survived centuries by conforming to certain practices and patterns, but it is important to realize that these are "unreasoned," or without a rational explanation. One does them simply because the "spiritual essence" requires them.

Intentionally or not, the missionary also presents a way of responding to the divine, though now it is the One True God. At the very least, he seeks mental assent (what the West calls belief) and models some form of prayer and study. He may use written materials, portions of Scripture or studies, perhaps in a trade language such as Spanish. He may challenge moral behavior and implement social reform. Perhaps he even arranges meetings, establishing Western patterns of leadership, forms, and content.

For meetings, the missionary introduces baptism and requirements for who can officiate and who can participate (Is there a catechism?  A standard moral behavior? Some visible change?).  He introduces a form of Eucharist, again with a set of requirements. He starts regular meetings with set components: Will people sit or stand? What is the order of service? What language will be used? Who officiates? How long is the prayer, and how is it paced? The list goes on and on, involving every aspect of what they do, and each new practice becomes law.

Very little of it has to make sense. The gods have always had intermediaries, experts that guided them into right practice. And this new God and his intermediary are so much better than anything they've seen before. So, for example, if the missionary claps during a song, the Mixtecs will clap, even if this is not the way their culture shows approbation. If the missionary only ordains men who can read Spanish, they'll do the same. Although the Mixtecs traditionally elect a rotating board of elders for town leadership, the churches now adopt the Western single-pastor style. Whatever is observable, physical and outward, the animists will imitate and turn into tradition that cannot be broken, just as they have done for centuries.

Following the advice of Jesus to his evangelists (Luke 9:1-6) will help us avoid this pitfall. "Take nothing with you." Jesus told his disciples to go in the same way he came to us, incarnationally, carrying nothing, remaining dependent on the hospitality and resources of the community. We should approach animist communities in this same spirit, learning their worldview and respecting their modes of transportation, their technology, their methods of education, their economy and social structure, and especially their language. We can test every method we use--for evangelism, for prayer, for meeting and teaching--to make sure it is immediately recognizable and immediately reproducible within this culture. We want the gospel to be incarnated in the culture.

When the gospel fails to become incarnate in a new culture, but rather arrives from a position of power, we run the risk of syncretism (where the external forms of one religion are assigned meaning from another) or at the very least, its lesser cousin, legalism. The Spanish conquistadors forced Christian conversion en masse, which resulted in syncretism where the indigenous peoples' Catholic feast days (the *fiestas patronales)* are often but thinly disguised worship of pre-Columbian deities. Obviously our evangelism does not use physical coercion, but to the extent that it imposes an outside culture on indigenous groups, it results in rigid legalism, and it is against this sin that Christ warns: "You turn him into twice a son of hell." For example, the Mixtec church, responding to an outside Latin pastor's teaching, for a time labeled as adulterous those married by the community elders but not by Mexican law.  To avoid arriving in a new culture from a dangerous position of power, we can obey Christ's words, "Take nothing with you."

Now, we add the second characteristic of animists: *identity is found in fitting into the group and is expressed in terms of relationship.* Despite the fact that animist communities tend to make decisions as a group, when a traditional missionary appears on the scene and witnesses to animists, he tends to approach individuals. In most cases new converts have had to disassociate themselves from the patterns and

forms of their own culture, and often even distance themselves from their families and friends. What had defined them till this point they now reject, and they are, as the Mixtecs call them, "untethered goats." They are desperate to take on a new identity and belong to a new family, and the new group of likewise dislocated believers with its foreign leader provides both. New Christians in fledgling churches feel driven to practice and defend the inexplicable outward practices of another culture's religion twice as fervently as the missionary himself, since his new identity derives from them.

To avoid this pitfall Christ taught his evangelists to "stay in a home of peace." The home of peace, headed by a man or a woman, connects people in the community and unites it. Christ's command to approach the peacemakers of the community and rely on their hospitality recognizes the need to work within the entire community and acknowledge its de facto leaders. We have found many times that doors have opened to us for evangelism when we recognized town leadership. Our friend, Nicolas, our man of peace among Mixtec migrant laborers whom he had brought under contract to work in Culiacan, opened up his community to us after we went to him first with our mission. Ironically, he never converted, but his heart changed toward us when we recognized his responsibility within the group. As he explained to us, "No one respects us, not even our children who have gone off to study or work. We have lost our *to'o*, our dignity." By working with heads of household and approaching town elders and other people of peace, we can ameliorate the division of the community when people come to Christ. By applying Christ's counsel to "stay in the home of peace," we honor community.

If we are sensitive to how leaders function within a society, we will be more effective in encouraging the new leaders of the church. For the last number of years most missionaries have been aware of the need to start indigenous churches, and they understand the need for local leadership. So they spend a lot of energy trying to make this happen but sometimes ineffectively. They encourage a local man, or if they are fortunate, a few, to "step up" and take more and more responsibility. However, if the missionary has taken over leadership (the still very normal practice of acting as the temporary pastor) rather than recognizing local leaders, he can get increasingly frustrated when this process seems to go so slowly, and the men seem so unwilling. He doesn't realize he has made it difficult for them to step up because none of them believe they can replace the "expert." He has based leadership on qualities that he as a Westerner possesses, but which animists may not.

I remember when, in our first year in Yuvinani, the Latin supervisor of the church, Armando, a loving man, insisted, "You should pastor here. The people know so little..." What he meant was that the Mixtecs did not know much Scripture and

had little ability to either read or study it. What he did not yet see was that the Mixtec leaders had already been helping their people to apply Scripture to their lives. They were guiding the church to obey the basic teachings of Christ--to love, to pray, to forgive, to be a body, to give--much more appropriately than many Westerners who were steeped in the Word. It is not necessary to be a Western scholar to serve Christ. It is necessary to love him and obey. As Westerners we must take care not to judge leaders by what they know, when according to Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus, God judges elders by what they do. We should soon leave the church itself to appoint new leaders.

## Moving Ahead

So if Western traditions can undermine indigeneity, what do we have to offer? Obviously Christ. His church. His Word. Our love. And the example of our lives. The book of Acts gives us insight. Paul and his fellow apostles entered into Gentile communities with a simple oral witness about Christ: the groundwork laid before his coming (Old Testament background), the deeds of his life, his death, his resurrection. They urged their listeners to respond with repentance, faith in Christ, and baptism, which was seen as an act of God that placed these believers immediately into the church.

Once a church was formed, Paul urged the group to withstand suffering and to act out a simple, loving discipleship. He appointed a local, respected, plural leadership and fully expected the young congregation to carry on the work of leading, teaching, ministering and evangelizing on its own. Paul never stuck around long, nor did he set up rituals or traditions or disciplinary regulations or statutes for these churches. He instructed them through letters, over time, urging them to act faithfully. Roland Allen's theme throughout his seminal book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* is: Paul never laid down Jewish practice as law, but insisted on the freedom of the Gentiles to follow the Spirit.[8]

One way we can serve believers from animist backgrounds is, like Paul, to first introduce the lordship of Christ and his basic teachings, which are never laws but principles of living that can be immediately understood and applied in any culture. The basic teachings of Christ in the gospels can be presented orally and through the stories of the Old and New Testament. George Patterson, a pioneer of church planting among Hondurans, has summarized them in seven basic principles:

- Repent, believe in Jesus Christ, and be filled with his Spirit.
- Be baptized into his body, and live your new life in the Spirit.
- Love God, your neighbor, those in need, and even your enemy.
- Pray fervently, sincerely, and without ceasing, trusting God for healing and for delivery from the Evil One in all your community.

- Give generously.
- Participate in the body and blood of Christ (the Lord's Supper).
- Make disciples, teaching unbelievers, believers and leaders to obey everything Christ commands.[9]

Upon these seven basic teachings the church is founded. The writers of the New Testament expanded on these gospel teachings, describing obedience in specific circumstances. Thus, the New Testament, focused around the most basic teachings of Christ (Anabaptists refer to this as a focused canon), became our ultimate authority. Too often missionaries, hoping to ease new Christians into obedience, set up requirements and traditions that they deem helpful but that never appear in the teachings of Christ. They do not allow the fledgling church to struggle through its own interpretation of Christ's mandates. The new church obeys the missionary in such matters as church government or methods of evangelism without realizing its own responsibility to apply Christ's mandates to its own culture.

The Great Commission requires us to make disciples who obey everything Christ has commanded. We must show new believers that their first loyalty is to Christ, not to us. We do this by insisting that they find their own ways to repent, to love, to pray, to teach, to be the church together. We walk away from public leadership of their meetings, from positions of authority within their churches, from the establishment of structure or ritual or moral standard. They must clothe, as a community, the teachings of Christ with their own culture. Anabaptists describe this as having a *hermeneutical community.*

The church historically has always recognized three levels of authority:

1. The teachings of Christ and his apostles (the mandates of the New Testament).
2. The practices of the apostles (such as laying on of hands or meeting on Sunday).
3. The traditions of the churches (such as Sunday school or raising hands at conversion).

Obviously the clear teachings of the New Testament are to be obeyed without hesitation. The apostolic practices we find in the New Testament serve as models, especially for new churches, but these cannot be required. Which of us can require a church to "hold all things in common"? At the lowest level of authority we find church tradition, the indispensable glue that holds the community together, but which changes from culture to culture. This is the level of authority which we must discard when we take Christ to new cultures. As beneficial as they have been for our home churches, these familiar practices hold no authority there.

When the gospel first arrived among the Yuvinani Mixtecs, it arrived as a simple, oral story of the power and grace of Christ. The teller, Felipe, bore witness with a transformed life: he had stopped drinking. It sped through the family networks of the

village and after one powerful sermon in the town square by Juan, his brother-in-law and first convert, a "Cornelius" that called for "a return to the path of God," the Spirit brought most of the town to repentance.

In the early days of obedience to the call of Christ, the Yuvinani church spontaneously did amazing things: It called a "board" of respected leaders, following the governmental practices of the town. Serafin, a musician, wrote songs in Mixtec. The believers stopped getting drunk and beating their wives, stopped charging usury on money they lent, stopped "selling" their daughters into marriage for money, and stopped fearing and worshipping spirits. The ritual at the first baptism was to proceed in full native dress down the mountain into the stream below, and in full view of the community on the mountainside above, call



**Mixtec Baptism**

out, "Today you are witnesses to my commitment to God." The Yuvinani church, without outside influence, very quickly took the gospel message and clothed it in Mixtec dress.

But when a Latin pastor visited and imposed church traditions from the dominant Latin culture, this Mixtec clothing faded away. The songs were forgotten. Preaching was done in Spanish, and the mature leaders who did not read Spanish were replaced by teenagers who did. Fortunately, another Latin pastor, Armando, visited later, and as he was very responsive to indigenous culture, slowly helped reinstate local leaders and Mixtec language in church meetings. It has taken the Yuvinani church twenty years, a full generation, to recover from early influences, but Mixtec prayer and music, teaching and leadership are returning. Now, twenty years later, Yuvinani church members are again preaching the gospel in unreached villages.

## Missionary Involvement in Mature Churches

In Yuvinani, the church is only beginning to reproduce. In other fields, we can see what more mature churches coming out of animism look like and learn what role we might play in them. Here again, we apply the supreme missionary model of Christ who left his disciples after only three years, explaining, "It is best for you that I go away… (so that) the Spirit will guide you into all truth."[10] There is something about our absence, our backing away from a newly-formed congregation that allows the Spirit to lead that congregation into all truth. We may overwhelm the group if we stay, but if we go, the church will be more likely to clothe the gospel in its

own expression and implement Christ's teachings more effectively. Our job is to go backstage at this point. Paul never disassociated from the Gentile churches he started, but he certainly took a back seat after appointing their first leaders. While continuing to disciple the churches through letters, occasional short visits and interaction with their supervisors (Titus, Timothy, Epaphras), Paul trusted the Holy Spirit to work in the congregations while he moved on.

Jacob Loewen saw this principle at work among the Wounaan indigenous people in Panama.  After the church's inception, visiting missionaries had limited interaction. They visited Panama only in the summers and did not train the entire group but interacted chiefly with key leaders, especially Aureliano. Nor did they introduce the Bible all at once, or in Spanish. As they helped translate Scripture into the indigenous language, one book a year, they and the leadership allowed the church time to digest new ideas and apply them to their own culture with care.[11] Loewen called himself a "fraternal counselor."[12]

In Honduras, where my wife and I were apprenticed into church planting in the same way the Hondurans themselves were, through on-the-job training, our experience was with folk Catholics (syncretistic animists). While most missionaries working among them followed the traditional model, training young men in classrooms to lead churches practically identical to their American counterparts, the work we saw was different. We saw local leaders working through a chain of discipleship in their own villages and churches. The one foreigner involved never pastored a church and rarely preached. He, George Patterson, met with a Honduran team, and the team agreed on plans of action where the Hondurans discipled other leaders following Paul's example in 2 Timothy 2:2.

The materials they used were developed and printed in-house and were based on a culturally accepted form: the photonovel. They looked cartoonish, and were short, practical, and menu-based, aimed at obedience.[13] The Honduran leaders involved in these discipleship chains planted several hundred churches, illustrating how a "fraternal counselor" can encourage leaders to disciple others without reliance on formal education.

As important as our role of "fraternal counselors" is our role as advocates for animists within the dominant culture. Like Paul who traveled to Jerusalem to defend the right of Gentile churches to live free of Jewish tradition, so the missionary, summoned to councils or conferences, advocates for the right of the new church to dress the gospel in its own language and custom.  I was saddened when, even after some protest, the Mexican Mennonite Brethren Church in 2012 wrote into their constitution definitions for the terms "church" and "pastor" that would make it nearly impossible for their Mixtec brethren to ever join them as equals. The need for advocacy for churches of minority groups embedded in dominant cultures is great.

Because as Westerners we come from such a dominant position, our interaction with churches from animist backgrounds has much to do with limiting ourselves, divesting ourselves, and taking on the role of humble servants, according to the Philippians 2 model. After introducing the gospel and recognizing the leadership that God raises up in the infant church, as Paul did in the book of Acts, we should be more and more absent, our primary role being to advocate for the group and to help leaders grow in their obedience to Christ though deeper interaction with Scripture within their own context. The New Testament describes numerous ministries that flow from the seven basic mandates of Christ: ministries such as healing the sick, caring for the poor, strengthening families, training new leaders, and spreading the good news. As outsiders, we can interact with leaders, acting as mirrors (Jacob Loewen's term)[14] to help them recognize the strengths and lapses in their own cultures, and to help them develop these ministries in their own maturing, indigenous churches.

In this interaction, we do not want to become or choose their leaders. We do not want to equate formal education with discipleship. We do not want to construct their buildings or give structure to their unity because when we do, we default to our traditions, not theirs. We want to insist, over and over, that their call is to obey Christ in fervent love, learning what this means through their own interactions with the words of Christ and his apostles. We can trust the Holy Spirit to do this at his own pace.

If God opens the door for us to witness to animists, we do well to start with repentance from our own ethnocentrism and then move into a recognition that animists have something to teach us about community, about the integration of the spiritual and the physical, and about the possibility of simple obedience to Christ without reliance on Western education or practices. Like Paul, we need to tread lightly, be known more for our absence than our presence, more for our reticence to teach than for our instruction, more for our ability to listen than to lead. As Hiebert says, "The goal of incarnational ministry is not that people understand the gospel. It is that they respond to God's invitation and are transformed by his power." [15] Believers coming out of animism are some of the world's most glorious witnesses to this grace.

## Notes

[1.] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: World Dominion Press, 1912), 136.

[2] "Animism," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 4, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism.

[3] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animist Contexts* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1996), 20

4 Jacob A. Loewen, *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), 134.

5 Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* ( Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 16.

6 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

7 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1996), 297, 302, 331f, 450. This source is used since Anderson and Venn's tracts are out of print.

8 Allen, *Missionary Methods*.

9 George Patterson and Richard Scoggins, *Church Multiplication Guide* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002), 22.

10 John 16:7, 13.

11 Loewen, *Culture and Human Values,* 13.

12 Ibid, 208.

13 Patterson called this "obedience-oriented" curriculum.

14 Loewen, *Culture and Human Values*, 208.

15 Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995),  373.

## Study Questions

1. The author states: "The Western assumption that people need, individually, to read the printed Scripture to forge a strong, private relationship with God was never recognized as a product of a particular culture." Discuss whether reading printed Scripture as a necessary discipline is a product of a particular culture.

2. Can you think of stories to either confirm or dissent from the author's view that "dependency on Western rituals, finances, training methods, structure and leadership became the norm"?

3. Discuss how the seven commands of Christ have been clothed with particularity in your own culture. Can you see how some at least, are cultural?

4. Do you think repentance is a necessary attitude for Western missionaries among animists?  Why or why not?

# 34 Mission to Buddhists

Andy Owen & Phone Keo Keovilay

As I settled into the old cracked vinyl of the barber chair, I said a silent prayer to God: "Lord, lead our conversation today." I (Andy) was making my regular visit to the barber shop, and had been looking forward to another conversation with my friend Phansaa. We always have lively discussions around a broad range of topics, from sports to politics to religion and everything in between. On this day, I steered the topic towards religion. Phansaa is a dedicated Buddhist, who sincerely tries to learn and practice the teaching of the Buddha. I asked him,

> "Phansaa, suppose you were invited to an international gathering of Christians who sincerely wanted to learn about Buddhism. What would you say to them? Why are you a Buddhist?"

Andy Owen (M.A. Global Leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary) and wife Carmen were part of Team 2000, which began MB church planting in central Thailand in 2001. Andy now serves as Southeast Asia Regional Team Leader for MB Mission in Chiang Mai, Thailand, equipping missionaries and national leaders for holistic church planting to reach the least reached in a region which is predominantly Buddhist.

Phone Keo Keovilay was born in Laos and came to faith in a refugee camp in northern Thailand. Following immigration to California, USA, in 1992, he began a church plant to the Lao/Khmu community, in cooperation with Butler Church (MB) in Fresno. For many years he traveled back to Khmu villages in Southeast Asia to share the gospel. Today he lives in that region serving in church planting, leadership development and social ministries among the Khmu and Hmong people groups.

Phansaa put down his scissors for a moment and thought.

> "That's a good question," he replied, "I would say I am a Buddhist because my father and mother were Buddhists, and their parents were Buddhists, and my ancestors as far back as I can remember have been Buddhists. However, even though it has been handed down to me, I would still choose to be a Buddhist because I believe what the Buddha taught is true."

Today, there are 480 million followers of Buddhism worldwide. Some claim that the influence of Buddhism reaches over one billion people, including those who practice various forms of wider folk Buddhism. This would make it either the third or fourth largest religion in the world, depending on how you measure. Whether it was handed down to them, or because they believe that it is true, one out of seven people in the world are directly influenced by Buddhism. In this chapter, we will look to explore the historical development of Buddhism, its main teachings, and consider how Christians can effectively share their faith with their Buddhist friends.

## History of Buddhism

Buddhism began through the journey of one man on a search for spiritual truth. Siddharta Gautama was born near the present-day border of India and Nepal, in about the fifth century BC. During this period of time, Daniel was in a Babylonian palace and the Israelites were searching for identity after the temple had been destroyed. Others were searching for truth as well. This period of time saw the rise of eastern religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Jainism. As we study the life of Gautama, who later became known as Buddha, we can see parallels to our own pluralistic times and many who are on a search for truth.

### Who was the Buddha?

The word *Buddha* comes from an ancient language called Sanskrit. It is an honorific title which refers to a person who is awakened, or enlightened (nirvana). Most of the time when people use the word Buddha, they are referring to the man who is believed to have reached enlightenment and founded the Buddhist community, Siddhartha Gautama. However, Buddhism today recognizes thousands of people who have reached nirvana and are also known as "Buddha." This explains why there are different types of images of Buddha. The thinner statues of Buddha refer to the founder Gautama. The "fat" and "laughing" Buddha statues are actually of a different person, a monk named Hotei who came after Gautama and is related to a different branch of Buddhism. We will study the various branches of Buddhism later in the

chapter, but for now we will examine the three main periods in the life of the founder, Siddharta Gautama.

*Affluence*. Gautama was born a Hindu prince. His mother passed away shortly after he was born, and his father received a prophecy from local noblemen that his son would become a great man. His father then pampered the young prince, not wanting him to suffer for any reason. He was surrounded by luxury and pleasure, and grew up completely unaware of the darker side of life. At the age of sixteen he married a young princess, lived in a comfortable palace, and had a son.

*Ascetic Life of a Monk.* The second period of Gautama's life began when one day the prince left his palace and observed four different people: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a priest. Shaken by the sight, one night he quietly left his wife and son while they were sleeping. At the age of twenty-nine, he abandoned his life of luxury to become a monk and discover the cause and cure for suffering.

For the next six years, Gautama followed the rigorous austerity of an ascetic, disciplined life. Initially he tried to follow two Hindu teachers but felt Hinduism did not provide the answer. He left to find his own way, and soon had five disciples following him, punishing their bodies, fasting, meditating, and praying for the answers to the meaning of life. Ultimately he found that the ascetic life only added more suffering.

*Middle Way and Enlightenment.* Gautama rejected both complete self-denial and also a life of luxury, and pursued a middle way of balance between the two. The third period of his life began with Gautama, desperate and disillusioned, meditating underneath a Bo fig tree. He vowed not to get up until he was enlightened. Finally, after seven weeks of meditation, he received enlightenment, which included the Four Noble Truths (see below).

Gautama, now known as Buddha, rejected the worship of God or any gods. He began teaching that the karma (cause and effect) of our actions in this life and prior lives resulted in a constant cycle of birth, aging, sickness, death, and rebirth (reincarnation). The way out of this cycle comes through following Buddhist teaching (known as *Dhamma*) through meditation and discipline. Buddha then found disciples whom he taught and they eventually became the first Buddhist community. Gautama Buddha continued to teach his disciples until died at the age of eighty, most likely of food poisoning.

## The Growth and Development of Buddhism

Buddha's teaching career spanned forty-five years, and reached around 2,000 disciples. For the next two hundred years or so, Buddhism was mostly confined to north India. However, under the reign of King Asoka (274-232 BC), Buddhism

became much more prevalent as the king sent out Buddhist missionaries to convert the people. King Asoka then sent missionaries to other countries and it spread east throughout Asia. Within 1,500 years it became the dominant religious influence in Asia as it remains to this day. In the twentieth century, Buddhism began making popular inroads into the West, through immigration as well as through conversion. Postmodern, humanistic thought relates well with the concepts of Buddhism, and in the United States alone there are estimated to be over 1 million practitioners.

## Buddhism as its Practiced Today

Wherever Buddhism spread, it often did not reject the local customs and practices, but rather absorbed them. This assimilation caused a great deal of variety within different communities of Buddhism.

### Major Schools

---

**Buddhism:**

*Key Facts & Terms*

- 480 million followers worldwide.
- Established in the 5th century B.C.
- Founded by the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as Gautama Buddha, "the enlightened one."
- The two main sects are Theravada, mostly practiced in Southeast Asia, and Mahayana, mostly practiced in East Asia, Tibet, and parts of the West. Tibetan and Zen Buddhism are branches of Mahayana Buddhism.
- Buddhism believes there is no God, but each person must follow the path to enlightenment to escape the cycle of birth, aging, suffering, and death
- Buddhism ascribes to a karmic system of rebirth and reincarnation

\* Statistics from *The World Factbook* 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/e-world-factbook/index.html

---

Today there are two main schools of Buddhism, with multiple smaller branches and sects. Theravada Buddhism is considered the more conservative branch, practiced mostly in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Mahayana Buddhism is considered the more liberal school of Buddhism, practiced in East Asia and around the world. As mentioned earlier, Theravada Buddhism is represented by the "skinny" Buddha statues, and represents the oldest, strictest, and purest form of Buddhism. Theravada means "the way of the elders". Mahayana means "big vehicle," and it represents a broader and less strict path to enlightenment, as represented by the fat and laughing Buddha images. A major branch which came out of Mahayana is Tibetan Buddhism

(also known as Vajrayana). Tibetan Buddhism acknowledges the Dalai Lama as its visible head. The Dalai Lama is arguably the most recognized Buddhist figure around the world, but his influence in the Buddhist world is limited.

**Major Teachings**

The basic beliefs of Buddhism are well known and held throughout all the major schools. Following is a brief summary of these teachings.

- *The Three Jewels*—these are the pillars of Buddhism, consisting of the Buddha, the Dharma (teaching of the Buddha), and the Sangha (the Buddhist priesthood and community).
- *The Four Noble Truths*—as described by the Buddha when he reached enlightenment.
    1. All of life is suffering—all existence is marked by the cycle of birth, decay, and death.
    2. The cause of suffering is desire—the desire to exist, to preserve self, and the desire for material things only cause more suffering.
    3. The solution is to extinguish desire.
    4. The way to extinguish desire is through the eightfold path.

- *The Eight-Fold Path*
    1. Right vision/views
    2. Right thoughts/intentions
    3. Right speech
    4. Right action
    5. Right mode of livelihood
    6. Right effort
    7. Right awareness
    8. Right concentration/meditation

- *The Five Sins*—in reality the common Buddhist does not completely understand the Four Noble Truths, and they can't fully practice the Eight-Fold path. However, they have some concept of the necessity to keep the moral precepts. The lower level of the Dharma (teaching) of the Buddha includes five prohibitions for the common person to avoid:
    1. Refrain from taking life
    2. Refrain from theft
    3. Refrain from sexual misconduct
    4. Refrain from lying
    5. Refrain from intoxicants (drugs and alcohol)

- **Karma**—this is the iron law which influences one's path towards (or away from) enlightenment. Every deed, good or bad, is recorded and will determine one's fate in this life and the next. Many Buddhists, knowing they will not reach nirvana, often try to improve their karma by making merit. Making merit includes going to the temple, giving to the monks, doing something kind, or giving to a charitable cause. When pressed, most Thai Buddhists are not able to know if they have made enough merit to cover the bad deeds and improve their karma. It is an unchanging law of cause and effect which leads to the cycles of rebirth (reincarnation) and the consequent suffering.

## Folk Buddhism & Idol Worship

The majority of Buddhists in East Asia are in fact folk Buddhists. Elements of Buddhism are mixed with local primal religions such as Brahmanism. The orientation of the folk Buddhist is not so much to follow the Eight-Fold path of classical Buddhism, but rather to improve their karma by making merit, and to manipulate the spirit world for their own benefit. This spirit-based world view leads to a lifestyle based more on ritual and superstition rather than meditation and following the Buddha's teaching. Most folk Buddhists are not aware of any difference between these animistic practices and the classical teachings.

One example of this is idol worship. Buddhist statues, spirit houses, and various idols abound in Thailand. The teachings of "pure" Buddhism insist that Gautama Buddha no longer exists, and therefore cannot be supplicated. The path to enlightenment (Nirvana), according to Buddha, was not through idol worship. However, one only has to make a trip to the most popular tourist destination in Thailand to see how many look for hope and direction from idol worship. Inside the grounds of Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok sits the Emerald Buddha statue, the nation's talisman. Every day, Thai and foreign visitors come to sit solemnly in the large hall with the statue looking down upon them. Many Buddhists will pray to the spirit of the idol in order to gain luck, fortune, or assistance in their lives. This scene is replayed throughout Thailand, as people make supplications to various idols, amulets, statues, and charms in order to gain a better or safer life.

The syncretistic reality of the religious practice of most Buddhists can make it difficult to truly grasp the actual beliefs of Buddhist people. In some instances Buddhism has been described as a pie: the outside crust may be traditional Buddhism, but inside is a mix of Hindu gods, Brahmanism, and animism. Much of the daily

life routine, symbols, and rituals of the average Buddhist are more influenced by their animistic beliefs than by a desire to reach enlightenment through traditional Buddhist teachings.

## Buddha and Jesus: "Point the Way" and "I am the Way"

In beginning to understand the complicated reality of actual Buddhist practices and beliefs, one can see the difficulty in witnessing to Buddhists. They often have adapted their religion to fit their current situation and are impervious to rational argument or attempts to convince them that Jesus is the way. That's why Alex Smith, a veteran missionary to Thailand and author of several books about Thai culture, religion, and history, says: "Sharing the gospel with a Buddhist is like slicing water with a knife." When talking with a Buddhist about Jesus, often the first response will be "all religions are good and teach you how to be a good person." After all, the Dalai Lama himself, the unofficial spokesperson of Buddhism, said: "Religion is like food for the mind, and as we all have different tastes, we must take that which is most suitable to us."

However, despite the complicated reality of actual Buddhist practices and beliefs, the gospel is taking root among Buddhist cultures. Recent church history has documented church planting movements among Buddhists in South Korea, Cambodia, and Laos. Individuals, families, and even entire communities are turning to God. What is happening in these places and is there anything we can learn in how to witness to a Buddhist? Consider the story of Khattanan, a Buddhist monk in northern Thailand.

### Khattanan: Victory over Addiction and Fear

When Khattanan was a young man finishing high school, he realized he did not have enough money to continue his education. The only way to keep studying was to become a monk and go to the Buddhist university in Chiang Mai, which was free for monks. So he shaved his head, said his vows to follow the Buddhist teachings, and began to live the life of a monk in study and in service. He received a B.A. in Buddhism, and taught others about the Buddhist religion. After eight years as a monk, he resigned and became a teacher in a high school located in a Buddhist temple. After leaving the structure of the monkhood, Khattanan begin to indulge in the liberties of a life without accountability, and began drinking, smoking, and living a secular life with his friends.

Khattanan lived in a guest house attached to the school where he was teaching. After moving in, he began to be tormented by an evil spirit every night. He found out that someone had died in the room he was staying in. As a monk, he had learned how to exorcise demons. However, he could not cast this demon out, and it was causing him much fear and sleepless nights.

He shared this story with his mother. His mother recalled that one of their relatives in their Khmu tribe was a Christian and perhaps he might be able to help. She contacted her cousin, Pastor Khun, from the north of Thailand. He explained that Jesus has power over all of the spirits, and we need to pray to him to cast this demon out. He volunteered to do so, and was able to cast out the demon that Khattanan could not.

This, of course, began to spark Khattanan's interest in Christianity. Initially he was very resentful of his uncle, Pastor Khun. He felt that his relative was betraying their family, their culture, and their religion. However, he could not argue with the power that was displayed. One day, Khattanan went back to his village and went to a meeting where this author (Phone Keo) was preaching. Phone Keo preached that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Something about this description of Jesus attracted Khattanan to go speak with Phone Keo. Phone Keo began to build a relationship with this young man, befriending him, understanding his dreams and aspirations, and answering many questions and objections about Christ. However, Phone Keo needed to travel back to the USA, so he then gave Khattanan a Bible with instructions to read the Gospel of John, and asked Pastor Khun to continue to follow up.

A few months later, Phone Keo heard from Pastor Khun: Khattanan has believed in Jesus! Phone Keo contacted Khattanan and asked him why he believed, and this was his response:

> At first I was just trying to prove that Buddhism was superior to Christianity, so that I could convince my family. Buddhism is a good structure with good laws. But even I, a former monk, could not actually live by them. I could not stop smoking or drinking or doing things that I knew were destructive in my life. I kept thinking about Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. So finally I asked Jesus to show me the way. After I gave my life to Jesus, I had no more desire to smoke or drink. When I would sleep, I used to feel tormented, but now I pray to Jesus and have no more fear of evil spirits. My life is full of joy and freedom now that I have experienced the power of God to help me win the battle against addiction and fear."

After becoming a Christian, Khattanan lived in Pastor Khun's village and continued to grow in his faith. Currently, he is serving God among his fellow Khmu people in his village, among MB churches, and in the Changed Life Center, a youth hostel and leadership training center for MB Khmu. He is an associate pastor, and now has a BA in Theology as well as a BA in Buddhism.

Khattanan's story reminds us of one the basic differences between Buddha and Jesus. Buddha saw his role as one who could point the way to enlightenment. Then it is up to each adherent of his teachings to walk their own path. In reality, however, the path to spiritual perfection is impossible. Even for a former monk, to follow all of the laws and teachings was hopeless. In contrast, Jesus says that he *is* the way. The gospel teaches that we must rely on his saving work on the cross to walk the path towards peace, wholeness, and eternal life with him. Religion is mankind's attempt to find God. Christianity, however, is God's attempt to find humanity, and to show him the way.

### Sharing Your Faith with a Buddhist: A Relational Approach

When you share your faith with a Buddhist, the goal is not to begin by talking openly about the Bible or Jesus Christ. It is more important initially to find out about their life. Begin to build a relationship with them, finding out what their problems and struggles are. Let them see the problems in their lives first, because people will not be able to grasp the solution before they understand the problem. After sharing life with them, and understanding their issues, you can begin by sharing your own testimony of how you may have had similar problems, but now your life is changed because of Jesus Christ. Once you have shared your testimony, look for opportunities to show the love of Jesus through practical acts of service or help. Then begin to point them to specific scriptures and steps to take to receive Jesus as their Savior.

In the list below, Phone Keo shares some practical ways he has found success in sharing Christ with Buddhists:

- First, **get into their lives** enough to know their problems, their hopes, their dreams.
- Second, motivate them to begin to open the door of their heart as you **share your own testimony.**
- Third, **show them God's love**—put hands and feet on your testimony. Be an example. Show them who God is in you. When they see your life and the difference, they will be attracted to Jesus.
- Next, look for ways to **explain the attraction**—why are we different? Christians in their own strength cannot do good either, but God changed our lives.

- Then **bring them a Bible**—give them some specific verses and principles about how God can change their life and provide power to face their problems.
- Do not neglect to **pray for them!** Pray seriously for them—then tell them you care for them and are praying for them. Pray for them in person if possible. Ask them how they are doing after praying for them.
- Continue to **follow up** regularly. Be friends. Encourage them. Practice patience and understanding.
- Don't push them to come to church right away! This may be way out of their comfort zone and their ability to grasp what is going on.
- **Don't compare religions**! Intellectual debate rarely leads to conversion and life transformation.
- Don't try to rush them to pray to receive Christ! They may just be trying to help you save face.
- Begin to **connect them with other Christians**, if possible others who were former Buddhists, to help them see that Christianity is not just a religion for white people or foreigners.
- Help them to understand who God is, and what it means to follow him, through select scriptures as you study the Bible together. **Begin with creation**, explaining God and his purpose for creating the universe and humanity.
- Point them to see the root of problems in our lives and in the world: **sin**.
- From there, point them to the solution: **the cross of Jesus Christ**.
- **Invite them to pray to receive Christ** as the Spirit leads in your relationship. Begin to help them grow in their faith in the Christian community.
- Don't be discouraged if, even after committing to Christ, they say they are only 50% Christian! This is common as it takes time for them to give their lives fully to Jesus. Continue to follow up, show love, and model your own faith. **Walk them through the initial steps of discipleship**, including the very real possibility of needing to address issues of spiritual bondage as a result of their former practices.
- **Rejoice with the angels** when a lost soul is found and eternity is changed!

**Conclusion: Hate Buddhism, Love the Buddhist**

As I write this, I (Andy) am sitting in a crowded food court at a popular local mall in Thailand. I look around at the faces of the people around me: children enjoying their meal with mothers and grandmothers. Young couples are chatting about life over a bowl of noodle soup. Professionals are reviewing their latest business deals, while teenagers are checking their smart phones. I know that based on the statistics, it is likely that 96% of these people are Buddhist. Each of them has their own hopes

and fears, successes and failures, joys and sorrows. They are created by God and loved by him.

Some have said that Buddhism is the masterpiece of Satan—it is spirituality without God. So as we wrestle against the spiritual forces of darkness, we must pray for God to open the blind eyes of the millions upon millions of people who have been blinded by the lies of Buddhism. There is a God, and he loves the whole world. There is hope beyond ourselves to alleviate the sin and suffering we see around us. Jesus is calling us as his body to reach out to those who have not yet experienced his love and his grace, and proclaim his gospel through word and deed. As the Spirit empowers us, may we be his witnesses to Buddhist people both across the street and around the world.

## Recommended Reading

Cioccolanti, Steve. *From Buddha to Jesus: An Insider's View of Buddhism and Christianity.* Oxford: Monarch, 2007.

Fredericks, James. *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

Hathaway, Paul. *Peoples of the Buddhist World: A Christian Prayer Guide.* Pasadena: William Carey Publishers, 2004.

Lai, Whalen, and Michael von Bruck. *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001.

Lim, David, Steve Spaulding, and Paul De Neui. *Sharing Jesus Effectively in the Buddhist World.* Pasadena: William Carey Publishers, 2005.

Smith, Alex G. *Buddhism Through Christian Eyes.* Littleton: OMF Publishers, 2001.

Thirumalai, Madasamy. *Sharing Your Faith with a Buddhist.* Grand Rapids: Bethany, 2003.

Yandell, Keith, and Harold Netland. *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal.* Westmont: IVP Academic, 2009.

Zacharias, Ravi. *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha.* Colorado Springs: Multnomah Press, 2001.

## Study Questions

1. Consider and discuss the advice for engaging Buddhists as provided by Phone Keo—someone intimately acquainted with this religion. Follow lines of gifts: what personal gifts or personality have prepared you for engaging Buddhists? What do you lack—which will you need to study for, and pray for?

2. John 14:6 ("I am the way, truth and life") was a key verse with unique power. Discuss other key scriptures that connect well with Buddhists.

# 35  Mission to Hindus
John Sankara Rao

"You are my witnesses" (Acts 1:8, Isa. 43:12). Three stories should be in line with one another in order for fruitful witness to occur: the story of Jesus Christ, the story of the messenger, and the story of the listener. The Indian story where the majority of Hindus live is a vast complexity of religion, philosophy, mysticism, language, literature, art, architecture, sculpture, dance, music, human institutions, social customs, etc. In a word, it is a perennial flow of a river that absorbs a lot of new elements as it runs through different regions. We need to understand this river in order to be effective witnesses. Paul understood the whole counsel of God (Acts 20.27), and so he was an exemplary leader, teacher and preacher (1 Cor. 11.1, Ezra 7.10). He understood the scriptures and cultures of his audience (Acts 17.16-30). This chapter should enable the reader to understand Hinduism, the major religion of India, and one of the oldest living religions of the world.

Hinduism is "a family of religions" and can be called "Hinduisms," which do not have a single founder or a single system of salvation but have different goals according to each sect or denomination. About 850 million people practice this religion. Although most Hindus live in India, Hindu literature and philosophy

John Sankara Rao (M.Th., Religions) grew up in a staunch Hindu family, and was converted to Christ in 1979. He served the MB Church of India in church planting ministries from 1988–2007. He also taught missions and evangelism at Gadwal Bible School (1988-1995) and MB Centenary Bible College in  Shamshabad (1998-2007). He is a Ph.D. candidate in the study of Hinduism, and a minister-at-large.

have influenced people throughout the world. Hinduism developed gradually over thousands of years, and many cultures and religions helped to shape it. It is believed that "the Aryans from Central Asia entered India in the third century B.C. and settled on the banks of the river Indus."[1] The word Hindu is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent.

## Definitions

There is no single definition of Hinduism, as Hinduism is a confluence of diverse traditions. Some attempts to define it are as follows:

1. 1. According to the Supreme court of India, "unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one god, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more."[2]

2. S. Radhakrishnan, the first vice President of India, says that there is no uniform, no stationary, no unalterable Hinduism in point of practice or belief. Hinduism is a movement not a position; it is a process not a result; a growing tradition but not a fixed revelation, which cannot be defined, but is only to be experienced.[3]

3. Vivekananda, an apostle of Hinduism, says that Hinduism is a universal religion that taught about the principles but not persons.[4]

4. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, says "all things to all men,"[5] that Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, and many-sided. In the usual sense of word it is hardly to be defined or hardly to say whether it is a religion or not. In its present form and even in the past it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to each other or contradicting each other.

5. Dr. Ambedkar: Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors, the sanctity and the infallibility of *Vedas, samhitas* and *sashtras,* and iron law of caste system; the heartless law of *karma*, the senseless law of status by birth, are the various instruments of torture for the untouchables. These very instruments that have mutilated and blasted and blighted the untouchables are intact with the Gandhism.[6]

6. Geographical definition: "Hindu" was the Persian word for "Indian" and was originally used of people living beyond the Indus River, not followers of a particular religion.[7]

7. Socio-religious definition: The nineteenth-century Hindu reformers call themselves as the followers of *sanathana dharma,* which means the eternal religion.[8]

## Characteristics of Hinduism

1. Hinduism has the largest pantheon of living gods and goddess that are being worshipped by millions of people according to their choice. The supreme deity of one Hindu tradition may be a secondary god of another tradition. Each devotee is allowed to worship a god of their own choice. There have been many incarnations or manifestations of God to accomplish specific purposes.

2. Hinduism is a religion, like Judaism, that was able to survive after having contact with Islam and Christianity which have the proselytizing spirit and missionary zeal.

3. There are many contradictions. One person's religious scripture may not be the same as another's. One sect may believe in the incarnation of God and another may not. One may not follow the caste system and another may be strictly following. Every Hindu is born into a certain caste which is the result of his/her past karma. He/she cannot do anything about this.

4. Hinduism is a religion of inclusivism. It includes any type of faith as its own. The religions are only ways to reach the Truth.

5. The soul is eternal in the past as well as in the future, and is subject to the law of *karma* or the law of moral causation.

6. The ultimate end of human life is liberation or deliverance (*moksa*) from the endless cycle of birth and death or transmigration of souls.

## The Teachings of Hinduism

### Scriptures

The *Vedas* reflect the growth and development of human thought over a span of many centuries. The *Vedas* are considered timeless, divine and eternal. They are without a beginning. The *Vedas* are regarded as divine in origin. They are not produced by a couple of individual poets or authors. The *Vedas* are the sublime knowledge revealed to the saints or monks of the Hindu system, in their meditation, by the Supreme Divinity. The *Vedas* encompass the human life. The word *Veda* originates from the Sanskrit root *Vid* which means "to know." The word *Veda* literally means knowledge.

Hindu scriptures can be classified in two parts: The first part is *sruti,* meaning "heard." The ancient sages, while doing their *tapasya* and *sadhana* (practice of austerities or severe meditations), heard the divine truths. For this reason the *Vedas*

are called as *sruti* literature. There are four *Vedas*—the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*. Each has four aspects—the *Samhitas* (prayers and hymns), the *Brahmanas* (explanations of *Samhitas* and rituals), the *Aranyakas*, and the *Upanishads* (explanations of mysticism). The second part is *smriti* which is "remembered." *Puranas,*[9] *Ramayana,*[10] and *Mahabharata*[11] belong to *smriti* literature. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are long epics. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a part of the Mahabharata in which the god Krishna and the *Pandava* warrior *Arjuna* discuss the meaning and nature of existence.

## The Concept of God

Vedic sages say, "*Ekam sad, vipra bahudha vadanti"*[12] (truth is the one but the sages said it in many ways). It is elastic enough to admit or to hold any number of gods into the Hindu pantheon, without offending to the deepest spiritual intuitions of the Aryan race. Early Hindus worshiped gods that represented powers in nature, outside of themselves, such as rain and the sun. Gradually, they began to search and find gods within themselves. Many Hindus believe in polytheism but these forms are part of one Universal Spirit called *Brahman* who is *sat-chit-ananda* (Truth-Consciousness-Bliss). The most important ones are *Brahma*, the creator of the universe; *Vishnu*, its preserver; and *Shiva*, its destroyer. Hindus worship some gods in the form of animals. Cows are sacred, but Hindus also revere monkeys, snakes, and other animals. Hindus worship their *ishta devata* (a chosen tutelary deity or favourite god) both in temples and in their own homes, since they have freedom to choose their own god as they like. Hinduism also believes in many types of theisms[13].

## The Concept of Soul

*Brihadarayanaka* (one of the Upanishads) describes atman as *neti neti,* neither this nor this. The *atman* is dependent on God. Most Hindus believe that the spirit or soul—the true self of every person, called the *atman*—is eternal. A human being must acquire self-knowledge (*atma jnana*), which is to realize that one's true self (*atman*) is identical with the transcendent self *Brahman*. According to the *Advaita Vedanta* School, this *Atman* is ultimately indistinct from *Brahman*, the Supreme Spirit. The goal of life, according to the *Advaita,* is to realize that one's a*tman* is identical to *Brahman.*

## The Concept of Sin

In Hinduism, *Papa* or *Pataka* are words generally used for sin. Every human being is composed of three *gunas* or qualities called *Sattva* (purity), *Rajas* (impurity), and *Tamas* (darkness). It is lust, anger and hatred springing from *rajas and tamas*…the enemies of man in this world.

The generally understood five heinous sins (*pañca mahā pātakas*) are: theft, drinking of liquor, murder (especially of a *Brahmin,* one of the high priestly castes of Hinduism), violation of the teacher's bed, *govadha* or killing of a cow, and associating oneself with the perpetrators of the five sins aforementioned.[14]

### Caste System

Hinduism strongly believes that the caste system has divine sanction. For Purusha sukta 10:90 of Rigveda says, "His face became Brahman, His arms were made into the Ksatriya, His thighs became the Vaisya and form His feet the Sudra was born."[15] So the Hindu castes are grouped into four main categories, called *varnas.* They are 1) *Brahmans*, the priests and scholars; 2) *Kshatriyas*, the rulers and warriors; 3) *Vaisyas*, the merchants and professionals; and 4) *Sudras*, the labourers and servants. The caste system includes thousands of sub-castes, each of which having its own rules of behaviour.

### The Concept of Salvation

Freedom from *samsara* is salvation. *Samsara* is the cycle of births and deaths through which the soul of every creature passes before it attains *Moksa* or liberation. It depends on love towards God and on God's grace (note similarity to biblical concepts). The law of *karma* is a moral law corresponding to the physical law of causation. As a man sows, he shall reap. The word *Prāyascitta* means purification of sin. The sins can be removed by confession, by repentance, by *pranayama* (calming the mind and senses) by *Tapas* (fasting, truthfulness) by *japa* (repeating the sacred syllable), by charity, and by pilgrimage to the holy places.

### Reincarnation and Karma

Hinduism teaches that the soul never dies. When the body dies, the soul is reborn. This continuous process of rebirth is called reincarnation. The law of *karma* states that every action influences how the soul will be born in the next reincarnation. A person's reincarnation continues until he or she achieves spiritual perfection which is called *moksa*. Hinduism also believes that one who is born twice (*dvijaha*- twice born are the Brahmins; the sacred thread is the sign of it) will die once, but the one who is born once will die twice. "*Janmana jayate sudraha; karmana jayate dvijaha.*"[16] (By birth everybody is a *sudra*/low caste but by conduct one becomes *dvijaha*). Note similarities to the twice born (spiritual rebirth) teaching mentioned by Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3:3-5).

### The Concept of Heaven

There are seven levels of *svarg* (heaven): *Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah, Satah* and *Brahmlok*. This is the last place where fortunate souls repair after death and enjoy spiritual communion with the personal God. Along with Buddhism, Hinduism also says: "When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and attains *Brahman*."[17] Heaven is also called *Moksa* (liberation, release, freedom from samsara) or *Mukti* which is the last goal of life. It is liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

### The Concept of Hell

There are seven levels of hell: *Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasatala, Talatala, Mahatala*, and *Patala*. Hell (*naraka)* is a place of torment for the people who committed sins. It is not a permanent place. Soon after receiving the punishment due to one's sins, he / she will be taken into one of the 8.4 million life forms.

### The Concept of Sonship

The son is called in Sanskrit as *kumara* which means the one who "kills evil doings". So the son is not the one who is born with male organ but the one who kills the evil natures. According to Rigveda 10:90, the Creator who is called *prajapati* will offer himself as a sacrifice to give life to his people.[18] The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, "*aputrasya gatir nasti, svargo nivacha*" which means "no heaven without that son."[19] (Note the Christian teaching of the son promised in Isaiah 9:6, born of virgin Mary in Luke 1:35, and who destroyed the works of evil in 1 John 3:5, 8).

### The Concept of Judgment

Hinduism does not believe in a judgment day. A person is a victim of his own *karma* (action) and the laws of dharma[20] judge him continuously. Judgment in Hinduism is immediate after death. Neither hell nor heaven (not even moksa) is eternal. Why? As it is explained in the concept of hell, after the due punishment is over, the soul will migrate into another body till it liberates from the "*samsara*" which is the cycle of births and deaths.

## Kinds of Hindu Devotion

1. Philosophical Hinduism: This group believes in the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads.

2. Religious Hinduism: This group believes in the *Puranas, Mahabharatha, Ramayana*, and *Bhgavad Gita*. Each person is at liberty to choose his//her

own favorite god from among a pantheon of 330 million and salvation may be attained in one of the following four ways: *Gnana marga,* the way of knowledge; *Bhakthi marga,* the way of devotion; *Karma marga,* the way of good action; and *Raja marga,* the way of yoga.

3.  Popular Hinduism: This group rejects the authority of *Vedas* but is concerned only about finding and pleasing a god who protects, blesses, and makes them prosperous. A majority of Hindus adhere to this form.

4.  Mystic Hinduism: *Gurus and Babas* (wise old men) have numerous followers. They claim to be *avatars* (incarnations), to have supernatural gifts of healing, and the ability to perform miracles.

5.  Tribal Hinduism: This group is very much influenced by animism, spiritism and the occult, and animal worship. The fear of the unknown exercises its instinctive dread over followers' minds.



**Hindu Pilgrim Places** [21]

## Hindu Social Structure

Hindu society was divided into four principal classes, and according to Manu's code, later many sub-castes were created. Having understood the background of Hinduism, the church should find ways and means to reach each category.

### Religious High Castes

In spite of the differences even among these high castes of Hindus (they differ in their social customs), they all adhere to the five major beliefs mentioned earlier. They are well educated, occupy high places in society and are proud of their social strata. They follow their religious practices and worship different gods and goddess according to their family traditions.

### Secular High Castes

This liberal group is more open than the above one but also well educated. These people tend to be more frustrated and disappointed, because in times of trouble they have no god to appeal to.

### Scheduled Castes

There are many sub-castes among this group, too. Some are more depressed and destitute than others but all bear the social stigma of being low caste. Educationally and economically this group has made much progress due to the government facilities.

### Scheduled Tribes

This group is mostly animistic in its religious approach and maintains strong community cohesion. The leader of the village and his *panchayat* (council of elders) make all the decisions.

## Stories of Searching for the Truth

### The Author's Story

At the age of 25, when two of my friends met with a road accident and died, the question came to me, "Where will I go if I die in the same way?" Frustrated at the death of my friends, I began visiting religious places and asking the gurus about the meaning of life and about life after death. But no satisfactory answer was found. In that situation, a friend of mine told me about Jesus Christ. In spite of having different opinions about Christianity, thinking of it as foreign as well as of low-caste religion, I decided to give a chance to Christ to answer my question.

I had a vision on November 20, 1979, in which I was walking along with one of my friends. After some time, I looked back and found someone coming to kill me

with a rifle. I informed my friend about that person and both of us began to run to escape him. But the person, who was coming behind, overran us and pointed the rifle to shoot at me. At that very movement, my friend jumped upon him and snatched away the rifle from him. In that struggle the bayonet of the rifle pierced my friend's arms and the blood began to flow.

When I saw the blood, I woke up from my sleep. Then I began to ask two questions, "Who is the person coming to kill me and who is this friend wounded for me?" It took no time to realise that the person who was coming to kill me was my "sins" and the person who was wounded was no other than my "Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ." Then and there I realised my need and asked the Lord to forgive me and as a result a great burden was removed from my heart.

In my first reading of the Bible I could understand the story of a beautiful yet naughty son Absalom, who came to kill his father and was himself killed eventually. After knowing of his death, David lamented, "… O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you!" (2 Sam. 18:33). David wanted to die for his son so that his son may live.

This incident reminded me of the cry of my grandma who gave birth to six children, with my father the eldest. I was just four years when my dad died and I do not have any memory. But when my uncle died, I was ten years of age and I remember my grandma's cry, "Oh God you are taking my sons—instead take me."

The vision I had, the text I read, and the cry of my grandma—all these three were but one truth that made me to understand that Jesus Christ loved me and died for me so that I may live.

### Chandraiah's Story

A young man by the name of Chandraiah, who belongs to the Gouda family (one of the castes that makes, drinks and sells the intoxicating palm tree liquor), was worshipping his god Hanuman in a temple. Along with his friends he was singing this devotional song:

> *People worship trees but why are they eaten by goats?*
> *People worship birds, but why do they snatch away chickens?*
> *People worship stones, but why do they need vermilion?*
> *The god is in our inner being.*

He was singing and saying that God is in his inner being, but he was sure that he was not experiencing him. He came out of the temple and asked one of the evangelists who was there serving the Lord as an MB church planter. The evangelist sat along

with him and narrated his own testimony and shared the good news of Jesus Christ, his life, death, burial and resurrection. After listening to the story of Jesus in line with the story of the evangelist, Chandraiah decided to give his heart to Jesus, for he heard, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

As Chandraiah confessed his sins and received the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, he began to experience the Lord within his heart and his life began to change. He received baptism and also a new name: "Paul Chandraiah."

He told his parents from then on he was not going to drink that intoxicating liquor nor make it. "This is our family tradition and source of life; how can we survive without it?" said the parents. He replied, "I will work in the city and take care of our family." Now because of his faith, all the family has accepted Jesus Christ and there is a brand new church in this village. Praise the Lord for the work of the Holy Spirit in a Hindu temple.

## The Need of the Hour and Points of Contact

There are 1,200 million people living in India according to the 2011 census. Of these, 25% of them are living in South India, 20% in West India, 15% in Northeast India, and 40% in North India. However, the spread of Christianity is such that 80% of Christians are living in South India, 5% in West India, 10% in Northeast India, and only 5% in North India. So the need of the hour is twofold. Internally the church should be strengthened, be equipped, be united; and for the external cause they need to be released with prayer, personnel, and financial resources to reach the unreached Hindus in India and beyond.

In order to reach Hindus, the church must have a good knowledge of Hindu philosophical doctrines, caste systems and rituals. We also need to avoid direct arguments regarding their religious beliefs. Christians should be equipped to present the whole Word of God to the whole person. There are many areas where we have points of contact for witness to the Hindus.

### Spirituality

Since Hindus are a very religious people, they consider externals to be reflective of holiness. The Bible calls us to live a holy life (1 Pet 1:16; Rom. 12:1-2; Mat. 5:16). The power of God through a transformed holy life will be a powerful influence on the Hindus.

From the ancient times the devoted Hindus used to pray, "Lead us from darkness to light; lead us from untruth to the truth; lead us from mortality to immortality." There is no one but Jesus who has responded to this human quest by saying, "I am the truth, I am the life, I am the way, I am the light" (John 14:6; 8:12). He is the eternal and true Guru.

### The Concept of Sin

The Hindu understanding of the concept of sin varies from person to person and group to group. For some it is just committing bad deed, or it is disobedience, or it is selfishness, or it is non-existence. Vivekananda said, "Each soul is potentially divine."[22] Further, he invites the children of Immortal Bliss to arise, to awake and not to stop till the goal[23] is reached. So for Vivankanada "it is sin to call any one a sinner."[24] But the Bible says, "For all have sinned…" (Rom. 3:23), yet believers "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

### The Doctrine of Karma

Hinduism believes (similar to the Bible) strongly in *karma* which is, "You reap what you sow" (Gal. 6:7). But Bible differs from Hinduism in teaching that salvation cannot be obtained by works, and so we need to communicate that it is the gift of God (Isa. 64:6; Eph. 2:8).

### The Doctrine of Salvation

The concept of salvation exists in Hinduism but its understanding is different as it is the liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. We need to communicate that salvation is the gift of God by his grace through faith (Eph. 2:7-9; 2 Cor. 5:21).

### The Concept of God

Since Hindus believe in pantheism there is no need of defending the existence of God, but we need to clarify that the transcendent God became immanent (John 1:1-14) for the purpose of destroying the works of evil (1 John 3:5, 8).

### Respect for Scriptures

Since Hindus respect "all sacred scriptures" including their own, we need to make use of this opportunity to exposit the Bible in their own context.

### The Concept of a Messenger

Hindu spirituality is perceived to be at a very high level, but they need only the Spirit from above that comes only through the blood of Christ. They need a "model" messenger which can only be Jesus.

**The Concept of Incarnation**

Since Hindus believe in the incarnation of God, it needs to be stressed that God's nature does not differ from one incarnation to another but that he is forever unchanging. God's nature is shown in the story of Jesus and his own lifestyle. The sound Word of God and the lifestyle of the preacher (word and deed) should go together. Then only like Paul can one courageously invite others, "Follow me as I am following Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The following precautions may be considered in order to be an effective witness among Hindus:

1. The way of worship should be Indian—allow converts to follow Christ in the Hindu world and within Indian culture.

2. The mingling of boys and girls must be moderate and respectful.

3. External signs, such as the removal of a red dot on the forehead, need not be stressed. To a Hindu woman the red dot on the forehead is the sign that her husband is alive. Traditional widows of Hinduism will not use this red dot (although the modern widows differ with this view and continue using it). The removal of the red dot on the forehead is an unnecessary challenge to the traditional Hindu women.

4. Food habits should be considered (eating beef is a taboo for a Hindu).

5. Cultural issues—discern which of the diverse religious-cultural thoughts, myths, and symbols need to be accepted, which need to be modified, and which should be rejected.

6. The caste system must be dealt with diligently;[25] the concept of a model *guru* (teacher) is accepted.

7. We need Christians to promote the holistic development of their communities and nation, in particular the Christian community.

8. We need to stress that salvation is free but the Christian life is costly—be willing to pay the price of faithfulness and suffer.

9. Make local churches part of decision making processes for sustainable growth.

10. If we are willing to love and lay down our life for the welfare of the listener, it will not go to waste (2 Cor. 12:15).

11. The witness to Hindus must be by *all* laity and clergy of the local and the universal church.

## Conclusion

Witnessing to the Hindus and to the nations at large is the major responsibility of the church both individually and collectively. Our Great Commission is, "All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:18-20). We fulfil the Great Commission by following the Golden Rule, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7.12). The Great Commandment is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12.30).

Loving the Lord and witnessing to his people will serve the purpose of the blood of Christ. This blood was shed so we could both experience and share this good news with humanity, including Hindus, both in India and beyond. In turn, we will see this revelation fulfilled: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-10).

## Notes

[1] Ralph D.Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*: *A Reader* (Pasadena: William Cary Library, 1992), 119.

[2] Klaus K Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism: Second Edition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 1.

[3] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: Unwin Books, 1961), 91.

[4] Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda, the Living Vedanta* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2006), 266.

[5] Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

[6] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (Bombay: Thacker, 1946), 307.

[7] Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 6.

[8] Ibid., 11. Also see Swami Siddhināthānanda, *Wealth and Wisdom of India* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1980), 1.

[9] The chief eighteen Puranas explain the nature and functions of the Hindu triad: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. See Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit–English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), 635.

[10] Ramayana, a story of Rama and Sita composed by sage Valmiki, consist of seven books and contains 24,000 verses. This epic exalts the character of Rama, a perfect man who bears suffering and self-denial with superhuman patience. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit,* 878.

[11] Mahabharata is one of the epics consisting of eighteen books in about 215,000 lines composed by sage Vyasa. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit,* 798.

[12] D. S. Sarma, *The Upanishads: An Anthology* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan ,1961), 4.

[13] Monotheism: the belief in one God/divinity and God is the separate Creator of nature; polytheism: the belief in many gods; panentheism: nature is in God, God is part of nature but retains an independent identity; pantheism: the universe itself is divine, God is in everything, and nature is God; monism: God is nature, the belief that there is no difference between the creation and Creator; and atheism: belief in no god/divinity. Among others is henotheism: devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others.

[14] Chandogya Upanishad (Hyderabad: Sri Ramakrishna Matam, 2012), 10:9.

[15] Wendy Doniger, trans., *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1981), 31. Also see Robert Antoine, et al., *Religious Hinduism: A Presentation and Appraisal* (Allahabad: St Paul Publications, 1968), 118-119.

[16] Quoted by Ch. Francis, *Kriste Margam* (Guntur: Logos Printers & Publishers, n.d.), 93.

[17] Swamy Jnanada Ananda, *Katha Upanishad* (Hyderabad: Sri Ramakrishna Matam, 2012), 1:10

[18] Doniger, *Rig Veda,* 29-30. Quoted also in Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 45.

[19] Quoted in Bandi Srinivasa Rao, *Aa Kumarudevaru*? (Eluru: Bandi Publishers, 1975), 1.

[20] Dharma means steadfast decree, statute, ordinance, or prescribed conduct, but not caste. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit*, 510.

[21] "India Religious Places," Maps of India, accessed February 9, 2015, http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/religious-places.htm.

[22] Swami Siddhinathananda, *Wealth and Wisdom,* 233.

[23] The goal of Vivekananda is one's own liberation and the welfare of the world. For him, liberation, according to Advaita, is from '*avidya*' or ignorance of self; *atman* is different than *Brahman*.

[24] Vivekanada, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 11.

[25] The caste system in India is both a delicate and a tough issue. The term caste (*jati* or *Varna*) refers to color, race, family, and lineage. The government of India

says there will be no discrimination based on caste. Yet a child at the time of beginning primary school needs to fill out forms in which he/she must say their caste. The government still gives some reduced or free provisions based on caste. All the members of the church, regardless of caste, sing together, worship together, and share the Lord's Supper together. Yet at the time of marriage, each one prefers to get a mate from their own caste. In order to eradicate this social evil, the government, social agencies, and other enlightened groups of people need to work together beginning from the home, school, workplace, etc.

## Recommended Reading

Antoine, Robert, et al. *Religious Hinduism: A Presentation and Appraisal.* Allahabad: St Paul Publications, 1968.

Hedlund, Roger E. *Missiology for the 21st Century: South Asian Perspectives.* Delhi: ISPCK, 2004.

Samartha, S.J. *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology.* Bangalore: South Asia Theological Research Institute, 1994.

Saraswati, Chandrasekharendra. *Introduction to Hindu Dharma, Illustrated.* Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2008.

Singh, Chitralekha and Prem Nath. *Hinduism.* New Delhi: Crest Publishing House, 2002.

Viswanathan, Edakkandiyil. *Am I a Hindu The Hinduism Primer.* San Francisco: Halo Books, 1992.

## Study Questions

1. Hinduism is clearly the majority religion of India: however, consider the Indian "diaspora," the multitudes of Indians in other countries, most of which are Hindus. Are there pockets of Indians near you? What is the population of Indian immigrants in your country? In your city?

2. The author lists numerous "points of contact," or bridges to Hindus by Christians. Select and review two or three of these, and prepare yourself to "give a reason for the hope that you have" (I Pet. 3:15).

3. In the second sentence, the author refers to the stories of Christ, the messenger and the listener. How do the personal stories shared later in the chapter illustrate this principle? How would you share your story with a Hindu Dalit? Or a younger Hindu? Or a devoted Hindu?

# 36 Making Disciples for Jesus from among Muslims

Gordon Nickel

$\mathbf{M}$any mission workers have found disciple-making among Christians of Muslim background to be one of the greatest adventures in ministry. The context and challenges of this particular work are unlike any other. The special challenges require the worker to rely more heavily on the Lord Jesus for strength and fruitfulness. The unique context draws out biblical truths that may not be glimpsed in the midst of a religion not explicitly formulated in denial of gospel affirmations.

There are plenty of guides along the lines of "how to witness to Muslims." If one searches for resources on making disciples of Christians from a Muslim background, however, very few resources seem to be available. Moreover, the subject has been confused in recent years by advocacy of mission methods that seek to erase the lines of

Gordon Nickel (M.A., South Asian Islam, University of London; Ph.D., Islamic Studies, University of Calgary) is a Christian scholar who researches the interaction between Islam and the Gospel. Gordon's personal experience of Muslims and their daily expressions of faith and life came during 10 years of teaching in Christian colleges in South Asia (Pakistan and India). In recent years Gordon has taught on Islam in a number of North American universities. Among his many publications, his most recent book is a scholarly response to polemic titled *The Gentle Answer to the Muslim Accusation of Biblical Falsification* (Bruton Gate, 2014). He is currently on assignment with MB Mission.

Christian identity. Much effort has been poured into discussion of this new advocacy and comparatively little into describing the contours of biblical discipleship with the Muslim context in mind.

The evangelical Anabaptist heritage can be seen as a great resource for disciple-making among Christians of Muslim background. First of all, that heritage fully appreciates the truth and power of the gospel and the centrality of gospel witness. Second, the Anabaptist story provides insight into the suffering that often comes for taking a public stand for Christ. Third, from among many other features, the evangelical Anabaptist vision takes seriously the teachings of Jesus on human behavior, including a peaceable response to situations of conflict.

By God's grace Mennonite Brethren (MBs) have also gathered valuable experience in ministry among Muslims in Central and South Asia, Indonesia and North Africa.[1] Such ministry continues apace today in new mission locations. Practical experience applies the biblical teaching on discipleship and the lessons from the Anabaptist heritage to a new context, learning in the process new lessons about how God works in challenging situations by His Spirit.[2]

The MB Confession of Faith as set out by Canadian MBs is very helpful for focusing the main areas of discipleship.[3] The ICOMB Confession of Faith also spotlights many important aspects of discipleship.[4] Contextualization of these confessions to the situation of Christians in Muslim settings can prove a blessing to many. In this short chapter, content from the confessions will be brought into a structure that reflects a practical emphasis. From the biblical content on disciple-making that MBs cherish, what is particularly relevant for belief and practice among Christians of Muslim background?

## Strong Biblical Teaching

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," Jesus said when he was about to ascend to heaven after spending three years with his closest disciples (Matt. 28:18).

How did Jesus then use that great authority which God the Father had given him? Not to rule an earthly kingdom. Not to provide his followers with health and wealth. Certainly not to fight those who had opposed him! Rather, Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples for him! By doing so, Jesus focused the goal of mission: to make disciples of all nations.

The original Greek word for "nations" in the biblical phrase "make disciples of all nations" (NIV) is *ethne*, and this helps us understand that all cultures and people groups are included in disciple-making. Jesus wants people of all backgrounds to be

his disciples, as we also see in John's vision of the Lamb in Revelation 5:9: "You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (*ethnous*)."

The MB Confession of Faith provides an extensive list of key biblical passages that inform the article on discipleship. The list includes the famous passage about taking up one's cross and following Jesus (Mark 8:34-38), as well as Jesus' own commands to follow his teachings (John 8:31-32; 13:34-35; 15:14-15). It highlights the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). A striking feature of this list is that it seems to have no difficulty in offering strong discipleship material from virtually every letter of the apostle Paul, as well as from the letters of James, Peter and John. For example, it specifies Peter's teaching on suffering for doing good: "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

Because the harsh treatment of the disciples of Jesus during the first century so closely resembles the treatment of converts to Jesus by the Muslim community since the rise of Islam, the list of biblical passages in the MB Confession promises to be a valuable resource. In this sense the New Testament is a great gift for the disciple-maker of Christians from Muslim background. All that is needed is an appropriate contextualization of the biblical truths for the Islamic context.

### Following Jesus

Discipleship to Jesus means a life of joy. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love," Jesus told his disciples. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:10-11). Discipleship is the joy of the students' fellowship with their Master, who has made them his friends (John 15:14-15).

The disciple-maker must first of all be a disciple of Jesus. He or she must fully absorb what the New Testament says about the followers of Jesus and then walk accordingly. The MB Confession of Faith states, "By calling his followers to take up the cross, Christ invites them to reject the godless values of the world and offer themselves to God in a life of service." Disciple-makers accept Christ's invitation eagerly. Translated into the Muslim context, the new Christian rejects the religious system of Islam and the anti-Christ values that it teaches.

## Questions that Islam Raises

Islam does not teach discipleship to Jesus but rather points to another figure as the focus for authority and obedience—that is, to the messenger of Islam. The Muslim confession of faith, the *shahada*, magnifies only Muhammad as the messenger of

Allah. The Muslim scripture, the Qur'an, repeatedly commands obedience to "Allah and his messenger"; Muslims understand this messenger to be Muhammad. On the basis of such expressions in Muslim scripture, the jurists of Islam developed an extensive and elaborate Law based largely on what they understood Muhammad to have done (*sunna*) and said (*hadith*).

Wherever field workers strive to obey the Lord Jesus in his Great Commission, they will certainly encounter resistance from the Muslim community. This is not because workers are imposing Western cultural understandings, or "extracting" believers in Jesus from their home environments. Jesus' command to make disciples is, after all, a Middle Eastern command, not an idea from the West. The New Testament is full of indications that an exclusive loyalty to Jesus will bring the disciple suffering.

Rather, the resistance that disciple-makers will encounter is due to the Muslim perception that the gospel gives loyalty and authority to someone other than Muhammad. "To reject Christianity is with Islam not merely the natural and intelligible reaction of every religion or world conception that has sufficient vigor in it to want to maintain itself; with Islam it belongs to its religious creed. To accept Christianity implies the explicit recognition of the error of Islam."[5]

The Qur'an presents a brief picture of the followers of Jesus (*hawāriyyūn*, ex. Q 3:52), but does not say anything about the content of the teaching of Jesus or the shape of discipleship to him. Later Muslim traditions, especially Sufi stories, portray Jesus as an ascetic wandering from place to place with a band of followers. However, nowhere is Jesus the "Lord of both the dead and the living" as the New Testament proclaims (Rom. 14:9).

This lack in Islam highlights the importance and beauty of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel accounts and the descriptions there of his relationships with people. It urges disciple-makers to fill this void in the minds of new Christians with New Testament content. Without straightforward and persistent instruction on the teachings and behavior of Jesus, attention will tend to drift back inexorably to the Muslim insistence on the authority of the messenger of Islam.

Indeed, it has often been through encountering the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that Muslims have come to Christ in the first place. For example, two former Muslims now serving Jesus fruitfully in Western Canada, Wajdi Iskander and Muhammad al-Halaaj, testify that it was by reading Matthew 5-7 that they decided to become disciples of Jesus, despite the high personal cost that each had to pay. One of these has written up his testimony in a beautiful book, *More than a Dream*.[6]

The cost of discipleship for most Christians from Muslim background is another urgent question raised by the Islamic context. In the development of Islamic Law,

Muslim jurists chose to formulate a "Law of Apostasy" that stipulates death for any Muslim who wants to leave Islam. This feature of Islamic Law certainly raises the stakes for those who decide to follow Jesus. It also forecasts why the Body of Christ is so necessary in this context, why the guidance of the disciple-maker is so important, and why a biblical understanding of suffering for following Jesus is so relevant.

One other special feature of the Muslim context, hinted at above, is that Islam is not merely a religious commitment or philosophy that ignores Jesus, but one which incorporates a deliberate denial of New Testament affirmations about Jesus into its scripture, the Qur'an. Hendrik Kraemer described this as the "antagonism to and indignant rejection of some cardinal elements of Christianity (Jesus' Sonship, His death on the Cross and consequently such doctrines as the Trinity and Reconciliation or Atonement)."[7] In this sense Islam is "anti-Christ"—that is, denial of the divine glory and redemptive death of Jesus is an integral part of its system.

## A Place Among The Sanctified

As important as the work of the disciple-maker certainly is, a lone Christian worker is never adequate for the needs of the new Christian from Muslim background. For the many challenges that the new Christian will face, he or she needs the full resources of the Body of Christ. This is one of the great blessings of salvation, according to the words of Jesus himself to Saul on the Damascus road. Jesus sent his apostle to the Gentles so that they could receive forgiveness of sins and also "a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

The Body of Christ is the international, multicultural fellowship of the disciples of Jesus. They are the "called out" ones (*ekklesia*), called out of every other loyalty and spiritual commitment to worship and follow the Lord Jesus alone. Paul certainly saw this as one of the astonishing blessings of being "in Christ Jesus." "There is neither Jew nor Greek," because the wall of hostility has been broken down by the cross (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-18). And if that highest of all ethnic walls is broken down, then all other human divisions disappear as well (Col. 3:11).

The ICOMB Confession of Faith states explicitly that Christians are called "to turn from individualism to interdependence with others in the church," and "are baptized by water into the fellowship of the church." This emphasis on church is very important when one considers the strength of the Muslim "nation," which Muslims call the *umma*. Kraemer, who learned to know Islam well in Indonesia, highlighted the Muslim conception of the *umma* to be one of the key reasons for the tenacious grip that Islam has on its adherents.[8] "The secret of the iron rigidity of Islam is that its real 'holy' and its real 'god' is group solidarity."[9] That conception tempts Muslims

to remain in the *umma* on the one hand, and encourages a kind of violent fanaticism towards those who want to leave Islam on the other. However, all Muslims who believe in Jesus are "called out" of the *umma* and "baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Though disciple-makers cannot supply the fellowship that only the Body can provide, disciple-makers can definitely nurture and facilitate that fellowship by their teaching and example.

## Guidelines for Belief and Approach

Making disciples is an aspect of ministry among Muslims which many Christian workers have found the most rewarding. This is about meaningful relationships with new Christians from Muslim background "…teaching them to obey everything I commanded you" (Matt 28:20). The command of Jesus is to teach, so the worker need not hesitate to do so. Disciple-making means a vigorous teaching of the disciple to obey. "Everything I commanded you" includes not only the words and example of Jesus in the Gospel, but also the preaching and teaching of those who spoke and wrote in his Spirit.

This opens up to the Christian worker a large area of positive teaching that has been very attractive to many Muslims, both in witness and disciple-making. The commandments of Jesus go against what Muslims understand from their messenger at many important points. For example: the response to violence. Jesus taught and modeled a way of peace, in which there is no revenge against evildoers, and indeed the enemy is to be loved. Jesus willingly laid down his life rather than fight those who seized him (Matt 26:53; John 18:36). This is in stark contrast to the commands to fight and kill in the Qur'an, and to the conduct of the messenger of Islam in Medina according to the standard Muslim accounts.

The disciple-maker should anticipate the kinds of teaching that may be most important for new Christians who have been told falsehoods about Jesus for most of their lives. For example, Muslim youth are instructed by their imams that not only is it wrong to call Jesus the Son of God, but that merely to utter this phrase is so terrible that it shakes the foundations of the universe (Q 19:90). Disciple-making among Christians of Muslim background should therefore excel in this particular teaching.

Paul Asghar Ali, born a Muslim near Delhi, India, encountered the glory of Jesus through a miraculous answer to prayer in Jesus' name. He immediately set out on a quest, however, to discover why Christians call Jesus the Son of God. Asghar could not proceed into discipleship until he was able to find a Christian to answer his urgent questions. New Christians need the same kind of thorough and straightforward

instruction on such themes as the historicity and necessity of the death of Jesus and its many benefits. Wherever there is denial and falsehood in Islamic teaching, there must be joyful gospel affirmation from the disciple-maker.

### Demonstrating True Faith

The MB Confession of Faith specifies that Christians show their discipleship in the way they treat other people, in the way they speak, and in their sexual purity. The disciple-maker's teaching and modeling of Christ-like behavior becomes especially important in the Muslim context because Islam has historically devoted its greatest efforts to the formulation of law. The concept of Muslim divine law is called *sharī'a*, its practical outworking is called *fiqh*, and the actual written details are called *furū'*.

The massive Muslim works of *furū'* stipulate the minutia of ritual practice as well as every imaginable interpersonal act. As the British scholar Norman Calder described it so eloquently, "Since the topics of the law cover all the major categories of a pious, and a social, life … a work of *furū'*, formally at least, constituted a literary depiction of social reality in normative form."[10] In other words, "Islamic culture" is understood by Muslims to be completely based on divine law, which they believe in turn to be based on the Qur'an and Muhammad.

The behavior of a disciple, by contrast, must be based on the teachings and example of the Lord Jesus. Fortunately, there is much for the disciple-maker to teach, both from the Gospel accounts and the letters of Paul, Peter, and other apostles. Paul's pattern is often to first explain the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus to the believer and then, on this basis, to detail the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) for the disciple in a practical and pastoral way. Romans 12 and Colossians 3 are two good examples of this pattern.[11]

"Filled with love and gratitude, disciples delight to obey God," states the MB Confession. Indeed, it is the privilege of disciple-makers to explain and model the wonderful truth of obedience out of gratitude. Islamic doctrine teaches obedience out of fear of punishment on the one hand, and hope for escape from hell on the other. Islam is a reversion to the false expectation that people will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law (Rom. 3:30). The good news of Jesus, however, is that salvation is a gift of God through the death of Jesus. The gift sets us free to do the good works that God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:8-10).

One part of disciple-making that is potentially very important, though somehow rarely discussed by Western missionaries, is leading new Christians from Muslim background to renounce the religious commitments they once held. The word *Islam*, after all, means "submission." Islam is a person's submission to a religious system that

has sociological, moral and spiritual dimensions. The spiritual dimension of Islam, as we have already explained, has an anti-Christ quality: it knowingly rejects the divine glory and redemptive death of Jesus, along with all of the spiritual blessings that flow from these truths. The moral dimension of Islam leads people into ungodly practices because Muslims have based human behavior on what they believe to be the sayings (*hadith*) and life example (*sunna*) of the messenger of Islam.

Those who submit to an anti-Christ system need to be set free. A scholar who has been very helpful in this area is Mark Durie of Melbourne, Australia, whose expertise is in Southeast Asian Islam. Durie has written a book titled *Liberty to the Captives: Freedom from Islam & Dhimmitude through the Cross*.[12] This book, in addition to contrasting the example of Jesus from that of Islam's messenger, offers "Prayers of release from Islam" that disciple-makers can use with new Christians from Muslim background.[13]

Anabaptists have not generally been known for their insights into the spiritual dimensions of powerful religions. However, the MB Confession of Faith urges disciples to "reject the godless values of the world" and to "resist worldly values and systems, the sinful nature, and the devil." If the godless values of the world are to be rejected, how can we take a sanguine view of a religious system that denies the truths about Jesus whereby people are saved?

## Parameters of Practice

Some Christian workers in the last several decades have said that once they lead Muslims to faith in Jesus, they need to step back and let the new disciples deal with many difficult questions on their own under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is hard to understand this approach when we begin our ministry from what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission. Jesus instructed his followers to teach new disciples to obey *everything he had commanded*. True, new disciples need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. True, disciple-makers must not pass on merely cultural traditions as the commandments of Jesus. However, this still leaves plenty of room to the disciple-maker for teaching, and to not take up the challenge to teach thoroughly would amount to disobedience to the Lord.

The hesitancy to teach may relate to either a lack of familiarity with, or a misunderstanding of, a worthwhile mission concept known as "critical contextualization." Disciple-makers from another culture need to be careful that they don't equate their own cultural understandings with the teachings of Scripture. They also need to allow local Christians to own the decisions they make. But the process includes an important component of teaching what the Bible has to say about the matter at hand.[14] No disciple-maker need hold back in this area.

Another temptation, especially in recent years, has been for Christian workers to seek for a way that new Christians from Muslim background might avoid suffering. For disciple-makers from Europe and North America, this may be understandable. Western workers rarely pay a severe price for taking a stand for Jesus in their societies. They may therefore wish that those they disciple in Muslim societies escape suffering as well. As we have noted above, however, the Muslim context has a "Law of Apostasy." It treats the leaving of Islam as treason, and prescribes the death of the apostate in Islamic Law.

In a desire to somehow overcome this "problem," which is certainly a major hindrance to the open conversion of Muslims to Christ, some Western workers have proposed that new believers in Jesus remain within Islam. They have begun to argue that Islamic identity is merely a cultural category along with the foods that people eat and the clothes they wear. They argue, therefore, that since we do not ask new believers in Jesus in other societies to give up their cultural identities, we should not ask believers in Jesus in Muslim societies to give up their Islamic identity. Remaining Muslim, reason the advocates of this method, new believers in Jesus will not trigger the persecution that would come if they clearly identified as Christians.

Here we encounter the striking contradiction of expecting new believers in Jesus to "reject the godless values of the world" (MB Confession of Faith) and at the same time seeing some Christian workers ask new believers to remain in a religious submission (*Islam*) that explicitly denies the divine glory and redemptive death of Jesus. It is at this point that evangelical Anabaptists need to depart from fashionable mission trends, however popular or energetically justified, and pursue instead the teaching of Scripture and the spiritual heritage of Anabaptist history.

Though some recent trends in mission advocacy and practice have necessitated the setting of parameters, they should not be allowed to distract from the central thrust of our theme. Disciple-making among Christians of Muslim background is first of all, and most importantly, a great adventure in serving Jesus. "Go and make disciples of all nations," Jesus commanded. To know and fellowship with new believers in Jesus saved out of the "nation" of Islam, and to encourage them in the ways of the Savior, is a joy and a privilege.

## Notes

[1] James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk, and Linford Stutzman, eds., *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005), esp. 156-8 (Afghanistan), 164-6 (India), 317-328 (Islamic Intercession and Christian Atonement), 334-346 (Dialogue with Muslims), and 361-9 (Apologetics).

[2] Gordon Nickel, *Peaceable Witness among Muslims* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1999), 47-66.

[3] "MB Confession of Faith," http://www.mbconf.ca/home/products_and_services/resources/theology/confession_of_faith/detailed_version/

[4] "International Community of MB Confession of Faith," http://www.mbconf.ca/home/products_and_services/resources/theology/confession_of_faith/icomb_confession_of_faith/

[5] Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: International Missionary Council, 1938), 354.

[6] (Edmonton: Salaam Ministries, 2012). Available at http://www.salaamministries.com/introducing-salaam/morethanadream/

[7] Kraemer, *The Christian Message*, 354.

[8] *Ibid.*, 222-3.

[9] *Ibid.*, 353.

[10] Norman Calder, "Sharīʿa," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, C.E. Bosworth et al, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), Vol. IX, 323.

[11] While the historical tendency of Islamic Law has been to specify human behavior down to the last detail, it is interesting to note the opposite impulse in the law of Christ. After listing a number of individual commandments, Paul writes that all of the commandments "are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Rom. 13:9, cf. Matt. 7:12, James 2:8).

[12] (Melbourne: Deror Books, 2010).

[13] Durie, *Liberty to the Captives*, 75-85.

[14] Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 89-91.

## Recommended Reading

Cragg, Kenneth. *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985.

Durie, Mark. *Liberty to the Captives: Freedom from Islam & Dhimmitude through the Cross*. Melbourne: Deror Books, 2010.

Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.

Krabill, James R., David W. Shenk, and Linford Stutzman, eds. *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005.

Kraemer, Hendrik. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. London: International Missionary Council, 1938.

Nazir-Ali, Michael. *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007.

Nickel, Gordon. *Peaceable Witness among Muslims*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1999.

Schlorff, Samuel. *Discipleship in Islamic Society*. Upper Darby: Middle East Resources, 1981.

Shenk, David W. *Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church: Exploring the Mission of Two Communities*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 2003.

Zahniser, A.H. Mathias. *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples across Cultures*. Monrovia: MARC, 1997.

## Study Questions

1. The author refers a number of times to "methods that erase the lines of Christian identity" or "fashionable mission trends," and lists some of them. Recall at least three of these that have become hindrances to true biblical discipleship.

2. List five key ingredients toward authentic disciple-making among Christians from Muslim background.

3. The author believes we need to recover the biblical practice of renouncing former loyalties and practices. Give two biblical examples where new believers renounced their former ways, either in word or in deed.

# 37 Mission to Nominal Christians

Andreas Isaak

There are millions of nominal Christians in the world today. They can be found in any denomination or church in our secular society. For example, last Sunday we had a special church service in a public building with somewhat different music, drama, and a sermon based on secular movies. Over two hundred people attended the event, of whom about a hundred do not usually attend a church. One person, who is a physician in town, mentioned on the side that he is a Christian, does not believe in the existence of God, and does not see the Bible as having any relevance for his personal life. Jesus was a good man but nothing more. However, he believes in the institution of the church, and also in life after death as a Christian, and likes the religious rituals that a church does. He refuses to make any real spiritual progress, because that would demand denying oneself and following the commands of Christ, which he does not like at all. If this is the case, where does this lead us? Who is a Christian or "nominal Christian"?



Andreas Isaak (M.A., Theology; M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary; D.Min. candidate, Columbia International University) has been pastor of the MB church in Burghausen, Germany since 2002. In this area, 90% of the population belong to the church and call themselves Christians, yet only 5% of them attend church regularly.

## A Definition of "Nominal Christian"

The *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism* (*LCWE*) defines a "nominal" Christian as "a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord." The person might give intellectual assent to basic Christian doctrines, be faithful in practicing the Christian tradition of faith, attend worship services, be an active member in church affairs, and yet never experience a conversion or personal relationship with Jesus Christ.[1] The *LCWE* also suggests that nominal Christianity is more often found wherever the church is more than one generation old.[2]

Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk suggest that "nominalism" is a major issue in our secular society today. They assert that "many traditionally Christian populations know nothing of a personal faith, true repentance, and a trust in the finished work of Christ for their salvation," and estimate that 1.2 billion people are "nominal and non-practicing 'Christians'."[3] According to Rommen, a nominal Christian may even participate in religious activities in the church on a weekly basis, and participate in fellowship with followers of Jesus, but in their hearts and minds they demonstrate apathy or even unbelief towards Scripture, and the divinity and sovereignty of Jesus Christ.[4]

The *LCWE* notes that a nominal Christian is someone who, within the Christian tradition, would call himself a Christian. This is how they are also regarded by society, but they have no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith. The conversion or commitment of a person involves a transforming personal relationship with Christ.[5] This relationship is characterized by the "fruit of the Spirit" whose qualities include love, faith, hope, joy, and peace; by a desire to have fellowship with God, to study the Bible, to pray, to have fellowship with other Christians, to witness faithfully; by a deep love; by a concern for God's will to be done on earth; and by a living hope of heaven (Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 13; Rom. 2:28-29, 10:8-10; Rev. 2:3-5, 3:1; Matt. 28:18-20; Heb. 10:25).

Essentially, a nominal Christian is one who does not really believe in the Bible and that Jesus should be the lord of his or her life. They would actually rather share the lordship over their life between Christ and themselves. One paraphrase quotes Jesus' warning:

> "Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance— isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—*doing* what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored

projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'" (Matt. 7:21-23 from "The Message" by Eugene H. Peterson).

Therefore, we are challenged in secular society to reach nominal Christians with the gospel of Christ and to having a living personal relationship with Jesus. Our approach must be suited to the culture and the type of nominal Christian we are dealing with in our environment. What has caused such a dilemma? How can we reach a secular culture populated with nominal Christians?

## The Causes of Nominal Christianity

### Historical Causes

Christendom began in the fourth century A.D., when the Western church picked up the pieces of a fallen Roman Empire and the church established the vision of God's purpose in the world. The church "attempted to create a Christian civilization, to shape laws consonant with the biblical teaching, to place kings and emperors under the explicit obligation of Christian discipleship".[6] The church defined the purposes for each area of life so that government, education, art, architecture, literature, music, personal morality, community life, and even economics marched to Christianity's drum".[7] From this period on, the church became the source and center of Western culture and influenced every area of Western life, thoughts and activity. This was the beginning of "nominal Christianity" - either you were in the "Christian environment" or you were out of the "Christian society."

Western culture and Christian civilization are characterized by a host of artistic, philosophic, literary, and legal themes and traditions from the Christendom era up to our present day. Christianity has played an important part in the shaping of Western civilization since at least the fourth century and has been influenced by the tradition of rationalism in various spheres of life. Culture in general has been developed by Christian influence, Hellenistic philosophy, humanism, secularism, scholasticism, the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. This has led to a society of free thought, human rights, and the need for equality and democracy. These in themselves are not bad but they prepared the ground for an environment of "nominal Christianity."

The Christendom church has proclaimed for years and even up to this day that infant baptism, taking the first Communion, getting married, and being buried in the church are the key sacraments for someone to be saved. This has definitely led towards a "Christianity" that is based on rituals or tradition yet often far away from

a personal encounter or relationship with Jesus Christ. It is strange that many such Christians are convinced that if you live a good life, be nice to people, do good deeds, and attend church once or twice a year then you are a Christian. Is this what Christianity means?

The state-church has played a key role of distinguishing between who is part of the Christian culture and who is out of the Christian circle. According to Hunter there are two causes of how the church alienated the people: "the first cause of Christianity's loss of influence upon Western people and culture was such a series of events – Renaissance, Reformation, Nationalism, Science, Enlightenment, and Urbanization … the second cause was the church's pathological pattern of responses to these events – responses that undermined the church's credibility and distanced the people from her witness." [8] This has often led people to be part of rituals or tradition with their mind and actions, but not to be involved in Christian faith with their hearts or be convinced it is the truth.

In regular interactions with people in Germany, it becomes apparent that many people have never read the Bible, or heard the Gospel, and have never had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In our Western society today it is a strange reality that many people believe they are Christians, but do not believe in the fundamental convictions of Christianity and the Bible. According to the German magazine *Focus* (April 10, 2012), there are even representatives of the church who neither believe that Jesus was the Son of God, nor that he had been resurrected. When the Christian faith is reduced to the principle "be nice to each other," then one can be converted even though one does not believe in God. However, there are other reasons that have led toward a society of nominal Christians.

**Theological Causes**

The secularization of the mind of our society over the last few centuries has led the church into a theological dilemma and into nominal Christianity. According to Rommen, secularization led to a critical questioning of the biblical text, the historical Christ and tradition common to the church. As a result, a number of common biblical truths were thrown overboard in Western society.[9] With Strauss, Bauer, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche, Western society left behind theological and religious thinking about orthodoxy, revelation, and miracles, and ceased to believe in absolute truth. This led Western society to strip God, theology, and the church of its relevance[10]. One might say that nominal Christians hate the doctrine of truth but love the "fellowship," yet therein is a big contradiction. One cannot have true spiritual fellowship without agreeing on true and essential biblical doctrines.

What is biblical truth? If Jesus is the truth, the way and the life, and the means of eternal life, then yes, he is the only truth. The teaching of Jesus is therefore the truth for every Christian. If a person who claims to be a Christian begins to argue that Jesus is only one way, and that His commands, the plain teaching of Scripture, are only one truth among many and regards their own opinion on anything to be higher than Scripture, then the person without doubt proves that he/she is a nominal Christian. There are people who oppose God on earth, disregard his commands, and still think that they will one day have a place in heaven. "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14 NASB).

Only Jesus' friends will be with him in heaven for all eternity. However, nominal Christians fail to recognize that Jesus said we can be his friends only if we do what he says. When true Christians stand up for the truth of Christ and Scripture, they will undergo persecution from the world and even from other nominal Christians. That should not be surprising because the nominal Christian will very often take sides with the world, and would rather save face than admit he is wrong when he is confronted with the truth of God. Secularization, social change, and rationalistic interpretation of scriptural truth in society have been major factors that have led to nominal Christianity.

**Sociological Causes**

The early religious motivations of the community have broken away through industrialization in society. Under great pressure from secularization, religious convictions based on the solid theology of Scripture in the church have slowly disappeared from the universities, society, community, and finally also from the church[11]. Such factors as industrialization have led to the development of cities and the breakdown of traditional communities, and have caused changes in people's behavior. The multiple choices of people, individualism, and anonymity of city life have led to the breakdown of communities and, finally, the family unit.

The secularization of society led to the social process of neutralizing the culture and opened the way for the breakdown of the religious traditions in culture.[12] It has also conspired with the intellectual atmosphere of post-enlightenment thought in a way that reinforces the drift into nominal Christianity.[13] The high rate of mobility due to industrialization in many countries also has led to the breakdown of old loyalties toward Christian traditions and Scripture, and was also a major cause of nominal Christianity.

**Philosophical Causes**

The Enlightenment period created an atmosphere hostile to the acceptance of revealed absolute scriptural truth. The philosophical thinking in the last centuries has progressively undermined personal conviction and singular commitment within society and the church tradition. This has led toward pluralism which, with its evenhanded tolerance of rational alternatives, has sapped the enthusiasm for the demands of total commitment.[14] In our society, it has become acceptable to say that all religions are equally valid paths to God. Cultural thinking firmly demands that there is not only one truth. So it is a shame that many church institutions or those nominally Christian have adopted this view and lost their biblical convictions. Weber mentions that materialism has also played a great part in increasing the number of nominal Christians, since religion became secondary; the growth of material prosperity in one's personal life has affected the level of commitment in church life.[15]

**Ecclesiological Causes**

We can also see ecclesiological factors that have encouraged nominal Christianity. Post-Enlightenment thought has pervaded much biblical theology and created intellectual atmospheres within universities that affect the thinking of Christians and non-Christians alike. The preaching and teaching of many pastors in the churches today does not come from an understanding of the Bible as "God's written Word." In some Western societies more than half of the state church pastors do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. This leaves the people without hope of life after death. There has been an emphasis on grace, yet no sin or the need for repentance and without the counterbalancing message of costly discipleship. While our salvation can never be earned, but only received by faith as God's gracious gift, it must be worked out through lives dedicated to God (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Nominal Christianity has been tolerated in our culture, if not encouraged, by pastors for reasons of prestige and even financial advantage for church work. According to LCWE, some churches have preached an undisguised message of justification by works, leading the congregation either to feel pride in their religiosity or a sense of hopeless inadequacy. The churches have too often failed to give help and support to those who have professed conversion.[16] In many churches, there has been a lack of concern for those without Christ being eternally lost. The prayer life has been reduced to the "Lord's Prayer", and every other prayer has been crowded out of the lives of individuals and out of church fellowship. The nominal Christian would rather be a people pleaser than a God pleaser and rather save face than admit he/she is wrong when confronted with the truth of God in Scripture.

Many nominal Christians once had an active faith, but have "de-churched" themselves as a result of some injury, to their pride or their feelings, or some legitimate grievance against the church or its members. People in society have been put off by the failure of the church to answer their most pressing questions with regard to everyday life. Young people have often disowned their parents' faith because it lacks credibility and social awareness. A major cause of nominal Christianity may be a lack of church discipline over admissions to baptism and the Lord's Supper. The biggest and most tragic aspect of nominal Christians' thinking is that they think that they are truly good and accepted by the Lord and will spend eternity with God in heaven. Therefore, a dead orthodoxy or church life can mislead people as much as a lifeless heresy.

We might recognize the complicity of organized churches that has led toward nominal Christianity, and therefore need to seek repentance and find new ways to reach out to secular people. We need a new awareness of God and a new openness to his Holy Spirit, who alone is able to break through to nominal Christians. It is the work of the Holy Spirit alone who can revive and renew our churches so that they can become instruments to reach people today.

## The Need for Renewal in Churches

There is a great need for renewal in today's Christianity. But how do we reach the nominal Christian? One might think about the need for great strategies or smart tools and many other things. However, I believe as people of God that we mostly start with an earnest cry to God in our prayers. Only then will we be blessed and become a blessing to the world. We must repent, seek forgiveness, equip and be empowered by God's Holy Spirit as his people to complete our tasks in the world. In our society today, there is no need for more programs and good speakers; what we really need is more people who are more Christ-like in the way they live.

The early church that is described in Acts 2 was one where new members were added daily. It was a church marked by Christ-like behavior, prayer, following Jesus, worshiping God, close fellowship, and sacrificial sharing of their property. This provided a great loving relationship towards those outside the church, which gave rise to much good will in return. Jesus has called us to follow his pattern, to live alongside those who are lost and be deeply concerned about their salvation. Jesus says in Luke 19:10 that he "came to seek and to save those who are lost," and this should also be our deep desire in following Christ.

Churches have often failed in the past to gather the people of God into His presence and to release its members to be the light in the world. There is a great need

for worship that is based on Scripture and Christ-like in its expression. The ministry of the church in the world needs to be holistic in preaching and serving the Gospel to the people. Our lifestyle must be indigenous in its expression as we practice our faith through "everyday evangelism" to our neighbors, coworkers, and family. The churches we need are those that place Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, worship, prayer, discipleship, passion for the lost, serving, and evangelism at the center of their existence and practice. The church must encourage every member to practice his/her gifts given by God and to live a holistic Christ-like life in everyday contexts. However, the growth of the Kingdom of God throughout the world is part of spiritual warfare in which we are all involved and must be skilled to fight against as a church. Therefore, we continue to ask ourselves: how can nominal Christians be reached?

## How does one Evangelize Nominal Christians in a Secular Society?

Recently a regional newspaper in Bavaria revealed that 89% of the population are members of the state church. A day later I asked the pastor of a local church: how many people attend the church? Of the 3600 members of the church who believe that through baptism they have received the grace of God unto eternal life, about 30 people had been at the Sunday service. Yet all would call themselves Christian even though they have not been to church for years or even possess a Bible. Is the church becoming lost and in need of salvation? If the church will not prayerfully prepare evangelistic projects that are rooted in the culture of the society and start to witness in a natural way through the lives of the individual members, it is lost. The Gospel needs to be preached and lived. In Acts 2 we see that the members of the church were embedded in the culture, which provided an authentic witness to the people and then led to daily conversions. Therefore, all true Scripture and church-based evangelism starts in natural "personal evangelism" through the lives of individual church members.

The Great Commission in Matthew is given to all believers in every situation in life and is not only applicable on Sunday at the church services. Therefore, there is a call for the church to perform "everyday evangelism" from Monday through Friday, where each member lives a holistic Christ-like life by witnessing the Gospel to the people in their own cultural setting. One might talk about personal witness/evangelism of the individual Christian and the cooperative witness/evangelism of the Christian's church family life.

**The Personal Witness of the Individual Christian**

The personal witness of the individual Christian is the key for reaching our secular society, where thousands call themselves Christians yet never have a personal experience of conversion. The individual Christian is more likely to have good contacts with nominal Christians at work, in social clubs, organizations, and in the neighborhood. The church is therefore obligated to nurture its members in sharing their faith in a personal witness or at a personal relationship level. Having contact with nominal Christians is definitely the most effective and authentic way to witness.

The members of the church will only be effective in sharing their faith and commending Christ in the world if they are helped and can draw nurture from the church that we have been envisioning above. A follower of Christ is more likely to have confidence to witness to secular people or nominal Christians if they have had personal contact and are rooted in small groups, such as home fellowship. The church is therefore obligated to give its members opportunities in small fellowship groups and to equip its members in performing their duty of witnessing to others.

As mentioned in Acts 8, all witness must be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the aspiration of the unbeliever. Practical tools and training can, however, make people more effective in explaining their faith and leading others to a personal relationship with Christ. Often Christians do not feel sufficiently equipped at crucial points in helping someone to respond to Christ. Therefore, programs of evangelism or witnessing could provide confidence, experience, and are to be commended by the church. However, people mainly respond to personal witness in everyday evangelism.

**The Witness of Christian Family Life**

Inviting nominal Christians to church might be an option for evangelism, yet the key will be a personal relationship witness. Hospitality and personal friendship are a vital ministry in the home and also in church settings. Sharing food around a table is a tradition dating back to New Testament times. Today it remains the most effective tool to reach people in a dialogue during dinner or over coffee, where one shares life, activities and, in a natural way, one's faith and the gospel. The lesson that we clearly get is that we must be prepared to meet people where they are. We can then seek in a gentle and natural way to take them onwards into activities that might help them to discover a living faith in Christ and live as dedicated Christians.

Does the church practice hospitality and provide a personal and family atmosphere to the visitors? If so it will open up the possibility in the church for a ministry that is based on relationships. Churches need to plan services of worship that are personal,

familiar, joyful, and creative in celebrating Christ. They also need to be sensitive to the needs of those who are seeking Christ. The life of the church mostly takes place in the world, but is not part of the world – just as Jesus prayed to the Father, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."(John 17:14-18 NIV).

The true Christian, unlike the nominal Christian, desires spiritual maturity instead of being worldly and getting along with this world or participating in worldly amusements, activities, and conversations. If the Christian outlook is not radically different from the world's, and if people cannot see you as different because you really are sold out to love Jesus Christ, the church will not reach out or witness to nominal Christians.

The regular life of the church must be a place for a family, where people experience love, hope, joy, care, and friendship through the services. This will be a powerful witness by itself. A Christian home, where conversation takes place at a personal and friendship level, which builds trust and confidence within the relationship, might be an ideal place for small groups and be a powerful witness of Christian family life. A personal relationship of family to family or person to person will build trust and confidence. The church must emphasize the everyday personal evangelism and witness of Christ of its members, which is rooted in the context of the society.

**The Witness of the Congregation: Understanding and Meeting Needs**

Everyday evangelism through personal individual witness, in Christian homes, small groups and the outward-looking life of the local church within the cultural setting must be prayerfully prepared. The outcome of evangelism is shown in the quality of the relationships that Christians build up with their neighbors and nominal friends at work and organizations. Such friendship must be constantly encouraged by church leadership and cannot be "turned on" when required by church activities. Churches are the main platform for evangelism and mission work, but it must be developed and equipped at a personal, individual, everyday witness level in a natural way through friendship in order to be effective in reaching nominal Christians.

A nominal Christian might attend church for different occasions such as marriages, baptisms, and sickness, and also want their children to be religious. These are often vital times for contact with church members, and these moments in life give rise to openness from the Spirit, which may be the best opportunities for the Gospel to be shared. Again, we see the local church as the main platform for this kind of

evangelism, but the church needs to be present and rooted in the social contexts of the community in order to reach the people in an authentic way with the Gospel. One cannot reach people unless one understands them first. How do we reach the community and the unchurched nominal Christians? The nominal see the church as irrelevant to their lives, and have no connection between church and their daily life, work, family, and relationships. For many the church is perceived as a waste of time. The church is therefore obligated to find ways to get the attention of the unchurched.

According to Hunter, the great communicators to secular people today -- like Rick Warren, Jim Harnish, or Bill Hybels -- argue that one needs to understand the needs of the people before we will can communicate to their hearts and reach their needs. Warren's emphases are (1) that God is a personal God, who cares about your life and wants a personal relationship with everyone; (2) that God is in control over all things – even if things are out of our control they are not out of His control; (3) we cannot control the things that happen to us, yet with the Holy Spirit's guidance and power we can control our response.[17] Harnish speaks about five affirmations for secular seekers: "(1) God is good. (2) God understands you. (3) God has already won the victory in Christ. (4) God is involved in this world. (5) The church has a role in this, as the Body of Christ and the community of faith with a mission in the world."[18] Hybels argues the essential message within two affirmations: (1) every one matters to God, no matter how far one has fallen. (2) The Christian's life is not just a preparation for death; God has a purpose in life for everyone that will bring satisfaction and fulfillment, even if life is very challenging along the way.[19]

The above arguments and perspectives show us how communication and faith is expressed through interpersonal witness. Therefore, the Christian faith and the Gospel need to be communicated by the church in a way that (1) shows a commitment to Christ and God's will, (2) can be experienced for everyone in their everyday lives and (3) emphasizes living in a new relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God; others in the church; the world around us; and ourselves.

Churches might also hold an introduction to Christianity course, family services, or many kinds of programs or projects that use modern Bible translations and language more likely to be understood by nominal Christians, and be part of the local culture.

## Integrating Converts into the Church Family

The task of the church will then be to integrate the new converts into the Body of Christ. The challenge is to move the converts from nominal Christianity into the worshipping community of Christ. Yet, this should not be a problem for the church if it models itself on the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47). However, too many

churches and Christians have become very egocentric in their thinking and live a very individualistic Christian life. This creates the challenge for today's churches of being authentic towards Scripture and the model of the early church. The requirements of such a church have already been noted above: vital patterns of worship, letting the Holy Spirit work, regular Bible teaching, fellowship and caring groups, ministries involving every member and utilizing all the gifts of the Spirit, a sense of God-consciousness, expectancy that God will work, and a constant measure of joy.

Unfortunately, a great problem that continues to occur is that many individual Christians find that when they have led a friend to Christ, they have failed to introduce the new convert to the local church, since churches are not open to new people and have become comfortable with their programs. This problem is especially painful for those who are active in everyday evangelism. There is a need for churches that are always open both for those Christians who have supported their local church for years, and for those who are new converts that will suffer if they are not nurtured carefully.

The best solution to this dilemma will probably be for strong, mature Christians to take clear responsibility for the nurturing of new converts. This will require regular mid-week sessions like home Bible groups, while still encouraging loyal support for Sunday worship at the local church. Such sessions could be at the personal relationship level on a one-to-one basis, or in the setting of a small group meeting.

## Conclusion

The mission of the church is to fulfill Christ's Great Commission and preach the gospel to all peoples. One might acknowledge that there are many other issues involved in the problem of nominal Christianity. Therefore, there is a great need to understand more clearly the current philosophical, theological, eschatological, and sociological issues that influence people to become nominal Christians. There are many issues that lead to nominalism. Ways to reach those who lose their way over the years will be an ongoing challenge to the church, particularly in the West, in this generation.

Many local churches have immediate access to the huge "people group" of secular people and nominal Christians. Therefore, I believe it is the task of the local church, as the Body of Christ, to take ownership, and to live out its God-given gifts through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only if the gifts of the Holy Spirit are being lived out by the Body of Christ can the reconciling and transforming love of God reach these lost people. It was Christ who came to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk.19:10). The concerns of Christians are to be regularly present in society, praying for God's blessing and seeking to exercise Christ-like influence wherever they can

in the world. For this task, we as mature Christians are called to use our hands and invite all those in similar situations to join us in unity, love, and expectation through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## Notes

[1] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics, Lausanne Occasional Papers* 10 (Pattaya: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980), accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/55-lop-10.html**.**

[2] Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Protestants, Lausanne Occasional Papers 23* (Pattaya: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980), accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/66-lop-23.html.

[3] Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 13–14.

[4] Edward Rommen, *Namens Christentum: Theologisch-sociologische Erwägungen* (Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1985), 85-87.

[5] LCWE, *Protestants LOP 23.*

[6] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 129.

[7] George G. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 23.

[8] Hunter, *Secular People,* 29.

[9] Edward Rommen, *Namens Christentum: Theologisch-sociologische Erwägungen* (Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1985), 23.

[10] Martin Marty, *Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 47.

[11] Max Weber, *Soziologie-Weltgeschichte-Analysen* (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1968), 375.

[12] L. Shiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (Fall 1967): 220.

[13] LCWE, *Protestants LOP 23.*

[14] Ibid.

[15] Weber, *Soziologie*, 374.

[16] LCWE, *Protestants LOP 23.*

[17] Hunter, *Secular People,* 127

[18] Ibid.

[19] Hunter, *Secular People,* 128

## Recommended Reading

Hunter III, George G. *How to Reach Secular People.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Johnstone, Patrick and Jason Mandryk. *Operation World: 21st Century Edition.* Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001.

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics, Lausanne Occasional Papers 10.* Pattaya: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980. Accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/55-lop-10.html.

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Protestants, Lausanne Occasional Papers 23.* Pattaya: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1980. Accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/66-lop-23.html.

Marty, Martin. *Three Paths to the Secular.* New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Creeks: The Gospel and Western Culture.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986.

Rommen, Edward. *Namens Christentum: Theologisch-sociologische Erwägungen.* Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1985.

Weber, Max. *Soziologie-Weltgeschichte-Analysen.* Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1968.

## Study Questions

1. It might be said that the church needs to go to the nominal Christian, rather than invite them (to programs, events, etc.) – an Incarnational model. If so, how are you preparing and encouraging people in your church for this? Is everyone responsible for themselves or have you devised ways for people to connect to nominal Christians together with others – so they don't do it alone?

2. What insights or new ideas can you derive from the article? Spend some time thinking quite openly together. Encourage any and all ideas to surface – no matter how impossible to conceive – for a period of time (allow 10 to 15 minutes). Record them where all can see. Then sit back and reflect together to see if concrete, doable ideas and plans can develop.

# 38

## Perspectives on Social Ministries and Community Development

Jamie Munday and Murray Nickel

## Social Ministries

**(Jamie Munday)**

### Common Questions

"Why don't you just stick to church planting and let us worry about social development?" This question—put to us by an expert in a large Christian development organization—challenged the very core of what we believe about social

Jamie Munday (M.A., Theological Studies, Regent College; M.Sc.Econ., Social Development and Policy, University of Wales) has served as Social Development Coordinator with MB Mission since 2008. Previously he worked in relief and development with Campus Crusade for Christ and World Vision. He grew up in Willingdon Church (MB) in Burnaby, Canada. Currently Jamie and his family are on a missionary assignment with MB Mission.
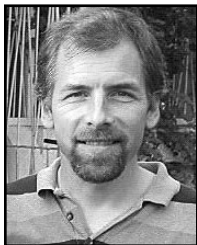
Murray Nickel (M.D.) is an emergency physician from Abbotsford, Canada. He spent many years growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and later serving there as a medical missionary together with his family on assignment with MB Mission. He returns frequently to the DRC to nurture friendships, learn from the poor, and serve wherever he can. He is the author of *Rhythms of Poverty* (5n2 Concepts, 2013).

development. Murray and I had requested this gentleman's input on a fledgling savings and loan program that had sprung up within a group of MB church communities in Congo with whom we had been working.

As development practitioners working with MB Mission, our projects tended to be small in scale and tied into a deeper emphasis on spiritual transformation. Most of these projects had developed organically from within poor church communities, and therefore had humble beginnings and modest goals.

But were these projects inconsequential in light of the much broader impact made by larger and seemingly more efficient organizations? Is it possible that the poor would be better served by allowing the "professionals" to address the complex social issues of our time, while leaving the church to focus on the all-important spiritual ones? What is the relationship between the social and the spiritual when it comes to the mission of the church?

The response we received that day is one that, unfortunately, still reverberates across the sphere of Evangelicalism. Some Christians, like the aforementioned "development professional," will draw a line between the social and the spiritual as a matter of *efficiency.* According to this line of thinking, those who focus their energy solely on social development can logically do it more proficiently. Conversely, those who focus their time and energy on the spiritual—such as evangelism or church planting—can do that with greater effectiveness.

Others will make the separation between social and spiritual as a matter of *priority*. In other words, they feel that social outreach is important since God commands it, but not as important as sharing the good news. According to this line of reasoning, social outreach is an important act of obedience, but is, at best, a bridge moving one towards the greater priority of verbal proclamation.

### Historical and Theological Contexts for Social Ministry

Whether it is a matter of efficiency or priority, for Christians in the West, the twentieth century has been characterized by this dichotomy between the social and the spiritual. In Latin America, it was the advent of Liberation Theology in the sixties that shone a light on the relationship between faith and Christian responsibility to the poor. In a society characterized by huge inequalities of power and wealth, Liberation Theology understood the gospel as a message of earthly liberation, which called believers to respond to the down-to-earth implications of the gospel. Over time, this theology of liberation became dangerously interconnected with political ideologies and at the same time disconnected from certain core biblical values such as love, grace and peace. As the influence of Liberation Theology began to wane in the mid-eighties, the church was left with a residue of anxiety towards any social action

or practical response to poverty or injustice. This, in effect, increased the artificial gap between the down-to-earth outworking of the kingdom and the more spiritual elements of the faith.

In North America it was the Social Gospel movement of the early twentieth century that helped to accentuate this dichotomy. During a dire time in American history marked by poverty, urban violence and social unrest, adherents to the Social Gospel sought to apply Christian ethics to these problems and bring the kingdom to bear upon the situation. As these so-called "liberals" grew in prominence they began to come into opposition with more conservative churches who felt that the fundamental values of the faith were being threatened. Many of these "fundamentalists" were not opposed to the practical application of biblical justice, but were concerned that the Social Gospel was soft on other key tenets of the gospel—most notably the call to repentance from sin.

Prominent social activist Ronald Sider suggests that orthodox Christians were right to call attention to the heresies of the Social Gospel; however, in doing so these same Christians disavowed their own responsibility to the poor. Many of them steered clear of any social ministries for fear that it might identify them with mainline Christianity or liberal theology in general.

This social-spiritual dichotomy was also being felt on the mission field. In his autobiography *Educating Tiger*, former missionary Jacob Loewen[1] described himself as a "gung ho soul-winner [who] disdained all relief work as social gospel." Over time, however, Loewen began to recognize that a complete witness of Christ demanded a "consistent Christian lifestyle." Later on, back in North America, he came to this conclusion: "Gradually I had to realize that Jesus himself had made no distinction between physical and spiritual help in his ministry."[2]

As Jacob Loewen discovered seventy odd years ago, it is becoming clear in our time that the polarities of word and deed must be brought together in subjection to Christ. He communicated the gospel as a whole-body experience, culminating in his bodily death on the cross. Ultimately the spoken truth of the gospel was substantiated by his propensity to bring it to bear on people's lives in real and tangible ways. He was not only pointing us towards a future hope, but initiating a new kingdom that was immediate and palpable.

When seen through the lens of the *kingdom* - revealed most clearly in the life and teachings of Christ—a more complete rendering of God's missional purposes come into view. Through this lens, the good news of personal salvation, the hope of earthly justice, and the anticipation of apocalyptic glory begin to coalesce into one *holistic* gospel. Through the kingdom paradigm, there is no room for the tired dichotomies

of word and deed. While evangelism—as a verbal expression of the kingdom—remains imperative, its expression is incomplete apart from this holistic witness to the in-breaking kingdom of God.

In recent years, a number of biblical scholars have pointed us back to the *kingdom of God* as a primary motif for the missiological endeavor.[3] In *Announcing the Reign of God,* Mortimer Arias, proclaims that, "a comprehensive New Testament theology of the kingdom will not let us take refuge in our favorite dichotomies that plague our internal debate concerning the spiritual and material."[4]

While the "kingdom of God does not come by careful observation" (Luke 17:20), as Jesus forewarns, the New Testament is clear that the kingdom is manifest when God's people move forward in active obedience. As Christians communicate the good news of the gospel in *earthly* and *physical* expressions, the *heavenly* and *spiritual* are rightly revealed—consequently creating fertile ground for God's Word to take root. For this reason, our theoretical understanding of the kingdom is authenticated when it is applied to a lost, needy and broken world.

Ultimately, a holistic understanding of Jesus' kingdom objectives should broaden the focus of mission. Social ministries have value not only because they can lead to evangelistic opportunities, but more importantly, because they can be a physical manifestation of the good news, and play an important role in articulating what that news is. Whether the kingdom is revealed in physical or spiritual manifestations, the underlying theme is the transformative power of God. While the manner of communication is important, it is *transformation* that articulates the wider objective of mission.

### An Incarnational Approach

Whatever we may understand theologically about holistic ministry, it is useless if it cannot gain a foothold in a world that is tangible and pragmatic. This was Jesus' way. He had little time for theological platitudes, instead letting his actions tell the story—touching, healing, feeding, liberating. This lifestyle of ministry is expressed most purely and succinctly in John's introduction: "The word (*logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

The incarnation presents us with an archetype for Christian mission. In one extraordinary event, Jesus brings together the disparate strands of word and deed. Whoever would have expected a spoken Word—God's verbal utterance—to be articulated in the flesh?

The full significance of this event is ably described by Darrell Guder. The incarnation is both the event of salvation and the way in which God's saving purposes are accomplished … it is both the *what* and the *how*."[5]

So as we abandon our comforts and move into the dark, cold places where the poor and marginalized reside we become a walking, breathing illustration of *what* the gospel is. When we are in step with the Spirit, our loving deeds to the poor have the ability to breathe life into the ancient text so that the gospel is both animated and uniquely focused. In this respect, our bodies are like a canvas on which the vibrant strokes of the gospel might be painted to be understood in ways that text and spoken words may not fully convey. As we listen to the poor and shoulder their burdens, we not only point to Christ, but we also point to a coming kingdom in which "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). This too is the *what* of the gospel.

However, as we minister incarnationally, we are not only communicating the what, but also *how* the good news is meant to happen. Throughout the New Testament there is a sense that the gospel—its life, grace, redemption and transformation—is both imminent and palpable. Jesus arrived not only proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Luke 4:43), but also hinting at something more: "The kingdom is near; it is within you; it is among you" (Luke 17:20-21). Obviously, the incarnation was changing the very landscape of the salvation story, so that through Christ, the kingdom was somehow being substantiated in a new and exhilarating way. Yet we also see that Jesus imparts this ministry onto the disciples, and ultimately onto the church (Luke 10:8-9, 2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 3:10); "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:8-9). So we also carry the kingdom within us as we minister to the poor and disenfranchised. As the oppressed are freed, the naked are clothed, the hungry are fed and sinners are redeemed, the gospel becomes both imminent and palpable just as Jesus portended. So the ministry of word and deed is more than an illustration of the good news, but the very unleashing of its power and presence into the world.

## Unto What?

As Christians engage in social ministry of any kind – advocacy, social justice, relief and development - the underlying question must be: "unto what?" Is the objective to feed the hungry? To liberate the poor? To provide credit, jobs, seeds, water, rights, democracy? While all of these are worthy endeavors, they find their ultimate meaning in the broader context of the in-breaking kingdom. It is through this lens that we should view social ministries, whether in planning, implementing, or evaluating. If our plans are not subjected to the greater purposes of the kingdom, we risk getting lost along the lesser path of our personal ambitions.

On the other hand, as we hold up the kingdom as the "unto what" objective of social ministry, we invite God's Spirit to intercede with transformative power. Transformation is the evidence of the kingdom. When John the Baptist inquired whether Jesus was the one who is to come, Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22). Why does Jesus not give a clear answer to John's question, "Are you the one who was to come?" For Jesus, the answer is self-evident, so he simply outlines these accounts of kingdom transformation as if to say, "What did you expect?"

## Recent Shifts

Interestingly, transformation has also become a central theme within the sector of international relief and development. This has been evidenced by a categorical shift from "growth-centered" to "people-centered" development. 1991 was a significant year in this shift, as the United Nations Development Programme introduced the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is a composite statistic including life expectancy, education, and income indices used to rank countries in their human development. The HDI reflects a new appreciation for *people* as the ultimate beneficiaries of development, as opposed to more growth-oriented outcomes which often measured by broader political and economic indicators.

More recently, we have seen a new appreciation for *people* (the poor) as more than beneficiaries of development, but as agents of transformation. In its 2013 annual report the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development proclaimed that "new development goals need to focus on developing people." [6] Central to this new approach is the idea that sustainable, long-term development is achieved by investing in people_moving them from the role of beneficiaries to active citizens and agents of change. It is not enough for the poor to have their needs met, when their greatest need is to live with dignity and self-respect_having the mental and emotional conviction necessary to overcome the barriers of poverty. For external actors, this means stepping back and encouraging the poor to take ownership of their own vision, ideas and assets in order to create their own positive change.

One conclusion to be drawn is that, amongst social development actors, the focus on human transformation is not strictly the domain of the religiously motivated. A more important conclusion however, is that given the new landscape of people-centered development, the experience and aptitudes of Christian field workers

and agencies to facilitate human transformation should make them increasingly relevant both in Christian missions and to some degree across secular relief and development sectors.

## What Do You Have?

At its core, the gospel bestows dignity and purpose, which coincidentally are the outcomes deemed necessary by development scholars who are advocating for people-centered change.

In his seminal work on transformational development (*Walking with the Poor*), Bryant Myers suggests that "the fulcrum for transformational change is no longer transferring resources or building capacity or increasing access, agency, and choices, as important as these things are ... these things count only if they take place in a way that allows the poor to recover their true identity and discover the vocation God intends for them."[7]

A short narrative from Acts 4 emphasizes the significance of dignity in the process of social ministry. A man who is clearly disabled from birth approaches two of the apostles and asks them for money. After hearing the man's request, Peter commands him, "Look at me!" It is a shocking remark because, for a first-century Jew it flies in the face of social convention. With trembling hands extended, and eyes cast downward, "Look at me!" marks the beginning of this man's transformation. You can almost see his posture begin to change, even before his physical disability is healed.

Ultimately what Peter offers is more meaningful and transformative than money: "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). Aside from physical healing however, he has given him dignity. To look into the eyes is to consider one's being, and to recognize their value and significance. It is to renounce any perceived hierarchy or condescension and to see the individual for who they are.

It is not enough to have the poor contribute to their own development. Rather, they must be the primary agents of change, providing the vision, energy and leadership needed to achieve their goals. As the poor invest in their own ideas, relying on their own community and expending their own blood, sweat, and tears, the outcomes will go beyond the physical. This very process of engagement is transformative as community actors grow in dignity and their sense of purpose.

The role of the missionary or development practitioner is not to instill something upon the poor, but rather it is to encourage something that already exists. Instead of asking "what do you need?" we must look into the eyes of the poor, and ask "what

do you have?" Inherent to this question is the belief that God has uniquely created and qualified each person—and acting upon that recognition is the beginning of transformational development.

In 2 Kings 4, a woman laments to Elisha that her husband has died and she is about to lose her children as indentured slaves. Elisha responds to her need by asking, "*What do you have* in your house?" She replies, "Nothing," overlooking for the moment a small jar of olive oil tucked away in her cupboard. When she recognizes this important asset and faithfully offers it to God, it becomes the source of transformation both in the life of her family and the wider community.

"What do you have?" represents a seismic shift in development thinking. In my experience it is so counterintuitive that the initial response of the poor is often bewildered silence, since they are accustomed to working with sympathetic benefactors and problem-solvers. It is not, however, a quick-fix methodology, but an attitude by which we must relate with the poor and evaluate the merit of our poverty interventions. It is a question that negates the self-importance of the giver, while affirming the significance of the poor as valued citizens and agents of change.

Far from a how-to approach to social ministry, this essay has considered development strategy at a more foundational level. The hope is that from this starting point we might set off with confidence down roads of advocacy, peacebuilding, relief and all sorts of other social activities with the faith that our interventions might go beyond social change to invoke kingdom transformation. What is essential is that we see the poor for who they are—as God sees them. As we lay aside easy and reflexive solutions and look into the eyes of the poor, we see that transformation is not rooted in good strategy but in our willingness to invite Christ into every initiative, praying "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

## Community Development
### (Murray Nickel)

### Introducing Community Development

If you've been to Paris you may have been to the Palais de Chaillot without knowing it.  At the Palais complex a large open space is hemmed in by two grand neoclassical buildings and eight bronze statues. Hundreds of tourists come daily to gaze across the fountains and over the river at the most well-known structure in Paris, the Eiffel Tower. Many people who come here don't know that this square has its own significant history. It's here that the iconic picture of Hitler was taken after the Germans rolled into Paris. More importantly, it's here the United

Nations (UN) General Assembly met on December 10, 1948, and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in reaction to the barbarities of World War II. As a memorial to that event the square at Palais de Chaillot is called the Human Rights Esplanade.

The UN document drafted at the Palais was surprisingly insightful given that it was written in an age of modernism and paternalistic attitudes towards less developed states. The first article states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."[8]  If these ideas sound familiar it's because they closely reflect what you've read in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

The UN elaborated on these principles years later defining community development as "a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative."[9] Unfortunately, these words have done little to quell the suffering resulting from all the wars and oppression the world has seen since 1948. Who is assigned the task of designing the "process?" And who defines what "progress" looks like? We in the North tend to dictate a process of community development for the south even though we aren't sure what the process is. We agree that community development is our Christian responsibility but we're uncertain what progress looks like.

**Community Development As Process And Progress**

When I moved to the Democratic Republic of the Congo I had high hopes of immersing myself in community development. But my optimism rapidly faded. The challenges of understanding a new culture and learning to communicate within a context of war, paranoia, and poverty were almost more than I or my family could handle. Just getting food on the table for supper took so much energy. The sacrifice was greater than I had expected. I questioned seriously the value of my presence in Congo. Questions about process and progress filled my mind, and I wasn't sure if there were acceptable answers.

As I visited people in Congo and asked questions I began to see what community development meant to people in the past and in the present. I remember visiting a school built by past missionaries. It had seen better days. The roof was half gone, the windows had long been removed, the blackboards were barely discernible and the worn-out desks had been covered with wooden planks. I thought of all the prayers, sweat and maybe even tears that went into raising funds, building the school and supporting missionary teachers. I couldn't help but feel disappointed.

Soon after this experience I was eating a meal with some of my colleagues and as we reminisced about the 'good old days' I was struck by a hopeful thought. Here I was, sitting at the table with a man with the grandest vision I've ever seen for good governance and effective leadership. He had worked incredibly hard to obtain an education locally and overseas to acquire the necessary skills. Another colleague was a self-made consultant for administrators and business people. He was so popular that he was now in demand internationally. Another was an agriculturalist encouraging local farmers to form associations. What did they have in common? They had all been students at that run-down school. Each of them acknowledged that their motivation to push forward in Christ-like service to their community came from the inspiration they received at that school. Their stories weren't about the building or the blackboards. They talked about the teachers. It was the relationships that mattered. The hopelessness I had felt about a past project was gone; in its place was amazement at its immeasurable success.

As I considered the experience of my Congolese colleagues I began to see that the core of community development process needs to be relationship and mutual respect, not projects or programs. I see a clear analogy here to our faith walk. The decision to follow Christ is a critical moment. But transformation of our lives and of our character comes as we discover how to follow. This is Christian discipleship. Discipleship centers around relationship. The process of community development looks more like discipleship to me than like secular charity.

Community development is an act of costly obedience, not a pastime. It is not simply a good work, nor a guilt-ridden task. We take on the challenge because we are passionate about loving others. Healthy development emphasizes our equality rather than drawing attention to our class differences. Those who possess power are willing to give it up for the benefit of the disempowered. Oppressive leaders are not good at this, but Christians should be. Bonhoeffer lived and died by his words: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."[10] When we practice true community development, attending to people's social needs is inseparable from and fully integrated with meeting Christ and coming to know Him.

If "process" is analogous to discipleship, how do we define "progress"? It doesn't follow that progress is achieved by meeting program objectives. My view is that progress in community development is the transformation of an individual or a community into followers of Jesus Christ. Of course, program objectives are important markers. A program to feed the hungry might have the objective to feed a certain number of people in need of food. Attaining these objectives is progress, but not the transformational progress that is necessary to achieve community development.

The success of a community development model shouldn't be measured by the end results of a program. Programs come and go. People in a feeding program get hungry again. A clinic built in a project may be burned down during the next rebel advance. This kind of "failed" project does not equal failed community development. A changed people remain. The progress we look for must be something more permanent—a transformed community of Christ-followers. We should remember that the opposite holds true as well. A program that looks successful doesn't necessarily translate to successful community development. In fact, it may distract us from our ultimate goal of changed lives.

It may sound like I'm dismissing programs and projects altogether, but they are important cogs in a wheel. What we need to remember is that they are not the wheel itself. Methods change from year to year. What was relevant or fashionable in my parents' generation may not apply today. What works in Congo may not work in Thailand. Worldviews change with the times and across cultures. It's critical that we hold loosely to our methods and constantly revisit them.

## Community Development, Worldview and Values

A few years into our sojourn in the Congo, a young Congolese colleague of mine died in a terrible motorcycle accident. According to his family it was not the slippery road or the lack of a helmet that led to his death. He had been cursed by another family. Two Christian families, leaders in their communities, accused one another and caused horrible division in their church. Though Christian belief was present, a strong sense of right and wrong resurfaced from the past and influenced their behavior in a time of crisis. Though this story may sound dysfunctional to our Northern ears, it made me realize that I'm not immune to a dysfunctional sense of right and wrong. I may assume that my worldview is correct, but when I base my methodology on my sense of right and wrong, I run the risk of not achieving the progress in community development that I'm hoping for.

Some years ago a church in the U.S. raised money for university scholarships for students from their denomination in Congo. In follow-up they asked the benefiting students how they were getting along. The students said they were receiving only a fraction of the money being sent. The church in the U.S. accused the university administration of thievery and ended the program. When I reviewed the issues later I found that the administration wasn't stealing the money, but distributing it so that all of the most needy students, including those from other denominations, could benefit. This was not communicated to the givers; now none of the students benefit from the scholarships. Lack of honest communication between parties plays havoc,

damaging relationships. In Congo there is a deep sense that loyalty to your friends trumps transparency with outside parties. In the north it's the opposite; transparency trumps loyalty. Who's right?

Once I recognize the fallibility of my deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong, I gain perspective and recognize my need for humility and guidance. Fortunately, we've been given an example to follow. The process of community development can be guided by Christlike virtue instead of the less dependable virtues of modern society or the G-20 (Group of Twenty major economies). If we have by faith committed ourselves to a life in Christ, it follows that we should want Christlike virtues to guide our behavior. Jesus provides a template for behavioral change and guides the process of community development. Understanding Christlike virtue is an essential element of determining methods for community development.

### The Micah Way of Community Development

Micah was a prophet who provided a template for community development that we can follow. He highlights three foundational community development virtues: justice, mercy, and humility (Micah 6:8). These virtues should be integrated into every community development methodology, no matter what culture or generation.

Micah implores us to do justice. He lives in a context in which the rich are taking advantage of the poor. Poverty is an injustice. Fortunately, there's a sincere desire in the churches of the richer world to intervene and correct the injustice. But we too often charge in with flags held high as heroes coming into battle. Despite our best intentions, we don't always achieve our objective of transformed lives. Poverty is foreign to us. The poor often speak a different language and live in an unfamiliar culture. These barriers must be crossed if we want to bring hope.

Moving against the injustice of poverty does not begin with our sense of what is right or wrong. It starts with understanding the poor. Entering into relationship before jumping into a project or program is imperative for community development. Justice doesn't start with projects designed by the rich. The theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin stated that Christian mission brings everyone "the possibility of understanding that the meaning and goal of history are not to be found in any of the projects, programs, ideologies and utopias…"[11] He says, "The Church… offers to all peoples…a vision which makes it possible to act hopefully when there is no earthly hope, and to find the way when everything is dark and there are no earthly landmarks."[12] Bringing justice to a community starts at the grassroots with the oppressed themselves. What are they saying? This takes time, patience and perseverance, particularly when communicating through cross-cultural filters. To introduce the light of Christ we need to discover where it is dark. It will do no good

for the non-poor to make decisions that are best left to local leadership in poor communities. Justice is rarely cut and dried. An understanding of it develops slowly.

Micah understood that justice needs to be dressed with loving mercy. Mercy is not pity. Acting out of pity does not require sacrifice. Pity is content with a quick fix. Pity doesn't challenge class systems. If justice is the muscle of community development, then mercy is at its heart. With mercy we see that we're all created equal; we are eager to break down class barriers. With mercy we commit ourselves for the long term. Mercy acts out the story of love and reconciliation that was acted out for us. As Christ-followers we willingly and obediently take up the cross. Because God has reconciled us to himself, it is a joy to be a part of his reconciliation among the poor. Bringing mercy into community development implies sacrificial commitment and respect for others. Encouraging local leadership, respecting ideas from the community and coaching ongoing progress are key elements of any program or method. Only God can restore a healthy identity to the poor. "When the poor accept their marred identity and their distorted sense of vocation as normative and immutable, their poverty is complete. It is also permanent unless this issue is addressed and they are helped to recover their identity as children of God, made in God's image, and their true vocation as productive stewards in the world God made for them."[13]

Finally, Micah encourages us to walk with humility. Humility is the underlying attitude that corrects our perspective. A delusional, corrupt oppressor is one of the greatest contributors to poverty. Mobutu, a dictator in the Congo in the eighties, stole billions from his country, causing his people to suffer in abject poverty. He constructed palaces for himself in Europe and flew there regularly on his personal Boeing 747. In the last disastrous days of his rule he managed to escape from his jungle palace on a borrowed cargo plane. As the plane took off under fire from his own supposedly loyal presidential guard, Mobutu found it hard to understand why his people had abandoned him. In order to maintain their illusions of grandeur, the powerful create corrupt frameworks that oppress their people. Power so easily distorts our perspective. With humility we retain a sense of reality.

Our god-complexes compromise our ability to engage in healthy community development. Drawing from Jayakumar Christian's insights, Myers states that, "Transformational development that does not assert God's truth over these self-justifying narratives leaves the structural side of poverty and its causes untouched."[14] Though the poor are shackled by their marred identity, the non-poor are deluded by their arrogance. When we grasp the hands of the poor, we don't have as solid a perch as we think. Perhaps it is more true that we're flailing in the water together with the poor. The poor and the non-poor are both guided by the slow process of experimentation and discovery. The non-poor learn that they are not

heroes. The poor learn that they are not helpless. When we realize this, we can begin community development.

**Conclusion**

Just as discipleship is an important element of our decision to follow Christ, community development is an integral part of planting the church. The goal of community development is not a new clinic or a thriving school, but a behavioral change. Behavioral change implies that corrupt virtues are exposed and Christlike virtues are introduced. It's the process of changing behavior, not the project on the brochure, that's essential for community development. It takes patience and perseverance to find the way through. If you are a Christian, community development is not about telling people how to improve; it's about helping people discover who they are. Emphasis on a Spirit-guided road of mutual understanding, not on our methods and resources, will bring transformation to a community.

## Notes

[1] Jacob Loewen was an MB missionary to Colombia and Panama beginning in the 1940s.

[2] Jacob A. Loewen, *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey*, (Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000), 290.

[3] See, for example, Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); and Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

[4] Arias, *Announcing the Reign*, xvii.

[5] Darrell Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 1-9.

[6] http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/dec/05/end-poverty-economic-growth-new-goals-oecd

[7] Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 116.

[8] "The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights - Article 1," http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr.

[9] Ashridge Conference on Social Development, *Social Development in the British Colonial Territories* (London: Colonial Office, 1954).

[10] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 87.

[11] Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 129.

[12] Ibid., 129.

[13] Myers, *Walking with the Poor,* 76.

[14] Ibid., 74. In this paragraph, Bryant Myers refers to Jayakumar Christian's *Reflections on Poverty and Transformation* lecture series for the World Vision board of directors (March, 1998).

## Recommended Reading

Arias, Mortimer. *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984.

Loewen, Jacob A. *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey.* Hillsboro: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000.

Myers, Bryant. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy.* New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church.* New York: Harper One, 2008.

## Study Questions

1. This chapter hopefully introduced some new perspectives about social change. List three new insights you have gained.

2. In the first section, the author promotes viewing people, especially the poor, not primarily as beneficiaries of charity, but as agents of change for themselves and their community. He then gives two biblical examples in response to the question, "What do you have?" Give two current examples where the poor became change agents and lives were transformed.

3. How important is the Jesus model of incarnation? What about lasting social change without the incarnation of the Body of Christ, the church? Reflect and discuss secular social service vs. Christian social service.

4. Reflect on and review those social ministries you are familiar with. How would you evaluate them in terms of some of the principles discussed in this chapter—incarnation, transformation, kingdom presence, relationships, justice, mercy, humility, etc.?

# 39 Peaceable Witness in Contexts of Conflict

Lutiniko Landu Miguel Pedro,
with David Wiebe

*"An innate hostility toward God is probably best evidenced by humanity's never-ending impulse to wage war."*
—Pierre Gilbert[1]

## Introduction

The world is really in need of peace! The news tells us that peace is really needed everywhere, at all times and in all nations. We receive bad news, trouble, sickness, conflicts and all kinds of information revealing a lack of peace. The world does not really know what peace means.

Because of this the church of Jesus is often called to bear witness in times of conflict. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church exists where peace is absent, and can teach us different lessons as a result. The following examples illustrate "contexts of conflict."

David Wiebe (M.Div., Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary) was the executive director of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches for 10 years. He has served broadly in ministries of Christian education, writing and preaching. Since 2011 he serves as the executive director for the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). He lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

*Civil war*: The church in Angola suffered decades of civil war. As is common, those in conflict were aided by outsiders with economic or ideological interests. Today the MB Church in North African and Middle Eastern countries again is in a context of violent conflict within, along with outside influencers.

*Regional war*: A civil war began in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 1990s which escalated into regional war involving many countries. The MB Church has had opportunity to present a practical peacemaking role.

*Crime-based conflict*: Colombia is notorious for drug cartels that control growing operations and inflict pressure on local farmers and business owners to cooperate with them. Often when people resist, they are forced off their properties and even out of their home towns. Such displacement disrupts communities and local churches as people resettle in cities. The MB Church provides exemplary witness within this context.

*Justice-based conflict*: Colombia (FARC), Peru (Shining Path) and a variety of other countries have guerrilla groups who purport to seek greater justice within the country. Kidnappings and killing are typical strategies and church members often are caught in the middle of an incident. The MB Church has suffered at the hands of such groups and seeks to offer peace-building solutions.

*Land claims*: Panama is an example of ongoing land claims by indigenous people, who also are members of MB Churches. Violence has struck, including the murder of one of their members. The church has been involved with patience and hope despite government indifference and lethargy.

*Religious restrictions and persecution*: While Laos officially supports Christianity, local police or other law enforcement leaders may oppose individual Christians who share the gospel. The MB Church witness has lowered the incidence of crime in some communities and caught the attention of political leaders.

The consequences of conflict situations are far reaching. Poverty, hunger, disease, and homelessness are some of the more obvious. People suffer psychological damage like post-traumatic stress disorders, physical harm, and loss of possessions. Reduced life expectancy, lower birth rates, and other painful consequences affect everyday life. Survivors and their families are tempted to pursue violent solutions.

The church has occasion to introduce *shalom* in many ways, offering a peaceable witness in the context of conflict. *Igreja Evangélica dos Irmãos Menonitas em Angola* (IEIMA – The Mennonite Brethren Evangelical Church in Angola) is one such example.

## Understanding Peace and Conflict

### Peace as Shalom

The concept of peace in Latin, *pax*, means the state of one nation without war; a state of harmony among the members of a group or family. It is relationship, calmness, the tranquility of the soul. In the same way the Greek noun *eirene* refers to the state of calmness of soul, the tranquility of mind, the state of a soul in harmony with oneself as a whole person: mind, soul and spirit, and with others.[2]

The Hebrew *shalom* adds nuance with at least three meanings: First, it refers to the state of victory as read in the story of King Ahab consulting the prophet Micaiah before going to war: "The king says, 'Put this fellow in prison and feed him with bread and water of affliction until I come in peace'" (1 Kings 22:27–28, Amplified).

Second, it refers to the relationship of "one another" through a sense of justice and equality in sharing things. Isaiah 32:16-17 expresses shalom as justice: "The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever."

Third, shalom refers to the state of moral and ethical wellbeing, including disciplined behavior. It is to be good, better, and becoming the best. In this way shalom is the wellbeing of a person or family, as the Lord recommended to his disciples: "'When you enter a house, first say peace to this house'" (Luke 10:5). Peace is the fruit of love as read in Galatians 5:22, the state of being in harmony.

We understand a conflict as a tension among two or more people: a lack of harmony, opposing opinions, and hostility. The main reason for conflicts is that needs are not satisfied.

When conflict arises in a family it should be resolved in love and justice, including looking for the reason for the conflict. What caused the conflict to arise? Who is involved in the conflict (this is merely an initial stage of understanding the conflict)? Further to this we move to ask what interests they have in the conflict. Why are they involved in the conflict or why are they supporting the parts involved? When we understand all these aspects of the conflict we are in a better position to solve the conflict. Usually parts involved know that they want to find peace through mediation, negotiation or traditional methods. Conflict is never altogether good or bad; it is the truth badly understood. In summary, we may understand conflict as lack of peace.

### Conflict Context and Dimensions

We have many conflicts but each has its context and its dimension. The context and dimension are complementary and affect the impact of the conflict. For example, a family conflict over its estate heritage is social in context but its dimensions depend

on the attitude of each part involved in it. There are many contexts in which conflicts arise: social, theological, political, economic, and so on. The Angola civil war context, for example, was political.

The dimension of conflict considers more the depth of conflict and its impact in the society. It is like the hidden part of an iceberg under the surface of the water. Context reflects external elements of the conflict, but dimension is the inner side of the conflict. We must analyze the context of a conflict to see the dimension or roots. The roots of the Angolan civil war are deep, appearing before independence in 1975, evident from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history.

During the conflict these roots could not easily be removed, and were expressed in emotions and behaviors that could be characterized as simple opposition, strong opposition, and extreme opposition to others on the various issues. It affected the church. For example, two evangelical Christians—Mennonite and Pentecostal—could have opposing views on whether Christians can enlist. A radical Mennonite might say, "I disagree strongly when Christians become soldiers" but a moderate Pentecostal might say "I approve."

Some important dimensions that affect conflict are psychological, physiological, sociological and economic.

The psychological dimension of conflict often stems from verbal offenses, committed in words or lies which destroy someone's shalom. They can be hard words that the other side cannot support. They may be hidden secrets publicly revealed to create shame.

The physiological dimension stems from armed and non-armed violence. It can be an attack on an individual or it may be collective—communities may be attacked and destroyed, affecting many people at once. Physical attack may trigger ill health. Its impact can easily touch the mind and the psychological dimension. One sociological dimension of conflict stems from the military defense of a politically organized society (e.g. a civil war or war between two states). This dimension is more disastrous, destroying human lives, materials, and economic resources.

How can the witness of peace make a difference in this kind of context? Can the church actually rise above its context in order to be a witness? Let us consider the church in the Angolan conflict and its witness in that context.

## The Angola Case Study

Beginning in pre-colonial times and continuing through the post-colonial period, traumatic experiences have created much frustration for Angolans. They have inherited customs that have led to extreme violence. A Leninist kind of Marxism that led to decades of civil war was introduced in the post-colonial period (1980s).

Churches were not spared the impact of such policies. In fact some churches adopted a Marxist ideology as a method and model of leadership.

It was during this period that Rev. Makami Mpovi started the MB work in Angola. Much hatred was present between brothers, even between Christians. Angolans who had fled to the Congo were not given easy access in returning to their own country. Once there, the reception by fellow countrymen was often one of hatred. A pejorative term "*langa,*" referring to Angolans returning from Congo who were not welcome, is illustrative of the hatred that was common in daily experience.[3]

The long period of civil war did not allow an adequate education for most Angolans. This created an inferiority complex among some and a feeling of superiority among others. Angolans were wounded and need time to heal with the assistance of others.

This lack of education extends also to theological training. Few leaders with national influence have understood the importance of well-trained ministers for Angola. Some Angolans went to Congo to study but received little support. In some cases indifference to theological education has turned into rejection of those who have advanced training.

Other cultural factors are also significant. Those who initiated church planting in Angola were from a Congo tribe that follows matriarchal kinship. But the father has an important, even divine, role within Angolan traditional beliefs. The biblical story also reflects strong patriarchal traditions. Some Angolan national leaders experienced grave difficulties and even pain when they were challenged and replaced by their own spiritual sons and younger leaders. This was humiliating for them.

The civil war affected the churches in both context and all dimensions. Much was destroyed in terms of lives and relationships, not to mention property. The Angolan church demonstrates ways that witness can be expressed in the context of such storm.

**The Broader Church Witness**

The church of Angola was compromised from the beginning following independence. The three political leaders were Protestant Christians: Dr. Antonio Agostinho Neto was the son of a Methodist pastor, Holden Roberto was a Baptist member, and Jonas Savimbi was a son of a Congregational pastor.[4] Practically speaking their churches turned into cells of their political parties and sustained the pre-colonial conflict based on tribal division.

An awakening came when church leaders found that their infrastructures were being destroyed. They knew it was time to open their mouths and call for peace. The formation of the Inter-ecclesial Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA) developed

a new force in Angola for which Archbishop Zacharias Kamwenho was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace.[5] This ecumenical platform was formed by three coalitions: *Conferência Episcopal de Angola e São Tomé* (CEAST, Roman Catholic), *Conselho das Igrejas Cristãs em Angola* (CICA, Protestant) and *Aliança Evangélica de Angola* (AEA, Evangelical). It was needed to provide a chance for peaceable witness in the compromised context.

Angolan history is known by the civil war conflict with many peace agreements. These agreements were initiated not by churches but by politicians. So how should churches bring the gospel to people overwhelmed in violent civil war?

A personal example illustrates: In 1996, I returned into my country from our refuge in Congo and started a local church plant in Luanda. In 1998 one of our members traveled outside of Luanda to sell dried fish—his livelihood. He was killed in public by a rebel military gang because he refused to give them the fish they demanded from him. This kind of incident was repeated numerous times.

This is why the formation of COIEPA—the awakening of the sleeping church— was so critical for peaceable witness as a holistic mission process which does not exclude others. This idea has its detractors. Michael G. Comerford observed that the involvement of AEA and CICA (Protestant councils of Christian Churches) in making political statements should be considered a betrayal of its Christian mission.[6] But it was needed to realize God has called his disciples to be witnesses in all levels of society and all social classes. Peace is central to the message of the Lord's mission. Without peace the gospel by itself would be incomplete. In the case of Angola, how should churches share the gospel without its central element?

Church leaders awakened by God's grace took a stand to call for peace, and to end hostility and violence in Angola. Through COIEPA peaceful marches and ecumenical worship events were organized in Luanda in public places. Leaders were commissioned to meet the president, the leader of UNITA (the opposition party), and "belligerents" of the civil war. Through negotiations, dialogue and written messages church leaders influenced the government and other party leaders.

COIEPA's efforts were not without controversy. Comerford critiques the churches' acceptance of the protocols and accords of the political leaders. He believes they compromised themselves for peace. "The churches warmly welcomed the Gbadolite Accords. AEA and CICA congratulated the Angolan President on securing peace for Angola and practising a politics of forgiveness."[7] But a critical question is: did the church leaders have a place in these negotiations or the decision-making? Comerford also noted: "In 2000 COIEPA put forward a considered proposal, suggesting a panel of twelve members to explore possible avenues to building peace."[8]

It is not necessary to always be seated in public political meetings. The more important role is to communicate what God wants us to do, and say it to whomever he sends us to. We are called to communicate the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole society.

One example is to consider the contributions of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, and probably Esther to the restoration of Israel. All these books illustrate contributions they made in so many different ways, at political and "grass-roots" levels. Restoration was achieved as the "whole gospel for the whole person in the whole society."

### The Mennonite Contribution

The Mennonite contribution was there but very tiny. It had minimal impact on the political side, but a little more in social and civilian society.

Mennonite Central Committee and CICA (the main partner of MCC in Angola) went together to visit all the provinces of Angola with the distribution of food to the neediest starving people during the war. They offered food in exchange for weapons.

In 1998 the Bible Institute for Missiology of Angola (IBMA), together with MCC held a week-long *Seminar of Peace* in the Centre of Training and Culture in Angola known as "CEFOCA." About 100 participated from the three Mennonites Conferences: Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (IEIMA), Mennonite Community Church (Igreja Comunidade Menonita em Angola: ICMA), and the Evangelical Mennonite Church (Igreja Evangélica Menonita em Angola: IEMA).

In 2002 IBMA organized a colloquium on *Mission and Peace* at the Kimbanguist conference center. Leaders of the political parties were invited to participate but few of them participated. The meeting was well attended by Christians.

In 2003 MCC published a peacemaking training manual for election monitors, and then trained them in many seminars all over the provinces.

While the Mennonite churches attempted to help with messages of peace, they also were affected by the conflicted context. The struggle for power has been a significant issue for the MBs.

The IEIMA experience from 1986-1991 shows conflict arose over the application of a major financial gift from the North American MB Church. The incumbent leader was challenged for his practice of independently deciding where the money was to go, for lack of accountability, and for abuse of authority. The MB conference split into two parts. Each side used the strategy of accusing the other of having ties to UNITA, the rebel force. Such allegations could easily lead to death. In 1990 the split became permanent, where the founder of the MB conference no longer

was part of IEIMA. A form of reconciliation was achieved and IEIMA was able to hold general assemblies.

During 2000-2007 there was further division again over IEIMA leadership. The once-marginalized Luzembo Segueira was elected general secretary in 2000. But his leadership was challenged by Jose Ngola Muinga, leading to another division. Eventually, however, Ngola's leadership was broadly affirmed, and reconciliation between Ngola and Luzembo (and others) has been achieved through several meetings.[9]

IEIMA is not the only Mennonite conference that coped with storms, looking for peace. IEMA also went through a great deal, though this seems to be solved with the founding of the inter-church Anabaptist conference in Angola (CIMA—*Conferencia Inter-Menonita em Angola*). Such church conflicts compromise a peaceable witness. But even with a partial witness the church can still achieve its peace mission.

Overall, the churches are known for their contribution to peace in Angola even though the military typically claim credit (the death of UNITA rebel leader Savimbi is known as the end of hostility). Still, many issues need a peace witness. Where the church could make unique contributions are in the democratization and participation in civil society (based on commitments to the priesthood of all believers and to education), demobilizing/disarming/re-integrating military participants and child soldiers (based on values of mercy and victim-offender reconciliation), and helping to heal past traumas.[10]

## Outcomes of Peaceable Witness

When peace is restored, those who were as enemies will come together. Peace is very complex. Even creation is included (Rom. 8:19-22). Isaiah wrote: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together" (Isa. 11:6). This is the effect of peace. Peace brings many good things and it really is a rainbow, as South Africans said after apartheid.

It also should be said that we do not understand exactly what peace is if we have not been in a situation of storm, in danger, or ill health, and come out of this kind of situation to experience calm. The case of Angola shows how bad it was for all Angolan Christians and non-Christians, many of whom left Angola, wandering and looking for peace as refugees. But when peace came, everybody experienced joy and shouted in the street.

How did peace come in Angola? One died for the nation to reach that stage of peace. Comerford wrote that the death of Jonas Savimbi on February 22, 2002 transformed the political landscape of Angola and created new possibilities for peace.[11]

Our theology of peace understands this from Hebrews 9:22: "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Many Angolans died but the death of Jonas Savimbi as well as that of the first president, Dr. Antonio Agostinho Neto, brought dramatic changes. The latter's death brought freedom to Christianity, which was in danger. Lutiniko wrote: "It is important to compare the death of Dr. Agostinho Neto to that of Jonas Savimbi since both opened new opportunities in Angolan history."[12]

What happened after Savimbi's death? On March 13, 2002 a ceasefire came into effect at midnight, UNITA was demilitarized, and the Luena Memorandum was signed on April 4. The process of reconciliation started in power-sharing all over the territory by political parties. Economic activities followed freely. Churches and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) were free to perform their activities. Angolans traveled around the country to visit their lost family members in greater security. I had the opportunity to see my mother in 2004 together with my sisters and my nephews who were subject of our prayers for years—we did not know if they were killed or still alive. We thanked God to meet each other. The political dimension of peace offers many opportunities.

What is happening with MBs in Angola? Peace in mission was experienced at the last general assembly (in 2013). Pardon was requested by both sides, with recognition of guilt and lack of maturity in the resolution of conflict. It was obvious that the 2013 General Assembly was the first one held in peace. Now IEIMA has a new peaceful experience. We are learning from each other how good it is to be together, sharing leadership and seeing the church grow in spiritual and material ways. (A deeper analysis will show that members from other backgrounds from Malange and Lunda provinces, who came to Luanda in this time of peace, are agents of this change in IEIMA). Our friends around the world who are interested to invest in the Lord's field cannot be afraid to do that for the Lord's glory. Something new is being experienced in IEIMA.

After three decades of civil war a healing process is needed, with new initiatives to implement the healing process. We have members who suffered the loss of their beloved husbands, fathers, mothers and children. Their minds are still coping with traumatic experiences. We need reconciliation centers to teach peaceful cohabitation of citizens or to host interreligious encounters for church leaders on this subject. We need poverty alleviation among Angolans (still a major issue). Human rights education is needed all over the country so people understand basic rights and are able to defend them by nonviolent methods. And urban centers like Luanda need new church plants which are adapted to the new "city style" of members according to God's will.

## Summary and Recommendations

We summarize with a few comments and then recommend several points to stimulate readers to action and application. These recommendations are for civil authorities for the Lord's glory and for people's benefit.

### Summary

Conflict must be understood both in its context and its dimension. The case of Angola illustrates this, where COIEPA was a very important contribution of churches for peace building, and the MBs' (IEIMA) role within that. The outcome of peace is like a stream of water in the desert: it brings calmness, stability and joy, and gives opportunities for people to work. Within this we considered the MB reconciliation experience. We also observed the "big picture:" peace in Angola opened many opportunities not only for churches to execute their activities but also for NGOs and economic institutions to operate in Angola. The outcome of peace is seen in many economic activities all over the country. We also need to understand that our task has not yet ended.

### Recommendations

Now that peace has come what shall we do? Churches have great responsibilities not only of saving souls but of proclaiming the whole gospel for the whole person and for all creation. Churches need to know what God wants his body to do and they need also to know what God asks for them on behalf of his people.

"'Peace be with you! As the father has sent me, I am sending you'" (John 20:21). We have been commissioned by the Lord to proclaim the gospel of peace to the world. Churches, as Christ's body, need to obey God's command to heal sickness, to set free those who are in the jail of the devil, and to reconcile people with God in Christ Jesus and with their fellow man and woman. Church members should shine in the world as light and be salt to keep the world shining and to have the saltiness of the Lord.

To the state we recommend: Be a peacekeeper. Establish justice among the people. This is why God established the authorities in the world: to correct those who are rebels, not only to God but also to the state and others. Justice should be done; this is the duty of the state. We need peace with God, with neighbor, with family and even within ourselves – for the glory of God.

## Notes

1 Pierre Gilbert, "Engaging Worldviews" in this volume, footnote 48.

2 Philippe NSINGI MAYAMBU, "Mission et Paix: La Résolution des Conflits au Sein de la tribu Ntandu, Une Etude Exégétique de Jean 20:21" (unpublished thesis, Centre Universitaire de Missiologie, Kinshasa, 2009), 4.

3 Lutiniko Landu MIGUEL PEDRO, "The Mennonite Brethren Church in Angola," in *The Mennonite Brethren Church Around The World: Celebrating 150 Years*, ed. Abe J. Dueck (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2010), 180.

4 Lutiniko Landu MIGUEL PEDRO, "The Reconciliation Ministry Comparative Study of the TRC in South Africa and the Memorandum of Luena in Angola" (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2008), 107.  Accessed February 10, 2015, http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/25011/Complete.pdf?sequence=9.

5 Ibid, 2.

6 G. Michael Comerford, *The Peaceful Face of Angola: Biography of a Peace Process (1991 – 2002),* (Windhoek: John Meinert Printing, 2005), 27.

7 Ibid, 60.

8 Lutiniko Landu MIGUEL PEDRO, "Mennonites and Peace-Building in Angola," in *Freedom's Distant Shores*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 132.

9 PEDRO, "Mennonite Brethren,"176-179.

10 PEDRO, "Reconciliation," 100.

11 Comerford*, Peaceful*, 17.

12 PEDRO, "Reconciliation," 100.

## Recommended Reading

Bonk, Jonathan. *The World at War, the Church at Peace: A Biblical Perspective.* Winnipeg and Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1988.

Friesen, Delores. "Peace Education and Conflict Resolution." In *Healing the Children of War,* ed. Phyllis Kilbourn. Monrovia: MARC, 1995.

Hiebert, Paul G. "The Kingdom Reconciling Humanity." In *The Kingdom of God and the Way of Peace.* Lombard: Mennonite World Conference, 1979.

Kreider, Alan, Eleanor Kreider and Paulus Widjaja. *A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church.* Intercourse: Good Books, 2005.

Kroeker, Peter. "Peace, Justice, Evangelism: The Mission of the Church." *Direction* 16:1 (1987): 18-26. http://www.directionjournal.org/16/1/peace-justice-evangelism-mission-of.html.

Ramseyer, Robert L., ed. *Mission and the Peace Witness: The Gospel and Christian Discipleship.* Scottdale: Herald Press, 1979.

Reimer, Dalton. "Toward a Holistic Understanding of Peace: The Twentieth-Century Journey." *Direction* 32:1 (2003). http://www.directionjournal.org/32/1/toward-holistic-understanding-of-peace.html

Shenk, David. *Peace and Reconciliation in Africa.* Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1983.

## Study Questions

1. Violent conflict characterizes much of our world. By contrast North Americans have not experienced this kind of violence. As a result, their hold on our peace conviction may be weaker. This affects peace teaching and shalom strategies in mission because many missionaries in the early twenty-first century come from N. America. What approaches to teaching and cultivating the way of peace are needed in order to equip any missionary to understand the critical place of the peace witness in violent contexts?

2. Consider the above question in light of the many scenarios and illustrations in the second section, "Undestanding Peace and Conflict." How should missionaries approach these scenarios?

3. Again, consider the above in light of the section, "The Angola Case Study," especially the first page which reflects on sources of internal church conflict, and then the sections outlining the impact of the state affairs on the church (notably the conflicts which characterized church elections, for one example).

# 40 Sharing the Gospel Using Mass Media

A Servant from North Africa

For many years missionaries have shared the good news face to face with the Arabic world but it has been very difficult. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have had a very strict policy on the work missionaries are allowed to perform. In fact in many countries known as the 10/40 window, churches and missionaries have not been welcome. More open societies in the Arab world are still hostile to the presence of missionaries who overtly discuss the love of Christ. A wave of change came in the late twentieth century with the advent of satellite technology. Today most North African homes have access to satellite television. They have their own dish mounted outside with over 400 channels available for viewing. Once owners purchase the receiver they do not have ongoing payments as in North America. Televisions are affordable for even the poorer communities. No existing technology is capable of effectively blocking such transmissions.

This new technology opened a door to send messages into the homes of even the most fanatical of followers of other faiths and presented an opportunity that missionaries, just five years earlier, would not have dreamed of. The sheer magnitude of the numbers of people in these countries prohibits the use of interpersonal contact, or even mass meetings to share the message within a short time. This new technology has that capability.

Mass media can penetrate locations where personal presence may not be possible. Although economic and/or political factors may present problems in some cases, the mass media generally are able, as no other medium, to reach areas and places where it would be impossible for a missionary to be in person. It can leap physical, geographic, social, and even political barriers, and convey the Christian message.

Mass Media has many advantages:

- It can reach people who might not be accessible through other media.
- It can place a given message within reach of more people in a short period of time than any other form of communication.

- It can make it possible to use highly credible and effective spokesmen as an aid to proclaiming the message.
- It can provide a warm, personal touch in the presentation of the message.
- It can locate and surface interested prospects for conversion.

## Satellite Television

In January 1990 Oasis Ministry began broadcasting Arabic Christian television programs. Their vision was a commitment to peaceful witness, discipling the new believers from all backgrounds, leadership training and house church planting. The programs are aimed at traditional families and broadcast around the world to all continents.

Oasis' motivation stems from Matthew 28:19:"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." They are careful that none of the programs ever attack another faith but rather seek to present the positive truth of Christianity in a peaceful manner. Mass media networks such as the Miracle Channel in Norway, Sat 7 in Cyprus, Al Karma in North America, El Kalema, ABN, and others are available for free viewing.

Oasis has pioneered the use of mass media in Northern Africa and uses these channels extensively. Each new episode is broadcast weekly and repeated many times on different channels. They get many calls from other stations that love the program and would like to air it on their own channels. An attractive speaker and well-presented program that is perceived as highly trustworthy has greater effectiveness in communicating a message than an individual without these characteristics.



**The Arab World[1]**

Oasis uses a variety of approaches in their programming. The evangelistic program, *Time for Miracles*, is thirty minutes long and contains interviews. In the first portion individuals tell how Jesus has transformed their lives, how he has touched them with a miracle, helped them solve a problem or handle deep pain. This is presented with dramatic video. In the next part of the program a person shares an experience related to the interview. Then a three-minute application is made to give people an opportunity to give their lives to Jesus. Information on how they can contact Oasis is provided. In the discipling program, *Follow Me,* two people are interviewed and a portion of the Bible is explained. This teaching is connected with five books that have been published through which the listener can follow the pertinent topic. House church leaders are encouraged to watch and use the videos together with the printed materials in their home Bible studies.

A great majority of Arabic viewers are middle class. Others are poor and illiterate, and a great number could not even adequately defend their own beliefs. Programs are produced in Modern Standard Arabic. This choice makes it possible to connect with people all over the Arab world, and is not limited to the Arabic elites.

The goal is to introduce people to Jesus. That being said, the program alone may not be the cause for viewers to become followers of Jesus. Sometimes that happens, and we are very pleased when it does. However, we believe that as a television program by itself it is unlikely to lead to a significant number of decisions to Christ. Television is not the most appropriate medium for producing such a deep level of commitment and change. The medium works at its best to introduce people to Jesus and inspire them to begin a search that can lead them to salvation. As significant as this opportunity is, it must be connected with other efforts such as house churches, follow-up ministry, Skype conversations, and other tools to encourage growth and a deeper relationship with Christ.

The media in itself is a passive tool that does not engage the viewers. So unless it is accompanied by a number of efforts to follow up, train, empower and educate the viewers, it becomes just another television program. A media ministry has to develop a comprehensive approach to ministry using television and satellite as one of the tools and not the only tool.

Television programs will provide information to the viewer about ways that they can connect and get further information. Many letters and emails are received in this way.

One viewer was impressed with a topic on the program and made contact with the host of the program. He said he wanted to change his religion. The host replied

that Jesus did not come to change religions but to develop a relationship and a better life. The inquirer said he called because he wanted a better life and the viewer became a follower of Jesus. He became a member of an underground church and is now one of the house church leaders.

A sixteen year old student, Muhammad,* hated a neighboring country because many had died from an attack by soldiers. Therefore he planned to become a suicide bomber. Two days before his planned attack he walked into a coffee shop where a Christian satellite program was being aired. He heard that you can make peace with God which can lead to peace with yourself and then peace with your neighbors. He noticed a website at the bottom of the screen and went home and used his computer to connect with the follow-up team. He received this peace, canceled his suicide pursuit and joined a house church in the community.

George,* a viewer from Australia, turned on his television and listened to a Christian program while his wife was away. He was about to turn it off when the host said to please give attention for half an hour because he had good news for him. He turned off the program, had coffee, and turned it back on. The host made a comment about why he had turned off the television. He thought the television program was speaking directly to him so he called the contact number and became a follower of Jesus. He is now sharing his faith as an evangelist.

## Security Concerns

Protection from danger has become a major issue in mass media ministries. Some world religious groups oppose the introduction of the good news of Jesus. In some countries Muslim background believers cannot get employment, cannot get an education, may lose their jobs and are banned from their families and even put to death. Therefore strict security measures must be followed. Names should not be used on websites unless special care has been taken to provide secure email. Otherwise well-meaning people can put new believers' lives in danger.

For this reason Bible schools and church buildings for worship are not available in these countries. Oasis has developed a website that is secure at considerable additional expense. Students can register for credit towards a degree with a student number and only the administrator knows their name. Correspondence can then flow freely between the school and the student. In newsletters the names of countries are often omitted or printed with some missing letters.

## World Wide Web

The World Wide Web has become a tool to further Christ's kingdom in a manner that is not possible with television. It can be effective for introducing the gospel to seekers and for follow up to those that have shown an interest in the good news through television or personal contact.

Most homes in the Arabic world have access to the internet with either wireless or cable connections. Internet cafes are available on most streets in the cities for a minimal fee. Sixty percent of the population in the Arabic world is made up of young people between the ages of 18 and 35. They have a special interest in being connected. Skype is very popular.

The OM website has been accessed by a total of over three million people in the last few years. Visitors can view radio and television programs, see the Jesus film, read articles for different age groups, download copies of the Bible and contact the office for more information. Much information is available in four different languages.

Skype is a program that is used extensively to communicate, on a one-on-one basis, by team members to those with whom they want to interact. The program is free to download and free to use around the world. It can be used very effectively for counseling and encouragement. Time zone differences can make certain connections more available or more difficult. Recently a counselor connected to Skype after midnight. The caller came from an Arabic country where it was already morning. The caller was a distraught lady who needed help. With the help of the Holy Spirit the counselor was able to share the love of Jesus through this media miracle to someone in need.

Pal Talk, a chat room on the internet, is a site where visitors can connect with a team ministry for discussion. They can get answers to questions, listen to others talk and hear music and messages. It is also a virtual church with worship opportunities and teaching. A separate team is dedicated to using chat rooms as many Muslims often visit these social media sites to converse in their pursuit for truth.

Brother Hassan* was a Muslim from an Arabic country. He started his journey with Christ through Pal Talk. First he defended his belief about Islam. He discovered that some things did not make sense. At the same time God started to work with him through visions and dreams. This led him to start to doubt his beliefs and he started asking questions about Christianity. The team on Pal Talk started to help him. He experienced blessings from God. In one year he was doing well with his beliefs. When he started to reject the darkness it opposed him. Satan sent him atheists and this led

him to doubt his beliefs. God continued to work in his life. One day he came back to the Pal Talk to refute Christianity and Islam. The team continued to talk with him in a peaceful way and after several conversations invited him to pray. God opened his heart again and this led him to reconsider Christianity. Now Hassan has become an evangelist on Pal Talk and is praying that his wife will come to Jesus.

## Mass Media Follow-Up

After initial communication with people and preparing them for going farther in Christian life, the discipleship team works with new believers from all backgrounds and starts to nurture them and to place them into a local church. Sometimes a new church is planted in new place to help them grow. They also use a website that promotes daily Christian teaching and a worship service.

Mass media has also made it possible to hold men's and ladies' conferences with about two hundred participants each year for each group. Most of them have connected with mass media prior to their attendance. The sessions are then posted on the Oasis website for others to watch.

Through television and personal contacts there are now over eighty house churches established.  Oasis holds training conferences for house church leaders on a regular basis as a way to empower them. This is done through onsite conferences and mass media connections.

An online Bible school helps to further train believers, establishing theological roots in their lives so they become stronger in faith. Then they can be ready to go outside and start the cycle again. Students use a secure website to communicate with the leader and can attain credits toward a degree.

Many stories can be told how Oasis mass media outreach has influenced seekers to increase interest in their search for peace. After watching a Christian program on television a lady came to a church to ask a question. The secretary said that the leader was away and she would have to wait. The enquirer replied that she had a question that any believer could answer and that she did not need a professional. She had become a follower of Jesus by watching a program where they provided teaching on having a quiet time with Jesus. Initially Jesus revealed himself to her during this special time but this was not happening each time. She learned that Jesus does not reveal himself each time that she has a quiet time.

## Scripture Distribution

In many Arabic countries it is unlawful to openly share the Jesus story on the street unless someone asks. A member from the follow up team, Ali,* left a New

Testament on a park bench and observed from a distance what would happen if someone picked it up. A man sat down, took the book and started to read. It was evident through his emotions that he was deeply touched. Ali approached and engaged him in conversation. The visitor shared that he had been searching to learn more about Jesus because he had experienced visions and dreams about him. Ali had the joy of helping this park bench visitor become a follower of Jesus. In most cases these new seekers of peace have been introduced to the gospel through Christian television.

Another time Bill,* from the United States, had a heart to reach Muslims for Jesus. He talked with the church mission board and they encouraged him to go to an Arabic country. He said he did not know the language or the culture so he went to a certain country and spent fifteen days walking and praying. At the same time he decided to hand out New Testaments. He gave away all except four Testaments before he left to return to his home. He left these four, early in the morning, on the steps of a mosque. Then he caught his flight.

A year later he had the same desire so he went back to this country. This time he had some information about house churches in the same city. He attended one. Someone stood to share his story. He said, "I and three friends wanted to learn more about Jesus because his name appears in the Quran many times." They decided that the only way they could learn about Jesus is if they had a Bible. They searched everywhere but could not find one. One day as he went to pray in the mosque he saw the books on the stairs. He was surprised to find that these were New Testaments with the story of Jesus. He phoned his friends and they gathered together to read the New Testament. God opened their hearts, they had dreams and visions and they all decided to follow Jesus.

Aisha* grew up as a Muslim in a Muslim country. Religion was very important to her. After completing some university she came to the United States to go to graduate school.  A friend came and gave her a New Testament as a gift. At first she did not care for the book and because she was a Muslim she was afraid to touch it. After a week she decided to be strong and open it. Her friend suggested she start reading the Gospel of Mark because it is short and easy to read. She also read Matthew. When she came to 23:25-26, "First clean the inside of the cup so that the outside may become clean too!" it touched her heart. She learned that Jesus wanted to clean the inside of her heart first while in Islam she had learned that she should clean the outside first. She loved what Jesus said.

She prayed to Jesus and said, "If you are real then come to me in a dream tonight." He came to her. She dreamt that she was in a mud hole and a hand wanted to pull

her out. She awoke and gave her life to Jesus. Her family rejected her. She asked her mother to continue to be a friend but heard her mother would reject her if she wanted to follow Jesus. She told her mother that she would continue to follow Jesus, love him and read about him. Jesus has become her family.

## Mass Media Studios

In developing a mass media ministry an essential consideration is where programming will be developed. Oasis has used offices in homes and studios very effectively for connecting with the various tools available on the World Wide Web. Special consideration is necessary for television program development. To begin with they rented studios with equipment and staff. This brings in non-Christians and opens the door to some security risks. To make an in-house arrangement with professional equipment and studio facilities provides better security and programming timelines.

The follow-up team experiences many ways that God works in people's lives. Workers need to be prepared to be led by the Holy Spirit to know how to best help those that are seeking the truth.

Mass media is a tool to share the love of Jesus through television to many people, through web pages where they have a choice of reading materials and through Skype and Pal Talk where they can interact on an individual basis. These tools are very helpful to introduce Jesus to those that do not have any knowledge of Jesus or those that are hungry for the truth.

\* Names have been changed for security purposes.

## Notes

[1] Source: http://linzhouweb.com/264887-arabic-in-arab-world-map.

## Study Questions

1. Even the author recognizes that mass media cannot accomplish all that is necessary in mission work. What can mass media do that other means of communication cannot? What can mass media not do, so that other kinds of contact are necessary?

2. Consider the use of mass media in your own life. How many times a day do you access some form of mass media? How often do you utilize mass media in your journey of discipleship?

3. If you were to lead a kind of "virtual church" for those with no face-to-face access to other Christians, what would you include in the life of this church?

# 41

# Mission and Service through Education: A Paraguayan Case Study

Heinz Dieter Giesbrecht

Whether Christian primary and secondary schools should be included in an outreach strategy or not is debated. The old Enlightenment ideal that education should be carried out independent of religious observance, speaks against it. The conviction that there is not such a thing as value-neutral education, and that the holistic witness of the church of Jesus including thought and culture, speak for it. Add to that the fact that faith foundations and belief are laid during childhood and adolescence period.

In this essay I want to use the example of Johannes Gutenberg Schools, which the Association of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches of Paraguay have implemented in partnership with other organizations, to describe how you can through Christian schools begin and develop *diakonia*, evangelism and church planting. After the descriptive part of this essay, the school *diakonia* missionary strategy should be evaluated from a theological perspective.

Heinz Dieter Giesbrecht (D.Th., Practical Theology, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Belgium) has been a teacher and pastor for many years in the Paraguayan Chaco. Currently he is Vice-Director and Professor at *Instituto de Formación Docente* in Filadelfia and in Yalve Sanga, a teacher training institution. He also serves in leadership coaching and training and is a member and preacher of the MB Church in Fernheim.

The term "*diakonia*" I understand to include social services which are Christian-motivated and conducted in the context of the Christian community, expressed in many different ways. It is primarily concerned to witness to the love, mercy and justice of God, by showing solidarity especially with suffering, disadvantaged, weak, poor and marginalized people.[1]

## Historical Background for School *Diakonia* of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay

The first MB church in Paraguay was founded in 1930 by Russian Mennonites immigrants. They had lived for more than 130 years in closed communities (colonies). The self-governing school played a crucial role as a mediator of the traditional Mennonite Christian values and culture of the Mennonite colony system, as well as preparation for economic and social tasks. The immigrant Mennonites in Paraguay, even before their emigration, had insisted with the Paraguayan government on the right to establish and manage their own schools, in which their own beliefs and the German language should be taught.[2]

It is also noteworthy that the missionary work initiated among the indigenous communities by the immigrant Mennonites in 1935 was to include Christian education. The constitution establishing the mission organization *Licht den Indianern* (Light to the Indians) has four specific objectives, namely evangelism and church planting, education, health promotion and economic development. The purpose of the mission schools was defined as follows: "raise the intellectual level of the Indians through their children's education and instruction about a morally pure, Christian family life."[3]

In 1955, upon the suggestion of the mission board of the MB Churches of North America, a church planting ministry was begun in the Paraguayan capital Asunción. Meanwhile, due to immigration and church planting, there were already five MB churches in Paraguay. Due to the need to manage and to continue the newly established mission work, the Association of Mennonite Brethren churches was formed in 1961, today known as the *Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden von Paraguay*. Mission and service were formative elements from the start of this church association.

In this context, in 1966 a Christian mission school started, which is known today under the name "*Colegio Alberto Schweitzer.*" The primary motivation for establishing this school was the challenge to offer the children of the families who were among the newly established Spanish-speaking MB churches, a holistic Christian education. In addition, from the beginning of the school, there was the intent to be

active in evangelism and service. Above all, children from poor families were the main focus. Priorities and characteristics of the school were and are: a good academic level, Christian beliefs, intentional personal support of students and parents through psychological counseling, and annual evangelistic school trips. On the premises of the school a Spanish-speaking MB church was born. The first members of this church, named *Roca de la Paz* (Rock of Peace) were students, parents and neighbors of the *Colegio Alberto Schweitzer*.[4]

Since 1983, the *Colegio Alberto Schweitzer* is under the full responsibility of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Paraguay, currently seven churches with a total of 2,031 members (as of December 31, 2013).

The experience gained in leading Christian primary and secondary schools was the essential condition for establishing the Gutenberg Schools in Paraguay. This originated out of a partnership with



**First Gutenberg School
Asunción, Paraguay[5]**

*Kinderwerk Lima* (Children's Work Lima), founded in 1968 by pietistic Christians of the Lutheran Church from Germany, in order to do *diakonia* work.

In 1970, *Kinderwerk Lima* founded a day care center and kindergarten in the slums of the Peruvian capital. Out of this a church started in 1973 and so began the first Gutenberg School in the district El Augustino. In 1991, a second school in the district *Comas* was opened in Lima, connected to a large-scale project of the daily feeding of children from poor backgrounds. Through this project, 11,500 children daily received a nutritious breakfast (year 2000). The diaconal work was always accompanied by evangelistic events and concrete projects of church planting.[5]

Through personal networks senior representatives of *Kinderwerk Lima* and the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay learned to know each other and their existing projects of school *diakonia*. So began the vision to build together a Christian school and missionary project in Paraguay. In 1989 the first Johannes Gutenberg School opened its doors in the Lambaré district of Asunción. The good results of the first Gutenberg School in Paraguay led to the extension of this model of school *diakonia*. Thus, the second Johannes Gutenberg School was founded in 2010 in the city Santaní (about 150 km. northeast of Asunción) and in 2013 the third Gutenberg School, called Campo 9, was inaugurated in Eulogio Estigarribia (213 kilometers east of Asunción).

With regard to the school name, the reference is to the inventor of the printing press, Johannes Gutenberg (1394 - 1468), who provided his knowledge and abilities in the service of spreading the Bible. By selecting this name, the Gutenberg Schools have as their purpose the same dual task, namely, to combine biblical values with the scientific, technical and social development.[7]

In the first years of the Gutenberg School Asunción, efforts were made by the school's Division of Christian education to teach the students and families who came to faith through the evangelistic work, and to integrate them into existing churches. In 2010 the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay agreed after a lengthy decision-making process to form their own churches in or through the Gutenberg Schools and offer students and parents a spiritual home. The background to this decision was the positive experience of the *Kinderwerk Lima* church planting projects, and also the observation that through the evangelistic work of the Gutenberg School, students and parents came to believe, but often were not easily integrated into existing churches. In addition, it was felt that many parents, students, and former students had a strong identification with the school, and that this would likely continue even after the completion of their formal education. The churches to be founded would be called *Iglesia La Mies Hermanos Menonitas* (Church of the Harvest, Mennonite Brethren), and would be supported and guided by the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay as daughter churches.

In 2011, the first of these churches was founded in the Johannes Gutenberg School Asunción. In the two new schools (Santaní and Campo 9), the start of the churches was carried out together with the inauguration of the schools. In Santaní the official church planting took place in 2013 and in Campo 9, it was planned for October 2014.

## The Institutional Profile of the Gutenberg Schools

Since the Gutenberg School in Asunción is the model for the other two Gutenberg Schools, I shall use this as an example in the description of the institutional profile, even if some of the pedagogical strategies have not yet been fully implemented in the two Gutenberg Schools of Santaní and Campo 9, since they are still in the development phase. The major institutional differences between the three schools are concerning the ownership and financing. These are described in more detail in the relevant sections.

### The Basics: A Christian School Philosophy

In 1993, the school philosophy in the context of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Church statements can be summarized as follows:[8]

- The theological framework is the Confession of Faith of the MB Churches of Paraguay.
- The Christian worldview assumes that all of creation is from God and therefore there can be no essential contradiction between God's revelation and the scientific study of God's creation.
- Christian education has the whole student in its field of view, that is, specifically a healthy physical, emotional, ethical and intellectual development, as well as social integration and spiritual growth. The dignity of the individual student must remain protected. Respect for the unique personality and life experience of the student, as well as being fitted with a will of his/her own excludes any form of indoctrination. Christian education should rather teach toward independent thinking, decision making and action in the face of biblical values.
- The teacher is not only imparting knowledge, but is also an educator, role model, encouraging companion, coach and dialogue partner for the students.

## Educational and Missionary Strategies

In a brochure for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Gutenberg School, published in April 2013 in Asunción,[9] the strategic guidelines of this educational institution were expressed as follows:

- The educational program of the Gutenberg School is characterized by a strong academic quality, a Christian orientation and a holistic approach. Children and young people from all social classes are accepted to this school, giving priorities to families with economically poor conditions. Through education they will be enabled to have a way to get out of poverty and marginalization.
- The love of God is to be seen and experienced by word and deed in the school family.
- The formation of Christian character and the promotion of healthy and stable families are essential objectives.

### General Education and Vocational Training

The Gutenberg School offers all levels of education from kindergarten until high school. In principle, it is envisaged that the majority of students will remain throughout their initial education at the school.

After completion of the ninth grade six options are available for the middle school students: general high school education in natural science or social sciences, or a technical high school education in one of the following four areas: electrical technician, clothing confection, mechanical technician or bookkeeping.

All courses of the Gutenberg School are officially recognized by the Paraguayan Ministry of Education. The program of technical high school education, which was developed in 1992-1993, at the time was an innovation in the Paraguayan education system.

Teachers should be good professionals in their field, but in addition active members of an evangelical church, have maturity of character and have a willingness for teamwork. The systematic and professional training of teachers in university courses and degree programs is very much encouraged and positively affects the development of the school.

In the meantime it has become a school tradition to have project exhibitions, organized every year by the students and accompanied by their teachers, in order to make the public aware of the integral professional preparation of the students at the Gutenberg School. To promote vocational training, systematic visits to companies and factories at home and abroad are organized, as well as internships.

### Social Work and Family Counseling

At the founding of the Gutenberg School the principle was established that at least 65% of students would come from poor or very poor families. This was associated with the need to provide scholarships for these children. To find out what support individual children needed, a Social Department was set up in the school. The staff at this branch visit the families from which the students come and evaluate their conditions of life, and recommend an amount and form of financial assistance. The children from very poor homes are given full tuition and financial aid for food, school clothing, and medical and dental treatment. For all children needing financial assistance, foster parents are assigned. In the strategic planning of financial aid for students, the principle of self-sustainability is applied. Each year the amount of support is redefined in order to not promote dependency, but rather further the responsibility of parents.

### Adult Education

The holistic approach of the Gutenberg School in the fight against poverty and social inequality is also evident in the program started in 2007 with the name *Padres a la Obra* (Parents to Work). Through regular contacts of the Social Department with the students' parents it became clear how many adults in the school environment are unemployed. Through targeted and practical short courses such persons should be able to improve their financial income. Technical courses are offered in mechanics, electricity, computer science, garment confection, cooking, baking and crafts.

### Spiritual Guidance and Church Planting

At the Gutenberg School there is a Department of Christian Education, which is headed by a responsible school chaplain. He and his team are responsible for the organization and design of the school chapels, the biblical instruction in classes, spiritual counseling of students and teachers, and for the organization of parent and school trips. In 2013 the Gutenberg School Asunción conducted seven student and two parent camps. The Department of Christian Education is also working closely with the school management in the implementation of the parents' meetings and other public events where beyond general, educational and organizational meetings, there is always the offer of spiritual instruction.

The combination of the spiritual work of the school and the *La Mies* Church is strengthened through weekly meetings in which the employees of the Department of Christian Education, the pastor of *La Mies* Church, and the Church Planting Coordinator of the Association for projects in the Gutenberg Schools participate.

The Church Planting Coordinator of the Association of MB Churches works closely together with the pastors and leadership teams of the respective *La Mies* Churches through regular weekly visits. Under his leadership, the pastors of the three church planting projects meet periodically to interact, to evaluate and to jointly develop visions for the future. For the Executive Board of the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay, it is important that the churches develop a biblical-Anabaptist identity and integrate into the national and worldwide MB churches. A special feature of these churches is, in addition to the Sunday worship service, a systematic instruction with courses for church members, and the promotion of evangelism, discipleship and small groups. The vision of Ephesians 4:11-12, the equipping of the saints for service, is leading the way in these church planting projects.

### Administrative Management

The management of the Gutenberg School Asunción has been carried out in partnership between the *Kinderwerk Lima* and Association of MB Churches of Paraguay since its inception. In principle, the *Kinderwerk Lima* is responsible for the finances and the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay for the administration of the school and their legal representation before the Paraguayan government. The Board of the school consists of four representatives of the Association of MB Churches of Paraguay and two representatives of the *Kinderwerk Lima*.

In the case of the Gutenberg School Santaní the partnership between the Association of MB Church in Paraguay and the *Kinderwerk Lima* has been extended to two other partners, namely PROCODIA, a relief organization founded by a local

Mennonite entrepreneur, and the Mennonite company Agro Eco SA. These partners share the operating costs that are not covered by the income performance of the school. Representatives of all the partners form the School Board. Part of the scholarships for students are received from the supporting churches of the Association, both in the Gutenberg School Asunción and in the Gutenberg School Santaní.

The Gutenberg School Campo 9 was begun with the cooperation of the following organizations: Association of MB Churches of Paraguay, *Kinderwerk Lima*, the Evangelical Mennonite Churches Sommerfeld and CEDEC, a Mennonite foundation of entrepreneurs. The finances for the construction and maintenance of this school have been completely taken over by the CEDEC foundation. This foundation also provides the legal covering for the school. Representatives of the four partners form the School Board.

## Results in the Implementations of the Desired Objectives

Institutionally, one can see the current status of the three Johannes Gutenberg Schools summarized as follows (as of August 2014):

|                       | Students, 2014 | Teachers, 2014 | Staff, 2014 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| **Gutenberg Asunción** | 1508           | 107            | 59          |
| **Gutenberg Santaní**  | 436            | 29             | 13          |
| **Gutenberg Campo 9**  | 327            | 24             | 15          |
| **Total**              | **2271**       | **160**        | **87**      |

In the brochure for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Gutenberg School Asunción it was noted that in the first twenty-five years, a total of 2,142 students have successfully completed their high school in one of the six possible courses.[10]

The former head of the Gutenberg School in Asunción, Theodor Loewen, summarized in a 2007 historical review of eighteen years of schooling, the results in the educational and academic sectors as follows:

- The Gutenberg School was known to the public for its above-average academic performance, the Christian character, discipline and order in the school life, good facilities and organization, as well as the honesty and reliability of employed persons.
- Although in Paraguay unemployment continued to climb, an average of 60-70% of the outgoing students found a professional job. Many companies are very interested in employing graduates of the Gutenberg School.[11]

In the same anniversary brochure of the Gutenberg School Asunción it was stated that one can observe a considerable social and economic development around the school, which was mainly due to the holistic programs of social counseling, vocational training, and health promotion. The Director of the Gutenberg School Asunción, Delbert Unruh, however, states an observation in a report from the year 2010, that not all teachers easily identify with the mission of the school, particularly in regards to the poor and disadvantaged. This may have to do with the fact that the teachers earnestly strive for the higher academic level of the school, and in so doing the social perspective can easily move into the background.

The aforementioned brochure also states that the pastoral counseling at the school has been instrumental in promoting and stabilizing families, and as a result, many members of the school community are integrated into an evangelical church. Also, it is instructive to observe that many former students send their own children to the Gutenberg School because they are convinced of the educational offer by their own experience. Of the 162 employees of the Gutenberg School some 20% were former students. In relation to the offers of short courses in the adult education program in the Gutenberg School Asunción about 1,300 parents, from 2007-2012, where trained for better work opportunities.[12]

The current results of the three church planting projects in the Gutenberg Schools can be summarized as follows (as of August 2014):

| Name of City/town | Official church beginning | Worshippers | Baptized members |
|---|---|---|---|
| **La Mies – Asunción** | 2011 | 110 | 86 |
| **La Mies – Santaní** | 2013 | 45 | 26 |
| **La Mies - Campo 9** | October 2014 | 35 | |
| **Total** | | 190 | 112 |

## A Practical-Theological Evaluation of the School *Diakonia* of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay

The Gutenberg Schools in Paraguay are an example of missional, cross-cultural, diaconal and developmental *diakonia*. It is developmental, as it is expressed through institutions that promote the development of society, especially vulnerable groups, through education and training. It is diaconal, an expression of *diakonia,* in that it is Christian education, and the unselfish and self-sacrificing service to humanity of

Christ is an essential source of inspiration. Culturally, this is a *diakonia* where conscious cultural limits are crossed, for example, those of the German colony Mennonites to Spanish-speaking Paraguayans. Missional as a developing *diakonia* where churches are the carriers of education, and strategic initiators of other churches in the vicinities of the Gutenberg Schools.[13]

From a theological perspective one can conclude through the example of the Gutenberg Schools that Creation and Redemption, integrated together under the general theological category of the Kingdom, form the fundamental theological categories of Mennonite school *diakonia*. The incarnation of Christ into his fallen creation is the key model and motivation for the witness of the church, and for peacemaking and liberating this fallen creation and society. In the specific case of the Gutenberg Schools, this manifests itself primarily in an initiative toward overcoming poverty through holistic Christian education. However, there is more at stake than just improving economic and social circumstances. The theological center of Christian education in the Gutenberg Schools is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which leads not only to improve one's external circumstances, but to a fundamental change of heart among the people involved, with the restoration of a personal relationship with God.[14]

Specifically, one can summarize this dynamic between a theology of creation, social responsibility, and Christ-centered proclamation with the following three guiding principles:[15]

- The social activities of the school *diakonia* are a result of the preaching of the gospel, since these efforts have come out of Christian communities that emerged through the preaching of the gospel. School *diakonia*, is living faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6).
- The social activities of the school *diakonia* are a bridge to the preaching of the gospel, since people who live in economic and social hardship, become acquainted with the biblical message in the vicinity of the Gutenberg Schools. Through a Christian school, mistrust and prejudice can be reduced, closed doors suddenly opened to the message of God, and the gospel heard.
- The social activities of the school *diakonia* are a partner of proclamation. The proclamation of the gospel is a public explanation of why Christians care, through holistic educational opportunities for socially disadvantaged, because they have experienced the grace of God. The social behavior in the school, such as the academic quality, honesty and love in dealing with each other, responsibility, empathy and dedication towards marginalized people are all practical illustrations of what the gospel can bring to people's lives.

At the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, held in 1982 in Grand Rapids (USA), reflections on this threefold relationship were debated. It was also mentioned that the integration of proclamation and *diakonia* is a risk, and that social action may evolve into a kind of bribery and thus can become a manipulation.[16] The example of the Gutenberg Schools can easily fall into such a problem. Children and families from disadvantaged social groups are funded through generous donations, and thus tend to be more open and trusting as they socialize into the new environment of a Christian school with all the associated services. Even the decision to follow Christ and to join the school church can be guided by this motivation and is perhaps more a socialization than a conscious decision.

Concerning this reality, the leaders of the Gutenberg Schools need to be very aware. It will be a constant challenge, on the one hand selflessly and unconditionally in the name of Christ to care for people in need, while also respecting their dignity as independent and self-reliant people. Theologically speaking, holistic school *diakonia* should therefore respect the dignity of humans created in God's image on the one hand, and on the other give the unconditional love of God, because God's grace is also an undeserved gift.

In conclusion it can be said that the model of the Gutenberg Schools in Paraguay, which now is becoming a social-diaconal movement, is a convincing example of how Jesus' disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world as explained in the Sermon on the Mount, and in this way follow the example of Jesus toward the saving transformation of people.

## Notes

[1] Heinz Dieter Giesbrecht, *Mennonitische Diakonie am Beispiel Paraguays: Eine diakonietheologische Untersuchung.* Veröffentlichungen des Diakoniewissenschaftlichen Instituts 45 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 17.

[2] Peter P. Klassen, *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay, Bd. 1: Reich Gottes und Reich dieser Welt*, 2. Aufl. (Bolanden – Weiherhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 2001), 330.

[3] Hans J. Wiens, *"…Daß die Heiden Miterben seien": Die Geschichte der Indianermission im paraguayischen Chaco* (Filadelfia: Konferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden, 1989), 41.

[4] Giesbrecht, *Mennonitische Diakonie,* 199-206; Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Ein Leib – viele Glieder: Die mennonitischen Gemeinden in Paraguay* (Asunción: Gemeindekomitee, 2001), 130-132.

[5] Source: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Colegio-Polit%C3%A9cnico-Johannes-Gutenberg/262435017109351?sk=photos_stream.

[6] Colegio Politécnico Johannes Gutenberg, ed., *Asociación Kinderwerk Lima: Su Historia. La obra de Dios en niños y familias en América del Sur* (Asunción: 2003).

[7] Veronica Villalba de Amarilla, "Manual de Organización y Funciones del Colegio Politécnico Johannes Gutenberg" (unpublished thesis, Asunción, 2003), 3.

[8] Giesbrecht, *Mennonitische Diakonie,* 198.

[9] Equipo Directivo Colegio Johannes Gutenberg, "Colegio Politécnico Johannes Gutenberg: 25 años: Construyendo juntos: Somos parte de esto", brochure, April 2013, 6.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Theodor Loewen, "Geschichte der Schule" (unpublished document, 2007), 2-3.

[12] "Colegio Politécnico Johannes Gutenberg: 25 años," 29ff.

[13] Giesbrecht, *Mennonitische Diakonie,* 218.

[14] Ibid., 219-220.

[15] Klaus Bockmühl, ed., *Verkündigung und soziale Verantwortung: Eine evangelische Verpflichtung. Gemeinsame Veröffentlichung des Lausanner Komitees für Weltevangelisation und der Evangelischen Welt-Allianz* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1983), 23-27.

[16] Ibid., 24.

## Study Questions

1. Of the many factors that have been a part of this successful story of mission and service, name the three you consider to have contributed most to the establishment of the Gutenberg schools, and the many lives touched through them.

2. While there may be some similarities between the *Kinderwerk Lima* Schools in Peru, and the Gutenberg Schools of Paraguay, there are also many differences. Even though one cannot transplant or "copy" a successful model into another context, what are three transferable principles that can be gathered from this story that could be applied in your situation?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to begin churches that are associated with Christian schools?

# 42 Mission to University Students

James Pankratz

H e was leaving home in a small town to start university in a city three hours away. As they finished loading the car his father said to him, "Remember who you are, and remember whose you are."[1]

Most Mennonite Brethren (MB) students who embarked on journeys to study at universities and colleges heard similar reminders from their parents, friends, and church leaders. These words conveyed concern about the challenges ahead. They also expressed hope that the foundations built in the home and church would survive those challenges.

## History—Experience

Mennonite Brethren have a long history of educating young adults for Christian discipleship and ministry. In North America small Bible schools provided training in Bible study, church history, theology and practical ministry during the winter months, between farming seasons. Over time many small schools were consolidated

James Pankratz (M.A., Ph.D., McMaster University) was Director of Canadian MB Student Services from 1975-1982, while a faculty member at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. He was President of MBBC-Concord College from 1988-1997, and Academic Dean of MB Biblical Seminary (USA) from 1998-2005. From 2006-2014 he was Dean of Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Canada.

into larger schools. As educational expectations grew, Bible colleges and seminaries were also established.[2] All of these schools had the dual purpose of faith formation and ministry preparation.[3]

As MBs planted churches and established conferences throughout the world they repeated this pattern, establishing Bible schools (institutes), colleges, and seminaries. In all of these global settings many Mennonites also study in public universities, colleges, and professional schools. They face many of the same challenges and opportunities described here, even though this account focuses on Canada.[4] As a global family MBs have much to learn from each other about ministry to young adults and specifically about ministry to university students.[5]

As students from MB congregations left home to attend post-secondary education in large numbers in the 1960s and 70s, their congregations and conferences did more than simply hope that the foundations built in the home and church would be sufficient. They also developed programs to minister to these students.

These programs were pastoral. They were for students from MB congregations, not for the thousands of other students at universities and colleges. Ministry to MB university students was an extension of the ministry of the congregation to its own members and their families. It was a shared, collaborative, pastoral ministry. Congregations cooperated with regional and national MB conferences and organizations as well as with other congregations to maintain contact with and minister to university students.

This collaborative, pastoral ministry began with one simple but essential feature. Year after year congregations gathered names and addresses of their post-secondary students in universities, community colleges, nursing schools, Bible schools and Bible colleges and sent these names and addresses to regional and national church offices. The names were then compiled into lists and distributed to congregations and agencies ministering to students.[6]

Church leaders and families recognized that post-secondary students were at an important stage of their lives, facing distinctly new challenges. Many of them were living away from home and their home church for the first time. Those in universities were constantly exposed to social activities that their families and churches regarded as harmful. The new ideas and critical thinking that universities encouraged were regarded as potential threats to Christian faith. Ministry to these students tried to address this disconnection from home and church and the challenge of new ways of thinking and living. These challenges were addressed through several interrelated ministries.

First, congregations sent students information about local church activities to keep them connected. Sunday church bulletins arrived in many students' mailboxes

by midweek. Congregations welcomed students home during school breaks and sometimes asked them to publicly share their experiences. Bible school and Bible college students were often asked to give a testimony about how their faith had been strengthened through their studies.

Second, denominational papers (the *Christian Leader* in the United States and the *MB Herald* in Canada) and other resources were sent to students. They were informed of regional and national retreats and conferences organized for them.

Third, students were encouraged to attend nearby MB churches. A key premise of formal and informal MB student ministry was that the primary means of strengthening Christian life was regular participation in Christian fellowship and worship. MB congregations near universities, colleges, and Bible schools became accustomed to a seasonal influx of students in fall, and some of these congregations developed specialized ministries to welcome and serve students. To this day there are congregations that offer Sunday morning transportation to students from nearby schools. Students were often invited for lunch at church or in homes after the Sunday service as a way of strengthening the bond between students and local congregations. If there were no MB churches nearby students were encouraged to find local fellowship in Baptist, Alliance, or non-denominational evangelical congregations.

Fourth, MB conferences also supported specific ministries to students. "Student Services" were organized regionally and nationally. Student names and addresses that had been gathered by congregations were used to contact students at their new addresses, to visit them, and invite them to regional seminars and retreats. Some regions had part time Student Services staff. For many years the Canadian Board of Higher Education had a Student Services Committee and employed one of the faculty at Mennonite Brethren Bible College as a part-time Student Services staff member. They collaborated with Student Services ministries and staff in other provinces in organizing retreats and sending resources to students. In Manitoba, Student Services was a shared ministry among the MBs, General Conference (GC), Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC).

For several years in the 1960s and 70s Canadian and US Mennonites cooperated in university student ministries, including the publication of *Arena* and *Forum*. These newsletters offered information, brief articles of interest to students, and vigorous debate.[7]

Student Services activities and pastoral care organized by MBs and other Mennonites were primarily oriented to students on public campuses. This was because students in Bible schools, Bible colleges, and Christian universities had regular worship and Bible study, were living in a social setting that was guided by

explicitly Christian lifestyle expectations, were being taught by Christian faculty who were committed to helping them mature in Christian discipleship, and had the support of many Christian fellow students.

The events and pastoral visits organized by Student Services were intended to strengthen the relationship of students to their churches, to deepen their Christian lives, and to strengthen their confidence that the Christian faith was relevant to the intellectual and social issues that they were studying and experiencing. Sometimes a Mennonite pastor or church member would host a group of local students for a presentation and discussion. Student Services also organized regional seminars and weekend retreats. In some settings Mennonites invited respected Christian scholars to offer public lectures on university campuses, and sometimes these were jointly sponsored by university departments. [8] Student Services also periodically circulated bibliographies of Christian books that were oriented to this young adult student cohort.[9]

Some Christian denominations (e.g. Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics) organized their ministry to students through chaplains on university campuses. Mennonites did not follow this model,[10] although Mennonite pastors or Student Services staff sometimes used chaplains' offices for meetings with their students.

Fifth, Mennonite students were strongly encouraged to participate in Christian groups on campus. Initially this usually meant InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), a campus ministry that emphasized Bible study, evangelism, and missions. The IVCF Urbana Missions Conference every three years challenged students to commit themselves to global mission. It was the stimulus for thousands of young adults to enter full time mission. Eventually two other student ministries, Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as "Cru") and the Navigators spread to many campuses. Campus Crusade developed a reputation for evangelism and apologetics. Navigators was known for its emphasis on mentoring and discipleship. All of these ministries organized conferences, retreats, Bible studies, and regular meetings for students. They also produced books, pamphlets, and study guides. Many of these resources were widely used far beyond university campuses.[11] Some resources, such as Campus Crusade's "Four Spiritual Laws" had a global influence. Mennonite students participated in all of these ministries and many staff from these organizations were members of MB churches. It was also through these campus ministries that university students often became aware of Christian faculty on campus.

Sixth, by the 1980s MB mission to university students focused on strengthening the student ministry capacity of urban churches that were near universities and colleges. In Canada several consultations sponsored by the Board of Higher Education

brought together pastors and volunteers from these churches to share ideas and to be equipped for more effective ministry.[12] Today the MB mission to university students is primarily regarded as a ministry of local churches who serve students at nearby schools through hospitality, fellowship, social activities, worship, opportunities for service, and faith formation.

## Priorities and Strategies for Mennonite Brethren Mission to University Students

What are the priorities in mission to university students? What are effective strategies? These can best be identified in relation to several inter-related dimensions of this ministry—the pastoral, evangelistic, ecumenical, and cultural.

### Pastoral

For Mennonite Brethren, pastoral relationships and care are primarily expressed through local congregations. MB mission to university students from MB churches has always emphasized the importance of regular fellowship in a local church. If students attend a university at a distance from their home congregation they are strongly encouraged to find a new church to attend. Their home congregations try to keep in contact with them and welcome them back when they return to visit. But one of the ongoing priorities of the home church is to encourage and assist their students to find Christian fellowship while they are at university.

This emphasis on the importance of participation in a local church is consistent with the MB emphasis on church planting and congregational health. Local churches are the primary contexts for Christian discipleship formation and pastoral care.

Thus the principal strategy for MB mission to university students will be to strengthen the capacity of congregations near universities for student ministry. As in the past, this ministry will not be limited to MB students but will include all students. The local church is the foundational community for all Christians. Students, like other Christians, are most likely to grow in faith and faithfulness when they are in regular, mutual relationships within a Christian community. The specific programs that local churches use to minister to students may be diverse—free transportation to church, hospitality in homes, Christian education, small group fellowship, opportunities for service, and pastoral counseling. All of these programs and activities are intended to draw students into the life of a congregation.

The ministry of the local church can be complemented by Christian groups on campus whose members are part of the shared university young adult culture. These groups often have thriving programs for social interaction, Bible study, and witness.

MBs have consistently encouraged students to participate in such groups in addition to regular worship in a local congregation.

There is solid evidence that Christian fellowship is a central factor in the development of a Christian identity in young adulthood. Students who have strong relationships with local congregations and Christian clubs on campuses generally mature in their faith and remain involved in the church in the years after university. Those who "take a break from church" while in university rarely return to the church later.

### Evangelism

The second dimension of student ministry is evangelism. Christian organizations like InterVarsity, Cru, and Navigators have a long and strong reputation for evangelism on university campuses.[13] Their media materials, discipleship training, and campus events are frequently oriented toward evangelistic ministry. Mission strategists recognize that communication of the gospel is enhanced when Christians understand and speak the cultural language of their hearers. For that reason, Christian university students are usually the most effective witnesses to other students.

The main forms of evangelistic mission on campus are relationship-building, Christian fellowship, and apologetics. Relationships on campus are developed through classroom or residential friendships and shared projects (academic, sports, clubs, service, and advocacy activities). Christian students with a "missional" orientation and lifestyle become involved with their university peers as part of their commitment to "seek the welfare of the university" in which they find themselves. Through such relationships and projects they are ambassadors of Christ in their world, witnessing to the reconciling and transforming presence of God. They invite students to commit themselves to God and welcome students into Christian fellowship.

Christian fellowship is both a witness to the gospel and the primary context for discipleship training. People often report that they identified with a specific church because they felt welcomed, developed friendships, and found meaningful ways to participate. Some came as Christians, others became Christians after participating in the church for some time. They not only heard the gospel proclaimed, they saw it lived. The same dynamic is true on university campuses. A vibrant, welcoming community of faith is both an evangelistic witness and a fellowship of Christian discipleship.

Another form of campus evangelism is apologetics. Christian apologetics involves "making a case" for Christian faith. The actions of individual Christians and the witness of Christian communities are one significant form of apologetics. When Christians, churches, and Christian organizations collectively exemplify the

character of Christ, they offer a powerful "case" for Christian faith. In recent decades, Christian clubs on university campuses have often been very effective Christian witnesses through their advocacy of civil rights, sponsorship of refugees, promotion of environmental stewardship, and support for religious freedom. They have also been leaders in voluntary community service projects among the poor, abused, homeless, and disabled. They invite others to join them in these activities and to learn more about the Christian worldview and motivation that underlies these commitments.

Intellectual debate is a form of apologetics that is very prominent on university campuses. Christian campus groups usually emphasize this in their public programs and their discipleship ministry. Sometimes apologetics happens in highly publicized events. These may be lectures by prominent Christian scholars on current topics or on contested aspects of Christian faith. Often these public events take the form of debates between a Christian and a critic. Such lectures and debates have been held on thousands of campuses. In recent decades some of the most prominent speakers and debaters have been Josh McDowell, William Lane Craig, Lee Strobel, and Ravi Zacharias. More than fifty years ago C.S. Lewis would have been at the top of the list.

The main topics of apologetic debate change over time. In past decades the major themes were science and religion, the reliability of the Bible, and the credibility of the resurrection of Jesus. In recent years Christian apologists have increasingly also addressed four other themes: the violence that God seems to demand in the Bible and that the church has sanctioned in history; the collusion of the church with colonial and totalitarian regimes; the destruction of the environment that has often been associated with Western (Christian) civilization; and the validity of the Christian confession that "Jesus is the only way" in the face of so many other religions whose adherents are now our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members.

Mennonites are not often the highly public Christian speakers on many of these themes on university campuses. However, Mennonites have influenced these public debates by providing rich biblical and theological resources on peace and violence, church and state, stewardship of the earth, and peaceful coexistence with members of other faiths. Some Mennonites are global leaders in restorative justice, reconciliation, and respectful dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims.[14]

The purpose of Christian apologetics is not simply to win debates. More often the goal is to offer a compelling Christian witness to those who have not considered it, to cause skeptics and critics to pause and think again. Apologetics also helps Christians when they confront challenges to the gospel in the contemporary world. Most Christian university students are unable to confidently and convincingly address many of the criticisms of their faith that they encounter. Of course it is not necessary, and in fact it is impossible for students to be experts in every contemporary

debate. But students' confidence can be strengthened when they hear or read the apologetic witness of Christians who intelligently articulate Christian perspectives on important issues. They can be better equipped to address some issues and confident that there are cogent Christian responses to others. It is reassuring to know that there are Christians whom they can trust as they "make a case for" the gospel.

### Ecumenical

MB mission to university students is ecumenical. MBs are selectively ecumenical. The MB church began largely because some Mennonites in Russia were profoundly influenced by pietistic Lutherans and Baptists. In North America MBs have been strongly shaped by revivalism and various currents in contemporary evangelicalism. MBs have been strong supporters of many non-denominational mission and service organizations. MB mission to university students is an example of this openness to ecumenical cooperation.

As noted earlier, MBs cooperated with other Mennonites groups in several Student Services projects in the 1960s and 70s. The Manitoba MB Student Services program was formally an inter-Mennonite project. Mennonites in North America held periodic inter-Mennonite consultations on student ministry and for several years they jointly published *Arena* and *Forum*. MB congregations near universities welcome students from any denomination to worship and fellowship with them.

MB mission to university students is also ecumenical in encouraging students to participate in non-denominational campus ministries like InterVarsity, Cru, and Navigators. MBs are traditionally cautious about interdenominational cooperation, but very open to cooperative ministry with nondenominational agencies. This is true in global mission, local evangelism, relief and development, and student ministry. The ecumenical dimension of MB mission to university students is expressed in two ways. First, students from many Christian backgrounds are welcomed into MB congregations and encouraged to benefit from and contribute to the ministries of these local churches. Second, MB students are encouraged to participate in the fellowship and activities of nondenominational ecumenical campus ministry groups and to benefit from their interaction with Christians from diverse church traditions.

### Cultural

The cultural dimension of student mission involves engaging worldviews and issues that are current on campuses. In recent decades this has involved exploring and often embracing popular media, especially music and film; questioning those in authority and dominant systems of authority; reformulating gender relationships and roles in new ways; challenging both the free market and state-dominated

economic systems that have pushed people into poverty; protesting racial prejudice and ethnic intolerance.

All of these issues are debated in many sectors of society. But university campuses are prominent settings for debate, advocacy, and action on contested cultural issues.[15] As students engage in these issues they often urge their churches to support them, to get involved and "take a stand." At the same time, students usually do not want their churches to prescribe and limit their freedom to express themselves. In addition, students sometimes apply the critiques they learn on campus to their own church.

Two examples illustrate the complexity of creating space for cultural mission. In the late 1950s MB churches in British Columbia appointed a full time youth worker in Vancouver to minister to university students.[16] He established Bible studies, social activities and discussion groups. In the discussion groups students addressed the application of Christian faith to various academic disciplines and issues that were part of their lives. This integration of faith and learning is a major aspect of Christian discipleship formation among campus ministry groups. Students found it interesting and stimulating. Even many years later some of them recalled how formative these experiences were in helping them to develop a Christian perspective on their education and profession. But MB leaders urged the youth worker to end these discussions and replace them with additional Bible Study and prayer meetings. Eventually these conflicting priorities led to the resignation of the student ministry leader and the discontinuation of these meetings.

A little more than a decade later MBs cooperated with other Mennonites in publishing *Arena*, a small magazine of information and opinion for university students. Two kinds of content in the magazine soon created tension with some leaders of the Mennonite denominations who sponsored the magazine. First, were movie reviews. Mennonites were still officially largely opposed to attending movies. These movie reviews clearly implied an acceptance, even a promotion of movie attendance. Furthermore, many of the reviews suggested that there were valuable insights to be gained from movies, even from some that depicted lifestyles that were contrary to the standards of Christian living that Mennonite churches advocated. The other content that troubled some leaders were the articles and letters that criticized the church. While supporters of the magazine thought that it was very positive to see Mennonite university students in serious discussions about the church, critics of the magazine interpreted many of the criticisms of the church as immature and worldly. The magazine was discontinued after four years.[17]

These examples illustrate the challenges of cultural engagement in mission to university students. While MB attitudes to cinema and popular music have changed

significantly in recent decades,[18] there are always new cultural challenges for university students and local churches. The church is called to be discerning and critical of contemporary culture. It adopts, adapts, rejects, and sometimes tries to redeem.

University students are at a stage of life and in a cultural situation where the challenges of cultural discernment are great. They are like cross-cultural missionaries or development workers who learn a new language, eat new food, dress in new clothes, and learn to relate to women and men in new ways. They will not incorporate all of the new culture into their own lives, but they will change. Their new culture may have some virtues that were lacking in their own. They may become critical of some of the patterns of their own life that they formerly took for granted. Their friends and family may be hurt by their comments. This can result in alienation. It can also lead to mutual enrichment. This dynamic, these risks, and these potential benefits are present in all cultures at all times.

## Conclusion

MB mission to university students affirms the central ministry of local congregations. The first priority is to equip congregations to welcome and nurture students within their fellowship.

The second priority is to strongly encourage students to find Christian fellowship on campuses and to become involved in Bible study, prayer, service, and witness.

The third priority is to equip students to be credible and articulate witnesses in the cultural setting in which they find themselves. Later in life that context will change, and they will need to express their witness in ways that are relevant in their new professions and relationships.

Finally, in both congregation and campus students should be mentored to bring their ideas, lives, and professional aspirations under the lordship of Christ, avoiding the false dichotomy of personal faith and secular profession.

Students are most likely to grow as Christians and maintain their relationship to the church when they encounter listening ears, generous hearts, and wise counsel as they learn to express and integrate their new discoveries and perspectives, their doubts and dilemmas, and even their critiques of the church itself. Within the fellowship of a congregation and a community of Christians on campus they will "Know who they are, and whose they are."

## Notes

[1] This story was told by an alumnus of the University of Waterloo at the 50th anniversary celebrations of Conrad Grebel University College, August, 2013.

[2] The Canadian story of these Bible schools and colleges has been told in various places by Bruce Guenther. See for example his, "Monuments to God's Faithfulness: Mennonite Brethren Bible Schools in Western Canada, 1913-1960." *Direction*. 30:1 (2001): 21-32.

[3] Even though "ministry preparation" came to dominantly mean "pastoral preparation" over the years, the original broader sense of ministry as the collective calling and work of all members of the body of Christ continues. Thus, post-secondary Christian education is relevant for all, regardless of professional occupation.

[4] There are two international student ministries started by Mennonites that have had a global impact. In the early 1950s the Mennonite Board of Missions initiated the London Mennonite Center and the Paris Mennonite Center to provide housing and Christian fellowship for international students studying in those cities. The London Center served many students from Africa, Asia, and North America, including many MBs. It became the impetus for the Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom, for the Bridge Builders conflict mediation service, and for the Wood Green Mennonite Church. It is now known as the "Mennonite Trust." The Paris Center spawned three congregations, a library, and a peace center. It was especially important for Mennonites from the Congo who came to Paris for university education. Many students who had no previous Mennonite connections were welcomed at these centers and a considerable number became Christians.

[5] I was involved in Student Services leadership in Canada from 1975-1982, and in Mennonite post-secondary education since 1974. In those years I have had the privilege to minister to many young adult and university student groups in churches and on Bible school, college, and university campuses. I lived in India and Bangladesh for several years and became familiar with Mennonite post-secondary education in India during that time. In my visits to many Mennonite churches and schools in Latin America, Asia and Europe I have seen the priority placed on biblical education and leadership training.

[6] These lists document a noticeable overall trend toward more university education among MB young adults from the 1960s, but also a strong emphasis on the importance of Bible education. Many students attended Bible school for two to three years before attending university. This was strongly encouraged as a preparation for the challenges of urban, university life. Higher education was not an "either-or" choice between university or Bible school, but a "both-and" combination of Bible school and university. Many students who appeared on lists in the "Bible chool" category for one to three years, later appeared in the "university" category for several more years.

Another model was to combine Bible and university education. The Mennonite Brethren Bible College established a formal association with the University of Winnipeg in 1971. This made it possible for students to live in a Christian college community, study with Christian professors, and study at a public

university at the same time. Enrollment at the College increased significantly in the following two decades.

[7] *Arena* was published from 1967-70 and *Forum* followed. MB participation in these ventures was contested. This is reflected in Minutes of the Canadian Board of Higher Education in the 1970s. For example, the Minutes of July 4-5, 1975 record a request from the Board of Social and Spiritual Concerns that *Forum* no longer be distributed to students. Members of the Board of Higher Education who evaluated issues of *Forum* expressed the opinion that, "there is merit in spite of some bad articles. Written responses to bad articles can tend to balance the harm of these articles." (Minutes 75-54)  For a brief history of the grounds for some of these debates, see Paul Tiessen, "'It was like watching my own life': Moviegoers in John Rempel's *Arena* (1967-70) and Miriam Toews's *Irma Voth* (2011)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review.*  87:1 (January 2013): 49-72.

[8] For example, Manitoba Student Services invited Harvard professor Erwin Hiebert to speak on the History of Science in February 1976 in cooperation with the University of Manitoba department of Physics.

[9] These bibliographies included resources for Bible study, discipleship, evangelism, and the integration of faith and learning. John Stott's, *Basic Christianity* (1958) and *Your Mind Matters* (1972) were commonly recommended. In 1976-77 Alberta Student Services sent a copy of *Your Mind Matters* to all post-secondary students and pastors. See Centre for MB Studies, Vol. 58, Box 4, Book 12, p. 973.

[10] It was not that chaplaincy was never an option. In 1965 the MB Board of Reference and Counsel of British Columbia developed plans to place a chaplain on the campus of Simon Fraser University. The plans were not implemented. See John D. Friesen, "Ministry to Mennonite University Students in British Columbia, 1950-2006, *Direction* 37:1 (Spring 2008): 122-131.

[11] For example, these books published by InterVarsity Press: Francis A Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There,* 1968.  John Stott, *Basic Christianity,* 1958, *Your Mind Matters,* 1972, and *The Radical Disciple*, 2010. Os Guiness, *In Two Minds,* 1976. Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life,* 1979. Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society,* 1980.

[12] There were many consultations. For example: A "Career, Life Planning" seminar for pastors, youth workers and high school teachers in 1979. Consultations on student and young adult ministry for pastors and provincial representatives in Winnipeg in 1980, Calgary in 1983, Vancouver in 1984, and Saskatoon in 1985. The 1986 meetings in Winnipeg addressed ministry to international students. In 1987 the seminar in Ontario focused on how to maintain contact with and minister to MB students who were studying in non-MB Christian schools.

[13] A more recent group that has had a significant impact is the "Veritas Forum." It works with Christian students on college campuses to host forums centered on

the exploration of truth and its relevancy in human life, through the questions of many of the disciplines studied at universities. The organization aims to engage university students and faculty in exploring life's deep questions through the perspective of Jesus Christ. The Veritas Forum began at Harvard University in 1992.

[14] For example John Howard Yoder significantly shaped contemporary understanding of the social and political implication of the life of Jesus and the mission of the church. John Paul Lederach is a global leader in conflict transformation. Howard Zehr is known worldwide for his pioneering work in restorative justice based on the teachings and life of Jesus. David Shenk is a world leader in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

[15] In John G. Turner's study of Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ, he tells the compelling story of how Campus Crusade mounted a massive campaign on the Berkeley University of California campus in 1967. Berkeley was chosen because at that time it was such an intense center for discussion, protest and change. Bright wanted Christians to be strongly represented in such places. See *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

[16] See Friesen, cited earlier.

[17] See Tiessen, cited earlier.

[18] Neither dominant culture nor the MB church are static. While stories of the past can be instructive, they do not define the present or future. In the past forty years many Mennonites, including pastors, have embraced popular music and incorporated it into the worship of the church. Movie clips and other contemporary media are used in many Sunday sermons.

## Study Questions

1. Interact with one of the four concluding priorities that the author lists by giving some of your own suggestions for *how* to accomplish that priority.

2. What are some of the current cultural issues facing university students today? How could Christian university students engage that issue?

3. In the history section of things done in the past, what should churches continue to do and what should change? What still works? What would not? Make some new suggestions.

4. What are some of the fears that college/university students are facing today?

5. A major priority for MB mission to university students has always been connecting them to local fellowships. What are some of the challenges to accomplishing this for students studying away from home? How would you address those challenges?

# 43 Mission Through Christian Universities[1*]

Marlene Wall

I am not a theologian. I am not a pastor. I am an MB (Mennonite Brethren), an MK (Missionary Kid), a PK (Pastor's Kid), and a TCK (Third Culture Kid).

Twenty years ago this summer the world changed in ways that most of us could never have imagined. Twenty years ago this summer the Soviet Union collapsed. The global definition of super-powers and of enemies, and the global polarization of ideologies was forever altered.

Twenty years ago in August, when I was in Moscow during the coup that changed the world, I wasn't able to tweet "Sat on tank in Red Square this afternoon!" because Twitter didn't exist. I wasn't able to change my Facebook status to "Ate at the same Pizza Hut where Yeltsin bought pizza for his troops today" because Facebook didn't exist. I couldn't Skype my family that I was fine, or check the latest status of the political situation at CNN online. In fact, in the Soviet Union in 1991 an international phone call would have required my booking it two days in advance. And the price might have been shown to me on an abacus.

I would suggest that the speed of change in parts of the post-Soviet world has been more dramatic than the speed of change in the West. From that summer of

Marlene Wall (Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, Kansas State University) has served in teacher training and professional development in Europe, Africa, and North America. Prior to being installed as President of LCC International University (Lithuania) in 2012, she served ten years as LCC's Academic Vice President. She is a member of the First Mennonite Brethren Church in Wichita, USA, and has served on various church and denominational boards.

1991, in which I participated in the first Summer Language Institute in Lithuania in a society that was just emerging from fifty years of being closed off from the world, to 2011 at Lithuania Christian College (LCC) International University, the quantity of change, the speed of change, and what has changed can no longer be captured in a short volume on a shelf. Because in reality, in these past twenty years, Lithuania has "caught up" on almost seventy years of change.

Within the aging generation of Lithuanian citizens for whom this pace of change seems insurmountable, incomprehensible, the self-imposed solution too often is suicide, giving Lithuania one of the highest suicide rates per capita in the world and creating a nostalgia for the good old days of Communism when at least everyone had sausage and a roof over their heads. By contrast, the students that now enter LCC were born after the fall of the Soviet Union. They hear stories from their parents or grandparents that hardly make sense, given the world that now exists.

This "change" of change is evident when we look at the accelerated rate of growth in mankind's knowledge base. The question to consider is, "How quickly does what we know change?" What would happen if we assumed that all of the scientific knowledge that mankind had accumulated by One A.D. equaled one unit of information? How long did it take that one unit of knowledge to double? Research shows that the answer is 1,500 years. The next doubling of knowledge from two to four units of information took only 250 years, until 1750. By 1900, 150 years later, knowledge had doubled again to eight units. The doubling speed has now reached every one to two years.

The speed of change globally occurs at such a pace that one wonders how the church, how the Christian institution of higher education, can even hang on for the ride, let alone participate as holistic witness.

What is our role? How can we contribute, as institutions seeking to be different, seeking to be change agents in the midst of change? I find it interesting that even UNESCO, in their proceedings from the World Conference on Higher Education in recent years, describes the relevance of higher education as being responsive to the world of work, being responsive to the other levels of the education system, being responsive to culture and cultures, being responsive to all, being responsive everywhere and all the time, and being responsive to students and teachers. There is very little that institutions of higher education are not challenged to consider, even outside the Christian arena.

So, how do we view our witness in this context? I would like to suggest three responses to this question. First, we must offer an education that is relevant. Second, we must create places of hospitality. And third, we must live as pilgrims, and not tourists. Relevant education—places of hospitality—life as pilgrims.

## Relevant Education

First, one could say that, given the pace of change, perhaps the best we can offer society is an education that is relevant in order to ensure vocational preparedness...not just for the first or second job after college, but perhaps even the fifth or sixth, perhaps even for a job that currently doesn't exist. Studies show that Americans change jobs ten times in the two decades following graduation. I would argue that a liberal arts education (a broad-based, multidisciplinary approach to education) would best serve the needs of a changing society. Under the umbrella of full disclosure, I remind you that LCC International University is a liberal arts university. For the past nine years I have introduced this concept of liberal arts, of multidisciplinary knowledge, to our incoming freshmen through a visual demonstration.

First, I reference the dominant model during the Soviet era—that of the pitcher and glass. If our brains are the container or glass, and the pre-determined knowledge is the liquid in the pitcher, then surely the pouring of the knowledge into the container should be a useful model. The challenge, however, is that our brains are more like a sieve than a glass, and thus we spend too much time patching the leaks and thinking of ways to maximize storage. This is generally the point in my presentation at LCC at which I announce my own personal number—which this year was 1520. This number represents the number of gigabytes of storage space that I personally own (laptop, camera cards, external hard drives, iPod), not including the two large bookshelves in my office. And yet, this pitcher-and-glass model is left wanting. The rate at which knowledge is created means that no number of gigabytes, no brain capacity, is large enough to capture what we need in 2011. It has been said that we live in an information-rich and action-poor society. We must push for education that moves us beyond simply the receiving of knowledge, to education that moves us/our students in the direction of doing things, the scholarship of engagement.

To put it another way, the world produces between one and two exabytes of unique information per year, which is roughly 250 megabytes for each man, woman, and child on earth. Note that an exabyte equals a billion gigabytes. By contrast, in the 1700s all the information in the world could fit into one edition of the *New York Times*. There is no strong incentive for the pitcher-pouring-knowledge-into-your-head approach.

Then I illustrate the "baked cookie" approach to education, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, where the combination of information, the access and reformulating of knowledge, the construction of ideas is greater than the accumulation of data. I offer the students a tray of flour, sugar, butter, an egg, and a little salt…and ask if anyone is interested in a cookie. Of course, any individual

ingredient is not sufficient to represent the whole once the real cookies are passed around; I make the point that a multidisciplinary approach to education, a well-defined integration of various disciplines, within a context of critical thinking and innovation, is an education that can prepare people for life.

At LCC, we believe that the liberal arts, with a well-ordered integration of theology and psychology and literature and science and economics and history are an educationally holistic witness within a changing society. Perhaps it is the critical thinking, the effective communication, the Christian worldview, the conflict transformation, the community building, the servant leadership, the multicultural perspective—these core competencies of our liberal arts education—that can contribute a sense of stability and preparedness within a changing society.

Some refer to this as the development of T-shaped graduates versus toothpick graduates. Employers do not want "toothpick" graduates who have learned only the technical skills and who arrive in the workplace deep but narrow, not able to break out of their mental cubicles. Society/employers need T-shaped graduates for whom the crossbar points to competencies traditionally identified with the "liberal arts" and with grounding in faith traditions (ethics, global knowledge, intercultural literacy, integrity, strong communication and collaborative skills).

These T-shaped graduates are more likely to be prepared to handle adaptive challenges (those that can be solved by the hard work of discernment by those who are impacted by the problem). On the other hand, toothpick graduates are more likely only to be prepared to handle technical challenges (those that are met with known, tested and predictable answers). The important reality is that generally adaptive challenges cannot be met with technical solutions. So it is important that our graduates (our congregations!) are trained for the adaptive challenges in our changing societies.

In 2007, the American Association of Colleges and Universities described the society that our students would be entering and how that should affect their education: "The world in which today's students will make choices and compose lives is one of disruption rather than certainty, and of interdependence rather than insularity."

In an era when knowledge is the key to the future, all students need the scope and depth of learning that will enable them to understand and navigate the dramatic forces—physical, cultural, economic, technological—that directly affect the quality, character, and perils of the world in which they live.

In an economy where every industry—from the trades to advanced technology enterprises—is challenged to innovate or be displaced, all students need the kind of

intellectual skills and capacities that enable them to get things done in the world, at a high level of effectiveness.

In a democracy that is diverse, globally engaged, and dependent on citizen responsibility, all students need an informed concern for the greater good because nothing less will renew our fractured and diminished commons.

In a world of daunting complexity, all students need practice in integrating and applying their learning to challenging questions and real-world problems.

In a period of relentless change, all students need the kind of education that leads them to ask not just "How do we get this done?" but also "What is most worth doing?"

And from a Christian institution, this T-shaped graduate should leave our halls with an understanding of the relationship of faith to all of life, a theology of work, a bridging of the sacred/secular divide (as Mark Green from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity refers to it), a knowledge of the ultimate "syllabus for living," and a Micah 6:8 commitment to obedience. These graduates then extend the holistic witness into areas of society that institutions cannot reach. (Micah 6:8— "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.")

I realize that I am not writing only to educators and administrators of liberal arts institutions. Nor do I want to assume that this model is the only model. But whatever model of education that we can confirm is relevant in our contexts, this is what we must pursue…with excellence. Whether we consider distance-education models, or certificate versus diploma options, whether we embrace "business as mission" or a "theology of work," whether we exhibit a particular focus on social responsibility or environmentalism, or other institutionally distinct options, it is the paradox of the long-term relevance of the education within changing societies that speaks to the witness we are.

## Places of Hospitality

Second, as holistic witness in changing societies, I believe we are called, as institutions of Christian higher education, to be places of hospitality. Henri Nouwen, a well-known Catholic priest and writer during the last century, defined hospitality as the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend. This kind of hospitality is intended not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.

So, what should our "empty space" hospitality look like? Counterintuitively, according to Nouwen, it includes a voluntary poverty of mind, a learned ignorance.

He suggests that in order to prepare ourselves for service we have to prepare ourselves for an articulate not-knowing. Someone who is filled with ideas, concepts, opinions and convictions cannot be a good host. There is no inner space to listen, no openness to discover the gift of the other. We need to be people whose articulate not-knowing makes us free to listen to the voice of God in the words of the people.

It is only through the silence of "open space" hospitality that we are able to learn about the soul of Lithuania:

- That Lithuania was the last European nation to move from paganism to accept Roman Catholicism, resisting religion that came with a sword, and therefore still reluctant to listen to a minister of the gospel who comes as a crusader.
- That Lithuania values fellowship more than entertainment, and emphasizes the emotional more than the intellectual.
- And, that despite the changes all around, Lithuania's character is one of passivity and nostalgia, symbolized by the Pensive Christ—who gives a false portrait as one who only laments over but does not save from oppression and sin. Therefore for many Lithuanians the gospel ends with the crucifixion, not the resurrection. This message needs to be challenged by the true, hope-giving empowering of the One who has all power in heaven and on earth.

I would suggest that a holistic witness begins with the creation of this kind of free space. This space can be a safe place where dialogue is possible, where the many "us versus them" distinctions can be blended into "we," whether that be related to diversity of ethnic and national cultures, language backgrounds, faith traditions, academic thought, or research pursuits.

The danger, according to Nouwen, is that empty space tends to create fear. As long as our minds are occupied we can avoid confronting the difficult questions which we do not want to surface. "Being busy" has become a status symbol, and most people keep encouraging each other to keep their body and mind in constant motion, without much tolerance for a moment of silence. But as Christian institutions of higher education, we can, we must, be places of empty-space hospitality, at least occasionally, so that dialogue can begin, and community can be built. It is within dialogue and community that we remain relevant as holistic witness in changing societies. (1 Peter 3:15—"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.")

A footnote to this notion of hospitality—I do not want to be misinterpreted as saying that universities and colleges and seminaries should be places of silence. I

certainly understand that a sense of "intellectual hospitality" can often be very noisy and engaging, but occasional "open-space hospitality" is important as we listen.

And as an additional postscript to this notion of hospitality, I would offer the strange notion that there might even be something we could call "architectural hospitality." How do we as institutions construct space? Do we intentionally seek to make it inviting? In the Soviet world, and still frequently observed, institutions were constructed with long dark hallways, and the doors out into the hallway were always closed. LCC intentionally constructed our buildings with windows on inner walls, with light and space playing as important a role as function. When the rector of the other university in town came to visit us, shortly after he had been appointed, his comment as we did a brief campus tour was, "This place just feels democratic." He says "democratic," I say "hospitable."

## Living as Pilgrims, Not Tourists

Third, as institutions of higher education, our holistic witness is readily visible in how we live and work among others—how and *with whom* we live as pilgrims. It is visible in our choice between being exclusive in our relationships, choosing to identify only with like-minded institutions or only with our church constituencies, and being inclusive in our dealings with neighboring state/secular schools, with neighbors in the community. It is visible in how we view others—not simply as what we are not, but rather as fellow pilgrims—certainly coming from varied perspectives, but not as antagonists. Life as pilgrims, not as tourists.

What are a few characteristics of "pilgrims"?

For pilgrims the journey is as important as the destination.

Pilgrims are concerned with more than the outer physical pilgrimage; depth, not distance, is the goal.

To be a pilgrim is to assume a new and risky identity, surrendering all that clutters one's life so that God takes center stage. Pilgrims travel light and unencumbered.

Pilgrims and pilgrimages build community. No world is perfect, and so the pilgrim must adjust to the sad fact that some companions on the journey are tourists pretending they are pilgrims. Some companions are sources of temptation; others, sources of grace, and it is the prudent pilgrim who knows the difference. But pilgrimage builds community.

Pilgrimage leads to a sense of interconnectedness, not separateness; of solidarity, not independence; of community, not privatism. Pilgrimage instructs us that however much it may appear a solo function, to be a pilgrim is always a corporate event.

What is a "tourist"?

A tourist observes, primarily, at a surface level. Tourists often make a conscious decision to be unaffected, untouched, and unaltered by their new surroundings. Tourists consciously resist transformation. If possible, they carry along their own water and food, and seek out familiar places that will not affect their equilibrium. There can be accidental transformations, but change and conversion are intentional and basic to the disposition of the pilgrim, not the tourist. (Hebrews 12:1—"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and…let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.")

It is who we are on this pilgrimage when we think no one is looking that often speaks louder than any overt message we may want to send. LCC has had to be very intentional in developing as an institution of pilgrims. Lithuanian academics and Lithuanian church leaders have, since our very beginning, carried a healthy dose of skepticism about who we are. We entered the scene in 1991 at a time of incredible change, change from a communist system to an emerging free-market economy, change from a squelched church to a returned openness to religious expression. We entered at a time when the laws regarding higher education were in flux, and certainly there was no distinction between private and public higher education law. We had to compete with the big boys, the universities that were established 500 years ago and which held monopolies on so much of the system and the programs. But we were determined never to ask for special favors. Although we were unique, we still chose to follow the rules of the game, knowing that once we were on the same playing field, we could perhaps effect change from the inside.

A few years ago, after having been turned down on our fifth attempt to submit our psychology program for accreditation from the Ministry of Education—for technicalities we believed were not an accurate reading of the regulations—we determined that we needed to push the issue through the legal system. This was done at the advice of our Lithuanian business/legal advisors, not because we were coming from the litigious societies of North America.

By following the established guidelines for appealing Ministry decisions, we ended up in the Lithuanian Supreme Court … and won! For us, this was the end of a very long process of gaining recognition for our psychology program. But, unknown to us, this was also a huge teaching moment for our fellow institutions. We had been watched. Every move had been analyzed. And days after our court decision was made public, we began to get phone calls. How did we do it? How did we manage to win the case? For many, the fact that there was no bribery, no vodka or chocolate involved, was almost impossible to conceive. But it was our desire to follow the laws and procedures that had been established.

Our living as pilgrims, incarnational living, should demonstrate a desire to both engage and transcend the culture. Our living out of faith as institutions of higher education should not only be an attempt to fit in with the existing social framework but should ultimately be an attempt to influence the culture. Where Jesus went, things were never the same again. Our roles should be similar, not to just blend in with the environment but to infect that environment with the transformational love of Christ, exemplified through a "long obedience in the same direction" that describes our sustained commitment to the work. As Alfred Neufeld has said, "Cultural dialysis for the kingdom of God requires time."

Life as pilgrims (living among, engaging in culture and transcending culture) can be a holistic witness in changing societies. And just to clarify, lest this sounds irrelevant to those of us who do not cross international borders—life as a tourist can take place at home just as easily as in another location. If we are living in isolation, if we do not rub elbows with the world around us, if we observe society from arm's length … then we can be accused of being a tourist in our own neighborhood. When society is changing at such speeds, it would seem to argue for no wasting of time. If we have no non-Christians on our list of fellow pilgrims, if we do not intentionally seek ways to walk alongside, then we are perpetuating a sense of otherness that divides. If our hands don't get dirty with the issues of the day, can we really say we are pilgrims? (To name a few: the earthquake/tsunami devastation in Japan, the use of rape as a weapon in the Congo, sex trafficking in Eastern Europe, anti-government resistance in Syria, female illiteracy rates in many countries, anarchy in Somalia, the conflict in Libya and Palestine and Israel, poverty and violence and destruction and fear.)

In changing societies, in a globalized world, for whom are we responsible? We cannot be paralyzed by the scope of the concerns. We must commit to pilgrim-living where we are.

## Conclusion

Our world is changing at speeds that cannot be measured. We have the answer. We can be confident in the promise that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the One in whom and with whom we live and have our being. With his life as our example, with the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can (as institutions of higher education together with the church) serve as holistic witnesses in changing societies—through education that is relevant, through space for hospitality, and through pilgrim-living.

May God help us to that end.

## Notes

[1] This chapter is reprinted, with permission, from *Direction Journal* vol. 41:2 (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, Fall 2012).

* This chapter was originally a plenary address given at the 2011 ICOMB Higher Education Consultation, Winnipeg, Canada. Present were church leaders, presidents, and academic deans of all Mennonite Brethren and many Anabaptist institutions. The theme was "Church and School: Compañeros (co-laborers) in Growing the People of God."

## Study Questions

1. The challenges of adapting to the incredible pace of change is a theme throughout this chapter. What would you say are some of the skills a person needs in order to be able to adjust to change in a healthy way?

2. With the vast amount of information available to us, including the desperate situations of people around the globe, how do you sift through what to act on and what not to? What criteria do you currently use? How do you keep from getting overwhelmed?

3. Discuss the difference between living like pilgrims and living like tourists. Of the people in your life whith with whom you have frequent contact, who is God asking you to "intentionally live alongside of?"

4. Which example of "creating places of hospitality" challenges you the most? Which one are you the most drawn to? Why?

# 44 Mission Capacity Building

Victor Wiens

## Introduction

"We are responsible for our generation and its evangelization. We have such opportunity to reach the world for the Lord Jesus Christ—with the means to travel, a multiplicity of tools, a motivated global workforce and the information we need to identify the most needy. Above all, God has given us clear directions as to what we must do, and his Holy Spirit empowers us to accomplish it. Will we grasp this opportunity …?" With this "burning question" Patrick Johnstone ends his magnum opus, *The Future of the Global Church*.[1] Said another way, we have the capacities available to us for world evangelization and the completion of the mission task—will we develop them in our circles of influence and use them for their intended purpose, making disciples of all nations?

In this generation there is a new awareness of the multiple challenges before us. We are more aware than ever before that the *nations* to be discipled are not 206 geo-political states, but rather 9,751 *ethne*, or ethno-linguistic people groups.[2] We are more aware than ever before that global allocation of resources for mission are severely imbalanced. One example will suffice: 90% of foreign missionaries work among already-reached people groups; 10% work among unreached people groups.[3] We are increasingly aware of the hostility felt by certain religions, or at least the growing radical elements among them, toward Westerners in general and Christians in particular. Although responding to another challenge, that of the rich entering the kingdom of God, we may be tempted to repeat the disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" (Matt. 19:25).

It is my conviction that we live in the most amazing time in history when it comes to carrying out the Great Commission. Never before has God used so many resources through so many Christians from so many churches in so many lands! There is a new

missionary army arising from the majority world that is allied with existing forces from the west. "More missionaries are now sent from non-western churches than from the traditional mission-sending bases in the west."[4] There is an unprecedented movement of peoples across cultures, borders and even oceans. There are missional implications in these migrations, many of which include non-Christians moving to places of Christian witness, and others including Christians moving into unreached populations (such as the thousands of Filipinos working in the Middle East). A third example of new resources is that of mass media. From the availability of the Bible online in dozens of languages, to internet chat rooms for seekers, to discipling new believers in restricted access countries through satellite television … we have entered a new chapter in the communication of the gospel.

The mission capacities we speak of must be embraced and activated. By "mission capacity building" we mean *coaching one another to actively engage in the missionary task, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).

We coach each other in a variety of ways for a variety of engagements in God's mission.  This is a biblical activity. God instructed Moses to *call* the people into a covenant with him, part of which is to be before the nations a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:5-6). The psalmist (possibly David) *instructs* the people to "declare his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Ps. 96:3). Isaiah *prophesied* that the suffering servant, first Israel and then the Messiah, was to be a light to the Gentiles and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 42:6, 49:6). In the New Testament, mission capacity building happened as the disciples *apprenticed* with Jesus, as the believers devoted themselves to *apostolic teaching* (Acts 2:42 ff.), and as church leaders gathered to *worship, fast and pray* (Acts 13:1-4). Missionary Paul *reminds* the Ephesians that leaders are given to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (4:12). For the Colossians he *prays* they would "bear fruit in every good work" (1:10). His life makes crystal clear he was not merely referring to service and fruit among believers. The author of Hebrews offers a *blessing* that the God of peace "equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him" (13:21).

As a missionary movement now engaged in mission for over 150 years, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church has also been coached along its missionary journey. How so? As a people of the book, the reading and study (individual and corporate) of Scripture has been a primary influence. While open to other "winds of the Spirit," the MBs never forgot their spiritual forefathers of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, including their sense of missionary responsibility and urgency. In earlier years, other missionary movements such as the Lutheran Pietists

(from which came the Moravians), and the German Baptists (which led to an early sending of missionaries to India) provided not only inspiration but also models and structures. In the twentieth century, the evangelical missions movement has provided the primary coaching influence for MB missions from North America. Over the years, a variety of methods have been instrumental in building mission capacities among the MBs, including literature (such as missionary biographies), visionary preaching, missionary conferences, personal witness, evangelistic preaching, women's missionary societies, regular missionary reports, mission-focused Bible institutes, and proactive mission boards or agencies.[5]

Mission capacity building can further be understood as coaching in three spheres of operation. These are the church, the training center, and the agency. To these three we now turn to better understand the strategic role of mission capacity building.

## The Church

Healthy churches are missional churches. Missional churches are missionary-sending churches with vision for reaching both their Jerusalem (local) and the ends of the earth (global), and the peoples in between. So the first question to ask toward mission capacity-building is whether our churches are healthy. By *church* we include both its local and other expressions (regional and national conferences, etc.). One of the most helpful tools in diagnosing church health came out of an international research project by German missiologist Christian A. Schwarz.[6] In his research of 1,000 churches in 32 countries, he discovered that healthy, growing churches seem to share eight quality characteristics. These characteristics are:

1. Empowering leadership. In a healthy church, leaders are more concerned about equipping others for ministry and releasing them, than they are about their name or their territory.

2. Gift-oriented ministry. In a healthy church, ministries are led and conducted by those who are gifted and passionate about precisely those ministries, not by those who lack these qualifications.

3. Passionate spirituality. Church members reveal an eagerness to worship, to grow, and to serve. They are passionate about the Lord and his people.

4. Functional structures. Where groups and ministries are contributing to the growth and well-being of the church, they are blessed and strengthened. Where they no longer serve the direction the church is moving today, they are graciously terminated.

5. Inspiring worship service. Worship services are characterized by variety, quality, relevance, sincerity, and congregational participation.

6. Holistic small groups. In a healthy church, there are a variety of small groups that meet regularly and address the daily concerns of their participants.

7. Need-oriented evangelism. In a healthy church, the gospel is indeed good news in the sense that it touches people where they are hurting today, in addition to bringing assurance of eternal life.

8. Loving relationships. The "one another" commands of Scripture are known and embraced. People know they are valued, and in turn express love and appreciation to others. This atmosphere is attractive.

Many of these characteristics also apply to the conference level of the church. The Canadian Conference of MB Churches has made healthy churches a priority. This has led not only to an articulation of church health in their mission, vision, and values statement, but to making church health a strategic service offered to their 250-church conference.[7]

Building missional capacities in the church goes beyond seeking healthy churches, though this basic ingredient is essential. One must also ask the question, "Is there a vision for mission?" If the Antioch experience is not a standard, it certainly is an inspiring model … have the leaders seen or heard something while they were seeking God and his purposes? Is it a vision from God? Is the vision clear and has it been written down? Is it owned by the church leadership? Has it been shared with the members so they own it? Jesus saw fields ripe for the harvest (John 4:35). Peter needed to see the vision which would open up a new mission three times, but he got the picture. Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian asking for help (Acts 16:9). It is true that without a vision people perish, but with a vision people are ready to charge hell with a water pistol.

If, like Moses, you have been to the mountain and received a word for God's mission, you can't stay there. Life happens in the valley, and the vision needs to get translated into effective systems and structures. By systems we mean a coordinated plan including people, methods and procedures. Examples of mission systems in the church include a plan for prayer, a plan for mobilizing resources, and a plan for training. Systems work well when there are gifted people to work them and structures to support them. A prayer system to intercede for the lost and the missionaries sent to reach them needs a prayer warrior to lead the charge (and prayer is a battle). This leader will need to create structures including communication tools (prayer bulletins), gatherings for corporate prayer, and prayer teams. Well-developed and well-operated structures will also be needed to support systems that mobilize finances, that recruit missionaries, that train those who will go, and so on.

As Anabaptists and Mennonite Brethren, we understand from Scripture that mission is *from* the church and *unto* the church. That is, essential to mission is the gathering of new believers into church communities, and where such do not exist, to plant new churches. Thus, mission capacity building in the sphere of the church must include coaching toward the planting of new churches. This may be in your church's immediate geographical or cultural sphere (your Jerusalem). Or it may be in your nearby district to a near-culture people (Judea). Both within many countries and in neighboring countries are people groups that are different but not distant (Samaria). Examples would be some immigrant groups in your own city who are somewhat acculturated. Or a same language and culture group, but living in a neighboring country. And then there are those groups that are distant from us, either geographically and/or culturally (the "ends of the earth" people). With the growing migration movements, many of these are closer geographically than we realize. However, many more are distant and need cross-cultural mission workers to cross many frontiers to reach them. All this to say that central to the mission capacity-building role is the coaching of churches to send mission workers and plant reproducing churches, from their Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Two reminders are necessary here in regard to Acts 1:8. We do well to remember that this is a prophecy that Jesus is giving to his disciples, not a command nor a suggestion. Therefore, it is assumed that indeed the Holy Spirit will come and that indeed the disciples will in fact be witnesses. Secondly, the connecting word between these spheres of witness is *and,* not *then* or *thereafter.* In other words, Jesus is not saying that witness must be sequential, or that we cannot go to the ends of the earth until we have passed through Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. The evidence of this is in the fact that soon after this prophecy, on the day of Pentecost, witness was given to visitors (both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles) "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). In fact, one could say that on this first day of Spirit-filled witness this prophecy was fulfilled all at once, since people from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth were present.

Finally, according to biblical patterns and our own mission story, we must coach churches to partner with each other as they engage in mission. The New Testament from Acts forward is the story of local churches working together to accomplish what no one could do alone. Jerusalem workers were sent to help Antioch grow as a fledgling church, but later Antioch sent workers and funds back to Jerusalem to help with famine relief. In Paul's letters, we see numerous references to inter-church cooperation for the sake of assisting the needy, offering encouragement and instruction, exchanging workers, etc. The outstanding expansion of the early church

did not happen by churches acting independently of each other. Moreover, the global expansion of the Mennonite Brethren Church could only have happened by local churches and national conferences cooperating to accomplish much more together than anyone could do alone.

## The Training Center

Whether we are thinking about missionaries preparing to cross the seas, church planters preparing to cross the city, pastors preparing to lead missional churches, or many others such as teachers or administrators needed to support mission activities, there is a need to have systems and structures focused on training mission workers. Here we are thinking much more broadly than a few missions courses in the Bible institute or seminary curriculum.

Rather, we need a multi-faceted system of training that has a number of delivery approaches, one of which is an *intentional structure devoted to the training of mission workers*. The larger system of training in a local church, or a family (conference) of churches, could include informal, non-formal, and formal approaches to training (see in this reader the chapters devoted to the non-formal and the formal). *Informal* training happens spontaneously during the normal activities of living, or for our discussions, the journey of the Christian life. Learning a language in daily conversation, spending time with a mentor, or observing appropriate behavior patterns are examples of informal learning. *Non-formal* learning is intentional and organized, but is outside the formal educational or school system. Seminars, non-accredited courses, and ministry apprenticeships are included in the non-formal approach. *Formal* learning is the approach we are most familiar with in literate societies. Whether centralized in a school or decentralized in an extension program it includes an academic curriculum, a course syllabus, a recognized teacher and leads to certification, usually accredited by a reputable organ. What follow are some recommendations for the development of the *intentional structure* of mission worker training referred to above.

Whether the training center is formal or non-formal, that is, whether it leads to a degree or not, in most cases is a secondary matter. What is primary is whether desired learning outcomes are accomplished. Outcomes should be identified and planned for in both formal and non-formal training structures. Whether the worker is a young adult just beginning his/her mission service, or a seasoned veteran that is committed to lifelong learning, training outcomes are essential both for learner and trainer. The following are a list of outcomes that are pursued in the Missionary Training and Equipping (MTE) program, a non-formal training center operated by MB Mission in Abbotsford:

- **Word Of God**
  - Understand the depth and uniqueness of the gospel message for personal, communal, and universal transformation.[8]
  - Learn to apply and experience the gospel's transforming power in all areas of one's life (spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and relational).
  - Learn to interpret God's word (Bible study, spiritual gifts of wisdom and discernment) and communicate his message to others (preaching, teaching, prophetic words) for transformational impact.
- **Prayer**
  - Grow in passion for God's abiding presence, hearing his voice (through Scripture, prayer, and community), obeying promptly, and experiencing the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
  - Grow his/her heart for the nations and practice the principles of strategic intercession.
- **Team Life**
  - Understand one's own and the team's primary passions, spiritual gifts, personality styles and leadership styles.
  - Understand how his/her family/singleness fits into this covenant community.
  - Grasp team development dynamics and acquire skills in healthy conflict resolution.
- **Church Planting**
  - Understand the centrality of the church in God's kingdom mission and grow in love for the family of God.
  - Learn to appreciate the relational principles of authority, mutual accountability (submission), and servant leadership.
  - Grasp the multiplicative dynamics of discipleship and church planting best practices:
  - Make disciples through personal faith-sharing experiences.
  - Lead small groups to foster spiritual growth and mission.
    - Disciple others so that they might make disciples.
    - Understand church planting cycles.
    - Understand and develop a philosophy of ministry.
- **Spiritual Engagement**
  - Learn the principles of and practice strategic intercession for the least reached.

- o   Be equipped for spiritual warfare through biblical study and the exercise of authority over the Evil One.
- o   Learn the principles of laying apostolic foundations among the least reached.

- **Cross-Cultural Engagement**

  - o   Learn to value incarnational ministry, "bonding" relationships.
  - o   Learn the importance of language learning in cross-cultural ministry and acquire skills for language acquisition.
  - o   Acquire skills for host culture exegesis (demographic and ethnographic research).

- **Evangelical-Anabaptist MB Values**

  - o   Learn to value and own Evangelical-Anabaptist values such as discipleship, community hermeneutics, covenant community, the priesthood of all believers, servant leadership, sacrificial service, kingdom of God theology, personal and social ethics, stewardship, peacemaking, and global mission.
  - o   Appreciate the stories and the missiological contribution of the MB Mission legacy.
  - o   Own the MB Mission values (interpersonal and organizational) and solution model.

- **Church-Based Mission**

  - o   Understand the value of being sent by local communities of faith.
  - o   Learn to communicate regularly and effectively for God's glory.
  - o   Learn to mobilize people (short- and long-term), prayer and finances for the furtherance of God's mission among the least reached.[9]

The advantage of using an outcomes-based approach to training is that outcomes such as those listed above can be embedded in any number of delivery structures, from the local church-based leadership center to a pre-service mission training center to an accredited Bible college. Each of these delivery structures can potentially become a mission training center with the right outcomes, and of course, the right trainers.

## The Mission Agency

While the formation of a mission agency is not an essential, the last two hundred years of mission sending from western churches, and now more recently the church sending from "everywhere to everywhere," has confirmed this recommended approach to mobilizing and sending mission workers.  Some mission agencies were

begun to focus on a particular region or people group (e.g. Sudan Interior Mission). Others were begun to advance a certain kind of mission ministry (e.g. Wycliffe Bible Translators). Most denominational missions begin to advance the whole gospel of Christ by obeying the Great Commission, including evangelism, discipleship, church planting and other supportive ministries. Mission agencies allow for a greater focus of attention, a greater employment of expertise, and a more effective administration of resources than most local churches or denominational boards are able to handle on their own.

Here some examples of the roles a mission agency can play as a church or denomination develops mission sending capacities:

1. Mobilize and channel resources from the local church to the mission field. These resources include prayer, vision, missionary candidates, and finances.

2. Discern, together with the local church, the giftedness, readiness, and placement of missionary candidates.

3. Train, together with local church and training center, those approved for missionary service. Part of this training includes the discernment and development of missionary teams.

4. Provide field-appropriate and experience-based ministry supervision to missionaries. This includes on-field needs such as language learning, acculturation, context analysis, strategy deployment, and cooperation with national partners.

5. Care for, together with the sending church, the missionary family and their many needs.

6. Request, prepare, and provide relevant and inspiring information between missionary work and supporting churches.

7. Learn from and share best practices in relation to other mission agencies.

8. To serve and lead the church in the discernment of opportunities, in developing missionary strategies, and in suggesting goals and plans.

## Conclusion

Church, mission training center, and missionary agency are partners in the mission task. Each is a key player in the building of mission capacities. Some recent examples serve to illustrate how we might *coach one another to actively engage in the missionary task, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.*

The mission department (agency) of the Democratic Republic of Congo MB Church recently sponsored distance learning seminars (training) for church health and church planting in Bandundu province. The trainers are also teachers

at the *Centre Universitaire de Missiologie* (University Center of Missiology), an interdenominational mission training center in Kinshasa. Some 400 pastors and leaders participated in this non-formal education reaching men, women, and youth. They are eager for more training because they sense an empowerment to bring the whole gospel to their communities.

The Khmu Mission, a MB church planting movement, has its center in Northern Thailand, called the Changing Life Center. It provides leadership, mission, and community development skills to Khmu workers coming from numerous locations. Semester-long courses are offered for resident youth and week-long modules for adult learners. Some are for credit and others only for capacity-building. Informal coaching is given to all. The movement is spreading to other people groups and countries.

The Colombian MB Church has sent out over ten missionaries in the last decade. Many of these workers joined teams supervised by the North American agency, MB Mission. Recently the conference took a leap of faith and appointed a former missionary to develop a mission agency. It is called *Heme Aqui* (Here Am I). The church is supporting the agency, but the agency is coaching the church to become more missional, to plant more churches, to care for its missionaries, and to send out its own missionary teams.

It's a great day to be alive and active with our Lord in his mission. With blood, sweat and tears, the whole church is taking the whole gospel to the whole world. One of the newer apostolic leaders coming from the majority world (India), K. P. Yohannan has declared, "The single most important hindrance to world evangelization right now is the lack of total involvement by the Body of Christ."[10] Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

## Notes

[1] Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011), 239.

[2] "Global Statistics," http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics.

[3] Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 4th ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 543.

[4] Ibid., 531

[5] G.W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 7-28.

[6] Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream: Churchsmart Resources, 1996).

7 "About CCMBC," http://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/resource/our-operations.

8 Each missionary candidate is paired with an experienced personal mentor during training, thus including the informal aspect of training also.

9 These outcomes have been developed by MB Mission staff Ray Harms-Wiebe and Tim Klassen.

10 K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton: GFA Books, 2003), 85. Also available online, http://www.eaec.org/bookstore/revolution_in_world_missions.pdf.

## Recommended Reading

Ferris, Robert W., ed. *Establishing Ministry Training: A Manual for Programme Developers*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995.

Johnstone, Patrick. *The Future of the Global Church.* Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011.

Lane, Denis. *Tuning God's New Instruments: A Handbook for Missions from the Two-Thirds World.* Singapore: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1990.

Mandryk, Jason. *Operation World*. Seventh edition. Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2010.

Naja, Ben. *Releasing the Workers of the Eleventh Hour: The Global South and the Task Remaining.* Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2007.

Wan, Enoch, and Michael Pocock, eds. *Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges, and Case Studies.* Evangelical Missiological Society Series no. 17. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009.

Winter, Ralph D., and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader.* Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009.

## Study Questions

1. Of the eight characteristics listed of healthy churches, which would you say describe your local church? Which need special attention? What might God be calling you to do?

2. Give one example of access you could have for mission training for each of the methods (informal, non-formal, formal).

3. What are the advantages of a missionary being sent out with a mission agency as opposed to being sent out directly by his or her local church?

# 45 Global Partnerships
César García and David Wiebe

## Introduction

Some years ago a woman with a foreign accent—a friend of ours—knocked on the door of one of our churches in Bogotá. The church's pastor—another friend—opened the door. The woman was evangelizing that neighborhood and started to talk with our friend without knowing about his Christian commitment. He invited her to talk, thinking he would give testimony to this foreign missionary that maybe belonged to some strange religion.

They were talking for several minutes before they discovered their common faith. The surprise grew even bigger when they realized they both were members of the same tradition—Anabaptism—and, more than this, that they were members of the same Mennonite denomination. She was shocked to learn that there are around 12 Anabaptist churches in Bogotá.

For several years this woman, who had come from a European country, had been serving in this city as a missionary under the auspices of her Mennonite church, without being in touch with Colombian Mennonites of her same church family.

César García (M.A., Theology, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary) was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He has been a member of the Colombian MB church since 13 years of age. He has served in his conference as church planter, pastor, and chair of the national Colombian MB church. Since 2012 César has been serving as General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

We would like to say that the story of our pastor-friend and his European missionary visitor is just an isolated case. However, similar stories are repeated again and again around the world in places where Anabaptist churches and agencies serve without knowing what other members of our global communion in the same place are doing. Anabaptist presence lacks power and impact when worldwide partnership among our members and institutions is not functional.

This article explores what it means to be a global church in partnership. The realm of global partnerships entails such fields as theological confession, evangelism, church planting, mission sending, peace, justice, diaconal service, education, health, and economic development among others. These matters are all in play if one includes the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). What does it mean to mobilize resources in all these fields "from everywhere to everywhere"?

## The Goal (Telos) of Global Partnerships

Following the story of our Colombian friend we can say that one of the goals of global partnerships has to do with the use of resources for cross-cultural missions. However, we think this is just one of the areas in which global partnerships affects our missiology. Furthermore, global partnerships have to do not just with our missiology but also our theology and ecclesiology.

### Theology

Global partnerships have as a goal to lead us to a better understanding of who God is. We can see in Revelation 7:9-10 how God yearns for his people to be a multicultural family of faith in which diversity is celebrated, where different foods, music, clothing, customs, ways of celebrating and individual identities are accepted and enjoyed. In our current world of cultural segregation among peoples, God calls us to give testimony of the love that destroys the walls that separate.

In this scripture, more than dogmas or human structures, the family of faith shares a common past of faithfulness to God. As the author John pictures it, the community has remained firm before the Lamb. This community has emerged victorious through commitment, suffering, sacrifice and even martyrdom. As at the Old Testament Feast of the Tabernacles where the Israelites waved palm branches, the multicultural family of faith now celebrates around the Lamb that was slain, free from slavery and materialism.

In Revelation, this family thus finds its purpose. It is in this community where Christ is acknowledged as the Lamb of God, worthy of our adoration, that we

discover the One who challenges human standards of glory, authority, leadership and power. Only when we share our faith experience in the context of global diversity can we see clearly who God is and what he is like. Only when we acknowledge our inadequacies and accept the gifts that other global communities share with us, can we have a clear vision of Jesus.

Interdependence in the context of suffering allows us to understand that our God sees leadership as service and commitment. Our God's authority stems from his sacrificial love for us; he has identified with our pain, and experienced our suffering.

When the global church shares its faith experiences of Jesus in an interdependent way, the characteristics of each local congregation give us a more complete image of God: Jesus, the Lamb of God, who sacrificed himself for us. The goal (center) of global partnerships, then, is the person of Jesus.

Acting as a global family fills us with life because it allows us to see the Lamb in a way we would not have otherwise seen. We are able to enjoy a little of that Kingdom which is still to come, and yet is already here among us!

## Ecclesiology

Another goal of global partnerships has to do with our experience of the church as a foretaste of God's Kingdom. In a world of nationalisms, violence, injustice, and suffering, to find a global community that stands with you and supports you gives you the strength and hope that you need to overcome difficult situations. Let's explain this based on our own experience and history.

Around one hundred years ago a German Mennonite pastor and historian, Christian Neff, had a dream about inviting Anabaptist churches from around the world to connect to one another. In a context of suffering because of world wars and revolutions he explained his vision in the following way: "Our strength is great if we stand united in one faith and remain loyal to the brotherhood."[1]

A unified, global brotherhood gives us strength and hope in spite of suffering. Neff understood this as well as his brothers and sisters of Russia, who, in the midst of suffering and persecution at that time, supported his vision and encouraged him in his desire of building a global Mennonite communion. However, not every Mennonite leader in Europe agreed with Neff. Why have another Mennonite institution? Do we need something like a global interdependency?

It is easy to get Neff's vision when you are dealing with contexts of suffering and oppression. Churches in contexts like this appreciate the support and hope they find in a global family of faith. On the other hand, churches that are in contexts of affluence and comfort tend to live independently, without seeing the value of a global

community. There are wealthy churches who appear concerned about taking God's Kingdom to other places, yet fail to notice that an essential part of that kingdom means being a global, interdependent church that is able to walk alongside members who suffer and celebrate with those who experience joy.

As followers of Jesus we are called to walk alongside those that suffer, to stand with them, and to try to stop the cycle of violence as Jesus did. In the words of Norman Kraus:

> Jesus' *shalom-making* was a ministry of the "wounded healer" who healed through transformation. Instead of leading a violent revolution as the insurgents of his day advocated or working at political reform of the oppressing structures, he identified with the poor and attempted to interrupt the cycle of violence. At the same time he by no means condoned the inequities of the system fuelled by the selfish anxiety of the politically and economically powerful. This nonviolent peacebuilding from the bottom up is the essential message of Jesus.[2]

God calls for the experience of feeling the foreign pain as our own pain. It has to do with hearing the calling of the other as God did in Exodus 3:8.[3] Jesus called us to live in this way, to be sensitive to the needs of others and to identify ourselves even with their feelings. This is what compassion is.[4]

Oliver Davies defines *compassion* as "the recognition of another's condition, entailing a degree of participation in the suffering of the other, an embrace of that fellow-suffering, and a preparedness to act on their behalf."[5] Can you imagine the impact that our global community would have if we acted as one body, moved by God's Spirit on behalf of those who are suffering?

*Compassion* in the Old Testament רָחַם (*rā·ḥām*)  involves the idea of having a strong affection toward someone, based on a relationship, which can manifest itself in actions of kindness and concern for one in difficulty. This word has the same Hebrew root as רֶחֶם (*rě·ḥěm*) which is the word for *womb*, or uterus.[6] In some way the relation of these words helps us to understand that God's compassion is comparable to the reaction—the feelings and the actions—that a mother experiences in feeling the suffering of her children.

A follower of Christ cannot be indifferent to those members of the global church who cry out in pain. A follower of Christ will react with the same passion that a mother would in order to defend her children. Acts of a global and compassionate multicultural family can make a real difference, as has been the case in our Mennonite experiences in Russia, Germany, Vietnam, Colombia, Panama, and Congo, among other places.

**Missiology**

Good partnerships make possible the sharing of resources, experiences, gifts and weaknesses in a way that strengthens our service and testimony. Good communication enables us to network teams for more efficient and effective work in church planting, peacemaking, social development, health, and education. However, global partnerships are not just an issue of pragmatic benefit. It is part of the core of the gospel we share.

In John 17:23 Jesus prays: "… that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me …" (NRSV). Through his prayer he establishes a direct connection between the unity of his followers and the effectiveness of their witness. In other words, the world would believe in Jesus if it saw a community that loved one another. In our world today nationalisms and the specialization of some ministries threaten the efficacy of our witness because of the fragmentation that they bring to the body of Christ.

What could happen if our witness were presented in a multicultural way and as an expression of Christ's church? What could happen if we saw our global family as an organic body that is interconnected and intercommunicated, instead of just a network of institutions? What could happen if we avoid duplication of efforts, while celebrating differences and diversity? Imagine the missional impact of a multicultural team that has been sent: people from different nations overcoming nationalisms, loving each other, serving to their new community; people with different gifts working on church planting, peacemaking, social development, health, and education, connecting all these gifts in a coordinated way; people being one, and the world knowing Jesus.

## The Culture of Global Partnerships

The global church in partnerships stands on a theological foundation, but is also affected by the sociology of interaction. The following items affect how we approach global partnerships.

**Models of Relating**

***Bilateral Model:***

As an example, this is a two-nation model. In the political sphere, an ambassador represents one country to another. Interests of the two countries are mutually discerned. This model turns "colonial" when the sending country attempts to dictate to the receiving country, either directly or indirectly. Such actions can be subtle,

and not always easily discerned cross-culturally, especially when relationships develop between people that gloss over colonial dynamics at a personal level.

### Multilateral Model:

ICOMB—the International Community of Mennonite Brethren—represents this model, at least potentially. It is in this body that each national church is represented. It is a context both for fellowship and to address the critical question: "What does it mean to be a global (MB) church?" ICOMB provides a forum where such matters as the rules of engagement between and among countries can be negotiated; where common activities in holistic mission can be discerned and selected.

The way to the future is the multilateral model. It is more complex and takes more time, but speed often results in violence and damaged relationships.

## An Understanding of Sharing Gifts

### Material and Non-Material.[7]

Material gifts include created things—plants, animals, minerals, our world itself—as well as things created from these by humans—goods, products, money, etc.

Non-material gifts include special capacities, skills, and "talents"—things that result in the ability to do almost anything: carpentry, food preparation, music, arts, business activity, farming, science, etc. Time is a non-material gift. Spiritual gifts fit here: all those things used in and by the church to "build up the body until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God…" (Eph. 4:11-16).

A conversation somewhere in the Global South went something like this. "What do you need (from our global church family)?" The list of largely material category items grew quickly. Then the question was asked, "What do you have to offer to the church?" Silence ensued. And then a little prompting elicited a list of some non-material gifts this church could offer.

In global partnerships we need to give credit to both categories because of disparity in the material realm. Some parts of the world are more gifted in non-material areas, and less so in the material category. Since material gifts are easily observed and evaluated, it is also easy to develop prejudice toward their intrinsic value, over against the value of people without an abundance of material gifts, and the value of their contribution.

### "Need" is Not the Opposite of "Gift"

We tend to think that need is the opposite of gift. But Tshimika and Lind propose otherwise. If all are gifted, then "need" plays a different role.

> "Needs are not the opposite of gifts, but are much more intimately re-
> lated. Why do the hungry need food and the sick need healing? So that
> the gifts God has endowed them with can be nurtured and can in turn
> be given. We could say that gifts "need" other gifts so that they in turn
> can be given. What we call a "need" then, can in fact be seen as a cry of
> invitation from a gift that is trapped and cannot be released or given".[8]

Need is thus the vital link between gifts. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." We do well to reflect on the implication: we actually need the weaker members of the body.  Need actually mobilizes gifts.

But we must be creative and thoughtful—need does not always dictate the kind of gift to be mobilized. Needs can awaken gifts, sometimes those not currently being used. Without needs there can be no gifts.

### Gifts are Meant to be "Shared," Not Merely "Given"

This follows closely, for example, behind the theory of need. In Africa, a strong funeral tradition is community sharing. Everyone comes, and all bring what they can—money, food, livestock, clothes, singing or a lengthy eulogy. All gifts have one central purpose: not to enrich the family of the deceased, but to build a stronger community. The gifts allow the family to take care of the needs to those who come to visit, of course, but the *telos* is that the bonds of the community be strengthened.

Sharing carries relational freight. When gifts are shared, rather than simply "given," the world of the giver and receiver are made to overlap. Sharing implies that all of the parties become involved with each other.

For this reason it is difficult to share (rather than merely give) material gifts. They are too mobile, and too easily separated from the giver and from the relationship. Unless, of course, material gifts take on a relational value because they are objects that can be viewed frequently, reminding one of the relationship. Then their value lies in their provenance, and because of who used them or gave them, not intrinsic cost.

### On Money

Of all material gifts, money is the most mobile, the most detachable, and therefore the least relational. Money is disconnected and mercurial. One easily gives money instead of sharing one's life in friendship.

But since it is essential for acquiring certain things we give it more value than it deserves. In conversations like the one above in the Global South, it becomes

apparent that we do this rather instinctively. Christians may offer "mature faith," "trust in God," and "the power of prayer" but somehow underneath, there is a feeling that these "don't really count" in comparison with what money can do. This is felt by all—not just the rich or poor. As Paul put it, "The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Discounting the non-material gifts of our brother or sister is one such evil.

### We Realize Our Inter-Connected Potential in Gift-Sharing

The human relationship is enriched with the sharing of gifts. In every family, there are special occasions when we celebrate by sharing gifts. The mutual exchange may provide a much needed item of clothing or a tool. Or we share to enhance beauty. No matter what gifts are shared, however, such sharing is designed to gladden the heart and reinforce the love between us. Can you imagine a relationship without sharing gifts?[9]

In the global family of faith, the same principle applies. Global partnerships are simply frameworks of relationship designed to mobilize gifts through need-detection, and thereby gladden our hearts and raise the love-factor between us.

### Challenges to True Partnership

These challenges revolve around material resources and how we manage or mismanage them.

### Limited Resources

ICOMB and MWC are organizations with very limited means. As organizations, they are restricted to the capacities of the members—many of whom are materially poor. So the resources available around the world have mobilization needs.

### Historic Attitudes and Prejudices

In addition to historic attitudes about material and non-material gifts, we have political and even theologically driven prejudices. The politics of the world have painted certain areas as less valuable, or more violent, or more aggressive, more unjust, and so on. These prejudices come from our own culture and even our own families. Only Christ and his message of inclusiveness can change that.

The church has also contributed to prejudice. Certain races were deemed "cursed" by the church of 200 years ago. This is completely unacceptable theology, but the echoes of such theological prejudice continue even today.

Anyone working in a global partnership needs to listen to their own thoughts and biases carefully to avoid slip-ups and embarrassing offenses that do not honor God.

### *Cultural Differences*

In relating across cultural lines even "accidental" offenses occur. One might be ignorant of the specifics, and commit an offense merely by doing one's best—but within the rules of one's own culture, rather than the host culture. Such differences can be learned, of course, and in global partnerships, it is worth the time and effort to acquire this knowledge.

### A Preferred Culture

In summary, what might a healthy culture of global partnership look like?

### *Global*

It is easy to get caught up in local concerns. However, in an age of global communication and awareness, one must not ignore the struggles of our faith family in another part of the world. This awareness makes us more responsible. Global partnering and relating is a divine calling to use the gifts available from all over the world to care, identify, and to address issues and needs.

### *Partnership*

"No one left behind" is a slogan from the educational field in the United States. It reminds everyone that some children who struggle to learn can be left behind as other children forge ahead.

This slogan easily applies to global partnerships and relationships. Those with fewer advantages can miss out on certain advances enjoyed by others. To embark on a global partnership means to assist the disadvantaged to participate fully.

We seek a multi-lateral global association based on the assumption that we all have gifts to share and also needs to mobilize those gifts… "from everywhere to everywhere."

### *Relationship*

The result of partnerships is relationship as characterized by Paul who said, "I have you in my heart" (Phil. 1:7). Church members in true partnership love one another, and care when the other experiences difficulty, trauma, distress, etc. We love to spend time together. We don't mind the costs.

## Guiding Principles

"Guiding principles" are convictions (values) which guide decisions. To reach the goal of helpful and healthy global partnerships, actions will be taken, and guiding

principles inform those actions. But we don't just want to "get things done" – we want to create the culture or character surrounding global partnerships (above). So the convictions (values) we abide by must be carefully chosen so that a preferred culture is cultivated.[10]

What guiding principles will help us get to the above characteristics and relational culture?

## We Embrace our Identity as Mennonite Brethren

In the MB mission effort, once churches are planted a MB national church (conference) is established. MB Mission, as the mission arm of the MB churches of North America, and global partner of ICOMB, is accountable to establish not just "any" churches, but churches that belong to the denominational family. Established national churches become members of ICOMB – the international expression of MBs. This model can and should happen also among non-North American mission efforts.

This has sometimes been unclear. The MB confessional identity has sometimes been hidden in favor of a more general "evangelical" approach. The obvious objective was to convince people to believe in Jesus Christ and then to join the emerging local church. But in fulfilling the objective, the character of MBs as part of the Anabaptist movement was not sufficiently taught. The "Mennonite Brethren" name and difficult parts of the confession have been hidden. This guiding principle was cultivated in North America, where most missionaries originated.

The result was confessionally "generic" evangelical churches whose leaders and members did not know their confessional identity except through the missionary presence. When they networked with other Christian church leaders these associations affected the "heart and soul" of the local church leadership and membership. Eventually the missionaries departed, leaving a very tenuous denominational (family) identity.

Today, some of these churches no longer belong to the MB family. The supportive MB community that sent out the missionaries cannot see the growth of the movement except for isolated independent churches or those which have joined other denominations. This is not our "preferred culture" but serves as an example of where global partnerships can take us if we are not careful to cultivate our identity through strong, positive associations and clear adherence to the Confession of Faith.[11] By contrast, ICOMB has a culture of loving relationship and real joy in upholding the Confession. This is the preferred culture of identity.

**The Global Partnership Goal is Church Growth**

Partnerships should lead to results in the area of mission and discipleship. Development partnerships serve the community and are critical to saving lives and making it possible to hear the gospel. Development is often a doorway to interest in Jesus Christ, conversion and church planting. MBs view community development as part of the holistic gospel. Resources accepted from non-church sources (e.g. governments) should not inhibit or compromise a church-related ministry from freely fulfilling its mission.

**We Encourage Transparency about Multiple Partners**

People in resource-poor contexts typically establish multiple income streams out of necessity, since a single income stream is not usually sufficient for survival. People in resource-rich contexts often view this suspiciously. In North America, for example, a culture against "moonlighting" (having two jobs) was developed in the twentieth century, and still is a subconscious factor even though many North Americans today work two or more jobs to survive.

Generally it is appropriate to bring to the surface all the income streams. This allows for understanding, and even, where appropriate, the chance to use the benefits from one to enhance the other. For example, when a Congolese brother was unable to get access to Canada in 2011 to attend and speak at the Higher Education Consultation hosted by ICOMB, he used his other partner agency to acquire the needed visa papers to come from the United States.

**Patience**

Beware of the violence of speed. In a multilateral model of partnership, patience is both a virtue and a critical conviction. Language and cultural differences require understanding, which is borne on long-term relationships and the spirit (culture) of mutuality. The issues of "sin" need to be discerned. Some things called "sin" in the colonial era are now recognized as cultural. Some things we might label "cultural" really are sin and must be addressed accordingly.

**Control and Accountability**

The use of trusted liaisons is critical to smooth over cultural differences. Partnership arrangements should be developed cooperatively with liaisons serving as bridges between beneficiaries and benefactors as much as possible.

Short-term development arrangements with partners should include plans for long-term sustainability, including both local and global support as judged

appropriate. Long-term support arrangements with partners should be trustworthy and reliable to enable both the giving and the receiving organization to plan financially with confidence.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have envisioned a global community that is aware of the condition of the other, a global community that prays for each other and celebrates together, a global community that shares its gifts and serves the world bearing witness about the kind of God that we have. We have spoken about a community that knows Jesus through global partnerships.

This is already happening around the world. And it will continue happening more and more. This is our prayer and our commitment! Come! Join and support our global family! As the song says:

> You're not alone, we are one body…
> You're not alone, we stand with you…
> You're not alone, your time of suffering is our suffering, too…
> And I know the day is coming when we will be rejoicing anew.
>
> Many members in this body that we know,
> Some are great and some are small,
> Eyes and ears, and hands and just a little toe,
> One God who activates them all…
>
> One body, Spirit formed and Spirit fed
> Men and women, rich and poor
> A banquet where the least sit at the head
> One body broken for the world[12]

## Appendix—Partnership Principles: A Case Study from ICOMB—MB Mission

In a Memorandum of Understanding between MB Mission and ICOMB the following principles, based on concepts by Phill Butler, were outlined to characterize this relationship:

1.  By working together, we <u>encourage each other to greater faithfulness, desire God's best for our partners, and maximize the use of the resources, gifts, and abilities God has given us.</u>  Partners are released to focus on their strengths, work within their passions, and maximize their contribution. (Philippians 1:9-11; Matthew 25:14-30).

2.  <u>Encouragement, refreshment, and hope</u> replace loneliness and despair when God's people work together (Psalm 133; Hebrews 10:23-25).  Independence increases risk and threatens perseverance.  There is <u>synergy in shared calling, shared vision, shared burdens, shared information, and shared resources</u>.

3.  Effective partnerships are built <u>on relationships characterized by affection, trust, transparency and mutual concern</u>.  Partners need to know, understand and value each other.  The most acute challenge to international cooperation is the absence of healthy relationships between the West and North and the growing majority churches in the East and South.

4.  Effective partnerships <u>begin by identifying key felt needs among the people being served</u> before discerning kingdom priorities, barriers to spiritual growth, and available resources.

5.  Partnerships are <u>a process, not an event</u>, which requires investment in relationships, consensus building and effective management.

6.  Effective partnerships are made up of <u>partners with clear identities</u> (calling, vision, values, ministry objectives, etc.) who know what they are able to contribute.  Partnerships motivated by weakness (we need money, know-how, missionaries, etc.) are unhealthy.

7.  Effective partnerships <u>recognize and honor all participating groups</u>:  the people being served by the partnership; the partner agencies, churches, conferences; the supportive constituencies (prayer, finances) of the partners; and the partnership group itself.

8.  Effective partnerships <u>value worship, prayer and communion as essential elements for oneness in Christ</u>.  It is essential to sustain the partnership with an active prayer support network (it is not just vision, strategy, and interdependence).

9.  Effective partnerships <u>demand sacrifice</u> (time, finances, personnel, etc.).

10. Effective partnerships <u>expect problems and deal with them proactively</u> (changes, exceptions, disappointments, unfulfilled commitments, etc.).[13]

Phill Butler has a somewhat more comprehensive list, which include several valuable principles that are appropriate to add to the above.

1.  Effective strategic partnerships have to be driven by vision – beyond the capacity of a person or agency to achieve alone. It's the essential purpose of having a partnership that takes it beyond simple fellowship.

2.  A lasting partnership requires a facilitator to bring it to life and keep it going. A facilitator will bring patience, tenacity, and a servant heart. There also must be a champion from each participating agency. This set of champions becomes ongoing facilitators.

3.  Broad ownership is critical. A hierarchical relationship or structure is not a true partnership. We want people to actively engage in the process of setting objectives, making decisions and ongoing communications.

4.  Celebrate differences. A partnership starts with what groups have in common, but the mature relationship comes to admire and value the contribution that comes from differences.[14]

## Notes

[1] Cited by John Lapp and Ed van Straten in "Mennonite World Conference 1925-2000: From Euro-American Conference to Worldwide Communion," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 2003), 8-9.

[2] C. Norman Kraus, *The Jesus Factor in Justice and Peacemaking*, Theological postings series (Telford: Cascadia Pub. House, 2011), 114.

[3] Javier Giraldo, *Derechos Humanos y Cristianismo: Transfondo de un Conflicto*, 2nd ed., Religión y Derechos Humanos (Bogotá: El Búho, 2008), 229-30.

[4] Ibid., 234.

[5] Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 233-34.

[6] J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

[7] Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind, *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2003), 24-25. Their observation about time as a gift is insightful. "It is as though, in some parts of our world, time has

been fully transformed from gift into a commodity" – i.e. from immaterial to material! (p. 28)

8 Ibid, p. 30.

9 Ibid, pp. 38-40.

10 T.J. Addington, *Leading from the Sandbox: How to Develop, Empower and Release High-Impact Ministry Teams* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010). We have used and modified Addington's concepts for this essay.

11 "ICOMB Confession of Faith," International Community of Mennonite Brethren, accessed March 18, 2014, http://www.icomb.org/confession.

12 Words and music by Bryan Moyer Suderman. Copyright© 2005 SmallTall Music.

13 Memorandum of Understanding for Partnership between MBMS International and the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), unpublished document, 2009.

14 Phill Butler, *Well Connected: Releasing Power, Restoring Hope Through Kingdom Partnerships* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2006), 16-18.

## Recommended Reading

Augsburger, David W. *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns.* 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Avruch, Kevin, Peter W. Black, and Joseph A. Scimecca. *Conflict Resolution: Cross-cultural Perspectives, Contributions in Ethnic Studies.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1991.

Branson, Mark Lau, and Juan Francisco Martínez. *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011.

Butler, Phill. *Well Connected: Releasing Power, Restoring Hope Through Kingdom Partnerships.* Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2006.

Dula, Peter and Alain Epp Weaver. *Borders and Bridges: Mennonite Witness in a Religiously Diverse World.* Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

_____. *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting in Around the World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Sheffield, Daniel R. *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2005.

Tshimika, Pakisa K. and Tim Lind. *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment.* Intercourse: Good Books, 2003.

Woodley, Randy. *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity.* Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2001.

## Study Questions

1. The authors' vision for global solidarity is clearly stated. What are the major hurdles against such solidarity? What are drivers and builders of such solidarity? How can this relate to the mission enterprise?

2. How can the principles of gift-sharing create an impact on evangelism? On community service and development? On the development of local churches and an association of churches?

3. Several sections refer to guiding principles for global partnerships. What set of guiding principles for a specific cross-cultural partnership in which you are involved might be developed from these points?

# Afterword

David Wiebe

This Missiology Reader comes at an important juncture in the life of ICOMB—the International Community of Mennonite Brethren. The global Mennonite Brethren movement itself is just over 150 years old. The first ICOMB meeting was held in 1990, meaning that the year of the Reader's publication coincides with ICOMB's 25th anniversary.

I represented the Canadian MB Conference at ICOMB's annual summits for ten years, and now have served as ICOMB Executive Director for four. From this vantage point I might make a couple of observations.

Our identity is forged along three lines: community, confession and mission. They are like a three-legged stool. If one is missing or shortened, the stool doesn't serve nearly as well.

ICOMB as an organization was formed to facilitate community among our national church bodies. At first the continents were represented, but soon enough each national church sat at the table. More and more, these representatives were national leaders, replacing missionaries from North America. The fellowship at Annual Summits is warm. There is personal sharing, foot-washing, and taking the Lord's Supper together. Community is expressed in church life too. When the German churches suffered damage under flooding in 2002, the African church, struggling as it was to manage meagre resources, sent money as a gesture of care and solidarity.

Secondly, ICOMB invested in creating an international Confession of Faith. An international committee wrote the first draft. Right away "East met West" in creating a two-part confession: one a more narrative (eastern) approach describing the larger story of God and his work in our world; the second part a series of points outlining our core conviction-set (west). All national bodies discussed, suggested improvements, and otherwise had input in subsequent drafts. Since acceptance in 2004, and the 2006 release of the commentary-lesson book to study the Confession, almost all national church bodies have translated the Confession and commentary into their heart language.

Mission is the final leg that forges identity. Classic forms of mission have included evangelism and church planting, but also services: relief, community development,

medicine, education, and more. ICOMB leaders are thrilled to have a part in this Reader, as it is an expression of our missional character in action. ICOMB is the result of mission—the missionary effort brings people to Christ and into churches, which form an association that ultimately becomes a member of ICOMB. Thus while ICOMB is different than a mission agency, we are inextricably linked.

Currently MB Mission is working in forty or so countries. The future membership of ICOMB will surely grow out of the work of this "mother" mission agency based in North America.

But the circle is not complete until our national church bodies themselves form capacity to go beyond church planting within their cultural confines to making the leap into cross-cultural mission. Healthy national churches are already reproducing significantly. It's that next step we pray and long for. And there are signs that it's coming.

Just prior to the ICOMB Annual Summit in Peru, 2013, the Latin American leaders caucused for a day. They analyzed themselves as individual national churches, but also as a whole. In their report to the Summit delegates, they asked if there would be room for a mission sending agency based in Latin America—something to stand parallel to MB Mission. Since then Brazil has launched a mission agency to send workers overseas.

Elsewhere India is working on a mission training institute within the MB Centenary Bible College. The German churches are beginning to sit on the board of MB Mission in Europe, taking responsibility for the direction of that part of the work.

A second observation: we could divide the global family into four broad contexts. Churches live in *poverty*, *plenty*, under *persecution* and under *political challenge*. So which setting is the most fertile for mission and the growth of God's kingdom?

In the past we might have said *plenty* because most missionaries came from the wealthy countries of Europe and North America. But that's not the case anymore as recently we see more than 50% of the global missionary force comes from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Besides, while it's the source of much funding, the Global North church can be spiritually bound by materialism.

Is it *persecution*? Our Anabaptist history—and all church history itself—tells us there is incredible spiritual power released in martyrdom. But it carries the danger of losing too many good leaders to really develop well. And the trauma carried by members can undermine their development.

Is it *poverty*? Mennonite Brethren could look to our own movement to make a positive case. The three largest national churches—India (200,000 members); Congo

(100,000) and Khmu Mission (almost 50,000)—are found in countries with some of the lowest per capita income indexes in the world. They say that need mobilizes other people's gifts. The problem is those "other people" may not hear the call of that need and thereby miss the chance to participate in freeing up gifts already residing in the poor… leaving the poor where they are.

Is it *political challenge*? This factor usually presents itself in war or conflict, or more benignly, neglect. C.S. Lewis in his book *Screwtape Letters* thought that war was the devil's tool to distract the church through fear or super-patriotism. The Mennonite Brethren story from the twentieth century is filled with witness and mission even during the conflict and terror in Russia. But the toll on leaders and members was severe. Today, the Panama church, made up entirely of indigenous people, suffers from political neglect. Their land rights are often overlooked, leaving them scrambling for justice at times, displacing focus for mission.

One unique political challenge in our global family is that facing the USA Mennonite Brethren. Like the Christians living in Rome in the first century, Christians living in the USA have to figure out how to prioritize the kingdom of God in the "most powerful nation on earth." No one else has quite the same environment as our American church family. How do they live out their peace conviction? How do they address hidden assumptions from the position of power that inevitably affect mission practice and missiology? Is it possible to take an authentic learning posture in order to hear what the rest of the global family has to say about mission?

It may not be possible to discern which of the four contexts has a particular advantage. We all have major challenges to overcome in the call of the Great Command and Great Commission.

Finally, one personal yearning. Wouldn't it be wonderful if publishing a Missiology Reader like this would provide a key to help unlock the potential of our movement to reach some of the more difficult parts of our world, where the major religions are powerful; where the thousands of unreached people groups reside? Most poignant for me as a Canadian is the yearning to reach the "First Nations" in Canada and the United States. Besides all the years of prejudicial public policy, the church itself inoculated the First Nations population to the gospel by operating residential schools and abusing children's rights. So far, over 100 years of attempts by Mennonite Brethren has yielded no standing church among the First Nations. Could this Reader contain keys to unlock this gate shut tight?

It's a lot of weight to put on one book. But it's not really the book. It's the people from our global family, historical examples and present-day writers, who are the key. May God be glorified and his kingdom extended through this intercultural sharing around the Great Commission.

# The Church in Mission

What people are saying about *The Church in Mission*:

*"Imagine the missional impact of a multicultural team that has been sent … people with different gifts working on church planting, peacemaking, social development, health, and education, connecting all these gifts in a coordinated way; people being one, and the world knowing Jesus."*

- Cesar Garcia, General Secretary, Mennonite World Conference

*"This volume is both a mirror and a map. With a careful reading both of Scripture and history under the Spirit's guidance there can emerge a map showing what paths might best be taken … Here is both information and inspiration."*

- Elmer A. Martens, President Emeritus, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary

*"The church (in Antioch) was committed to an international vision. They had people from different backgrounds and ethnicities who brought different perspectives to their ministry … we should be working hard to raise and integrate teams from our different worlds for the same cause."*

- Nzuzi Mukawa, MB Mission Team Leader, Sub-Saharan Africa

*"The circle is not complete until our national church bodies themselves form capacity to go beyond church planting within their cultural confines to making the leap into cross cultural mission … It's that next step we pray and long for."*

-David Wiebe, Executive Director, International Community of Mennonite Brethren

## About the Editor

Victor Wiens, Ph.D. serves as Mission Capacity Building Coach for the North American Mennonite Brethren agency, MB Mission. He has taught young church and mission leaders in most MB conferences worldwide in both formal and non-formal settings. With his wife, Marty, he served as a missionary in Brazil for twenty-five years in church planting, leadership development, and mission development.