

# Anabaptist Identity, Pedagogy, Faith, Ethics, and Research in the Teaching of History\*

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## **Introduction**

In this article I recount my pilgrimage as an Anabaptist and my experiences in pedagogy, ethics, and historical research. Hans Denck said that the only way to know Jesus Christ is to follow after him in life. Together with many sisters, brothers, girls, boys, and old and young people, I have sought to follow Jesus in life. I would like to share some facets of my biographical itinerary which have shaped both my Anabaptist identity and my understanding of pedagogy, faith, ethics, and the teaching of history.

When I look back, I realize that much time has passed since I began to move in the direction of a teaching career. I was born in the lovely valley of Cachí, Cartago, Costa Rica in 1958, into a large and poor family that included nine siblings. My father, Luis Salvador Prieto, worked on a large coffee plantation that belonged to the Murray family. My mother, María Esther, died unexpectedly when I was three years old, and my little sister María Eugenia and I were sent to live at an orphanage called “the Biblical Home” in San José de la Montaña, Costa Rica. This orphanage was founded by the Latin American Mission, an interdenominational organization financed by North American Protestant churches. It was established in Costa Rica in 1921.<sup>1</sup> In this orphanage I encountered Bible stories daily, with color illustrations, sermons, and talks, and theatrical presentations put on by the boys and girls growing up with us. I was moved by the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Sarah, Jacob, the children Samuel and David, Esther, Ruth, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, Daniel, Isaiah, the Apostle Paul, the beloved disciple John, Lazarus, Stephen the martyr, and above all, Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> “An Attempt to Meet the Need,” in *Latin American Evangelist* (San José, Costa Rica), 1, no. 1 (1921), 4.

of Nazareth. Margarita and Plinio Sánchez were my first parents in the orphanage, and their kindness and tenderness are still inscribed in my heart.

At the end of 1960s, my family's difficult economic situation still had not improved. After finishing primary school I had to leave the orphanage to begin a new phase of my life. In 1971 I began living with a family that had only recently come to know the Gospel. They attended the Mennonite church in Heredia. The pastors of this church were the Mennonite missionaries Eileen and Elmer Lehman,<sup>2</sup> and they provided the opportunity to develop my talents by teaching Sunday School, directing worship and, later, leading the youth and in evangelization and preaching the Word of God. From 1971 until the present I have been a faithful and active member of the Conference of Mennonite Churches in Costa Rica, and this is my point of departure for these reflections.

### **Pedagogical Challenges in the Teaching of History**

Perhaps it was being uprooted from my family as a child that led me to see history as an enormous challenge in my own life. Today I still have my first bookshelf, which I built from wood from old window frames I found behind the house where I lived when a youngster. I still have the teacher's books that I used to teach Sunday School classes in the 1970s. And I still have the manual used to instruct baptismal candidates in biblical and Anabaptist doctrines and in church practices, as well as the first minutes that testify to the people and circumstances that shaped the Conference of Mennonite churches of Costa Rica (1974).<sup>3</sup> I sometimes think that my collecting and fondly preserving documents passed out by the Mennonite Church was a way to try to give shape to my own life, which had been torn apart by being an orphan. In one phase of my adolescence, my keeping those documents

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<sup>2</sup> The Lehman couple came from the Lowville Conservative Mennonite Church in New York State and, along with Raymond and Susan Schlabach, were the first missionaries of the Conservative Mennonite Conference of Costa Rica, beginning in August 1961. See "Lowville Couple To Establish New Mission In Costa Rica," [Lowville, New York] *Journal & Republican*, August 1961, clipping in Eileen and Elmer Lehman family album, "Memoirs Costa Rica 1961-1965." Photocopy provided to the author by the Lehman family.

<sup>3</sup> Víctor Vargas, secretary, "Actas de la primera Asamblea de las Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas de Costa Rica, 29 de Marzo de 1974." Archivo Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas de Costa Rica.

was an attempt to develop my religious identity and to take my place in society.

If my childhood was marked by the orphanage, my adolescence and early youth were marked by the Mennonite Church of Heredia. Without a doubt, the lives of Elmer and Eileen Lehman, Mennonite missionaries who adopted five orphan children, truly shaped my life. I played with the twins Melvin and Marvin, and with Erland, Elnora, and Emily; we participated together in a thousand worship services, Bible studies, summer Bible schools, youth meetings, serenades for mothers, and Christmas pageants; we played soccer and even picked coffee beans together on the enormous plantations of Heredia. That was where my interest in serving God grew, as did preparations in Christian education. I became one of the first students in the Biblical Institute led by Elmer Lehman and Henry Helmuth,<sup>4</sup> and came to the attention of the missionary Nelson Litwiller<sup>5</sup> in 1976, when he offered courses on “the pastor and his congregation” and on the book of Revelation.<sup>6</sup>

A pedagogical challenge and a great opportunity that arises when we study history is the chance to find ourselves and undergo a process of reflection that can help us understand the development of our own biography. I have written several biographies of theologians, pastors, and Christian leaders, and I always find it challenging to understand the first years of their lives.<sup>7</sup> Those years set an important direction for later years,

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<sup>4</sup> Henry and Esther Helmuth were the second North American couple to work as missionaries among the Spanish-speaking people of Costa Rica. They arrived in 1965. As well as serving as volunteers in the rural zone of Sarapiquí, they were also pastors of the Casa de Oración church, established in the Pilar de Guadalupe barrio of San José. Vernon Jantzi, “Field Worker’s Meeting,” San José, February 23, 1965, 1. Archivo Misión Menonita de Costa Rica.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson Litwiller (1898-1986) was a Canadian missionary and bishop of the Mennonite church in Argentina for many years. Strongly influenced by the charismatic stream, he arrived in Costa Rica in 1976. See John M. Bender, “Litwiller, Nelson,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, 527.

<sup>6</sup> A document signed by Henry Helmuth and Elmer Lehman certifies that the author completed these courses in February 1976. Author’s archive.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Jaime A. Prieto Valladares, “Vocación y misión de Irene Foulkes en América Latina,” in *Vida y Pensamiento* [UBL review] 21, no. 1 (2001): 9-30; “Plutarco Bonilla Acosta (1935- ). Construyendo puentes de la oikumene desde la identidad evangélica,” in Edesio Sánchez Cetina, ed., “*Enseñaba por Parábolas.*” *Estudio del género “parábola” en la Biblia* (Miami, FL: Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas, 2004), 189-322; “Vida cotidiana, movimiento estudiantil cristiano y alfabetización. El testimonio del pastor metodista boliviano Aníbal

when the person taking early opportunities begins to acquire the maturity brought about by experience.

In one's youth the seed of novelty and rebellion – and the desire to explore beyond what one's mentors approve – also grows. This was my experience when I wished to study at a university and learn other things. I began by studying economics. But God's calling would not stop assailing my heart, so I decided to study theology and directed my efforts to that end. The study of systematic theology excited me, as did Old and New Testament and pastoral studies, but the thesis I wrote for my Bachelor of Theology degree was titled "The Radical Reformation of the Sixteenth Century."<sup>8</sup> This first historical sketch required not only an effort to understand the economic and social-religious context in which the Radical Reformation was incubated, but also an exploration of the polygenetic character of the movement and the theological principles regarding church/state relations, liberty, justification by faith, nonresistance, and peace and justice. Historical work helps us recognize, deepen, and understand the very origins of our tradition.

In those years my theological and academic education took place at the Latin American Biblical Seminary (Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano: SBL) in San Jose and at the National University of Heredia,<sup>9</sup> where I was employed in the General Services department from 1976 to 1983. The SBL had become one of the most important theological centers on the continent,

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Guzmán (1951-1969)," in Pablo Moreno, ed., *Protestantismo y vida cotidiana en América Latina. Un estudio desde la cotidianidad de los sujetos* (Cali, Colombia: Fundación Universitaria Seminario Teológico Bautista Internacional-CEHILA, 2007), 91-112; "Victorio Araya-Guilén (1945- ). Desde la vorágine de la revolución hasta la teología de la luz," in Jonathan Pimentel Chacón, ed., *En el camino de la Luz. Homenaje a Victorio Araya-Guilén* (Heredia [San José], Costa Rica: Universidad Nacional/UBL, 2008), 405-53.

<sup>8</sup> Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, "La Reforma Radical Siglo XVI, Trabajo de investigación en cumplimiento parcial de los requisitos para optar al título de Bachiller en Teología" (San José, Costa Rica: Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> The National University (UNA) was founded in February 1973 during the administration of Costa Rican president José Figueres Ferrer. The UNA was described at the time as a "Necessary University" because "it takes up the production of knowledge necessary for a society that is developing by means of scientific investigation and the free expression of ideas; ... desires to arm that society with the necessary and proper technical knowledge in order to free her from dependency; ... wishes to give to its people the professionals, technicians, thinkers and artists who will allow it to attain its integral well-being." Rev. Benjamín Núñez, "Hacia la Universidad Necesaria" (Costa Rica: np, 1974), 61.

and was where a Latin American theology was being developed.<sup>10</sup> The National University, on the other hand, was influenced by the theology and philosophy of Bible scholar Dr. Pablo Richard, sociology professor Elio Gallarde, and economist and philosopher Franz Hinkelammert, all of whom took refuge in Costa Rica after the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile. Enrique Mejía Godoy, the great Nicaraguan singer, was a strong leader in the university's department of Cultural Activities. He spread the ideals of the neighboring Nicaraguan quest for freedom through his enormous creativity in words and music. Many years of struggle by this peasant people – from the assassination of General Sandino in 1934 until the death of Carlos Fonseca Amador in 1976 – were crowned with the success of revolutionary forces over the dictatorship of the Somoza family when the Sandinistas triumphantly entered Managua in July 1979.

One of the great pedagogical benefits of writing history is the increased capacity to perceive what is happening in one's present context. That context should lead us to reflect on the historical reconstructions we undertake, even though our historical writing refers to other times now past. My study of 16th-century radical reform began with an illustration of Menno Simons, who seems to be writing his "Fundament" book; at the end of the appendix appears a depiction of Thomas Müntzer,<sup>11</sup> a leader in the peasant uprisings in Germany, with a book in his hands. Between both figures I placed the declaration of the Ninth Central American and Panamanian Anabaptist Consultation of 1982<sup>12</sup> which, inspired by the revolutionary situation then being lived in Central America, proclaimed the desire to be a prophetic voice in the face of injustice and at the same time to give a testimony of peace.

The Anabaptist message is Christocentric and invites us to get to know

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<sup>10</sup> For details on the theologians and topics permeating the UBL in the 1970s and '80s, see Jaime A. Prieto Valladares, "Desarrollo histórico de la producción teológica del Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano (1923-1993)," in Roy H. May, ed., *Vida y Pensamiento* 13, no. 2 (November 1993): 7-53.

<sup>11</sup> This is the engraving by Christoph von Sichem from 1608. See Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer, Mystiker, Apokalyptiker, Revolutionär* (München: C.H. Beck, 1989), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Convenciones de Iglesias Anabautistas y Menonitas de Centro América y Panamá, Declaración de la IX Consulta Anabautista Menonita de Centroamérica y Panamá (Nicaragua: Monte de los Olivos, July 1982).

Jesus Christ in order to imitate him. One of the most important things in my classes in church history is not to lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ, the center of the Anabaptist movement, invites us not only to know him but also to imitate him, following in his footsteps as we make our way in the world. The students in the institution where I teach come from diverse religious traditions. But no matter their tradition, it moves me to see how the history of our (Mennonite) origins in the 16th century stimulates them to commit themselves to announcing the Kingdom of God and to be witnesses to the transforming power of Jesus Christ, participating in the construction of more just societies in the struggle for peace and justice in our region. Indeed, several of my students got completely involved in the struggle for the rights of indigenous people in Ecuador, for human rights in Honduras, and for peace movements in the troubled country of Colombia.

### **Faith and Ethics in the Teaching of History**

In 1983 I began studying church history with the Presbyterian professor Dr. Arturo Piedra in the SBL, where I had started my theological studies. Following doctoral work in West Germany (1985-1992) I returned full time to the SBL as a teacher. That institution, known today as the Latin American Biblical University (UBL), is international and interdenominational, with students and professors from many different countries and ecclesial traditions, including Roman Catholic. I teach courses on the universal history of the church; the history of the Latin American church; the history, religion, and culture of indigenous peoples and African-descended people in Latin America; and ecclesiology and theology. The particular confessions of faith of professors and students are fundamental in our institution, and its great richness stems from this, since the intent is for all members of the university to nurture one another with their diverse perspectives of faith, liturgical practices, and pastoral models. In this sense, teaching is mediated by the element of faith. Explicitly or implicitly, my Anabaptist orientation is always present in my courses. In the Reformation course, for example, although we do study the magisterial reforms of Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon, and Erasmus of Rotterdam, I give particular attention to the great range of groups that emerged in the Radical Reformation.

For me, teaching is a vocation, not simply a profession by which to

earn a salary. From my first steps as a Sunday School teacher in a Mennonite church to teaching today in a university and giving intensive courses in history and theology in many countries, I have seen teaching as a ministry. It would not be acceptable if, as a teacher, I lost this vocation of service to my students, to the church, and to the Latin American people. I wish to be prepared the best way possible, to be up-to-date with new bibliography in the themes I deal with, and to give daily testimony to the unity of what I preach and what I practice. I believe that our solidarity with those who suffer most should always be present in our teaching agenda, and that our reflection and the construction of our thought should always have contexts of injustice in sight, so that we can see how to contribute concretely to peace. A fundamental part of my teaching agenda is to live simply, remain close to the students, and encourage them to serve the church and the communities in which they live.

I am an Anabaptist not because my parents were, or from convenience, but rather from conviction. The Spirit of God led me to live with Mennonite families, and the testimony of the Lehmans was fundamental during my growing-up years. Afterwards, my faith conviction was affirmed by an opportunity to learn German and to have direct access to the historical, theological, biblical, and pastoral sources of the Radical Reformers by way of the Anabaptists. Although all courses have their specific aims, in my view I should not leave my Anabaptist convictions of faith and ethics to one side when I teach other history courses, since these convictions are a basic part of my identity.

We live in a complex world, but it seems to me that the great spiritual wealth of the different Radical Reforming groups allows us to reinterpret our theology and gives us enough space that we can enter into ecumenical dialogue with many religious traditions and participate creatively in constructing the kingdom of God.

### **Anabaptist Identity and the Teaching of History**

Perhaps it was the reality of revolutionary upheaval in Central America during the 1970s and '80s that led me to re-read Radical Reformation traditions in order to find theological, biblical, and pastoral paradigms with which to confront the challenges presented by my society. I remember that

as the 1970s came to a close, one of the Nicaraguan students in our Biblical Institute was deeply affected by the situation in his country and joined the Sandinista guerilla forces in fighting the Somoza tyranny. This caused great consternation, especially among the North American missionaries, who felt it was important to emphasize the teaching of nonviolence. But the situation was actually much more complicated than this. Nicaragua really was a military state in which many young people were being killed and the most basic human rights of citizens were being violated. The people had no other option than to oppose the forces of the dictatorship just in order to survive. From this reality came great questions: How can we give testimony to our faithfulness to Jesus Christ without ignoring the injustice, hunger, and death being lived by the people of Nicaragua? How can we give a testimony of nonviolence without implying an attitude of indifference to, or distance from, the pain of the people? In other words, How can we incarnate our faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of a peasant people who are suffering violence, destruction, and death at the hands of a military dictatorship lacking all morality, ethics, or scruples?

One of the hermeneutical keys in Latin American theology is reflection that takes into account reality, the Word, and pastoral action. LaVerne Rutschman, a Mennonite pastor and professor of Bible, was a pioneer in building bridges between Latin American theology and the Radical Reformation.<sup>13</sup> He did this by means of the “hermeneutic circle” (a new way of understanding Scripture and experiencing reality), taking into consideration the ideas of the now-deceased Juan Luis Segundo, namely ideological suspicion, theology, exegesis, and hermeneutics.<sup>14</sup> Daniel García, the Argentine Mennonite historian, later offered a general framework for understanding the historiographical debate concerning the Anabaptists.<sup>15</sup> In order to build a bridge between the Radical Reformation of the 16th century and Christian witness in the revolutionary context of Central America, then, it was crucial for us to value the hermeneutic circle in both contexts, to

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<sup>13</sup> LaVerne Rutschman, *Anabautismo Radical y Teología Latinoamericana de la liberación* (San José, Costa Rica: Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberación de la teología* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Lohlé, 1975), 11-45.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel García, “El debate historiográfico en torno al movimiento Anabautista,” in Beatriz Melano, general editor, *Cuadernos de Teología. Historia de la Iglesia. Enfoques desde el Río de la Plata* 12, no. 2 (Buenos Aires, Argentina: ISEDET [University Institute], 1992), 73-97.



compare them, and to allow this mirror to illuminate the reflection and the pastoral and prophetic action of the church at that time.

It seems to me that various persons in the Radical Reformation showed the way of solidarity with the “common man” – the peasants, weavers, and poor families of their time.<sup>16</sup> We may question Thomas Müntzer’s actions in his war against the princes, but we cannot help but admire the argumentative force of his “Bitter Christ,” which led him to identify completely with the impoverished peasants and weavers of his day. Menno Simons’s message, impacted by events in the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster, developed and emphasized following Jesus with the church at the center. Nevertheless, it should not go unmentioned that the authorities put a price on his head. In their constant flights and pilgrimages, Simons, his wife Gertrude, and their children carried the marks of humility, pacifism, and poverty in their superhuman efforts to pastor dispersed Anabaptist flocks.<sup>17</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier is another example of Radical Reform traditions of the 16th century. He showed how to read the Scriptures from the traditions of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, desiring an end to the enslavement of the peasantry.<sup>18</sup> These are some examples of the relevance of the identity born among Radical Reforming and Anabaptist groups.

Another inheritance of great value from the Radical Reformers is their mystical theology. In a world threatened by ecological destruction, Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount can be taken as a powerful spiritual source for preserving the planet. He said:

Don’t walk about worried about your lives, thinking about what you will eat or drink, or concerned about your bodies, wondering what you will wear. Isn’t life worth more than food, the body more than dress? Look at the birds: they don’t plant or

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<sup>16</sup> Ferdinand Seibt, “Johannes Hergot. Die Reformation des ‘Armen Mannes,’” in Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Hg.), *Radikale Reformatoren. 21 biographische Skizzen von Thomas Müntzer bis Paracelsus* (München: C.H. Beck, 1978), 84-92.

<sup>17</sup> Marjan Blok, “Discipleship in Menno Simons’ Dat Fundament: An Exercise in Anabaptist Theology,” in *Menno Simons: A Reappraisal. Essays in Honor of Irvin B. Horst on the 450th Anniversary of the Fundamentboek*, ed. Gerald R. Brunk (Harrisonburg, VA: Eastern Mennonite College, 1992), 105-29.

<sup>18</sup> Christof Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis. Baltasar Hubmaiers Lehre zwischen traditioneller und reformatorischer Theologie* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).

harvest or keep storehouses. Nevertheless their heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they? And, who of you, by simply worrying about it, can add even one hour to time? And, why are you preoccupied with dress? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't work or weave. And I tell you that not even Solomon, in all his luxury, was dressed as well as they are. If God dresses even the grasses in this way, which are in the field today and tomorrow are burned in the furnace, will He not do even more for you, you people of little faith? For this reason, don't be disturbed, wondering about what you are going to eat or drink or how you will dress. It is the pagans who are concerned about these things. Your Father in Heaven already knows that you need all these things. Seek first that His justice reigns, and everything else will be given to you in addition. (Matthew 6:25-33)<sup>19</sup>

Jesus' wisdom from the mountain teaches us to care for creation in the same way God cares for the birds and for us.<sup>20</sup> The profound simplicity of this text moved the spirit and hearts of Jesus' followers in the 16th century. If it was the recovery of the Gospel that led Margareta and Michael Sattler to seal their love for the teacher of Nazareth with their martyrs' blood,<sup>21</sup> we find in Müntzer a critique of the princes who considered themselves owners of the land – on which peasants worked as slaves – who appropriated the fish in the rivers, the birds of the sky, and the wood from the trees. We can see in Müntzer, as in his disciple Hans Hut, who was the main Anabaptist missionary in South Germany and Austria, the influence of the *Theologia Naturalis seu Liber creaturararum* of Raimund von Sabunde, which states clearly that God has delivered two books to humankind: the book of creation and the Sacred Scriptures.<sup>22</sup> For Hut's Austrian Franciscan disciples such as

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<sup>19</sup> Translation into English from *Nueva Biblia Española*, Latin American Edition, Luis Alonso Schökel and Juan Mateos, eds. (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Concerning the universe as a place of enchantment and the preservation of the planet, see Jaime A. Prieto Valladares, "Diálogos para re-encantar el universo," in *Vida y Pensamiento* [UBL review] 28, no. 1 (2008): 111-45.

<sup>21</sup> John H. Yoder, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> Gordon Rupp, "Thomas Müntzer, Hans Hut und das "Evangelium aller Kreatur," in *Thomas Müntzer*, ed. Abraham Friesen and Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche

Leonard Schiemer, Hans Schlaffer, and Ambrosius Spittelmaier, grace has three dimensions. In the first, it is a light that shines in all human beings, be they Jews, Christians, Turks, or pagans. The second dimension has to do with the internal light that comes from the reading of the Old and New Testaments; the third is the light born in the crucible of *Gelassenheit*, which is a complete abandonment in God, in spite of trials and suffering, in order to follow Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

These principles, inherited from the Radical Reformation, are profound in the areas of preaching the gospel to all creatures, human rights, ecumenical/intercultural or inter-religious dialogue, the perception of the sacredness of God in the universe, and the experience of suffering in the following of Jesus. Consciously or unconsciously they become relevant points of departure not only when teaching the history of the church but also when teaching the history of Latin America and the history of indigenous and African-descended peoples.

### **Institutional Objectives, Strategies, and Successful Teaching**

The SBL was founded by the Latin American Mission in 1923 with the aim of educating leaders of the various Protestant churches of the entire continent in Bible, theology, and pastoral practice. In April 1997 the National Council of Superior Private Education of Costa Rica (CONESUP) approved the institution's application to function as the Latin American Biblical University (Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana [UBL]).<sup>24</sup> The UBL has its headquarters in San José, but has agreements with Protestant and ecumenical theological institutions in 13 countries of Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Its key purpose is "to contribute to the integral education of leaders and community members in general, in theological, spiritual, moral, technological, cultural and educational aspects, by means of different service programs and activities both self-defined

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Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 178-210.

<sup>23</sup> George H. Williams, *La Reforma Radical*, trans. Antonio Alatorre (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), 194-210.

<sup>24</sup> Document 322-97 of the Sesión Ordinaria del Consejo Nacional de Enseñanza Superior Universitaria Privada (CONESUP), April 21, 1997. San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Educación Pública. Archivo de CONESUP.

and as defined by its statutes and rules.”<sup>25</sup> Although the UBL, in agreement with other institutions, does teach English, German, and Portuguese, its principal activity is tied to its Bachelors, Licentiate, and Masters programs in Theological and Pastoral Sciences and Biblical Sciences (Old and New Testament).

The relationship which the institution established in 1923 with Latin American Protestant churches was publicized by means of a journal called the “Latin American Evangelist,” in Spanish “El Mensajero Bíblico” (the Biblical Messenger). Also well known were the evangelistic campaigns carried out in many countries by Harry and Susan Strachan. Currently the university publicizes its activities through the previously-noted institutional agreements and by means of the internet. Theological education can take many different modes of distance and residential study, and includes study modules in theology, Bible, church history, and pastoral education. Another program is the Pastoral Biblical Institute, which offers theological, pastoral, and biblical courses for church leaders who have not yet concluded their secondary studies.

There is great respect shown for the confessional orientation of all professors and their academic freedom. But there is also teamwork in assemblies of professors and students where curricular issues are discussed and revised. There is also a public sharing of findings in colloquia which are open to everyone in the university. The orientation of seminars and courses is centered on the central axes of the pedagogy, gender, culture, and society.

The courses in church history help students understand the development of Christianity from the time of its origins to the present. They can get to know the courageous and sure testimony of women leaders and prophets such as Katharina Kreutter, Margret Hottinger of Zollikon, Sabine Bader of Augsburg, Katharina Purst Hutter and Anna Jansz of Rotterdam from the Anabaptist tradition<sup>26</sup> and small groups who gave their testimony of

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<sup>25</sup> Jaime A. Prieto Valladares (Secretary) and Adolfo Ruíz Contreras (President), “Acta Número cuarenta de la Asamblea General Extraordinaria de la Asociación Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano,” June 9, 1995, San José, Costa Rica. Actas de Asambleas Generales, Archivo de la UBL.

<sup>26</sup> Marion Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes. Frauen im Bauern-krieg und in den Täuferbewegungen* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 1993); C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming*

faith from the “margins of history.”<sup>27</sup> It is important to recognize ambivalences in the history of the church, for when it entered into conspiracy with the state, temporal and power interests prevailed over an imitation of Christ. In the history of Latin America, after we come to understand its multi-cultural origin, we see that conquest and colonization mark its subsequent development. Colonial domination of the economy, culture, and society is a reality which overwhelms us even today. Discrimination against indigenous and African-descended peoples defined our colonial past and continues, sometimes in the plain light of day and other times surreptitiously.

I believe I am attaining my pedagogical objectives when, along with studying history with my students, we analyze the whole context, and when we write monographs and theses that both reveal and describe the past and shine a ray of hope towards building better inter-personal relationships in our homes, in the church, and in society, and creating better living situations for society’s most marginal and vulnerable people. I feel I have achieved my objectives in teaching history when students are challenged to follow Jesus Christ in spite of the great difficulties they may experience on returning to their countries and communities of origin. At a first level, I see success when students sharpen their methodological, technical, and writing skills. At a second level, when they are able to write articles and books, and influence their churches, communities, educational institutions, social organizations, and politics or society in general. The third level has taken more time to become visible, but I have seen it in visits over the last 20 years when I have happily met many of my students again. Along with continuing to write relevant contemporary commentaries, they also hold important posts in their churches, communities, educational institutions, human rights organizations, NGOs, and even government offices.

### **Research and Pedagogical Recommendations**

My research has been dedicated primarily to describing the history of Anabaptist-related groups in Latin America. I believe it is necessary to strengthen teaching with research, for a mutual enrichment takes place. In the first two books I wrote about the Mennonites, the accent of my work

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*Pioneers* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Univ.Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Juan Driver, *La fe en la periferia de la historia* (Guatemala: Ediciones Clara-Semilla, 1997).

fell on the role played by the Mennonite missionaries who came to Costa Rica; this research was based primarily on written documents.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, my last two books have made a great effort to incorporate oral traditions. Personal interviews have allowed me to write history that more closely reflects the faith experience of church members. One of the attractions of these latter books is that at least some members of the church can see part of the history of their own lives re-drawn in the historical outlines.<sup>29</sup>

In these new investigations I have tried to balance the actors, so that women, children, and young people are present in the narrative, and to make visible the multi-cultural nature of the Anabaptist people of the Latin American continent. These new methodological and theoretical approaches to writing history have helped me to develop other abilities – and to encourage and direct original research by students at the UBL. Some examples of the latter are a dissertation by Margarita de la Torre, a member of the Quichua tribe of Ecuador;<sup>30</sup> a thesis by Reynaldo Figueroa, an indigenous African-descendant from the Miskito coast of Nicaragua;<sup>31</sup> a thesis by David Eduardo Soto Gallegos of Peru;<sup>32</sup> and a dissertation of Pamela Idjabe Mambo of Ecuatorial Guinea.<sup>33</sup> What was new in these investigations is the use of oral

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<sup>28</sup> Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Die mennonitische Mission in Costa Rica 1960-1978* (Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1992); Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Indianermission im Tal von Talamanca, Costa Rica 1891-1987* (Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Mennonites in Latin America. Historical Sketches* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College/Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2008); *Mission and Migration. Global Mennonite History Series: Latin America*, trans. and ed. by C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA: Good Books/Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> María Margarita de la Torre Saransig, “Una interpretación teológica y pastoral del levantamiento indígena ecuatoriano (29 de enero-7 de febrero 2001).” [A theological and pastoral interpretation of the uprising of Ecuadorean Indigenous (January 29 - February 7, 2001)]. Bachelor of Theology thesis, UBL, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Reynaldo Figueroa Urbina, “La celebración de la muerte: Un estudio de la herencia cultural en la Iglesia Morava Central Miskita en Bilwi, Nicaragua, desde una perspectiva pastoral.” [The celebration of death: a study of the cultural inheritance in the Central Miskita Moravian Church, Bilwi, Nicaragua, from a pastoral perspective.] Licenciante in Theology thesis, UBL, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> David Eduardo Soto Gallegos, “Inicios históricos de las Asambleas de Dios del Perú (1919-1928).” [Historical beginnings of the Assemblies of God of Peru (1919-1928).] Licenciante in Theology thesis, UBL, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Pamela Idjabe Mambo, “La construcción de un discurso sobre Dios en medio de una lucha

history recovered by means of interviews as well as the recovery of cultural elements with origins in the Andean and African cultures of these countries.

To conclude this reflection, I would like to offer some practical pedagogical orientations for colleagues teaching students how to conduct research on the history of the church:

- Carry out the work of historical interpretation taking interdisciplinary approaches into account. That is, be open to dialogue with the social sciences, social history, economics, art, anthropology, literature, gender studies, and other sciences.
- Encourage students to write short monographs on themes that interest them.
- Show them how to do field work with tape recorders and, if possible, with digital cameras.
- Share with students a model for doing interviews, which includes a brief history of the person being interviewed and questions regarding the church, its evangelistic task, and its testimony in society.
- Insist on including in these testimonies the voices of young people, women, old people, children, and, ideally, the entire community.
- Encourage the reading of key, intelligible theoretical studies that make possible the interpretation of a particular person or historical event.
- Encourage the understanding of theoretical parameters that allow tying together the cultural traditions of a people with their experience of the Christian faith.

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de poder y resistencia en la historia de 'El huevo y la gallina' de José Vieira Mateus da Graca." [The construction of a discourse about God in the midst of a struggle of power and resistance in the history of 'The egg and the chicken' of José Vieira Mateus da Graca.] Bachelor of Science in Theology thesis, UBL, 2009.

- Accompany students closely during the research process, and encourage the beginning, continuation, and conclusion of their investigations.
- Allow testimonies and histories of the faith of other people to motivate us to continue following Jesus Christ.

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