

Mennonite Scholars and Friends at the AAR/SBL

Friday, November 16, 2017, 6:30–8:30pm

Denver, CO, Sheraton Downtown, Silver Room (in the I.M. Pei Tower—Third Level)

Forum Abstracts

Ryan R. Gladwin, Palm Beach Atlantic University, "Anabaptism as a Help and Hindrance to Latin American Protestant Theologies of Mission: Moving Towards a Trinitarian and Postcolonial Theology of Mission"

The Argentine liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino aptly called mission the 'material principle' of Latin American Protestantism (LAP). Indeed, all the types of LAP (Liberal Protestantism, Conservative Evangelism, Progressive Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism) have understood their identity and purpose through the paradigm of mission. However, the concept of mission has roots in colonial constructs and cartographies, as noted in the failure of the organizers of the renowned Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference to invite LAP leaders because Latin America was considered part of the Christian (i.e., Catholic) world instead of the non-Christian world. This paper will examine the concept of mission as it has functioned in LAP and, in particular, how Anabaptism has played role in the critique of certain aspects of mission's colonial history. First, this paper will examine how Progressive Evangelicalism has interacted with Anabaptism in its development of a professed 'contextual,' 'evangelical,' and 'biblical' theology of mission: *Misión Integral*. For example, progressive evangelicals such as C. René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and Orlando Costas have interacted with Anabaptist voices such as Juan Driver, Nancy Bedford, and John Howard Yoder. Second, the paper will examine the interaction between liberation theology, Progressive Evangelicalism, and Anabaptism in an effort to critically engage how Anabaptism has both helped and hindered Progressive Evangelicalism in the attempt to overcome the colonial roots of mission. While progressive evangelicals have laudably developed an Anabaptist-like, ecclesiocentric theology of mission that envisions the local church as an instrument of contextualization and social change, they have tended to subsume the kingdom into the church in much the same way that Christendom subsumed the kingdom into the colonial enterprise. Instead, we will suggest the need for a more robust Trinitarian theology that offers an alternative vision of eschatology and pneumatology that breaks with the confines of colonized theologies of mission.

Melanie A. Howard, Fresno Pacific University, "Peaceful Pedagogy: Paul's Areopagus Speech (Acts 17:16–34) as a Model for Education-Based Mennonite Missions"

In Acts 17:16-34, Paul delivers a missionizing speech to Athenian philosophers in which he proclaims the gospel through an appeal to pagan sources. Although this speech has been viewed as an example of using indigenous material or evidence from natural revelation in the service of Christian mission, this episode may also be understood as an attempt to connect the mission of evangelization with the mission of education. In fact, Paul begins the speech with an

object lesson including an “unknown God” (17:23), and he later diagnoses Athenians’ malady as “human ignorance” (17:30a). Paul’s proposed solution to this difficulty is simultaneously an evangelistic and educational one: repentance (17:30b). This final call for “repentance” (μετανοεῖν) could itself suggest a fundamentally pedagogical task insofar as the term demonstrates a philological relationship to the term “mind” (νοῦς). Thus, this paper will argue that the model of missions that Paul provides in Acts 17:16-34 is based upon an assumed connection between education and mission. The paper further contends that such a connection provides a model for a Mennonite practice of non-coercive pedagogy as a mission strategy today.

Joe Sawatsky, Mennonite Mission Network, "Translation, Contextualization, and North American Mennonite Mission with African Initiated Churches"

Over the past decade and more, publications such as Philip Jenkins’s *The Next Christendom* have popularized the reality that the Christian religion’s “center of gravity” has shifted numerically to the “global south”. Christianity’s growth on the African continent has been particularly dramatic, from 10 million in 1900 to a projected 1 billion adherents—or one-third of the worldwide Christian population—by 2050. The Gambian-American scholar Lamin Sanneh has attributed much of this growth to the “vernacular principle”, to Christianity’s innate genius of “translating the message” of the Bible in any and every local language, so that the Word of God finds expression only in the terms laid down for it, being thus transformed even as it transforms culture. Translation has thus embraced and nurtured indigenous expression of the faith, even when western missions, à la colonialism, tragically failed to inhabit their faith’s wisdom. Yet some missions from the west did seek to conform their praxis broadly to the logic of translation or contextualization, i.e., recognizing the primacy of local context for the shaping of ministry. As one such example, Mennonite Mission Network and its predecessor agencies have been working with African Initiated Churches since 1959, scarcely a decade after Bengt Sundkler’s *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* broke ground in the study of independent churches and yet before his positive re-evaluation of these churches in his second edition, not as a means of extending the Mennonite denomination but of strengthening such churches—most commonly through interchurch Bible study—as authentic *African Christian* embodiments of the gospel. Drawing upon published and archival sources, this paper will trace the origins and development of the North American Mennonite mission of interchurch cooperation with African Initiated Churches from West to southern Africa as an expression of that missiological commitment to contextualization.

R. Bruce Yoder, Mennonite Mission Network, "Mennonite Missionary Contributions to the Emergence of ‘World Christianity’ as a Field of Study"

In the decades following World War II, Mennonite missionaries were among those who increasingly conceived of Christianity as a worldwide faith with diverse cultural expressions instead of as a western religion. This paper will use archival material to explore the work of Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) personnel in Argentina during the 1950s and in Nigeria during the 1960s to show how missionary engagement and reflection contributed to such a

change. This evolving perception encouraged the emergence of world Christianity as an academic field of study. In their homelands western missionaries faced a seemingly unyielding advance of secularism, but in Argentina and Nigeria MBM workers found vibrant religious commitment in expanding Christian movements. Native Christians held their Christian identity zealously while retaining many of their traditional religious assumptions. Religious agency and vitality resulted in new forms of Christian practice and belief. Missionaries responded by setting aside their traditional role of creating new churches that copied the polity and theology of North American Mennonites, instead capacitating local leaders who were formulating doctrine and practice for their particular contexts. MBM workers implemented studies of non-traditional Christian movements and collaborated with institutions such as the World Council of Churches and with researchers such as David B. Barrett, Harold W. Turner, and Andrew Walls, documenting novel expressions of Christian life and practice. This paper will show that by documenting new expressions of the faith and by articulating their new understandings of the world Christian movement, Mennonite missionaries were among those who provided the empirical and intellectual foundation for the emerging field of world Christianity.