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Anabaptism as a help and hindrance to Latin American Protestant Theologies of Mission: Moving towards a Trinitarian and Decolonial Theology of Mission

I. Introduction:

In 1916, North American and European missionaries and a sprinkling of Latin American ecclesial leader from historic denominations met in Panama for a conference. The most avid advocates of the conference triumphantly declared it, "unparalleled in the New World's history of missions"[1] and comparable to the early apostolic church's action in confronting the Roman Empire, the spiritual and cultural ancestors of Latin Americans.[2] In fact, the conference was not unparalleled and was a reaction to the better-known Edinburgh 1910, which was a global Protestant missionary gathering that brought together missionaries and some national leaders from all around the globe except Latin America.[3] The organizers of the 1910 conference failed to agree on whether or not Latin America was part of the Christian or non-Christian world, given the over 400 years of Catholic mission. As a result, Panama 1916 was a reactionary conference, an apologetic declaration that Latin American Protestantism (LAP) was a viable alternative to Catholicism. First, the emerging Liberal Protestant Theology in the conference documents asserted that Latin American Catholic Christianity was not a valid extension of Christendom and, as a result, Latin America was a valid mission field. Second, the documents consistently expressed the superiority of Protestantism and its culture as compared to Catholicism, which was depicted as a "carrier and sustainer" of a dark ages' feudalism that created and sustained political and social oppression as well as anti-intellectualism.[4]

The significance of these two conferences is that they demonstrate the dilemma of Latin American Protestant theologies of mission. By 1916 Protestants had been in Latin America for roughly a century and they had to justify their existence because of a colonial-Christendom

[1] Harlan Beach, *Reinaissant Latin America: An Outline and Interpretation of the Congress on Christian Work in Latin America, Held at Panama February 10-19, 1916* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1916), 1.

[2] Erasmo Braga, *Panamericanismo: Aspecto Religioso* (New York: Society for Missionary Education in the United States and Canada, 1917).

[3] Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 13, 54-72. According to Stanley, the conference reiterated the West's tendency to equate the West with Christianity and the Rest with the supposed non-Christian world. Geographic areas equated with Roman Catholic colonialism were deemed as part of Christendom and accordingly not fields of mission. Although the reason for this was laudable in one sense – out of an ecumenical spirit, the reasoning was rooted in colonial imaginaries of geography and culture.

cartography[5] that continued to dominate the social imagination of Protestants. The world was an imagined map of Christian and non-Christian geographies. Latin America, a context colonized and evangelized by Catholicism did not fit nicely into either geography. Latin American Protestants responded not by rejecting this colonial-Christendom geography, but by recalibrating the map. Catholicism and Catholic Christendom became a barbaric-like borderland between Protestant Christendom and the non-Christian world of the heathen.[6]

This colonial-Christendom geography dominated the social imagination of Protestants even though the model of Free Church mission dominated LAP. For this reason, the Argentine liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino aptly called mission the 'material principle' of LAP. Indeed, all the types of LAP (Liberal Protestantism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism) have understood their identity and purpose through the paradigm of mission. However, the concept of mission has deep roots in colonial constructs and geographies.

This paper will examine the concept of mission. First, the paper will develop an analysis of the general development of the concept of mission. Second, the paper will examine the development of the concept in LAP and its different theologies of mission. Third, the 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. Fourth, the paper will examine how Anabaptism has both helped and hindered Progressive Evangelicalism in developing a decolonial[7] theology 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

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[4] José M. Bonino, Carmelo Alvarez, and Roberto Craig, *Protestantismo y Liberalismo En América Latina* (San Jose, CR: Ediciones Sebila, 1983), 25.

[5] We refer here to the colonial-Christendom cartography, a complex process of social construction and map making rooted in colonialism and the expansion of Christendom. It involves the history Christendom as well as Christian imperialism and the creation of a colonial logic rooted in race, language, culture, and economics.

[6] Ryan Gladwin, *Latin American Protestant Theology* (Brill, forthcoming).

[7] I am using the term decolonialism instead of postcolonialism because decolonial theory and not postcolonial theory has been the dominate voice in Latin America. Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo are some of the most prominent voices. Decolonial thought critiques postcolonial thought for maintaining a Eurocentric system of thought. For decolonial thinkers the history of Europe, the Enlightenment, and Modernism is the history of the colonized because none of it would have existed without the lands and peoples of the global south. Even today, the economic systems, culture, and langue continue to be dominated by the "coloniality of power" (Quijano) and decolonialism seeks to give voice to the underside of the coloniality of power.

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.

II. The Problem of Mission: Colonial Heritage

The concept of mission is rooted in cross-dimensional (divine vs. created; eternal vs. historical; impassible vs. passible) and -geographic (Christian vs. Non-Christian world) crossings. Mission emerges as an interpretation for understanding the dimensional crossings of the processions of the Triune God in the context of a Christianity responding to the challenges of the contextual philosophical questions within Hellenistic culture. The term "mission" was not used prior to the 16th century to refer to human and cross-geographic crossings. Instead, the language of mission first appears in the development of the economic Trinity. Augustine and then Aquinas[8] developed mission as a theological concept to explain the action of the economic Trinity in sending (begetting) the Son by the Father and sending (breathing) of the Holy Spirit by the Father in the Son (i.e., in the Western tradition as per the filioque statement). It was a concept hammered out under the shadow of the Arian debates and the philosophical questions surrounding how to bridge the gap between the creator and the created, the eternal and the temporal, the impassible and passible.[9] For Augustine and Aquinas, mission provided a vocabulary to explain the unexplainable — God eternal coming into time and human history. However, the renaissance of the doctrine of the Trinity in Western theology has reminded us that there is often been a spurious division between the economic and immanent Trinity and that we should follow the guidance of Karl Rahner: "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity."[10] God is in mission because God is missional, that is eternally in mission as the Trinity. The action of the Father in sending the Son and the Father and Son in sending the Spirit is eternal; God is eternally in the perichoretic dance of creation and redemption.

It was the Jesuits that plucked the term from the lexicon of the Trinity to develop the concept of mission as bridging another gap, this time geographic, political, cultural, and linguistic. This time the process of contextualization was not that of the Arian heresies and Greek philosophical understandings of the divine, but instead empire and colonization. The gap was

[8] *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q. 43, A. 2.
[9] John Hoffmeyer, "The Missional Trinity," *A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 108–09.

between the civilized 'Christian world' and the barbarian 'non-Christian world.' As such, the Jesuits were the first to use the term to refer to "the spread of the Christian faith among people (including Protestants) who were not members of the Catholic Church."[11] The context of the emergence of mission was a Christendom in crisis, amidst the continued challenges of the threat of Islam, the recent emergence of Protestantism, and the so-called 'discovery' of the new world. It emerged as part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and pushed to extend the expanse of Catholic Christian territory. The resurgence of mission in the 16th century was rooted in the cartography of a colonial Christendom and the social imagination of a colonialized world. The transcendence of the Triune God that enters the passibility of human time and existence was interpreted through the lens of the colonial imagination. The mission of the Church was the extension of the Christian world into the uncivilized, primitive, and underdeveloped non-Christian world. The Spirit and the Kingdom of God were subsumed into the Church and Christendom and, so it follows, the expansion of Christianity into the Americas, Africa, and Asia was a geographic expansion, an expansion of the church and the crown and cross and the sword. While we do not have time to examine this in detail in this paper, this clearly demonstrated in the papal bulls that granted the Portuguese dominion of lands Africa (*Romanus Pontifex*, 1454) and the Spanish and Portuguese dominion over lands in the Americas (*Inter Caetera Divine*, 1493). The bridging of the gap was one of geographic annexation through domination and colonization.

III. Mission in Latin American Protestantism

By the beginning of the 20th century, the sands of time had shifted; Christendom in Europe was crumbling and Christianity in the global south was growing exponentially, primarily through the efforts of Free Church models of missions. However, although the rise of Protestant mission signaled a transition in the relationship between Christendom and mission, it did not signal an end to the influence of Christendom. The social imagination of the 19th and 20th century Protestant missionary movement was still dominated by the vestiges of Christendom and the colonial cartography.

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[10] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 22.

[11] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1. Bosch cites Thomas Ohm, *Machet Zu Jüngern Alle Völker: Theorie Der Mission* (Freiburg/B: Erich Wevel Verlag, 1962), 37-39.

It is important to recall again that the Protestant Reformers, apart from Calvin, made little-to-no attempt at missions for several centuries and when they did, as with Calvin, it was according to the colonial cartography of Christendom. Evangelism was one-in-the-same with geographic expansion and, although some of the Reformers critiqued compulsory conversion through the threat of violence, the early attempts of Protestant mission were at best a less hostile form of colonialism. While historians have typically excused the lack of missionary activity in the Reformation due to the obligations of the Reformation – they did not get around to it due to the pressing issues of the Reformation – that seems to be an overly gracious and hagiographical[12] reading. While the magisterial reformers proposed many changes, they did not challenge the concept of Christendom or the model of mission of bridging gaps through geographic annexation. Indeed, the rise of the Protestant magisterial traditions further complicated the matter to the extent that they tightly married the relationship between the church and the governing authorities of certain geographical areas. Whereas Catholicism presumed a citizenship of the entire *oikonomia* or, at least in practice, throughout the Holy Roman Empire, Protestant Christendom(s) did not, but instead made close connections between Church and ethnic-national allegiances (German, Dutch, English, Scottish, etc.). The Reformers unwittingly committed themselves to a "provincial definition"[13] of mission by entrusting the implementation of ecclesial reform to local authorities. Not surprisingly, most reformers taught that the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) and the injunction to preach and make disciples of all the nations was no longer valid because this had already been accomplished during the apostolic age.

In direct contrast to this, the Great Commission was central to the formation of the early Anabaptist theology of mission and martyrdom: "no biblical texts appear more frequently in the Anabaptist confessions of faith and court testimonies than the Matthean and Markan versions of the 'Great Commission,' along with Psalm 24:1."[14] Indeed, if we want to find an early Protestant missionary presence during the time of the Reformation, then it comes from the Anabaptists, who developed a soteriology and ecclesiology that challenged the political theology of the Reformers. Anabaptists actively formed lay, itinerate preachers and even organized the first

[12] John H. Yoder, "Reformation and Missions: A Literature Survey" in *Anabaptism and Mission,* ed. Wilbert Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984) 41.

[13] Yoder, "Reformation and Missions," 46.

[14] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 246. See Franklin Littell, "Protestantism and the Great Commission," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (October 1959): 26–42.

'missionary' conference of the Protestant era.[15] The reaction of the Protestant Reformers to the Anabaptists is a case in point of the domination of Christendom cartography. The Anabaptists were perceived as a threat in great part because they challenged the social and geo-political imagination that assumed the cultural and political structures of certain geographies were defined by a specific type of Christianity due the God-given sovereignty of the governing (princes and magistrates) and ecclesial authorities. The magisterial traditions did not call the model of Christendom into question, but instead the imagined 'Christian' world was further politically subdivided into Lutheran, Reformed, and, in time, Anglican geo-political spaces.[16] Anabaptist missions directly challenged these ecclesial and political assumptions of Christendom; Anabaptism preached in both Catholic and Protestant territories. For these actions, they faced the possibility of imprisonment, torture, and capital punishment.

It was only with the rise of Pietism in the 17th century and Evangelical revivalism in the 18th century that Protestantism finally began to question the missionary effectiveness of Christendom and to form missionary structures. Consequently, missionaries began to arrive in Latin America at the beginning of the 19th century. LAP, in all its manifestations (Liberal, Evangelical, and Pentecostal) is the result of mission. Moreover, LAP has an identity formed by mission. Mission is the *esse* of LAP or, as José Míguez Bonino has said, its material principle.

First, LAP is the result of missionary effort. LAP was born in the cradle of Pietism and evangelical revivalism and herein lies some of its greatest virtues and vices. Protestant mission arose in spite of and not because of ecclesial structures of the established churches. The era of Protestant mission harkens back to the mission of Anabaptists in that the independent churches and mission societies have led the way in this essentially free-church movement. The historic Protestant denominations in the 18th century continued to operate according to the *modus operandi* of Christendom. These ecclesial structures resisted a free-church model of mission and,

[15] The "Martyr's Synod" on Aug. 20-24, 1527 is most often noted as a meeting of the Swiss Brethren to establish a common foundation of beliefs/practices and the production of the Schleitheim Confession, but it was also a missionary conference. At the meeting, decisions were made concerning the division of areas of preaching among itinerant preachers.

[16] Of course, the Christendom cartography underwent its first recalibration in 1054 with the East-West due to, among other things, political theology. The East in many ways was representative of the Constantine-phile Eusebius and his depiction of the state as the protector of Christianity and the emperor as a political and ecclesial figure — the vicar of God on earth. The West came to embody the tension inherent in Augustine's City of God and City of the World. The Reformation, including the Radical Reformation, generally accepted Augustine's categories as read by Luther, although different traditions interpreted them in different ways.

as a result, mission tended to be a para-ecclesial or extra-ecclesial exercise. The beginnings of LAP came as the result of institutions that were separate from the established churches and centers of theological education; the assumption was that mission was an activity connected to church but not necessarily 'church.'[17] Mission concerned proclamation of a personal faith to individuals, bible distribution, and the formation of schools,[18] but not explicitly the formation of 'church' because the true religion of church was rooted in the sending geographies of the Christian world. In a similar fashion, mission involved theology, that is the preaching and practice of the theology of the sending geographies, but not the formation of centers for theological formation and development. Even contextualized and sustainable models of mission such as the influential 'three selfs' principles of church planting (self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting) did not challenge the theological assumptions of missionaries because they "did not envision self-interpretation or self-theologizing" as one of the principles.[19] The model of mission assumed that the sending churches fully understood the gospel and that there was not a need for continued theological development. Real theological production was left to the church and universities of the sending geographies and at best theology was translated or contextualized. The great century of Protestant mission (1815-1914) corresponds precisely with the rise of lay ministry as the prototype of missionary activity.[20] It was the lay believer and not the ecclesial leaders or political economic lord that launched Protestant mission. Evangelical revivalism and pietism made an important critique of Christendom, calling into question the lack of a personal experience of faith, a spirituality, in the midst of the inevitably nominalism produced by Christendom. However, they did not call into question the theology and ethics of

[17] I am borrowing some of the ideas that John H. Yoder developed in his Theology of Mission class at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and that was posthumously published in *Theology of Mission: A Believer's Church Perspective*, eds. Gayle Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 145-181. See also his "Believers Church in Theological Perspective." This tendency would change to some extent with the rise of the North American mission's movement and the formation of mission societies as extensions of church denominations due to the Free Church model of most churches in the US. However, at the same time, the rise of theological liberalism would once again give rise to the para-ecclesial dominance in mission as conservative evangelicals and fundamentalist founded their own separate and often independent mission societies.

[18] For example, the first missionaries to arrive in Latin America, such as James 'Diego' Thompson from Scotland, came under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society and focused their work on bible distribution and the formation of schools. The hope of many of these early missionaries was to form Christian colonies among emigrant populations.

[19] Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 49.

[20] Franklin Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. by Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 15.

the sending geographies.[21] Like Kierkegaard, these movements began with the question of how to become a Christian in Christendom and the search for the existential experience to make that possible. As they moved into the latitudes beyond the imagined Christian world, they taught and formed structures to live out the personal, existential reality of the theology and ethics of the Christian world. These ethics represented the civilized Christian world as compared to the barbaric culture of the receiving geographies as read through the eyes of colonial logic.

Second, mission is the interpretive core of LAP. All Latin American Christianity, including Catholicism, is the result of mission, but Protestantism, in particular, is defined theologically through the call to and action of mission. While there are many ways to define mission,[22] in LAP there are three dominant theological streams that can be distinguished according to how they define mission: Liberal, Evangelical, and Pentecostal. While these streams can be further broken down into subcategories,[23] we will simply mention briefly the general trends of each stream.

The Protestant recalibration of mission and the Christendom cartography can be seen at work at the highpoint of the so-called Great Century of Protestant mission (1814-1914), the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference. This first global Protestant missionary conference shunned Latin American missionaries because Anglo-Catholics objected to their presence along the lines of Christendom cartography: they were missionaries in a 'Christian' part of the world. As mentioned earlier, the Panama 1916 Conference was a direct response to the shunning of Latin American missionaries at the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference. A Liberal Protestant theological voice emerged from Panama 1916 and continued to develop in subsequent conferences. After 100 years of existence, Liberal Protestants developed an apologetic theology of mission that justified the Protestant presence in Latin America. Protestantism offered a hope for the future, a hope akin to the liberalism that helped inspire the French and American revolutions. Latin American Catholicism had failed to form a Christian culture and the accompanying economic development that one would expect and Protestantism offered a better

[21] John H. Yoder made the point that pietism made possible the practice of the Christendom ethics but failed to question them. See his Theology of Mission, 161-181.

[22] David Bosch has documented that there are at least twelve different ways to define mission/evangelism, "Mission and Evangelism: Clarifying the Concepts," *Zeitschrift Für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 68, no. 3 (July 1984): 161–91.

[23] Liberal Protestantism was the context out of which Protestant Liberation Theology grew. Evangelicals could further be broken down into conservatives and progressives and Pentecostals could further be broken down into Classic Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics.

option as noted by the superior culture and economies of Northern Europe and North America. Mission according to Liberal Protestantism was evangelism, but also education and development. Protestantism was a leaven for the rising of a more Christian Latin American. The documents from the 1916 conference and others that followed described Catholicism in negative terms as a barbarian-like form of Christianity. Here we can the see continued influence of the Christendom social imagination and how the colonial logic can recalibrate the Christian-vs-non-Christian-world geography in light of a new context. Catholicism became a barbarian, pseudo-Christian borderland between the Protestant world (i.e., Christian) and the rest of the world (i.e., non-Christian world).

While all the streams of LAP have an evangelical core and most Protestants in the region call themselves *evangelicos*, we can talk about a Latin American Evangelicalism that more directly equates mission with evangelism. The evangelical identity of mission as evangelism was always present in the bosom of liberal Protestantism and has ultimately been a mitochondria for all Latin American Protestant theologies of mission. However, in the early 19th century rifts began to form between liberals and conservatives and by the 1940s these rifts had become cracks. The division was over how to define the core of mission and eventually led to the formation of different types of Protestantism. The divisions between liberals and conservatives heightened with the birth of a Protestant liberation theology among radicalized liberal Protestants such as José Míguez Bonino and Rubem Alves. For liberationists, mission went well beyond evangelism and included social transformation. Simultaneously, divisions arose in the heart of conservative evangelicalism with the birth of progressive evangelicals and their assertion that mission was like a plane with two wings: evangelism and social responsibility.[24] Faced with liberal theology and progressive evangelicalism, conservative evangelicals doubled down and subsumed mission into evangelism at the expense of social activism.

There is one final 'face' of LAP that has arguably changed all of LAP in a short period of time. While Pentecostalism has only been in Latin America for a little over one century, today 3 out 4 Protestants are Pentecostal. Although Pentecostals can be further divided into subcategories (Classic Pentecostals, Charismatics, and neo-Charismatics), there are some common descriptors

[24] René Padilla, "Teología Latinoamericana: ¿Izquierdista o Evangélica?," *Pensamiento Cristiano* XVII, no. 66 (1970): 133–40. David Kirkpatrick has a good historiography of the development of this quote of mission as a plane with two wings and how it was eventually co-opted and wrongly assigned to John Stott in his "C. René

that apply to all Pentecostals. They interpret the manifestations of the Spirit (speaking in tongues, healings, etc.) as signs of the liberating presence of the Spirit in the latter days of rain that like the apostolic times of Acts empower believers for witness and mission. The results have been nothing short of unprecedented in the history of Latin America. While we do not have the space to develop a more in-depth analysis of Pentecostalism, it is worth noting that the underdevelopment of pneumatology in Anabaptists and progressive evangelical theologies of mission have at times limited their interaction with Pentecostalism, although clear connections can be made.[25]

IV. How Anabaptism has critiqued LAP's understanding of Mission and helped Latin American Progressive Evangelicals

We will now engage Anabaptism as it has offered a critique of Latin American Protestant theologies of mission through its interaction with progressive evangelicalism. Anabaptism has of course engaged Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT), but the most fruitful interaction has occurred with progressive evangelicals. While liberation theology in its many forms and manifestations paid little direct attention to Anabaptism, progressive evangelicals have been directly influenced by Anabaptism's theology of mission, ecclesiology and social ethics.

Progressive evangelicalism is not, as it is often depicted, a movement that grew out of a rejection of a prior-existing LALT, but instead is a unique stream of Latin American theology that like LALT grew out of the soil of the geopolitical and localized social struggles in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century.[26] At the same time that liberationists such as Gustavo Gutierrez, José Míguez Bonino, and others were gathering in the WCC sponsored *Church and Society and in Latin America*[27] (1962-73) and moving towards a theology of liberation, René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and others were responding to the challenge of the proliferation of Marxism in Latin American university settings and developing a progressive

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Padilla and the Origins of Integral Mission in Post-War Latin America," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67, no. 2 (April 2016): 353-54.

[25] Ryan Gladwin, "Why I like the Quiet Peace of Mennonites and Loud Liberation of Pentecostals: The Transformative Possibility of Mennocostal Ethics and Praxis," in *Our Lives as Mennocostals*, eds. Marty Mittelstadt and Brian Pipkin (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publ., Forthcoming).

[26] The development of Progressive Evangelicalism can be read with the larger 'Mission as Transformation' movement, in which Latin American voices – Orlando Costas, René Padilla, and Samuel Escobar – and the FTL proved influential. See A. Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford, UK: Regum Books Int., 2008).

[27] *Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina* in Spanish.

evangelical theology. Progressive Evangelicals were able to listen and appreciate the allure of Marxism and develop a stream of Latin American theology that, like LALT, was critical of colonial forms of mission. As result, progressives expressed both appreciation and critique of LALT's methodology and hermeneutics of suspicion. On the other hand, progressives offered their sharpest critiques of conservative evangelicals and what they saw as the reduction of gospel and mission to evangelism: the saving of souls. They argued that subsuming mission into evangelism does violence to both the Bible and the souls and bodies of humans. It also offers a precarious ethical foundation, a consequentialist methodology of mission that potentially justifies any means for the greater good of the salvation of the souls. Instead, progressives argued for a *Misión Integral*, an integral gospel concerned with the entirety of the human existence (body, soul, and spirit) and the entire creation. They founded the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL) in 1970 and developed a progressive evangelical theology.

While conservatives focused on personal transformation through conversion and liberationists focused social transformation through a liberating historical project, progressives developed a theology of mission and ecclesiology influenced by Anabaptism. Unlike the social gospel movement in the United States and LALT that spoke of the kingdom of God in macrosocial terms, progressive evangelicals asserted that the epicenter for the transformative action of God was the local church: a community of the kingdom. Progressives did not ignore the larger social structures or the need for the transformation of social and political systems, but at the center of the progressive *Misión Integral* sits the local church as an active gathering kingdom community and instrument of transformation.[28] The local church is a sign of the kingdom[29] and a nexus of transformation that binds together evangelism and social activism. This means that one of the distinguishing features of progressive evangelicalism is its development of an ecclesiology. This is a noteworthy development among Latin American Protestant theologies of mission, given that ecclesiology has often been ignored or underdeveloped. Ecclesiology is almost nonexistent in the theology of conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals and underdeveloped among liberal Protestants. This is to a large extent because the Protestant missions movement grew out of Pietistic and evangelical revivalist traditions focused on forming

[28] René Padilla and Yamamori Tetsunao, *La Iglesia local como agente de Transformacion: Una Eclesiologia para la Misión Integral* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Kairós, 2003).

[29] René Padilla, *La Iglesia, Señal Del Reino* (San Jose, CR: Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, 1986)

structures, usually extra- or para-ecclesial, for the fostering of conversion and personal piety.[30] In like manner, liberationists have an underdeveloped ecclesiology because of what we have called an ecclesial pessimism [31]due to the failure of most churches to side with liberation movements and the poor.

The ecclesiology and social ethics of *Misíon Integral* is clearly baptistic. For example, the kingdom community that lies at the center of the *Misión Integral* social vision is autonomous and congregationalist; it engenders an egalitarian vision of Christian community that confronts destructive hierarchies. Moreover, this local church is called to be manifestation of God's kingdom, both in word (evangelism) and deed (social action)[32] and instrumental in making the kingdom become visible in the 'already.[33]' The community is a kingdom community that is a veritable witness to Christ and his Kingdom and, as a result, is an "instrument of social transformation."[34] This may not seem surprising, given that all Latin American Protestant churches are essential Free Churches and that there were many Baptists among the ranks of the first generation of progressive evangelicals: C. René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Orlando Costas, Pedro Savage, Pablo Deiros, Oscar Pereira, Roland Gutiérrez, etc. However, there is a clear link with Anabaptism in that, as noted by Bonino, the FTL "recovered an evangelical tradition, linked especially to the Anabaptist movement…"[35] This recovery came at least in part through direct interaction with Anabaptists, such as the Mennonite ethicist John H. Yoder, the missionary and missiologist John Driver, the missionary and biblical scholar La Verne Rutschman, and the Argentine born feminist theologian Nancy Bedford. Yoder gave lectures in Argentina and Uruguay in 1966 and then taught for an academic year in Argentina between 1971-72, the latter of these at the invitation of José Míguez Bonino. During these visits, Yoder became acquainted with Samuel Escobar and René Padilla and was eventually made an honorary member of the newly founded FTL.[36] Both Padilla and Escobar would speak of the influence that Yoder had on

[30] The same is not true for Catholicism which has always maintained ecclesiology as central to its theologies of mission and has a long history of equating the kingdom with the church.

[31] See Gladwin, *Latin American Protestant Theology*, Chapter 2.

[32] Padilla, "Señal del Reino," 23 and his "La Biblia y El Reino de Dios," in *Los Derechos Humanos y El Reino de Dios.*, eds. René Padilla, Darío López, and Humberto Lagos, 2nd ed. (Lima, PE: CENIP - Ediciones Puma, 2010), 41.

[33] Padilla, "La Biblia y el Reino," 42.

[34] Padilla and Yamamori, *La Iglesia Local.*

[35] Bonino, "Faces," 45.

[36] John H. Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity: The 1966 South American Lectures*, eds. Paul Martens, M. T. Nation, Matthew Porter, and Myles Werntz (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xii.

them and it can clearly be seen in Padilla's most well known work, Misión *Integral: Ensayos sobre el Reino y la Iglesia*.[37] Likewise, Yoder would participate in the First Congress for World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland (1974) with progressive evangelicals such Orlando Costas as well as Padilla and Escobar. He met with them in unofficial sessions dedicated to the theme of 'Radical Discipleship' and out of which came the unofficial *Statement of Radical Discipleship*.[38] This conference put Costas, Padilla, and Escobar on the map of global evangelicalism as they delivered fiery presentations and were instrumental in the push for the inclusion of a statement on 'social responsibility' and 'contextualization' in the Lausanne Covenant.[39] John Driver was a missionary in Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Spain, and Argentina and rubbed shoulders with progressive evangelicals such as Padilla and Escobar.[40] Similar to the Baptist ethicist John McClendon, Driver attempted to widen the gates for what constituted radical traditions, making an argument for a baptistic/believer's church tradition that included most evangelicals and Pentecostals as well as the direct spiritual ancestors of the Radical Reformation.[41] La Verne Rutschman was a missionary and bible professor in Bolivia, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. Nancy Bedford was born in Argentina as the daughter of Baptists missionaries and became an influential theologian and member of the FTL in Argentina. The connection is clear: Anabaptist impacted the formation of the progressive evangelical theology of mission.

V. How Anabaptism has hindered the Development of a Decolonial Progressive Evangelical Theology of Mission

Anabaptist theology of mission has provided since its inception an important critique of Protestant theologies of mission. Their theology of mission and martyrdom and accompanying ecclesiology challenged the Protestant forms of Christendom. In like manner, Anabaptists called

[37] René Padilla, *Misión Integral: Ensayos Sobre El Reino y La Iglesia* (Buenos Aires, AR: Nueva Creación, 1986). It was also published in English but under a different title. Escobar spoke of the influence of Yoder and Anabaptism in, "Latin American and Anabaptist Theology," in *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition*, ed. John D. Roth (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 75-88.

[38] Tizon, *Transformation,* 45.

[39] David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 132.

[40] Samuel Escobar, "Notas Anabautistas para Una Misionalogía Latinoamericana," in *Comunidad y Misión: Ensayos en Celebración de La Vida y Ministerio de Juan Driver*, eds. Milka Rindzinski and Juan F. Martínez (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Kairós, 2006), 147-166.

[41] John Driver, *La Fe En La Periferia de La Historia: Una Historia Del Pueblo Cristiano Desde La Perspectiva de Los Movimientos de Restauración y Reforma Radical* (Cuidad de Guatemala, GT: Ediciones Clara-

into question the coercive and violent modes of evangelism that were standard among Catholics and Protestants during the 16th century. They offered an alternative reading of ecclesial history that questioned the dominant imperial Christendom of the past. Nevertheless, although an Anabaptist theology of mission offers a cogent critique of Christendom, it fails to comprehend and confront the pernicious continuance the Christendom cartography and what the decolonial sociologist Anibal Quijano has referred to as the "coloniality of power."[42] While Anabaptists have been able to develop a theology of mission that imagines a "mission without conquest,"[43] they have been less clear in their analysis of the profound ways that Christendom cartography shapes the global economic systems and understandings of race and identity that have in turn been used to justify these unjust economic system.

First, there is the uncomfortable historical fact that contemporary Anabaptism is disconnected by centuries from its original missionary zeal and radical witness of nonconformity and martyrdom. For example, clear comparisons have been made between Anabaptists and LALT (the similar socio-historical contexts of the 16th century Europe and 19th century Latin America, theological methodology of LALT, focus on orthopraxy, etc.)[44] as well as Pentecostals,[45] but these comparisons are often exercises in "denominational reification"[46] and self-flattery: the creating of a homogeneous and glorified image of Anabaptism that is disconnected from reality.[47] While many of the early Anabaptists did provide a critique of Protestant Christendom, the situation of contemporary Anabaptism is much more complex. After

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Semilla, 1997). A book review of the English version of the text makes a similar assertion, Neal Blough, review of *Radical Faith: An Alternative History of the Church Church*, by John Driver, *Mennonite Life* 55, no. 3 (2000).

[42] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.

[43] Willis Horst, Ute Paul, and Frank Paul, *Mission without Conquest: An Alternative Missionary Practice*. (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2015). This is translation of the original Spanish version, *Misión Sin Conquista: Acompañamiento de Comnidades Indígenas Autóctonas Como Práctica Misionera Alternativa* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Kairós, 2005).

[44] Daniel Schipani, *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Daniel Castelo, "A Yoderian Appraisal of Latin American Liberation Theology." *Asbury Theological Journal* 2, no. 1 (2003): 25–40.

[45] Juan F. Martínez, "The Anabaptist Reformation in Latin America: Contributions from the Radical Reformation to Popular Latin American Protestantism." *Journal of Latin American Theology* 13, no. 1 (2018): 125.

[46] Yoder, "Orientation in Midstream," 159. Yoder finds two problems with denominational reification: 1. It does not allow a tradition to deal well with change within that tradition, 2. It tends to thwart a movement from being able to internally critique and examine itself.

[47] At some level this reification conceals other forms of violence and oppression. The tragic irony is that one the most vehement critiques of Anabaptist reification was John H. Yoder. This shows us that the Yodarian historical reconstruction of Anabaptism also fell into and, in light of Yoder's heinous sexual assaults on many women, has been a source of violence and oppression.

decades of oppression, Anabaptists ceased to be the vanguard of Protestant mission and became the *Quiet in the Land*. As a result, just as pietism and evangelical revivalism helped Protestantism to leave behind centuries of choosing Christendom over mission, so the same pietists and evangelicals helped certain Anabaptists move beyond their Anabaptist colonies to mission. Many of the first Mennonites to arrive in Latin America in the early 20th century were not what we would call missional Mennonites, but instead what are often referred to as 'ethnic' Mennonites. They, similar to the early 'ethnic Protestants,'[48] arrived not seeking to preach the gospel but instead in search of quiet and good land to continue their way of life. In contrast, the missional-Anabaptists (Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, Beachy Amish Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, etc.) effectively borrowed from Protestant missionary trends and structures, forming mission societies amidst the failure of the Anabaptist churches to carry out mission.

Second, while missional Anabaptists clearly began to move beyond the cul-de-sacs of ethnic Anabaptists, they did this through assuming the missionary structures and Christendom geography (sending vs. receiving geography) of other Protestants. This can clearly be seen both in narratives of ethnic and missional Anabaptists and the ways they spoke of native Latin Americans.[49] Many ethnic Mennonites thought that conversion was possible for Latin Americans, but being a Mennonite was not. Clearly this racialized identity is eerily similar to that of the Spanish and the civilization vs. barbarian geography that shaped their imagination and perceptions of the indigenous populations of the Americas. While missional Anabaptists moved beyond Anabaptist colonial and ethnic models of expansion, they remained trapped by the spatial and racial logic of colonialism. Although Anabaptists questioned the theology and practice of the magisterial traditions, they nonetheless brought with them Eurocentric Anabaptist historiographies and theologies that saw pure Anabaptism as rooted in 16th century Europe. They valued orthopraxy, but it was an orthopraxy based on the narratives of European martyrs and not the plight of the poor and oppressed of the Americas. Although they brought with them an ecclesial vision of the local church as a community called to embody the ethics of Jesus and the kingdom, they inherited Protestant structures of mission (sending vs. receiving churches) that effectively subverted these ethics to the economics, politics, and theology of the sending

[48] Bonino argues for calling these churches "ethnic churches". See *Faces*, 79-106.
[49] Benjamin Goossen, "Mennonites in Latin America: Review of the Literature." *Conrad Grebel Review* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 236–65.

geographies. As a result, Anabaptism fails both in its theology and practice to move towards a clear decolonial theology of mission. It provides a noteworthy ecclesiology and social ethics that challenges the social ethics of magisterial traditions, but nonetheless runs the risk of subverting the kingdom and the Spirit to a church trapped by the coloniality of power.

While progressive evangelicals have developed an Anabaptist-like, ecclesiocentric theology of mission that avoids many of the pitfalls of the individualist and consequential theology of mission of conservative evangelicals, they, like Anabaptists, have nonetheless not moved towards a clear decolonial theology of mission. The progressive ecclesiology that envisions the local church as an instrument of contextualization and social change has tended to subsume the kingdom into the church in much the same way that Christendom subsumed the kingdom into the colonial enterprise. Progressive evangelicals, following Anabaptists, develop a robust Christocentric theology of mission and ecclesiology, but at the same time fail to develop a robust pneumatology and Trinitarian theology that points to the kingdom before and beyond the church. This of course means that Anabaptists and progressive do not avoid the colonially of power and the oppressive ideologies of race that can be imposed even on communitarian-focused ecclesiologies and ethics.

VI. Moving towards a Trinitarian and Decolonial Theology of Mission

Anabaptism confronts the *Corpus Christianium* with a radical *Corpus Christi*: the local, gathered church is the primary theological locus, a kingdom community rooted in the life and teachings of Christ. This has served to blunt the sword and structures of Christendom, the most obvious example being that Christendom is crumbling and most Christians, of all traditions and creeds, now accept that evangelism should not involve violent coercion. The Free Church model of the church is the model of the church of the 21st century. It has also served in Latin America to help progressive evangelicals critique Christendom and develop an integral view of mission and a transformative ecclesiology that envisions the church as an instrument of social transformation. However, Anabaptism fails to help progressive evangelicalism to confront the enduring coloniality of power and the logic of colonialism. The colonial cartography continues to form the social imagination of mission and geography shaped around civilized centers and barbaric peripheries.

Anabaptism offers a radical ecclesiology rooted in Christology, but it fails to confront the logic of coloniality and colonial cartography that can co-opt even a Christologically-centered ecclesiology and turn it into a colonial geography of a civilized center and barbaric periphery. Following the lead of Anabaptism, progressive evangelicals have precariously subsumed the kingdom and the Spirit into the church. Instead, as we have suggested elsewhere,[50] the church is the not the kingdom or the exclusive space of Spirit, but instead a kingdom-focused historical project, that is a transformative space[51] and place[52] for the unity of personal and social eschatology. The church is a place where personal identity and social commitment can be interwoven in the formation of a community of mutual love and solidarity; a nexus between love and social transformation for the formation of a political spirituality and radical voluntarism that can foment and sustain liberation. However, the church is not the kingdom and both Anabaptism and progressive evangelicalism at times blur this distinction.

In like manner, both Anabaptism and progressive evangelicalism lack a robust Trinitarian and pneumatological theology of mission. Anabaptism interprets mission through the dominant lens of a logos Christology focused on the life and teachings of Jesus. This serves to emphasis the particularity of the ecclesial faith and practice. However, the lack of a robust Trinitarian and pneumatological theology leads to the reification of the church and disconnects the church from the Spirit present in all the created order. The Spirit did not arrive with the church or missionaries, but instead has been present from the beginning of time. The colonial-Christendom cartography continues to dominate and co-opt Christology, ecclesiology and even genuine attempts to contextualize the gospel and ecclesial practice. The problem is that the concept of mission is rooted in the cartography of cross-dimensional (divine vs. created; eternal vs. Historically; etc.) and -geographic (Christian vs. Non-Christian world) movements. The cross-dimensional border crossing and is ultimately interpreted through the lens of colonialism and Christendom. The result has been that mission has long been concerned with crossing borders as well as civilizing the barbaric peripheries of the *Corpus Christianium.* It is precisely for this reason that a robust Trinitarian theology must move beyond border crossings of domination (divine over the created or Christian over the non-Christian) and geographic expansion to border

[50] Ryan R. Gladwin, *Towards a Liberating Latin American Ecclesiology: The Local Church as a Transformative Historical Project*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publ., forthcoming).

[51] By 'space', I mean a socio-cultural space that is both a product of the larger social context and a construction in tune with and against this context.

crossings as an intimate embrace. The Triune missional perichoresis of creation and redemption are not processions of domination but instead creation, covenant, and redemption, a loving embrace of the Father, Son, and Spirit of all the creation. The Missional God does not invade space and time to extend the divine geography, but instead to reveal that from the beginning *Emmanuel* (Is. 7:14). The Son proceeds from the Father in the loving embrace with the Spirit that reveals that God is with us. The Son and the ethics of the kingdom represent a particularized call upon God's people to be a kingdom people and the Spirit goes out before (precedes) and beyond (exceeds) the church. The Spirit pushes out God's people to scatter among the nations and the Son calls God's people to gather in the name of the Son and in the power of the Spirit. The gathering community does not subsume the kingdom, but instead the kingdom of Spirit precedes and exceeds the church and the attempts to domestic, colonialize, and civilize the Spirit.

[52] By 'place', I mean a physical place that allows for chronological development of practices over time.

Peaceful Pedagogy: Paul's Areopagus Speech (Acts 17:16-34) as a Model for Education-Based Mennonite Missions

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Introduction

What does one man's oration in Greece nearly 2000 years ago have to do with illiterate women in the Congo today? The question, reminiscent of Tertullian's famous query ("What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"), finds its answer in a strange pair of bedfellows: mission and education. The exploration that follows will suggest that Paul's speech at the Areopagus narrated in Acts 17:16-34 evinces a connection between Christian mission and education. Thus, the model of mission as an educational endeavor that emerges in the Areopagus speech can serve as an example for Anabaptist-Mennonite mission practices to emulate today.

The Areopagus address has assumed a prized place in biblical scholarship for decades. As the initial section of this exploration below illustrates, it is impossible to do justice to the many interpretative questions that are raised by Acts 17:16-34. Nonetheless, this study will focus on just one aspect of Paul's speech: its connection between missional and educational activity. Because of the essentially noncoercive nature of Paul's activity here, I will be suggesting that such a model of missions serves as an appropriate example from which Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activities can take their cue and, in fact, have already emulated, even if unknowingly. Thus, in answer to the question posed above, an ancient speech may very well have quite a bit to do with global Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activities today.

A Brief History of Interpretation

Adolf Deissmann famously identified Paul's Areopagus speech as "the greatest missionary document in the new Testament."[1] Likewise, Ben Witherington begins his exploration of Acts 17:16-34 by noting, "This passage is in many regards one of the most important in all of Acts, as is shown by the enormous attention scholars have given it."[2] Witherington's assessment of the massive scholarly coverage of this text suggests that any review of previous scholarship would likely be both unwieldy and incomplete. Nonetheless, at least a few brief comments might establish the place of the present project within the larger field.

As is the case in several areas of biblical studies, traditional interpretive authorities have historically been identified among Western male scholars. For example, one stumbles upon frequent

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[1] Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (4th ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 384.

[2] Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 511.Over 40 years before even Witherington made this assessment, Ned Bernard Stonehouse likewise commented as early as 1957 that the passage has undergone scholarly examination "at considerable length" (*Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies* [London: Tyndale Press, 1957], 1).

references to the work of Martin Dibelius,[3] Ernst Haenchen,[4] and Arthur Darby Nock[5] among others[6] when exploring the interpretation of this text. However, the expansion of interest in Acts is attested by growing count of commentaries on Acts, including several recent volumes.[7]

The scholarly interest in this particular section of the Acts narrative has also been vast.[8] Studies have devoted particular attention to the audience of Paul's speech[9] as well as to the larger question of what the speech might say about the world in which it is set.[10] As is evidenced by these broad interests related to this passage, many scholarly examinations have taken up particularly historically-oriented probes. One of the questions that has occupied the minds and pens of several scholars is whether any aspect of this speech can be traced back to the historical Paul or whether it is a prosopopoeia penned by Luke.[11]

This query, of course, relates to a similar question of whether the Paul described in Acts can be reconciled with the Paul of the epistles. Several scholars have devoted space to the question of how the claims of the Paul of Acts that God gives life to humans (17:25, 29) and demands repentance of past ignorance (17:30) coheres (or not) with the claims of the Paul of Romans who asserts that God is revealed through creation (Romans 1:20) despite the confusion between the

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[3] Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM Press, 1956).
[4] Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Uebersetzt und Erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).
[5] Arthur Darby Nock, *St. Paul* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).
[6] Cf., e.g., Ned Bernard Stonehouse, *The Areopagus Address* (London: Tyndale, 1950).
[7] Cf., e.g., Loveday Alexander, *Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994); Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Hans Conzelmann, Eldon Jay Epp, and Christopher R. Matthews, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); David E. Garland, Mark Strauss, and John Walton, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017); Beverly Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003); Justo González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001); Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); William J. Larkin, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon W. Robinson, *Acts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010).
[8] Cf., e.g., Colin J. Hemer, "The Speeches of Acts: II. The Areopagus Address," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 239-259; Joshua W. Jipp, "Paul's Areopagus Speech of Acts 17:16-34 as *Both* Critique *and* Propaganda," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 567-588; C. Kavin Rowe, "The Grammar of Life: The Areopagus Speech and Pagan Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 57, no. 1 (2011): 31-50; Juhana Torkki, "The Dramatic Account of Paul's Encounter with Philosophy: An Analysis of Acts 17:16-34 with Regard to Contemporary Philosophical Debates," (PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2004).
[9] Cf., e.g., N. Clayton Croy, "Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17:18, 32)," *Novum Testamentum* 39, no. 1 (January 1997): 21-39; Atef M. Gendy, "Style, Content and Culture: Distinctive Characteristics in the Missionary Speeches in Acts," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 99, no. 3 (2011): 247-265; Patrick Gray, "Implied Audiences in the Areopagus Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 2 (2004): 205-218; Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel before Pagan Audiences in the Greco-Roman World," *Religion & Theology* 12, no. 2 (2005): 172-190.
[10] Cf. Joel Marcus, "Paul at the Areopagus: Window on the Hellenistic World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (October 1988): 143-148.
[11] Although neither the Gospel of Luke nor the Acts of the Apostles name their shared author, "Luke" is used here as shorthand for "the author of Luke-Acts." As Marion Soards observes, this question of Luke's influence was raised at least as early as J. G. Eichhorn's exploration of the topic of prosopopoeia in Acts in the early 19th century (*The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concern* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994,] 2, citing J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* [2 vols.; Leipzig: Weidmann, 1810], 33-43). Stephen Wilson explores this question at some length, concluding that the speech represents the literary efforts of Luke, not Paul (*The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], 212-215).

Creator and the created (Romans 1:23).[12] While the points of contact between Acts 17 and Romans 1 are intriguing, the present analysis does not demand a definitive answer to this question.

Many of the scholarly questions that have been taken up in connection with this text have engaged with the historical and/or literary questions that present themselves. However, the text has also been the basis for explorations of mission work and missiology today.[13] Explorations along these lines fit a bit more closely with the task here insofar as the question at hand regards how this text can profitably inform Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activity today. Yet, despite these existing probes into the implications of this text more broadly for mission work, I have not yet uncovered a specifically Anabaptist-Mennonite approach to this text that would inquire about its implications for missions today.[14] Thus, despite the very long history of interpretation of this passage, there nonetheless remains an opportunity to engage it afresh with an eye toward applications for a 21st century Anabaptist-Mennonite context.

Reading the Areopagus Speech as Mission and Teaching[15]

Acts 17:16-34 narrates Paul's encounter with the Athenians and his speech at the Areopagus. Paul begins his missionary efforts in Athens by speaking to whomever will listen in the marketplaces (17:17), but his odd message quickly attracts enough attention that his audience requests to hear him in a more formal venue (17:19). At the Areopagus, Paul delivers an impassioned speech on the problems of human ignorance, and he proclaims the good news of Jesus's resurrection (17:22-31). These efforts yield a modest group of new converts (17:34). As an exercise in early Christian missions, it is worth examining this text for the question of how mission and education are combined and how that combination might be instructive for Anabaptist-Mennonite missions today.

Paul's mission in Athens does not start off on an auspicious note. Indeed, the text gives the impression that Paul is simply killing time in the city until Silas and Timothy are able to rejoin him (17:15-17).[16] There is little indication that Paul is actively attempting to spread his message as he had in Thessalonica (17:2) and Beroea (17:10-11) just prior to this stop on his journey. Nonetheless, in

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[12] Cf., e.g., Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1955), 248-252; Huw P. Owen, "The Scope of Natural Revelation in Rom 1 and Acts 17," *New Testament Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 1959): 133-143; Philipp Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts* (eds. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn; Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1999), 33-50; Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 212-215; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 523.

[13] Cf., e.g., Susan Campbell, "Scratching the Itch: Paul's Athenian Speech Shaping Mission Today," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 2 (April 2011): 177-184; J. Daryl Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind: Paul's Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34)," *Trinity Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 47-62; Dean Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul's Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication," *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 2002): 199-214; Dennis R. DiMauro, "Witnessing Lessons from the Areopagus," *Word & World* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 186-195; James Tino, "Paul's Greatest Missionary Sermon: A Lesson in Contextualization from Acts 17," *Lutheran Mission Matters* 25, no. 1 (May 2017): 165-175.

[14] One potential work that begins to gesture in this direction is a posthumously edited collection of class lectures delivered by John Howard Yoder in which some attention is given to Paul's Areopagus speech (*Theology of Mission: A Believer's Church Perspective* [eds. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014], 139-142). However, even in this, the implications of the Areopagus episode for contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite missions remain underdeveloped. Furthermore, given the deeply problematic aspects of Yoder's life, one might well question whether his voice can adequately be taken as representative of Anabaptist-Mennonite views.

[15] Much of the exegesis here is drawn from my recent article on hospitality and pedagogy in the mission of the early Christians in Acts. See Melanie A. Howard, "Hospitality, Pedagogy, and Mission: A Model for Christian Higher Education from Acts 8:26-40, 15:1-35, and 17:16-34," *Pacific Journal* 13 (2018): forthcoming.

[16] Ned Stonehouse argues that "Paul had come to Athens with the purpose of finding a brief respite from the arduous experiences and the perils of his activity in Macedonia rather than to carry forward his apostolic mission" (Stonehouse, *Paul before the Areopagus*, 5). Stonehouse perhaps infers more than what can reasonably assumed based on the pronouncement that Paul was "waiting" (17:16). Nonetheless, Stonehouse's point is well taken that Paul does not seem to have arrived in Athens with a clear plan for evangelistic endeavors.

the short space of a single verse in the narrative, Paul moves from waiting (17:16) to actively dialoguing (17:17) with those in the marketplace. Thus, while the seemingly limited number of converts that Paul produces (17:34) could seem to suggest a failed mission, this number is remarkable given the lack of intentionality with which Paul initially approached his activities in the region.

However, even if Paul's "mission" in Athens does not initially begin as an evangelistic endeavor, the presence of education is quite clear indeed. The pedagogical element of Paul's activity in Athens may be most visible in terms of his speech's audience and location. Luke specifies that Paul delivers his remarks to "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (Acts 17:18) who, as Chalmer Faw identifies them, represent "the two most influential schools of Greek thought of the time."[17] That is, Paul's remarks are addressed precisely to those in the city tasked with educating and being educated. The one who would more naturally be presumed to be the student takes on the role of teacher.

Beyond the speech's educated audience, its location, too, highlights its pedagogical aim. As Richard Pervo notes, the location in Athens draws attention to the educational thrust of Paul's work. Pervo observes, "Although the essential elements of this speech were set out in 14:15-17 and gentiles have been among the converts since chap. 13, Luke has reserved his detailed justification/description of the theological means of this mission for the symbolic environs of Athens. This prepares the way for the eruption of the gentile mission in Corinth and its explosion in Ephesus and Asia."[18] Thus, Athens serves as something of the gateway to future mission fields.

Likewise, even within Athens, the specific location of the Areopagus draws attention to the fundamentally educational thrust of Paul's work. As J. Daryl Charles observes, "Athenians looked to the Areopagus as a source of knowledge, wisdom, reason, and justice."[19] Charles observes that in the Areopagus's long history, it "functioned as authoritative in civil-legal and educational matters."[20] Paul's discourse from this location, then, places him in a position of assumed authority in educational matters.[21] Thus, although Paul's missionary endeavors in Athens achieve only modest success there (17:34),[22] the fundamentally educational task that Paul begins in the intellectual center of Athens[23] sets a foundation for future evangelistic success.

While the unfolding narrative will highlight future success, the initial response to Paul's teaching is not positive. In fact, the philosophers initially dismiss him as a "babbler" (17:18). The term that Luke uses here (σπερμολόγος) is etymologically related to the words for "seed" (σπέρμα) and "word" (λόγος), and the term itself is evocative of birds pecking at seeds.[24] In other words, the

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[17] Chalmer E. Faw, *Acts* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1993), 193.

[18] Pervo, *Acts*, 430. Likewise, Justo González also notes that the presence of the Academy of Athens distinguished this location as a center of learning (*Acts*, 201).

[19] Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind," 52.

[20] Ibid., 53. Charles points to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* 2.29.74 where Cicero illustrates a larger point by noting that the Areopagus is the assumed place of governance within Athens.

[21] Werner Jaeger similarly points to the importance of Paul's location in this episode: "The author of Acts…let the apostle Paul visit Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the classical Greek world and the symbol of its historical tradition, and preach on that venerable spot, the Areopagus, to an audience of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, about the unknown God" (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], 11).

[22] Again, however, given that the text opens by giving the impression that Paul was not even intending to engage in mission activity in Athens (17:16), that his work would produce *any* converts is impressive. Bruce Winter offers a more sustained argument for understanding Paul's work in Athens as fundamentally successful ("Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul's Failed Apologetic in Acts 17?" *Themelios* 31, no. 1 [October 2005]: 38-59).

[23] As C. K. Barrett notes, "Many visitors came to Athens, some as serious students" (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary,* 834). Charles, too, identifies the city as a "university city" ("Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind," 50).

[24] Although there are no lexical relations between the term here and the vocabulary of Luke's parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-8), one may nonetheless detect a conceptual link between Paul's sowing of seeds among the Athenians with its

initial evaluation of Paul is not impressive. Nonetheless, as Beverly Gaventa notes, while "[t]his response scarcely constitutes a warm welcome…it does portray Paul as a legitimate proclaimer."[25] That is, the fact that Paul would even evoke a response from these philosophers suggests that he is viewed, in some way, as a fellow pedagogue, even if not a particularly gifted one.[26]

This identification of Paul as a teacher is further underscored by the request of his "students" to continue the lesson (17:20). As C. K. Barrett comments here, "The verse suggests…a desire for information and enlightenment."[27] That is, Paul's audience seeks to be educated, and they recognize in Paul a teacher who can perform that task.

Paul's speech itself highlights the educational nature of his task. By drawing the Athenians' attention to a religious structure devoted to "An Unknown God" (17:23), Paul implicitly suggests that the fundamental problem that the Athenians are encountering is one of a lack of knowledge.[28] His speech, then, is aimed at correcting this deficit. Likewise, later in the speech, Paul mounts an argument for what the Athenians "ought not to think" (17:29). The issue, then, is a fundamental misunderstanding of appropriate thought patterns, and Paul aims to correct this misunderstanding through his educative encounter with the people.[29]

The ultimately pedagogical thrust of Paul's efforts becomes most apparent in his definitive plea in Acts 17:30: "While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent (μετανοεῖν)." The term "repent" here in English masks the Greek's philological connection to the term for "mind" (νοῦς). Thus, what Paul demands of the Athenians is not simply a guilty conscience or an abstention from wrongful behaviors, but a change of mind. Likewise, Paul suggests again that the Athenians' fundamental problem is simply a lack of knowledge.

However, beyond the themes of learning and ignorance that permeate Paul's discourse, the speech act itself is indicative of the fundamentally educational thrust of Paul's activity. In considering Paul's Areopagus speech as an act of education, it is helpful to place this event within the context of ancient rhetorical practices. Rhetoric was, for all intents and purposes, foundational for ancient education.[30] Thus, part of demonstrating one's education included a demonstration of one's rhetorical abilities.

The recognition that Paul's speech is making use of rhetorical features may seem incidental. After all, one might expect that such a speech would naturally contain rhetorical elements insofar as it is attempting to persuade an audience to adopt a particular point of view. However, understanding rhetoric solely as a means of persuasion misses a large portion of what rhetoric meant in the ancient world. In his ground-breaking work on rhetorical criticism of the New Testament, George A.

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meager harvest of converts (Acts 17:34) and the parable in which three-quarters of the seed fail to grow but a small percentage produces an unexpectedly abundant crop.

[25] Gaventa, *Acts of the Apostles*, 249.

[26] Eckhard Schnabel, however, offers a competing interpretation whereby he suggests, "There is evidence from the eastern Mediterranean world that orators who spoke in public were invited by the magistrates of the cities to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities and their philosophical orientation" (Schnabel, "Contextualising Paul in Athens," 176). Thus, Schnabel insinuates that Paul's invitation here may reflect the Athenians' understanding of him as an orator.

[27] Barrett, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 833.

[28] Soards suggests that there may be a thematic connection here in Paul's speech back to Peter's speech in Acts 3:17 where Peter suggests that his audience has acted in ignorance (*Speeches in Acts*, 99).

[29] To some extent, Paul's aim here might not be unlike the author's own aim in penning this narrative. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke admits that the purpose of his two-volume work is to contribute to Theophilus's education (Luke 1:4).

[30] George A. Kennedy notes that a typical progression of education would move from grammar to rhetoric to philosophy (*New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984], 9).

Kennedy notes, "Rhetoric was a systematic academic discipline universally taught throughout the Roman empire. It represented approximately the level of high-school education today and was, indeed, the exclusive subject of secondary education."[31] That is, rhetoric *was* education, and education *was* rhetoric. The delivery of a rhetorical speech would have been viewed as an exercise in the realm of education. Just a tri-fold poster-board at a science fair would strike many modern North Americans as a uniquely "educational exercise," so too would have the construction and delivery of a rhetorical speech been connected to the task of education.

Given the close connection between rhetoric and education, then, we might well ask what evidence the Areopagus speech provides of being a rhetorical exercise. The speech itself is relatively brief, spanning just 10 verses (17:22-31). Nonetheless, as Dean Flemming observes, "Paul's sermon features a variety of rhetorical techniques that would have been familiar to educated Greeks."[32] Among the rhetorical devices present, Flemming notes assonance, alliteration, and paronomasia.[33] However, this is only a partial list. A closer view reveals that in the course of this short text, the speech demonstrates several recognized rhetorical strategies, including hyperbaton, polysyndeton, polyptoton, homoeoptoton, and homoeopropheron. As Table 1 below illustrates, these devices are described in several ancient handbooks of rhetoric, including those by Quintilian and Cicero. Thus, as Luke portrays Paul making use of these strategies in his speech, the reader gets the impression that Paul is engaging in an act of rhetorical demonstration.

Rhetorical Device	**Description of Device**	**Use in Acts 17:22-31**
Hyperbaton	Moving, juxtaposition, or transposition of a word for emphasis (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.62-67; Cicero, *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.32.44)	v. 29a (γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεου)
Polysyndeton	Use of surplus conjunctions (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.51)	v. 25b (ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα); v. 28a (ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν); v. 29a (χρυσῷ ἢ ἀργύρῳ ἢ λίθω)
Polyptoton	Repetition of words from the same root but in a different case, gender, inflection, or voice (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.37)	vv. 23/30 (Ἀγνώστῳ / ἀγνοοῦντες / ἀγνοίας); vv. 22/31 (ἄνδρες / ἀνδρὶ);[34] vv. 25/26/29/30 (ἀνθρωπίνων / ἀνθρώπων / ἀνθρώπου / ἀνθρώποις); vv. 24/26/28 (ποιήσας / χειροποιήτοις / ἐποίησέν / ποιητῶν); vv. 24/27/29 (ὑπάρχων / ὑπάρχοντα / ὑπάρχοντες)
Homoeoptoton	Use of two or more words with similar endings within a sentence (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.78; Cicero, *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.20.28)	v. 26b (τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας)
Homoeopropheron / Alliteration / Assonance	Repetition of the same letter or sound in different words (cf. Cicero, *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.12.18)	v. 26a (ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος); v. 20b (παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ); v. 31 (πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν)

[31] Ibid.
[32] Fleming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens," 201.
[33] Ibid., 209n11.
[34] The speech is framed at the beginning and end by addressing clearly male-gendered "men" (vv. 22, 31) even though the potentially more inclusive language of "humankind" is used elsewhere throughout the speech (vv. 25-26, 29-30).

Beyond these traditional elements of rhetoric, several scholars have also noted that the construction of this speech itself follows a typical outline for a piece of deliberative rhetoric.[35] While the precise delineations of the speech's outline vary somewhat by author, delineations of the speech among such scholars tend to follow a typical pattern:

I. Introduction / *Exordium* (vv. 22b-23a)
II. Thesis / *Propositio* (v. 23b)
III. Narrative of fact / *Probatio* (vv. 24-29)
IV. Argument / *Peroratio* (vv. 30-31)

Such an outline would likely have been recognizable to ancient audiences as part of a deliberative speech. Thus, whether it was the historical Paul or the text's author who penned this speech, the discourse itself draws attention to the fundamentally pedagogical character of the speech-giving activity.

Both in its themes and its construction, then, Acts 17:16-34 recounts a moment in the early Christian mission when mission and education are combined. In this text, Paul models a missiological approach that recognizes the power of education and the link between education and the Gospel. Thus, these texts may serve as a helpful foundation for reimagining the task of Anabaptist-Mennonite missions.

Implications for Anabaptist-Mennonite Mission Practices Today

It would be impossible to survey adequately the many ways in which Anabaptist-Mennonite mission efforts have already incorporated educational practices. Indeed, an adequate summary would be well beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, in what follows, I wish to highlight just two illustrative examples of where such missional and educational endeavors have combined and to suggest how these mission activities exemplify the principles that underlie Paul's own mission activity in Athens as it is described in Acts 17:16-34.

One particularly well-documented Mennonite missions endeavor linked closely to education was the Mennonite Vocational School for Orphan Boys operated in South Korea between 1953 and 1976.[36] The school, begun with just 13 students, came to serve over 460 students during its time of operation.[37] At one point, the school was "the only vocational school in Korea which taught its students trades utilizing hand tools which were readily available in local markets."[38] Beyond this vocational training, the school was offering, as early as its first year in existence, classes in Bible, Korean History, World History, and Agriculture.[39] Yet, despite the distinctly educational thrust of the school's work, its purpose was to "provide food, shelter, clothing and education for these

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[35] Cf. Campbell, "Scratching the Itch," 177-184; Flemming, "Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens," 201; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 129; Lynn Allen Losie, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus: A Model of Cross-cultural Evangelism, Acts 17:16-34," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* (eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 228; Karl Olav Sandnes, "Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 14-17; Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 96; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 513-514; Khiok-khng Yeo, "*What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing?" Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 186-173; Dean Zweck, "The *Exordium* of the Areopagus Speech, Acts 17.22-23," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 95.

[36] Kim Eel Sahm and Joanne Voth, eds., *Mennonite Central Committee Relief & Educational Missionary Work in Korea 1951-1971* (N.p. Mennonite Central Committee, 2006), 20-75.

[37] Ibid., 62.

[38] Ibid., 26.

[39] Ibid., 24.

boys…to teach them about Christ."[40] Thus, education and mission were intimately linked in this endeavor.

Fast-forwarding about 50 years and moving roughly 1500 miles to the west, another Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activity illustrates a similar combination of interest in both mission and education. A little over a year ago, a particular manifestation of this combination of mission and education arose from Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Evangelical Mennonite congregations in Kinshasa and Kikwit in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Started by women in the congregations, the "Evangelization through Literacy" program provides meaningful teaching experience to trained volunteer educators and lessons in reading and writing to illiterate women and men who may otherwise not have had a connection to the churches where classes are held.[41] One student commented, "I can read and write, and reading the Bible is especially beneficial to me."[42] Thus, while being located in a very different time and place, this mission work also demonstrates an Anabaptist-Mennonite interest in merging missional and educational endeavors.

Whether in the Korean peninsula in the 1950s-70s or in Congo today, Anabaptist-Mennonite mission efforts have by no means been divorced from educational endeavors. Nonetheless, it may be helpful to suggest how the model from Paul's speech at the Areopagus might be able to provide a theoretical grounding as well as an imperative for these and future Anabaptist-Mennonite mission efforts.

Perhaps one of the first lessons to be gleaned from Paul's combination of mission and education activity is that the education itself is fundamentally noncoercive. Some have suggested that Paul's speech seems to be lacking the sort of conclusion that might be expected from a piece of deliberative rhetoric such as this.[43] This lack of an expected conclusion to the speech could raise the question of whether Paul was forcibly cut off by his audience.[44] In fact, the text's notice in Acts 17:19 that "they took him and brought him to the Areopagus" (NRSV) could suggest involuntary coercion on the part of the Athenians. Thus, it might not be so much of a stretch to imagine that the speech might have also been stopped prematurely. Of course, it is impossible to assert this with any certainty, and the mixed response reported in 17:32 suggests that at least some in the audience received Paul favorably. Nonetheless, the report of scoffers (as well as the title of "babbler" applied to Paul) suggests that Paul was not in the presence of a wholly friendly audience.

If it is, indeed, the case that we are to imagine Paul delivering his address to an antagonistic crowd, it is especially noteworthy that Paul does not appear to engage in tactics of coercion or threats against his audience. In fact, Paul himself may have been under a degree of threat insofar as he seems to have lacked agency in being taken to the Areopagus (17:19). The education that he provides, then, is an education directed upwards to those in power over him, not downwards toward students who are perceived as inferior. Given the potential for educational mission endeavors to devolve into problematic colonialist enterprises, it is important to observe the ways in which Paul himself seems to be providing an example of education that would resist such a colonialist turn. In doing so, this method of education evinces a noncoercive and peaceful approach education.

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[40] Ibid., 20.

[41] Nancy Myers and Charlie Malembe, "'Evangelization Through Literacy' Program Touches Hundreds in Congo," *The Mennonite*. https://themennonite.org/daily-news/evangelization-literacy-program-touches-hundreds-congo (accessed May 17, 2018). Idem. "New Readers, New Believers in Congo." *Mennonite World Review*. http://mennoworld.org/2018/04/30/news/new-readers-new-believers-in-congo/ (accessed May 17, 2018).

[42] Myers and Malembe, "New Readers, New Believers in Congo," http://mennoworld.org/2018/04/30/news/new-readers-new-believers-in-congo/

[43] Losie, "Paul's Speech on the Areopagus," 228.

[44] Ernst Haenchen, however, denies this possibility claiming, "There is no hint that Paul is interrupted" (*The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 526; qtd. in Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 100).

However, beyond the noncoercive and peaceful approach to education that Paul demonstrates in his teaching, one might also speculate that these values were developed in Paul's own education. Luke does not narrate Paul's early education, but Acts does include several references to Paul's origins in Tarsus (cf. Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). If J. Daryl Charles is right in viewing Tarsus as an ancient "university city,"[45] then it might not be too far-fetched to imagine that Paul was conversant not only with the "ancestral law" in which he claims to be educated (22:3) but also with broader Greco-Roman perspectives.

Such familiarity with these educational systems may also have been a hallmark of emerging Christianity. In an exploration of the place of education in early Christianity, Sara Wenger Shenk observes that "early Christian thinkers sought to adapt particular strengths of a Greek educational approach to their new Christian priorities. In an effort to reach their Hellenized world, they used concepts and approaches familiar to their listeners while filling those concepts and approaches with new content."[46] Stated otherwise, early Christian missionaries may have been voluntarily assuming the role of student vis-à-vis their targeted audience. Thus, it could be imagined that prior to his own education of the Athenian philosophers, Paul himself had been a student of similar philosophers and was thus able to manage his relationship with his "students" in a noncoercive and peaceful manner precisely *because of* his own previous student status.[47] Such a positioning, first as student and then as educator, illustrates an educational mission endeavor that begins to escape some post-colonialist critiques that might see Paul's mission to correct ignorance as a hopelessly colonialist undertaking that offers a poor model for Anabaptist-Mennonite missions today.

Paul's example might further escape a post-colonialist critique insofar as it displays some concern with being a student-centered enterprise. The mission-driven education (or education-driven mission) that Paul provides seems geared at meeting his audience on their own terms as he references their own displays of religious statuary (17:23) and their own poetry (17:28). Indeed, one looks in vain for a highly developed Christology as Paul's only reference to Jesus is "a man" who was raised from the dead (17:31). If Paul's aim were to preach about Jesus, it would seem that he has failed miserably in this task. However, if his aim was instead to provide an educational moment in service of his larger mission, he appears to have accomplished this objective more clearly.

Paul's own peaceful and noncoercive education of the Athenians at the Areopagus could provide a model for Anabaptist-Mennonite mission efforts today. This model suggests that the educational moment itself may be the key opportunity for mission. Thus, in cases such as a school for orphaned boys in Korea or a literacy program in Congo, Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activities that have been linked to educational endeavors demonstrate an approach to mission much like Paul's.[48]

However, beyond simply being modeled on Paul's example, such education-driven missions embody an Anabaptist-Mennonite emphasis on peace. As historic peace churches, most Anabaptist-

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[45] Charles, "Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind," 49-50.

[46] Sara Wenger Shenk, *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing: A Conversation about Tradition-based Critical Education* (Telford, PA: Cascadia 2003), 67.

[47] To be sure, this suggestion relies on several assumptions including Paul's exposure to Greco-Roman *paideia* in Tarsus and his intentional use of similar pedagogical strategies in his own teaching mission. While these assumptions could both be invalidated, they do not change the fundamental nature of Paul's encounter with the Athenians. That is, viewing Paul as first a student and then an educator of philosophers lends itself to the establishment of an argument that Paul's pedagogy is fundamentally noncoercive and peaceful. However, establishing these qualities of his teaching is not dependent solely on his own prior status as a student.

[48] Though not explicitly addressing issues of mission in connection to Anabaptist-Mennonite education, a recent volume on the topic features several essays that address a variety of topics related to the values, including an emphasis on peace, that underlie Mennonite higher education (J. Denny Weaver, ed., *Education with the Grain of the Universe: A Peaceable Vision for the Future of Mennonite Schools, Colleges, and Universities* [Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2017]).

Mennonite church communities would affirm the centrality of peace and peacemaking in their belief statements.[49] Although none of these confessions of faith or belief statements include a statement on the role of education, noncoercive and dialogical education is in keeping both with the educational model of mission evidenced in Paul's Areopagus speech and with the peace position of Anabaptist-Mennonites.[50]

The bridge between Paul's Areopagus speech and Anabaptist-Mennonite mission practices today can also be found in the values that undergird both missions and education. In a volume that explores the fundamental values of Anabaptist-Mennonite education, John Roth observes, "At its core, education is the means by which humans negotiate how they relate to each other, how they engage with the natural world, and how they understand ultimate questions of goodness, justice, and truth."[51] This broad definition of education illustrates the potential for a connection to Christian mission efforts insofar as such efforts often include similar values of relationships, goodness, and truth.

Thus, we return to the question of what the implications of this view of Paul's Areopagus address might be for Anabaptist-Mennonite missions today. In one sense, the conclusion is an anti-climactic one: there is no clear call for change to Anabaptist-Mennonite missions that arises from an understanding of the Areopagus address as a combined act of education and mission. However, what could appear on one level to be disappointingly lame, is, on a different reading, a strong encouragement to many contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite mission practices to continue practicing precisely the sort of work in which they are already engaged. That is, perhaps because of the strong Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment to peace, noncoercive education has established a history of being paired with mission practices. Thus, if any clear call to action arises from this reading of Paul's Areopagus speech, it is simply a call to be more explicit about the ways in which the pairing of education and mission is supportive of Anabaptist-Mennonite positions on peace and peacemaking.[52]

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[49] Most ecclesial Anabaptist-Mennonite bodies include statements concerning peace in their confessions of faith. For example, the "Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective" shared by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada states, "As followers of Jesus, we participate in his ministry of peace and justice. He has called us to find our blessing in making peace and seeking justice. We do so in a spirit of gentleness, willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake" ("Article 22: Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance," Mennoniteusa.org. http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/peace-justice-and-nonresistance/ [accessed May 21, 2018]; cf. "Article 22: Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance," Mennonitechurch.ca. http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/cof/art.22 [accessed May 21, 2018]). Likewise, the US Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches includes a similar statement of support for peacemaking: "We actively pursue peace and reconciliation in all relationships by following Christ's example and His command to love God, neighbors and even enemies. We strive to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in families, churches, communities, in our nation, and throughout the world" ("Confession of Faith," Usmb.org. https://usmb.org/confession-of-faith-4/ [accessed May 21, 2018]). Similarly, international bodies of Anabaptist-Mennonites such as Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) provide similar statements of support for the work of peacemaking ("Shared Convictions," mwc-cmm.org. https://mwc-cmm.org/article/shared-convictions [accessed May 21, 2018]; "What We Believe," icomb.org. http://www.icomb.org/what-we-believe/ [accessed May 21, 2018]).

[50] The dialogical nature of Paul's educational moment with the Athenians is evidenced by Luke's word choice in 17:17 in describing Paul's encounter as one of discourse or discussion (διαλέγομαι).

[51] John D. Roth, *Teaching that Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011), 16.

[52] This is not to claim that such explicit linking has been entirely absent. In fact, a fairly explicit connection was made in a 2007 consultation regarding Mennonite Brethren higher education: "Education can inform missionary thinking and missionary praxis can stimulate (motivate) the educational process" ("ICOMB Consultation on MB Higher Education, June 4-9, 2007," *Direction* 36, no. 2 [2007]: 261).

Conclusion

What do Epicurean philosophers have to do with Korean orphans? At first glance, the two could hardly seem less similar. Yet, as has been demonstrated here, both have been the recipients of Christian mission tied with education, one group at the hands of Paul in the first century and one group at the hands of Mennonites in the 20th century. The huge historical, cultural, and social distance between these groups cannot be underestimated. Nonetheless, Paul's model of Christian mission demonstrates a combination of mission and education that can continue to provide a meaningful model for engaging in mission activity.

For Anabaptist-Mennonites, the noncoercive and peaceful aspect of this approach to mission may be especially appealing. Paul does not forcibly proselytize his audience, but he engages them in dialogue (cf. 17:17), an approach that leads at least some to hope for further opportunities to explore his ideas (17:32b). This model is in keeping with some examples of Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activity that has intentionally engaged in educational pursuits as a means of doing mission. Thus, in looking ahead to the future of Anabaptist-Mennonite missions, it may be most helpful to look back. Just as Paul's strategy of engaging in peaceful pedagogy paid modest dividends in his mission in Athens, so too does it promise to be a strategy well-aligned to Anabaptist-Mennonite values and well-suited for Anabaptist-Mennonite mission activity today.

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Translation, Contextualization, and North American Mennonite Mission with African Initiated Churches

By Joseph C. L. Sawatzky

Introduction

The following narrates the quest of Mennonite Mission Network, through its predecessor agencies,[1] to conform its praxis to the primacy of context—the emerging historical circumstances and deeply-seated cultural patterns of a place[2]—for faithfulness to the *missio Dei*.[3] That mission prioritizes context might seem unremarkable; yet the claim arises from the persistence of the impugnation of mission in both academic and ecclesial circles. Nearly thirty years ago, the Gambian-American scholar Lamin Sanneh addressed both such criticism and claim for mission when he wrote of translation that "missionary adoption of the vernacular . . . was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western cultural imperialism."[4] Moreover, the translation of the scriptures into the vernacular communicated,

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[1] Mennonite Mission Network, "the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA", draws together the mission constituencies of the former Mennonite Church (MC) and General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) denominations, namely the Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) and the Commission on Overseas Mission (COM), based respectively in Elkhart, IN and Newton, KS. COM conducted its work in Africa through Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), a cooperative agency of various evangelical and anabaptist "Mennonites." AIMM, with office in Goshen, IN, no longer a sending agency for North American missionaries, coordinates mission efforts among its international member bodies.

[2] For a precise definition of mission as "contextualization" in contradistinction to "replication" and "indigenization", see Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 48-58. David J. Bosch named "mission as contextualization" as a main theme of "an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm", with "mission as liberation" and "mission as inculturation" as two types of contextualization. In turn, he treated "translation", of which Lamin Sanneh, Andrew Walls, and Kwame Bediako have been prominent theorists, as a synonym of inculturation. In *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 420-457. While this paper tracks a Mennonite mission commitment to contextualization, it bears stating that contextualization emphasizes the appropriation or assimilation of the faith by indigenous actors rather than its transmission by foreign agents, though the latter may assist—and have assisted—in the process.

[3] The "sending" or "mission of God". On the ascendance of *missio Dei* in missiological thought, see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 389-393. The concept is foundational for Mennonite Mission Network.

[4] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 3.

regardless of otherwise negative missionary assessment of non-western cultures, not only mission's fundamental embrace of context—the gospel finding expression *but* in the terms that precede it—but constitutes, in the judgment of Kwame Bediako, the most "important single explanation for the massive presence of Christianity on the African continent",[5] "the surprise story of the modern missionary movement."[6] The so-called "African Independent Churches" (AICs) were in the vanguard of such an indigenous uptake to the faith and a catalyst for renewal of the continent's western-initiated denominations,[7] while North American Mennonites were among the first western missionaries to esteem and sustain relationships with AICs as partners in the body of Christ.[8] The succeeding, therefore, briefly details the history of Mennonite-AIC encounter from West to southern Africa through the lens of the North American agencies' endeavor to adapt their missions to the priority of context.

In 1977, at the close of a two-year term in southern Africa, Ed Weaver, with his wife Irene pioneer missionaries for Mennonite work with independent churches in Africa, reflected on the mission situation at hand.

> Missions and their missionaries have always known the importance of sensitivity, humility, and patience in their relationships with governments and the people among whom they were working. They always knew that new languages and cultures had to be learned in order to effectively communicate the Gospel. What then

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[5] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 62.

[6] Ibid., p. 191. On skepticism within the missionary movement on the prospects of Christianity in Africa, see Ibid., pp. 69, 192-93. Cf. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 58. For statistics and projections on Christianity's growth in Africa, particularly from 1900 to 2050, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, 3rd Edition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

[7] Thus, Bediako wrote that "the significance of the independents . . . has been that they pointed to the direction in which broad sections of African Christianity were moving, and so they testified to the existence of some generalised trends in the African response to the Christian faith in African terms." *Christianity in Africa*, p. 66.

[8] See the brief historiographical survey of the literature on AICs in Andrew F. Walls, "The Challenge of the African Independent Churches: The Anabaptists of Africa?" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 111-112. Already between the first and second editions (1948, 1961) of Bengt Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, the first scholarly treatment of AICs in Walls's 1979 review, Mennonites had commenced work with AICs, as the story below recounts. Walls judged that "the most effective bridge-building between independents and others has probably been in the area of shared Bible teaching—and is it coincidental that Mennonites, successors of the Anabaptists, have been so prominent in this? Ibid., p. 116.

> is so different in "the new day" in mission? How different are the problems of orientation today? Principles of adjustment and relationships haven't really changed! Isn't it rather we who are having to change our attitudes toward people who are determined to be free [sic]. They have a new image of their own identity that we have to learn to adjust to. "Freedom" is the correct word for foreigners coming to Africa to learn to understand. Missions and their missionaries can no longer dominate. We are hearing these words repeated many times during this month in Lesotho. In every situation the foreigner must take a subordinate role. He must not be an authority figure. Constantly we hear or see this "new commandment" of national-foreigner relationship being flaunted. Much more appropriate is the learner-teacher attitude. The foreigner learns as well as teaches. And how much we all have to learn before we can really teach. We are not authorities. We don't know it all. Even if we think we do![9]

Weaver's words came at the end of an extensive missionary career. After serving twenty-one years in India for the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC), Elkhart, Indiana, Ed and Irene Weaver were called to southeastern Nigeria to oversee the formation of a new, national Mennonite church. From 1959 to 1967, when their service was ended by the Biafran War, the Weavers "sponsored" the Nigerian Mennonite Church even as they broke new ground in mission with the host of independent churches they discovered in the area around Uyo.[10] *The Uyo Story*, as a seminal document for Mennonite mission praxis named the Weavers' experience, details not so much their experience with Mennonite Church Nigeria—which they referred to as "our Independent Mennonite church"—as an explication of what they called "the new day" and its implications for foreign missions.[11] These implications were

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[9] Ed and Irene Weaver, "December to January Report, 1977", MLA.VII.A.1.a, Box 41, Folder 280. MLA stands for Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, KS.

[10] Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970). For the language of "sponsorship", see pp. 56, 67-77.

[11] For the exact phrase see *The Uyo Story*, p. 112. For references to Mennonite Church Nigeria as an "independent church", see pp. 66, 67, 71, 73, 106.

basically twofold. First, recognizing "the new day" in Africa as the context of political independence and freedom, the Weavers initiated a turn in North American Mennonite mission from denominational affiliation, the planting of Mennonite denominations, to interchurch cooperation, with a specific focus on African independent churches. Second, viewing Africans as actors in the new freedom context, the Weavers articulated a "learner-teacher" approach to mission in which "teachers become learners and learners, teachers".[12] Through published and unpublished sources, each little-known beyond pockets of North American Mennonite constituencies, this paper traces the concept of "the new day in mission" and the "learner-teacher" philosophy as set forth by the Weavers and continued through the thought of Mennonite missionaries to Africa who followed in their train.

"The New Day"

The concept of "the new day" is a thread binding together the Weavers' reporting on their experience in Africa. Their African reports detail the Weavers' second missionary career, more than three-quarters the length of their years in India. Naturally, the Weavers came to view their African experience in light of their Indian experience. According to Mennonite mission worker and historian Bruce Yoder, who has studied the full body of the Weavers' Nigerian correspondence, "when the Weavers arrived in Nigeria at the end of 1959, they found similar impulses [to India] for greater independence, both in the national political realm and in the churches."[13] Fourteen years later, writing from Swaziland where he and Irene had been sent by a joint-appointment of three Mennonite agencies in order to assess the viability of a potential Mennonite ministry with independent churches, Ed Weaver marveled at the arc of their missionary career with regard to political events. In country on 13 April 1973 for the repealing of the five-year-old, British and Swazi-signed constitution, which Weaver interpreted as a "rejection of Western politics", he wrote,

> The Swazi move to greater freedom was of special interest to Irene and me, because in 1947 we were in India when she gained her

[12] The exact phrase comes from James R. Krabill, *Where Teachers Become Learners and Learners, Teachers: MBM Marks Four Decades of Ministry with African-Initiated Churches, Mission Insight #23* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2001).

[13] R. Bruce Yoder, "Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria: Changing Contexts and Strategy at the Dawn of the Postcolonial Era", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 3 (2013):140.

> independence from Britain. Then in 1960 when Britain gave Nigeria independence, we were there also. And now in 1973 here we are in Swaziland. Politically, five years ago Swaziland was already free. But the Swazis felt hampered and threatened by their "British" constitution. India! Nigeria! Swaziland! Each of these countries is different, yet in some ways so similar. We learned many things from each.[14]

Weaver's words synthesized his experience—India, Nigeria, Swaziland—within the thematic context of national independence and freedom from foreign oppression. By sounding the freedom note from Swaziland, the Weavers were echoing earlier comments on Africa, gleaned from their years in Nigeria. In fact, the Weavers chalked up the very existence of independent churches in Africa to the freedom factor. Not satisfied with the otherwise "many good reasons" given "for the increasing number of African independent churches", the Weavers posited that

> sufficient consideration has not been given to the naturally strong desire of the African to be free. He seems to say, 'The white man could subjugate our bodies, but never our souls.' Sympathy must be shown for the human rights of freedom and self-determination. Africa too must be free! The African must be given the right to become the person that God in His grace meant him to be![15]

Moreover, just as some scholarship has viewed the African independent church movement as a forerunner of broader political freedom,[16] the Weavers recognized the link in reverse, that "the new political freedom of the nations of Africa has set the pace for religious freedom."[17]

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[14] Ed Weaver, "Letter 4" in *Letters from Southern Africa: Exploring Mennonite Relationships with Independent Churches* (Elkhart, IN: Southern Africa Task Force, Council of Mission Board Secretaries, Wilbert R. Shenk, secretary, 1974), p. 16.
[15] *The Uyo Story*, p. 54.
[16] See, e.g., with regard to South Africa, Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pp. 85ff.; Hennie Pretorius and Lizo Jafta, "'A Branch Springs Out': African Initiated Churches" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social & Cultural History*, eds. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), pp. 212-216, 224.
[17] Ibid., p. 54.

Regardless of the order of flow between church and society, the common denominator in the Weavers' assessment of the African settings to which they came was a "fierce passion for freedom." It was this freedom that conditioned "the new day" to which "missions of all kinds must adjust themselves."[18] Or, as Ed Weaver put it in another passage, it was the "new day of missions" which necessitated that "an entirely new approach would have to be worked out."[19]

Of course, the Weavers' rhetoric about a "new day" implied the presence of an "old", a political context and a mission enterprise therein that was passing away. The Weavers did not sit in judgment on "older mission approaches"; indeed, in their own words, "we too participated".[20] Speaking of an older approach to mission, Irene Weaver, who had grown up as the child of Mennonite missionaries in India, confessed, "I can't ever criticize the way they worked because if I had been there in that time I would have done the same thing."[21] In words that moved beyond sympathy with missionaries of the past, Ed Weaver extolled "the good work done by the older Missions."

> Missions in Africa have done great things for God. We have only the highest admiration for the good work done by them.[22]

Even so, such appeals to the old were made in relation to the new, so that Irene Weaver hastened to account for her own perspective on mission on the basis of being in "the new day".[23] Almost identically, Ed Weaver implied that his conversion from older "patterns of mission" was not the result of special ability but "merely that we are in a new day."[24] Relatedly, in an appendix to *The Uyo Story* entitled "A Mission Strategy for Uyo", Ed Weaver briefly surveyed trends current in the missiology of the 1960s as a preface to drawing lessons from the Mennonite mission's own experience in Uyo. After weighing the benefits and pitfalls of "self-government, self-propagation and self-support" for national churches; the shift in language from "missions" to "mission"; and "the worldwide trend toward greater unity and ecumenicity", Weaver concluded

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[18] Ibid., p. 54.
[19] Ibid., p. 107.
[20] Edwin and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1975), p. 116. For similar comments, see *The Uyo Story*, p. 92.
[21] Irene Weaver quoted in Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *'A New Day in Mission': Irene Weaver Reflects on Her Century of Mission", Missio Dei # 8*, series ed. James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2005), p. 3.
[22] *The Uyo Story*, p. 107.
[23] Irene Weaver quoted in Hollinger-Janzen, *'A New Day in Mission'*, p. 3.
[24] *The Uyo Story*, p. 107.

with regard to his and Irene's own thinking that "the influence of world trends has been more or less unconscious." Continuing, he said,

> What has determined our policies more than anything else has been the force of circumstances. Uyo was different from any other mission field our Board has ever entered. It called for an entirely different approach. Why we stayed after we arrived can only be explained by the providence of God, who works in lives and organizations in unpredictable ways.[25]

Seemingly, it was this "force of circumstances", otherwise perceived as "the new day", which led the Weavers, and subsequent North American Mennonites, to develop "an entirely different approach" to mission in Africa.[26]

Uyo and Onward

But if the concept of "the new day" has been sufficiently attested in the Weavers' writings, those "circumstances" which opened a new chapter in the history of North American Mennonite mission to Africa beg further specificity. What led the Weavers to Uyo, and what did they find when they got there? Though the story has been well-told in several sources, it is necessary to recount here that Mennonite mission in Nigeria began not at the initiative of foreign missionaries but at the invitation of "a group of independent churches who had of their own accord adopted the name 'Mennonite' ",[27] having heard a "[Mennonite Board of Missions] internationally transmitted radio broadcast" called *The Mennonite Hour*.[28] In 1958, based then in neighboring Ghana, longtime Mennonite missionaries Sylvan Jay (S.J.) and Ida Hostetler went on behalf of MBMC to investigate the call from Nigeria. Excited by the "prospect of immediately taking in nearly 3,000 members—and the schools and medical work he envisaged

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[25] Ibid., pp. 105-106.
[26] Mennonite historian James C. Juhnke highlighted a nearly identical phrase, "an entirely new direction", which he attributed to James Bertsche. As director of work in Botswana for another Mennonite-supported agency, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Juhnke was one of the first Mennonites to establish contact with independent churches in Botswana, paving the way for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) to establish its work in that country. See Juhnke, *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), pp. 202-203.
[27] Wilbert R. Shenk, in the foreword to *The Uyo Story*, p. 3.
[28] James R. Krabill, "Where Teachers Become Learners and Learners, Teachers", p. 1.

as associated with this 'bigger church than any we have on any mission field' ", S.J. Hostetler "traveled periodically to Nigeria, visiting congregations and accepting them into [Mennonite Church Nigeria]."[29] Consequently, when the Weavers arrived as resident missionaries in Nigeria in late 1959, the existence of a Mennonite church and the expectation of increased support from foreign mission to local church were established realities. The Weavers soon discovered that their Mennonite congregations had previously been attached to other missions, most recently Mormon, and that there were dozens of similar groups around Uyo seeking affiliation with foreign missions beyond the historic, western-initiated denominations from which they had split.[30] Loath to contribute to an already overcrowded ecclesial climate, the Weavers halted Hostetler's course of accepting new congregations into Mennonite Church Nigeria while working with the church to set priorities and develop structures in line with the goal of becoming "a New Testament church".[31] Meanwhile, while residing in the country under the auspices of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission, for whose hospitals and schools MBMC seconded workers,[32] the Weavers worked to facilitate inter-church cooperation "on two fronts": "relationships between older churches and Independent Churches and the relationships among Independent Churches."[33] These efforts led to the formation of the Uyo United Independent Churches Bible College, designed to meet a need which both independent churches and Mennonites identified as primary: the grounding of leadership in the knowledge of the Bible.[34]

Mennonite Board of Mission's (MBM) experience in Nigeria became a baseline for subsequent North American Mennonite forays into the worlds of independent churches in Africa. Beyond Nigeria, the Weavers helped to lay the groundwork for future North American Mennonite mission in Africa. From 1969-1971, the Weavers resided in Accra, Ghana, where they taught Bible classes in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and helped to spearhead an inter-church effort resulting in the Good News Training Institute (GNTI), another Bible program for

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[29] R. Bruce Yoder, "Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria", pp. 138-139.
[30] See *The Uyo Story*, p. 13.
[31] See Yoder, "Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria", p. 139; *The Uyo Story*, p. 63.
[32] See Ibid., pp. 31-41, 110-111.
[33] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission Agency and African Independent Churches", *International Review of Mission* 63, no. 252 (1974): 482.
[34] On the priority of a Bible School, see *The Uyo Story*, pp. 73, 108, 112.

leaders of independent churches.[35] During these years they also traveled in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Dahomey (Benin), Togo, and Ivory Coast, making contacts for future Mennonite work with independent churches.[36] In 1973, the Weavers traveled through southern Africa—South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)—"at the request of the inter-Mennonite South Africa Task Force", in order to "investigate the viability of Mennonites working together with indigenous zion churches".[37] The following year, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), active historically in Congo/Zaire but having recently explored the possibility of expanding its ministry to southern Africa, called the Weavers out of retirement to serve a two-year term (1975-77) with independent churches in Botswana. Thus, although the Weavers were not the first North American Mennonites to serve in Botswana, they were the first to arrive in southern Africa specifically with the mandate of developing ministries with independent churches. Shortly thereafter, Mennonite Bible teachers arrived to work with independent churches elsewhere in Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Transkei, South Africa.[38]

"Learner-Teacher" Approach to Mission

If *The Uyo Story* was an articulation of "the new day in mission" within the context of late- and postcolonial Africa, then *From Kuku Hill*, the Weavers' reflections from their years based in Ghana, employs to a much greater extent the language of mission in "the new day" as a "learner-teacher" experience. Stated in the preface, restated in the conclusion, and running as a refrain throughout the book, the concept of "learner-teacher" functioned for the Weavers as a kind of summation of authentic mission, of mission shaped by and appropriate to the context in which it is carried out.[39] Because local context provides the terms without which the good news cannot be heard, any foreign messengers of the gospel must study, must *learn*, the settings to which they come. Ed Weaver, in the extended quote above, identified this learning vocation as

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[35] The school continues today as the Good News Theological Seminary. See, accessed October 15, 2018, https://www.goodnewsseminary.org/.

[36] For this story, see Edwin and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill*. On the enduring legacy of this work, see Nancy Frey and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, with preface by Augustin Ahoga, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership, Missio Dei #23*, series ed. James R. Krabill, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2015).

[37] "United Mennonite Witness Urged in Southern Africa" in *Letters from Southern Africa*, p. 5.

[38] For the history of AIMM's involvement in southern Africa, see Jim Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace* (Elkhart, IN: Fairway Press, 1998), pp. 443-590. For the Weavers' part in the story, see pp. 479-483.

[39] In *From Kuku Hill*, see pp. 6-7 and 114-117, as well as pp. 21, 24, 38, 43, 54-55, 76.

something "missions and their missionaries have always known."[40] Precisely then for Weaver, that which was "different" in the " 'new day' in mission" was not learning as the acquisition of knowledge but learning as the fruit of a renewed missionary mind, an "attitude" of openness toward the truth of God revealed in the lives of peoples and cultures beyond the missionary's own.[41] Indeed, the Weavers spoke of "the learner-teacher factor" and missionary "attitudes" in parallel fashion. Just as they explained the former on the basis that "Jesus spoke often about humility with reference to the Kingdom", so the latter consisted in a call to "be humble. Be patient. Be sensitive. Be like Jesus in relating to persons as human beings."[42] In a parting shot from a 1973 interview after their return from their exploratory trip through southern Africa, Irene Weaver laid out what was perhaps her main counsel to North American mission constituents.

> One of the emphases that we are trying to break through in our writing is that we are learners as well as sometimes being teachers, but mostly we are learners and I think that's one thing we have to be very careful about in sending people. If they go with all the answers, then that's just too bad.[43]

Into Southern Africa

Not surprisingly, since AIMM had sought out and appointed the Weavers to pioneer its work among independent churches in southern Africa, mission personnel both administrative and on the field emphasized the basic goals and strategies that MBM had developed in West Africa. Indeed, Jim Bertsche, longtime administrator and chronicler of AIMM's work, noted that the Weavers' "correspondence" from their base in Gaborone, Botswana, "plus the reading of their writings and other MBM materials" enabled AIMM "to establish some base lines for its work."[44] As in the MBM experience in West Africa, so North American Mennonites debated among themselves the goals of AIMM's mission among independent churches in southern Africa. For indeed, just as until the Weavers' arrival in Nigeria MBMC had begun by receiving an "independent church" into denominational affiliation with the Mennonite mission, so within

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[40] Ed and Irene Weaver, "December to January Report, 1977", MLA.VII.A.1.a, Box 41, Folder 280.
[41] Ibid.
[42] In *From Kuku Hill*, compare pp. 114-115 with point no. 10 under their "Guidelines for ministry", p. 117.
[43] Irene Weaver in "An Interview with Ed and Irene Weaver" in *Letters from Southern Africa*, p. 46.
[44] Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM*, p. 480.

AIMM's board questions surfaced as to the compatibility of a proposed ministry with independent churches and the very purpose of mission. As Bertsche summarized "the biggest question of all",

> Was not Christian Mission first and above all else a call to evangelism and church planting? And as Mennonites, had it not been our objective for over sixty years to plant a Mennonite church in Africa? So where, now, did the business of African Independent Churches fit into our understanding of our role in Africa? If we decided to try to engage in ministry among them, what would be our objective?—to seek to bring them into the Mennonite fold or simply to accept and affirm them as we find them while trusting joint study of Scripture to accomplish God's intended work among them?[45]

These questions with regard to ministry in Botswana were essentially reiterations of questions that had arisen within AIMM concerning the placement of North American Mennonite workers in Lesotho in 1973, the previous year. "Underlying all of the preliminary discussion and planning for AIMM arrival in southern Africa," Bertsche reported, "was the assumption that its ultimate objective was the planting of a Mennonite Church."[46] However, as the result of the findings of several Mennonite inter-agency "investigate" trips into southern Africa,[47] AIMM "determined not to make hasty judgments."[48] Rather, in Bertsche's words, "the discovered reality of a South African Christian presence which dated back literally hundreds of years quickly gave rise to a persistent, troubling question: In that setting and at this point in its history, was it AIMM's mission to seek to plant yet another church among the many already on the scene . . . ?"[49] Recognizing both the preponderance of denominations and the deeper divisions and hostilities in a region under the shadow of apartheid, AIMM, like MBM in West Africa, settled

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[45] Ibid., p. 476.
[46] Ibid., p. 463
[47] Bertsche surveyed the scene with others several times before placing workers in Lesotho. See *CIM/AIMM*, pp. 445-447, 462.
[48] Ibid., p. 463.
[49] Ibid., p. 463.

on the path of resourcing existing churches—most prominently independent churches—rather than initiating or amalgamating new Mennonite denominations.[50]

"Learner-Teacher" Extended

As befitting this mission of interchurch cooperation, Mennonite missionaries who followed the Weavers to southern Africa extended their "learner-teacher" approach. Subsequent missionaries recognized their indebtedness to the Weavers. In an unpublished paper describing what she called a "Presence Ministry" with independent churches in Botswana, one worker acknowledged "the history of greatness that has gone on before", which she detailed in a list of predecessors beginning with "the Weavers".[51] In a companion reflection, that worker's colleague quoted at length from *The Uyo Story*, highlighting one of Irene Weaver's own epiphanies as a challenge to Mennonite workers in Botswana to "humble themselves" in the context of independent church worship.[52] Recapping the history of "Mennonites and AICs" in Botswana at a 1997 conference, another worker credited the Weavers for "crystalliz[ing] . . . our past and present strategy" which included, among other related principles, to "approach AICs as fellow-students of God's word".[53] As part of a correspondence concerning ministry in Botswana, a veteran worker counseled a prospective missionary couple that "failure to approach both culture and the [independent churches] in an open, sympathetic way will lead to snap conclusions that will prove in the long run to be far off the mark and will shut down avenues for growth and ministry." Continuing, he repudiated "an easy assumption" that members of the independent churches "are beginners in theological reflection" due to their lower levels of literacy. On the contrary, he suggested that the independent churches had their own knowledge of God which was at least the equal of western epistemology; "when they begin telling and interpreting their dream messages, you will ask what good your seminary training was!"[54] At the aforementioned 1997 conference, a former AIMM missionary in southern Africa and ongoing

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[50] Ibid., pp. 480-481.
[51] Sandra McLaughlin, "The 'WHY' and the 'How' of Building Relationships with A.I.C.s: Part A", unpublished paper, Mennonite files in author's possession.
[52] Elinor Miller, "The 'WHY' and the 'How' of Building Relationships with A.I.C.s: Part B", unpublished paper, Mennonite files in author's possession.
[53] Tim Bertsche, "Botswana: Historical Overview: Mennonites and AICs", short paper included in a document entitled "AIMM-AIC Kuruman Consultation", the report from an AIMM consultation held at the Kuruman Moffat Mission, Kuruman, South Africa from 9-12 May 1997, Mennonite files in author's possession.
[54] Letter from Jonathan Larson to Tim and Laura Bertsche, 22 July 1988, MLA.VII.A.1.b., Box 38, Folder 888.

observer expressed a similar appreciation for what independent churches might teach North American Christians. Desiring that AIMM's "teaching/learning" focus with independent churches might proceed to a deeper commitment, he denounced "the huge myth" that "international contacts are unnecessary for the [North American] church to mature in Christ at this stage of Christian history" and proclaimed that "we North American Mennonites NEED AICs to help us grow up in Christ and to carry out his mission" [his emphasis]. Lessons which Mennonites had learned in mission with independent churches in Africa awaited application to the church in North America at large. Such an application would fulfill the greater promise of mission as "a two-way street, a 'teaching/learning' exchange."[55] In one further example among a host of like sentiments to be found in missionary letters, another couple anticipated their ministry in the Transkei, South Africa along the learner-teacher axis. Explaining that their official "role" was "to assist in teaching Bible to the leaders and in the churches", they endeavored to carry out this ministry "in a spirit of mutual learning." In their words, "we believe that [independent churches] have much to teach us. We will seek to learn and grow together as God's children."[56]

Such statements, communicating an openness to learn, should not conceal the struggles North American Mennonite missionaries faced in responding to the beliefs and practices of independent churches in southern Africa. Beginning with the Weavers in Nigeria and Botswana respectively, Mennonite missionaries encountered many leaders of independent churches with whom congeniality of spirit was not strong enough to establish or sustain a working relationship.[57] Writing from Botswana in 1983, one missionary lamented of the independent churches around him that "there are some genuine church men among them but there are proportionately fewer among the leadership as well." Even so, though he had gleaned disconcerting, even damning, evidence of the moral character of many leaders, he could not quite relinquish "the purpose of working with the church leaders" nor recommend to his North American administrators "a divorce from these churches in total."[58] Torn between expectation

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[55] Stan Nussbaum, "Paradigm Shifts in AIMM Relations with AICs in the Next Decade", paper included in a document entitled "AIMM-AIC Kuruman Consultation", the report from an AIMM consultation held at the Kuruman Moffat Mission, Kuruman, South Africa from 9-12 May 1997, Mennonite files in author's possession.
[56] Letter from Gary and Jean Isaac to mission supporters, September 1986, MLA.VII.A.1.b., Box 37, Folder 870.
[57] For the Weavers' evaluation of some leaders of independent churches in Nigeria, see *The Uyo Story*, p. 62. For the experience of the Weavers and other AIMM personnel with one leader in Botswana, see Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM*, pp. 485-489.
[58] Letter from Buddy Dyck to James Bertsche and Erwin Rempel, MLA.VII.A.1.b., Box 35, Folder 788.

and reality, the vision of finding genuine partnership with leaders of independent churches continued to hold the day. Twenty years later, another missionary to Botswana evaluated the Mennonite work with independent churches, seemingly doubting whether there was "a vision [in Mennonite agencies] for the 're-evangelisation' of AICs". Alleging that North American Mennonite mission had fallen short of "sharing the good news of Jesus Christ as we understand it without apology or any attempt to avoid difficult issues", he felt constrained to acknowledge the prevailing Mennonite ethos in approach to independent churches; "I don't mean by this that our understanding is right and the AICs are wrong".[59] Even amidst disappointment, the "learner-teacher" approach to mission served to sanction Mennonite certitude and mitigate judgment against independent churches.

Conclusion

The language of "learner-teacher" commended for North American Mennonites a new "attitude" for missionary engagement in late- and postcolonial Africa. In an era in which Africans were gaining greater control over their political lives, the independent churches of Africa embodied a similarly strong desire for freedom from foreign domination within the ecclesial realm. Africans were actors reshaping the church according to their own embedded worldviews and patterns of worship in conversation with the Bible. To participate in this process, North American Mennonite missionaries found a ready welcome from African independent churches; indeed, Africans in both West and southern Africa often identified biblical education for leadership as their top priority. Nevertheless, foreigners had something to contribute only inasmuch as they recognized that Africans had their own relationship with God; in the Weavers' words, "the African must be given the right to become the person that God in His grace meant him to be!"[60] Seeing God in African Christians, North American Mennonite missionaries, following the Weavers, increasingly emphasized the missionary as learner.

Even so, the Weavers and others did not discover the path of the "learner-teacher" through sophisticated ideology—a preconceived theory of mission—but through reading the signs of the times, by paying attention to context. Hence, as recounted above, it was not so much

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[59] Eugene Thieszen in an "email discussion" with Stan Nussbaum, printed in *The Review of AICs: A Practitioners' Journal Produced by and for the Network on AICs and Missions* 14 (2003): p. 43.
[60] *The Uyo Story*, p. 54.

missiological trends as "the force of circumstances" that opened Mennonite eyes to a mission of interchurch cooperation with a focus on independent churches.[61] Neither was it, in the case of AIMM's entry into southern Africa, the non-negotiability of age-old imperatives—mission, in Jim Bertsche's words, *as* "church planting"—but the priority of context—"in that setting and at this point in history"—that commended the resourcing of existing denominations.[62] By recognizing that a "new day" was dawning in Africa, North American Mennonite agencies sought a missionary approach commensurate to the freedom of Africans.

[61] *The Uyo Story*, pp. 105-106.
[62] Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM*, pp. 476, 463.

Mennonite Missionary Contributions to the Emergence of "World Christianity" as a Field of Study

In recent decades scholars have found the concept of "world Christianity" to be a helpful way to analyze and understand the Christian faith, and it has gradually accumulated characteristics of a field of study. Centers for the study of world or global Christianity have emerged; research projects, book series, and journals dedicated to the subject have appeared; and posts in world Christianity have become a feature in university settings.[1] This shift in focus in the study of the Christian movement is likely the result of multiple factors that interact in complex ways: the presence of Christian communities around the world, the shift of the demographic weight of the movement to what is often identified as the Global South, the ease of communication and travel that an interconnected world provides for researchers, scholarly interest in subaltern movements that had not previously been included in a narrative centered on the European and North American story, increased exchange among global Christian communities due to migration and global interconnections, and the rich diversity of belief and practice that emerges from a faith that has found a home in innumerable contexts. During the twentieth century North American Mennonite missionaries worked around the world, facilitated the growth of the Christian movement, and engaged the issues that arose as different expressions of the faith grew out of the particular places and peoples where and with whom they worked. By documenting and legitimizing new expressions of the faith that they encountered, Mennonite missionaries were among those who provided the empirical and intellectual foundations for the emerging field of world Christianity.

The concept of world Christianity is a way of comprehending the Christian faith that highlights the global existence of Christian communities among which different expressions of the faith arise. Particularities of history, culture, religious tradition, race, nationality, gender, etc. influence Christian belief, practice, and identity, resulting in diversity. Such social and theological plurality leads some scholars to prefer conceiving of Christianities, plural.[2] World Christianity emphasizes the multicultural, polyvocal, complex, and polycentric character of the Christian movement and has roots in the fields of mission studies, ecumenics, and world religions.[3] It prioritizes a focus on indigenous responses—the ways local communities have appropriated and transformed the faith—and on the interconnections between the different expressions of Christianity. Making room for marginalized voices that have been underrepresented is a major concern. The Christian movement has been multicultural and diverse since the first centuries of its existence, but the hegemony of Europe and North America over the last several centuries influenced the way scholars and the faithful have understood and shared the faith. They assumed that the western traditions were in some sense universally descriptive and normative, making the rediscovery of world Christianity in the highly interconnected world of the twenty-first century a significant change of perception. Neither scholars nor practitioners can today conceive of Christianity, a global religion with multiple and differing manifestations, as uniquely western—or Euro-North America-centric.

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[1] Joel Cabrita and David Maxwell, "Introduction: Relocating World Christianity," in *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, vol. 7, Theology and Mission in World Christianity (Boston: Brill, 2017), 1–2.

[2] Peter C. Phan, "World Christianity: Its Implications for History, Religious Studies, and Theology," *Horizons* 39, no. 2 (2010): 175.

[3] Dale T. Irvin, "What Is World Christianity?," in *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights, Essays in Honor of Peter C. Phan*, ed. Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016).

As people who traversed cultural and geographical boarders while paying attention to religious dynamics, missionaries were some of the first voices calling attention to non-western indigenous Christian movements and their significance. Maurice Leenhardt studied native African church movements before a missionary career in New Caledonia where he engaged Melanesian religious understandings of the Christian leaders among whom he worked and taught.[4] Leenhardt's work over the first decades of the twentieth century is an early testimony to the "indeterminate, open-ended process" that is characteristic of an evolving faith that spans the globe.[5] Missionary anthropologist Edwin Smith argued for better understanding of African cultures, a Christianity rooted in African experience, and theology adapted to African thought forms.[6] Starting from the mid-twentieth century missionary scholars such as Bengt Sundkler, David Barrett, and Walbert Bühlmann highlighted the emergence of dynamic Christian movements in regions formerly the focus of missionary efforts.[7] As the end of the twentieth century approached, scholars such as Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Dana Robert continued to call attention to these movements and their significance for the study of Christianity and missiology.[8] By the first years of this century there was enough accumulated research for Philip Jenkins to produce a synthesis in his *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity*, which brought the topic of world Christianity to the fore in a new way.[9] Mennonite missionaries were part of this stream that was discovering indigenous Christian movements and adapting mission strategies and understandings of the faith as a result.

This paper explores the work of Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) personnel in the Chaco region of Argentina during the 1950s and in southeastern Nigeria during the 1960s to show how missionary engagement and reflection contributed to an understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith with diverse cultural expressions instead of as a western religion. Its thesis is that by legitimizing and documenting native Christian movements, Mennonite missionaries were actors in the emergence of world Christianity as a field of study. Legitimization was necessary in order for researchers of Christianity to consider these movements to be valid subjects of study. Documentation was necessary in order to accumulate the necessary data and analysis for a subject area. MBM missionaries arrived to the Argentine Chaco and to southeastern Nigeria expecting to plant Mennonite churches. After encountering dynamic native Christian movements, however, they set aside that goal in favor of collaborating with and

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[4] Maurice Leenhardt, *Le mouvement éthiopien au sud de l'Afrique de 1896 à 1899* (Cahors: A. Coueslant, 1902); James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1992), 74–91.

[5] Clifford, *Person and Myth*, 5.

[6] W. John Young, "The Legacy of Edwin W. Smith," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25, no. 3 (2001): 126–30; Edwin W. Smith, *African Beliefs and Christian Faith: An Introduction to Theology for African Students, Evangelists and Pastors* (London: The United Society for Christian Literature, 1936).

[7] Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, Missionary Research Series 14 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948); David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968); Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1976).

[8] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); Andrew Walls, "Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 105-111; Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993); Dana Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 50-58.

[9] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

capacitating those movements. Such engagement helped to legitimize the movements in their local contexts and in the wider ecclesiastical and academic communities. Missionaries also worked with researchers to document the movements, providing raw material for the study and analysis of local expressions of the world Christian movement. This paper will introduce the two cases from Argentina and Nigeria, describe the roles that missionaries played, and show how their work legitimized and documented new forms of the faith, helping to set the stage for world Christianity as a field of study.

The Argentine Chaco

In November 1943 MBM missionaries in Argentina opened a new mission station to minister to the indigenous Toba people of the Argentine Chaco. This section will introduce MBM's work in the Chaco and show how, with the help of expertise from the fields of linguistics and anthropology, missionaries changed their approach in response to their encounter of a Pentecostal-type movement among the Toba. Missionaries disbanded the mission colony they had created and focused on itinerant preaching and teaching, Bible translation, and capacitating the Toba Christian movement. This section will demonstrate that via their new approach missionaries assisted in the legitimization and documentation of this Toba Christian movement, thus helping to provide the groundwork for world Christianity as a field of study.

There had long been missionary activity in the Chaco region. Jesuit and Franciscan mission efforts started in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries respectively.[10] Anglican work started during the last half of the nineteenth century, and Pentecostal missionaries had been on the scene since the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1942 MBM workers responded to Swedish Pentecostal missionary Berger Johnson's enthusiastic presentation of the mission needs and possibilities among the native groups of the Chaco by sending a commission to visit the region.[11] As a young man, Berger had lived for a time in Los Angeles, California where he participated in the Azusa Street revival; experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit; and, like many who passed through Azusa, felt the call to international missions.[12] He had three decades of experience in the Chaco by the time Mennonite missionaries responded to his description of the need for another mission in the region. In the town of Resistencia, the visiting MBM commission heard of a large native population that was scattered over a wide area and that was not being served adequately by a mission agency. The following year MBM bought a farm where missionaries establish the Nam Cum mission station, twenty-eight kilometers north of the city of Sáenz Peña.[13]

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[10] Elmer S. Miller, "Shamans, Power Symbols and Change in Argentine Toba Culture," *American Ethnologist* 2 (1975): 477–96; César Ceriani Cernadas, "La Misión Pentecostal Escandinava En El Chaco Argentino: Etapa Formativa: 1914 - 1945," *Memoria Americana* 19, no. 1 (June 2011): 117–41; Patricia Torres Fernández, "Políticas Misionales Anglicanas En El Chaco Centro-Occidental a Principios de Siglo XX: Entre Comunidades E Identidades Diversas," *Población Sociedad* 14/15 (2008 2007): 139–76.

[11] "Investigation Trip to Northern Argentina and Bolivia," in *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1943); Agustina Altman, "La Disolucíon de Nam Cum En Perspectiva: Contextos Globales de La Misión Menonita En El Chaco Argentino," in *Los Evangelios Chaqueños: Misiónes Y Estrategias Indígenas En El Siglo XX*, ed. César Ceriani Cernadas, Ethnogaphica (Buenos Aires: Asociación Civil Rumbo Sur, 2017), 122–24.

[12] Ceriani Cernadas, "La Misión Pentecostal Escandinava En El Chaco Argentino: Etapa Formativa: 1914 - 1945," 122–23.

[13] *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1943), 133–34; J. W. Shank and Selena Shank,

MBM followed a common mission strategy at Nam Cum. Missionaries sought to establish a colony of native people where residents would have the opportunity to better themselves, spiritually and materially.[14] This was in the tradition of Jesuit *reducciones* or Protestant mission stations into which missionaries gathered new Christians for spiritual formation and for protection, from enemies or from what missionaries considered the malevolent influence of native societies. The strategy was common among Catholic and Protestant mission initiatives in the Chaco and was often part of an attempt to "civilize" the native population, acculturating it towards modern social, political, and economic ways of life.[15] At Nam Cum MBM missionaries envisioned a colony that would allow converted Tobas to move away from the pernicious influence of their home communities into a new Christian community where they would find it easier to live Christian lives, participate in schooling, become proficient in Spanish, and become economically self-sufficient within the Argentine economy.[16] It was to be a central hub to train leaders and from where missionaries could serve the Tobas in the surrounding area.[17] The initiative sought to provide Toba families with land to farm, shelter from unjust treatment at the hands of non-native people, medical attention, trade skills, and training in cleanliness, hygiene, and healthy living. As the work at Nam Cum developed, missionaries established outstations for evangelization, church planting, the establishments of schools, and the provision of general assistance to the Toba population.

A decade after the start of the Toba initiative, a number of factors combined to motivate a reassessment of its mission strategy. One was the response to missionary efforts. While many Toba seemed eager to receive assistance in biblical study, the number that was willing to be baptized, become church members, and whose Christian life met the standards of the missionaries was small, one hundred members in three congregations in December 1952 after a decade of work.[18] Despite the slow rate of adhesion to Mennonite congregations, many Toba were actively involved in a Christian movement that missionaries described as Pentecostal.[19] Preaching by Pentecostal missionaries such as Berger and John Lagar of *Go Ye Mission* had introduced an ecstatic and emotional form of the Christian faith that the Toba valued, even

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"Mission to the South American Indians," in *Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1944), 118–19.

[14] Shank and Shank, "Mission to the South American Indians."

[15] Fernández, "Políticas Misionales Anglicanas En El Chaco Centro-Occidental a Principios de Siglo XX: Entre Comunidades E Identidades Diversas"; Elmer S. Miller, "Mennonite Chaco Mission, Igelsia Evangélica Unida (IEU), and Argentina's Nation-State," *Missiology: An International Review* 30, no. 3 (July 2002): 353–58.

[16] Calvin Holderman and Frances Holderman, "The Chaco Indian Mission Nam Cum," in *Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1945), 136–39.

[17] J. W. Shank, "The Chaco Zone-Indian Mission," in *Report of the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1946), 127–31.

[18] William David Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, an Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1954); "Chaco Mission Directory," in *Report of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1953), 133.

[19] J. W. Shank, "Among the Chaco Indians," in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 145–47; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955. All archival material in this paper is from the Mennonite Church USA Archives in Elkhart, IN unless otherwise noted.; Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, an Interpretive Report*, 44–50.

though no formal ecclesiastical structures beyond local, unstable groups led by local leaders had emerged.[20] Missionaries bemoaned the Toba's attraction to ecstatic worship, to what appeared to be esoteric spiritual revelation, and to charismatic leaders whom missionaries considered to be false teachers.[21] The Toba people were attracted to Christianity but seemed to prefer the erroneous spirituality of these native movements to what Mennonite missionaries offered.

The Argentine political context was a second factor that motivated missionaries to reconsider their strategy. The government implemented a policy limiting non-Catholic missionary endeavors, so that expansion of a traditional, geographically defined mission field outward from the Nam Cum center was not possible.[22] Meeting requests for assistance from the Toba community would mean reorienting mission efforts so that they would be less likely to draw government attention.

MBM's mid-twentieth century priority of indigenization was another contributing influence on the re-evaluation of the Nam Cum strategy. The mission concept of indigenization had its roots in Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's three-self theory of the nineteenth century.[23] The development of self-financing, self-administering, and self-propagating churches was to ensure that newly established churches would participate in the missionary advance, free them of dependency, and allow them to embody Christian faith that was meaningful in their particular contexts. MBM General Secretary, J. D. Graber, advocated for an indigenous approach, sending literature about indigenization to his missionaries and urging them to capacitate local leaders, turn over decision-making and administrative responsibilities to locals, and work towards indigenization from the very beginning of their mission initiatives.[24] The geopolitical context increased the pressure to indigenize. Failure to turn over power to local leaders during the post-World War II period of decolonization would prove embarrassing in the long run.[25] Under

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[20] Elmer S. Miller, "The Argentine Toba Evangelical Religious Service," *Ethnology* 10, no. 2 (April 1971): 149–59; Ceriani Cernadas, "La Misión Pentecostal Escandinava En El Chaco Argentino: Etapa Formativa: 1914 - 1945," 120–22.

[21] Shank, "Among the Chaco Indians"; Albert Buckwalter to Amos Swartzentruber, June 29, 1953, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55, MCUSA Archives.

[22] Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, November 4, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; Peron and Ministers, "Translation - On the Appointing of a Commission by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Said Commission Is to Study the Location of Religious Missions, Decree No. 15498," August 20, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, January 1955, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

[23] Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983); Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 4 (1981): 168–72; Peter Williams, ""'Not Transplanting' Henry Venn's Strategic Vision," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147–72.

[24] J. D. Graber to Missionaries of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 19, 1953 and T. Stanley Soltau, "Planting the Church Abroad," *HIS*, May 1952, IV-18-10, Box 4, Planting the Church 1953; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 25, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and Edwin I. Weaver, March 26, 1955, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary 1951-1955; J. D. Graber, "Report of the Secretary," in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 16–18; J. D. Graber, "Making Indigenous Principles Work," in *Reports of the Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1957), 8–13.

[25] J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, February 4, 1948, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; J. D. Graber, "Procedures in the India Mennonite Mission, A Line of Reasoning," February 4, 1948, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India -

pressure from the government, the Chinese church had declared independence from foreign missionaries and funds, alerting missionaries to the possibility that they might be barred from working in other regions of the world as well.[26] The Cold War was intensifying, raising apocalyptic possibilities of political instability and another World War that might cut off MBM and the assistance it provided from its international mission initiatives.[27] With Graber's leadership, indigenization became a strategic imperative as well as a guiding principle for MBM.

Indigenization became a priority in Argentina as it did in other MBM mission fields. Latin America Field Secretary Nelson Litwiller sought ways to increase indigenous agency and decrease reliance on mission personnel, institutions, and financing.[28] Graber affirmed Litwiller's focus, envisioning an Argentine church that would invite missionaries to work under its supervision and articulating a policy of scattering missionaries among native peoples instead of grouping them in mission stations.[29] It was not clear how the Nam Cum colony, which depended on missionary leadership, could move in the direction of indigenization.

Finally, missionaries came to realize that additional cultural and linguistic understanding would be necessary to meaningfully engage the Toba people. They acknowledged the missiological significance of the difference between Hispanic creole culture and Toba culture as well as the need for anthropological assistance.[30] Although they understood that the Argentine government followed a strategy of forced accommodation to Spanish among native peoples, missionaries increasingly articulated the importance of mastering the Toba language.[31] The assistance of a linguistic consultant would provide the final incentive that pushed MBM to adopt a new approach to its work with the Toba people.

In October of 1953 the Chaco missionaries started a reorientation of their strategy. Given the move by the government to limit non-Catholic mission activity, Field Secretary Litwiller assigned the missionaries the task of studying options for future mission initiatives.[32] He met

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Church-Mission Relations 1947-51; J. D. Graber to Jonathan Yoder, April 20, 1948, V-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

[26] J. D. Graber to P. J. Malagar, October 18, 1950, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51.

[27] J. D. Graber to India Missionaries, April 6, 1951, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Unification Commission 1950-1953.

[28] Nelson Litwiller, "The Missionary - National-Worker Relationship" (January 1951); Nelson Litwiller to Albert Buckwalter and Wife and John Litwiller and Wife, October 22, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

[29] "Minutes of the Mission Council," (Monte Retiro: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 28, 1952), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Mennonite Mission Council 1951-55; Albert and Lois Buckwalter to Friends, December 25, 1952, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Buckwalter, Albert and Lois Confidential 1951-55; J. D. Graber to Nelson Litwiller, November 12, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Litwiller, Nelson and Ada 1951-55 Confidential.

[30] J. D. Graber, "Report on Trip to Latin America," Annual Report (Kalona, Iowa: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 12, 1952), IV-06-3, Box 4, Change to workbooks, Annual Reports 1952; "Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council," (Chaco Mission Council, December 12, 1953), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

[31] Albert, Lois and Rachel Buckwalter to Dear Christian Friends, December 4, 1951, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Buckwalter, Albert and Lois Confidential 1951-55; Albert Buckwalter, "Are We Adequately Meeting the Needs of the Indian Through the Spanish and Interpreters? Or Should the Mission Officially Take Steps to Put the Toba in Writing?" (December 31, 1951), HM 1-097, Box 9, Folder 4: Unpublished Manuscripts, 1951-1965; "Minutes of the Chaco Worker's Meeting," (Quitilipi, August 18, 1952), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

[32] Nelson Litwiller to Albert Buckwalter and Wife and John Litwiller and Wife.

with the Chaco team in December, and together they modified their strategy.[33] They prioritized learning the Toba language and the acquisition of professional anthropological and linguistic assistance as well as the training of Toba leaders according to the indigenous principle. The colony of Nam Cum would continue under missionary supervision, but the missionary role outside of Nam Cum would be limited to that of an itinerant evangelist and worker who maintained contact with leaders the mission had trained and who would seek new students for the leadership training program. Such a role was consistent with indigenization and reduced expansionist activity that might run afoul of the government's pro-Catholic policy.

A consultative visit by William and Marie Reyburn of the American Bible Society in 1954 was the impetus for completing the reorientation of mission strategy. Litwiller hoped that the visit would be able to help the missionaries to better understand Toba ways of thinking.[34] The Reyburns spent six months with the Chaco missionaries, preparing them for ongoing study of Toba culture, outlining the beginnings of a grammar of the language, and establishing a method for language study.[35] William used a kind of "participant observer" strategy, living among the Toba in order to gather data.[36]

In August 1954 the Reyburns submitted the findings of their research. It indicated that while most of the native peoples of Latin America had not accepted the Christian gospel, a majority of the Toba had, surprisingly, already accepted it.[37] The Reyburns' research found that, unbeknownst to the missionaries, the Toba were holding church services in their language and under native leadership across the region, including in one of the Mennonite churches.[38] Upon the arrival of the missionary during a worship service, they would simply revert to Spanish and the more Mennonite style of worship under his leadership. Of the three missions that were then working most closely with the Toba; the Pentecostals, the Anglicans, and the Mennonites; it was with the Pentecostals that the Toba had found "emotional release, spiritual satisfaction, a spiritual community, and the ethical content of the gospel of the Christian message."[39] The Reyburn report led to two and one-half days of meetings during which the missionaries discussed its implications for their work. MBM eventually published the report as *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco: An Interpretive Report*.[40]

During the meetings about the Reyburn report, missionary John Litwiller, Field Secretary Nelson Litwiller's son, proposed an approach that the team accepted as its new strategy. His proposal acknowledged that while most of the Toba people had already accepted what it described as a Pentecostal piety instead of a Mennonite expression of the faith, the missionaries still wanted to assist the Toba church and accept the Toba believers as Christians.[41] It committed

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[33] "Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council"; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Litwiller, Nelson and Ada 1951-55 Confidential.

[34] Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, May 17, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

[35] Albert Buckwalter to J. D. Graber, May 1, 1954, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

[36] Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, May 17, 1954.

[37] Albert Buckwalter, "Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council," (Nam Cum: Chaco Mission Council, August 18, 1954) and Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

[38] Miller, "Mennonite Chaco Mission, Igelsia Evangélica Unida (IEU), and Argentina's Nation-State," 349.

[39] Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954.

[40] William David Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, an Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1954).

[41] Buckwalter, "Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council," August 18, 1954.

the missionaries to a sympathetic view of Toba culture and to a posture of assisting the Toba church to realize its own goals. The missionary role would be to identify with the Toba, become as much as possible a member of the Toba church, assist the church in interpreting the Christian faith in light of Toba life, and work within the frame of the Toba's existing piety. This approach went much further than the changes that the team had made the December before. It committed the missionaries to work from within the framework of Toba culture and within the particular Pentecostal-type expression of the Christian faith that the Toba had chosen. Contained in the new approach was an implicit recognition of the validity of this non-western expression of the Christian faith.

With the articulation of the new approach, the presence of the Nam Cum colony with the eight families that had settled there became a dilemma. After Field Secretary Litwiller interviewed the Nam Cum families to ascertain their expectations of MBM, the mission reimbursed them for their time and expenses and ceased activity there.[42] For all practical purposes the mission and the colony simply ceased to exist. All that remained were missionaries who continued their linguistic work and who acted as circuit riders, living, preaching, and teaching in the Toba villages, sometimes for weeks at a time.[43]

The Chaco missionaries had made a radical change, so much so that they referred to it as a conversion.[44] They still believed that they had something to offer the Toba people, but they had come to value the Toba spirituality and culture and allowed Toba understandings to orient their mission strategy. A paragraph in Nelson Litwiller's report to Graber demonstrates the significance of the change for the missionaries' approach.

> But the grace of God has worked effectively among them. They are ignorant in many things, but they have turned away from "idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son." Thank God! And who knows if their worship and faith, simple [and] unliturgic [sic] but intense is not just as acceptable to our Heavenly Father as some of the polished formal one-hour-a-week bored worship of the comfort-cult-Christians of a materialistically minded North America.[45]

In response to the challenges of mission engagement in the Chaco region during the 1950s and thanks to an increasing appreciation for local contexts and cultures that anthropological and linguistic insights had facilitated, MBM's Chaco strategy had moved from a traditional mission-station approach to one that sought to serve an indigenous Christian movement from within that movement's religious and social understandings. Missionaries no longer focused on converting the Toba to the Mennonite faith or on civilizing them via a new life in the Nam Cum colony. In Graber's report about the new mission strategy to the MBM Executive Committee, he noted that the approach would be indicative of future mission policy in other MBM fields.[46]

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[42] Albert Buckwalter, "Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council," (Nam Cum: Chaco Mission Council, September 11, 1954), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

[43] Albert Buckwalter, "Conversion in the Chaco, 1954," in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 43–45; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

[44] Buckwalter, "Conversion in the Chaco, 1954."

[45] Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954.

[46] J. D. Graber to Members of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 5, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

With their approach in the Argentine Chaco, Mennonite missionaries contributed to the emergence of world Christianity by legitimizing the Toda's expression of the Christian faith. They had come to the Chaco expecting to establish churches that would conform in some way to the Mennonite identity they brought. But they set aside that goal in order to respond to the needs that grew out of the Toba understanding of the faith and to participate in the Christian life and worship that the Toba had chosen. Missionaries worked at learning the Toba language and responded to requests for preaching and teaching.[47] They itinerated among churches and lived in Toba communities for extended periods of time. Such an approach demonstrated to Toba Christians, other missions and churches, and the surrounding population that MBM and its missionaries accepted this indigenous expression of the faith as an authentic form of Christianity. In addition, MBM missionaries were instrumental in assisting the movement to obtain legal recognition from the government.[48] Argentine law required non-Catholic religious bodies to be registered with the government in order to gain the right to hold public assembly. As the movement's leaders were not accustomed to governmental bureaucracy, the missionaries helped them navigate this process to form the Iglesia Evangélica Unida (IEU). Finally, missionaries learned the Toba language, helped to document its grammar, started a literacy program, and helped translate the Bible into the Toba language.[49] This affirmed the value of the Toba language and culture in the face of societal pressures to set aside native languages and cultures in favor of creole culture and the Spanish language. Affirmation of Toba Christianity, acquisition of legal recognition of the movement, and the acknowledgement of the importance of the Toba translation of the Bible were moves that helped legitimize this indigenous expression of the faith in the eyes of government authorities and increased the likelihood that other churches and scholars would acknowledge it as an authentic Christian movement.[50]

Mennonite missionary engagement with the Toba Christians also contributed to the documentation of this stream of the world Christian movement. Reyburn's *The Toba Indians* has been a foundational document that initiated modern ethnolinguistic study of Toba grammar and anthropological study of religious change among native peoples of the Chaco.[51] In the decades following his report, Mennonite missionaries conducted research and facilitated the work of other researchers, particularly anthropologists, who studied and sought to explain the religious history of the region and the Toba appropriation of the Christian faith.[52] In addition, MBM

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[47] Buckwalter, "Conversion in the Chaco, 1954"; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954.

[48] César Ceriani Cernadas and Silvia Citro, "El Movimiento Del Evangelio Entre Los Toba Del Chaco Argentino: Una Revisión Histórica Y Etnográfica," in *De Indio a Hermano: Pentecostalismo Indígena En América Latina*, ed. Jean Pierre Bastian and Bernardo Guerrero Jiménez (Iquique, Chile: Ediciones Campus: Universidad Arturo Prat: El Jote Errante, 2005), 111–70; Altman, "La Disolucíon de Nam Cum En Perspectiva: Contextos Globales de La Misión Menonita En El Chaco Argentino," 138.

[49] John T. N. Litwiller, "Our New Responsibility: The Toba Church," *Gospel Herald*, 1955; Albert Buckwalter, *Vocabulario Toba* (Chaco, Argentina: Talleres Gráficos Grancharoff, 1980).

[50] Some researchers go even further, suggesting that the long-term presence of Mennonite missionaries and the assistance they provided in helping Toba Christians to interpret their religious history was instrumental for the current indigenous religious identity of the Toba Christian movement. See Ceriani Cernadas and Citro, "El Movimiento Del Evangelio Entre Los Toba Del Chaco Argentino: Una Revisión Histórica Y Etnográfica."

[51] Ceriani Cernadas and Citro; Altman, "La Disolucíon de Nam Cum En Perspectiva: Contextos Globales de La Misión Menonita En El Chaco Argentino," 135.

[52] E. g. Jacob A. Loewen, Albert Buckwalter, and James Kratz, "Shamanism, Illness, and Power in Toba Church Life," *Practical Anthropology* 12 (1965): 250–80; Agustina Altman, "Círculos Biblicos Entre Los Aborígenes Chaqueños: De La Utopía Cristiana a La Necesidad de Legitimación," *Sociedad Y Religión* 21, no. 34–35 (June 2011).

missionary Elmer S. Miller, who served among the Toba from 1959 to 1963, became professor of anthropology at Temple University and produced a significant body of scholarly work about the Toba Christian movement.[53] Miller returned to North America from the Chaco in 1963 for a study leave and experienced a change in vocational identity, which led him to doctoral work and a professorship at Temple. While the loss of Miller to the missionary cause resulted in consternation at MBM, Miller's contributions and his supervision of scholars who have continued such work has made him a doyen among a stream of researchers who have published about indigenous Christian movements in the Chaco.[54] The significance of Mennonite missionary engagement with the Toba is highlighted by the place of Reyburn's report, and the changes that it wrought, in the historiography of native religious expressions in the Chaco. Reyburn and the subsequent Miller work provided a baseline for scholars that followed them. In the words of one Argentine researcher, the dissolution of the Nam Cum colony by the Mennonite missionaries has taken on the nature of an origin myth for anthropologists who study religion and native movements in the Chaco.[55] It is the point of departure for the analysis of indigenous Christianity in the region. Through their innovative strategies; their appropriation of the fields of anthropology and linguistics; and via research, their own and that of those whom they assisted; Mennonite missionaries helped document this Toba stream of the world Christian movement.

Southeastern Nigeria

MBM started working in southeastern Nigeria in 1958, four years after missionaries in the Argentine Chaco had changed their mission strategy in order to capacitate the indigenous Christian movement among the Toba. Missionaries from MBM responded to a group of native independent churches among the Ibibio people in Calabar province that requested affiliation with MBM. This section will introduce MBM's work in southeastern Nigeria and show how missionaries set aside the goal of forming these churches into a Mennonite church in order to implement a strategy of reconciliation between independents and mission churches, whose relationship was characterized by competition and animosity. Missionaries established a number of initiatives that sought to increase understanding and mutual acceptance between these two streams of the faith, in the process helping to legitimize the Ibibio independents despite their lack of association with western missions or churches. This section will show that missionaries also worked to document these indigenous Christian movements by organizing surveys of churches in the region and by providing venues in which researchers could share their work and receive feedback. As such, Mennonite missionaries contributed to the accumulation of data about African indigenous Christian movements.

As in the Chaco, there had already been a history of missionary activity in southeastern Nigeria by the time Mennonite missionaries arrived. The Church of Scotland Mission had started

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[53] E. g. Elmer S. Miller, "Pentecostalism Among the Argentine Toba" (Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh, 1967); Miller, "The Argentine Toba Evangelical Religious Service"; Miller, "Shamans, Power Symbols and Change in Argentine Toba Culture"; Elmer S. Miller, *Los Tobas Argentinos: Armonía Y Disonancia En Una Sociedad* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1979). University of Buenos Aires anthropologist Pablo Wright credits Miller's dissertation with creating the conceptual space for the analysis of socio-religious phenomena in the Chaco region. See Pablo Wright, "L''Evangelio': Petecôtisme Indigène Dans Le Chaco Argentin," *Social Compass* 49, no. 1 (March 2002): 44, 58–59.

[54] Miller supervised the dissertation of Pablo Wright, who has written extensively about religious movements among the native peoples of the Chaco. Wright supervised the work of Silvia Citron and César Ceriani Cernadas, who have continued this stream of research.

[55] Altman, "La Disolucíon de Nam Cum En Perspectiva: Contextos Globales de La Misión Menonita En El Chaco Argentino," 138–41.

work there in 1846, the Anglicans in 1857, the Roman Catholic Society of Holy Ghost Fathers in 1885, and a non-denominational mission called the Qua Iboe Mission in 1887.[56] Over the first six decades of the twentieth century other foreign missions arrived: the Primitive Methodists, the Salvation Army, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Mission, the Lutheran Church, the Assemblies of God, the Cleveland Tennessee Church of God, the Church of Christ, and a host of others.[57]

By the mid-twentieth century a majority of the Ibibio people identified themselves as Christian, affiliating with one of the mission churches or forming their own independent churches. The 1953 Nigerian census put Calabar province, which contained all of Ibibioland and part of the neighboring Igboland, at seventy-seven percent Christian.[58] The Uyo District, where most of the congregations that invited MBM to the region were located, was ninety-one percent Christian. The Christian movement included native forms of the faith, the region being a hotbed of activity by African Independent Churches (AICs), which operated outside the authority of the foreign missions.[59] Mennonite missionaries reported that in some small villages there were congregations of five or six different denominations and that in most villages there were at least two or three, often working in close proximity to one another.[60] Missionary Edwin Weaver, who arrived to Nigeria in 1959 and was a veteran of two decades of work in India, wrote back to the home office, "Never in my life have I seen a place so full of Churches and their institutions. Church and school buildings are everywhere."[61] Southeastern Nigeria had become highly Christianized with a mix of foreign missions and their churches as well as native churches.

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[56] Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1863), 241; K. Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, 2nd ed. (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1962), 1–15; Lamin O Sanneh, "The CMS and the African Transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Opening of Nigeria," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 173–97; Ikenga R. A Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1931* (Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers (Nig.), 1988), 36–40; Richard J. Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission, 1887-1945" (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen, 1984), 30–37.

[57] S. K. Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Eastern Nigeria* (Oron: Manson Publishers, 1985), 1–13; Monday B Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission: Towards a History of an Ibibio Independent Church.," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 59 (1989): 496–516; Reda C Goff, *The Great Nigerian Mission* (Nashville: Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ : Nigerian Christian Schools Foundation, 1964), 1; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

[58] Nigeria and Department of Statistics, *Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953.* (Lagos: Census Superintendent (the Govt. statistician), 1955), 42.

[59] Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*, 114, 121, 291; Africans established AICs in significant numbers during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, sometimes in schisms from existing churches, as prayer groups or revivals that evolved into churches, or through the initiatives of local Christian evangelists, healers, or prophets. AICs are a movement, not one denomination, within which there is variety of belief and practice. While their early defining trait was their autonomy, many AICs were characterized by the continuity of their religious practice and belief with African traditions. Afe Adogame and Lazio Jafta, "Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), 271–87; Kevin Ward, "Africa," in *A World History of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 221–23.

[60] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

[61] Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

In July 1958 Matthew Ekereke wrote to MBM from Ikot Ada Idem, a village eight kilometers from the town of Uyo, asking if a group of independent churches that he represented could affiliate with MBM.[62] In November, after exchanging letters, missionaries from Ghana visited the group of some sixty congregations and found that it had already taken on the name Mennonite.[63] The following month MBM authorized the missionaries to accept the congregations into the Mennonite fold.[64] Over the next ten months, missionaries visited five times, traveling from their post in Ghana to visit the Nigerian congregations.[65] At each congregation they would explain the Mennonite faith, read a list of twenty Mennonite doctrines in the Ibibio language, and respond to questions, after which the congregation would decide whether or not to become part of the new church. By October 1959 forty congregations with some 2,100 members had decided to join the new Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN).[66] In November 1959 Edwin and Irene Weaver, the first resident MBM missionaries assigned to Nigeria, arrived.[67]

The Weavers were to continue the process of integrating congregations into the new Mennonite church, but in a move similar to that of their Chaco colleagues six years earlier, they instead entered a time of reassessing MBM's mission strategy. Within a few weeks of their arrival, the Weavers stopped accepting new congregations into MCN.[68] There were four primary concerns that led to such a move. The first was indigenization, which had also been a motivating factor in the Chaco reassessment. The AICs that were joining MCN seemed to meet the three-self criteria of the indigenous church.[69] They were generally self-financing, self-administering and self-propagating churches. However, the Nigerian churches expected MBM to provide financial support for schools, health institutions, and other infrastructure that foreign missions had typically provided in the region. MBM had agreed to provide some such assistance before the Weavers arrived.[70] In previous mission experience, the Weavers had found such institutions to be costly and unsustainable without foreign assistance.[71] To introduce this kind of assistance risked resulting in a move away from an accomplished form of indigenization towards dependency. In addition, the Weavers believed that indigenization had theological significance.

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[62] Matthew Ekereke to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 25, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

[63] S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province," Trip Report (Accra, Ghana, November 28, 1958), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

[64] J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; "Minutes of the Executive Committee," (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 20, 1959), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4.

[65] S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1959 and S. J. Hostetler, "Statement of Beliefs," March 7, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; S. J. Hostetler, "Nigeria Churches Join Mennonites," *Gospel Herald*, May 5, 1959.

[66] S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, October 3, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

[67] Edwin and Irene Weaver to MBMC, November 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59.

[68] Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

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

[70] S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to A. A. Dick, December 22, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; J. D. Graber to John Lehman, December 29, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

[71] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

Churches needed to be able to develop beliefs and practices that were faithful in their particular contexts.[72] Protecting the indigenous nature of the church meant encouraging and equipping it to develop authentic faith expressions for its own context instead of assuming that western theological formulations would suffice. The value of indigenization included not only the concern for the three-self formulation but also a fourth self, self-theologizing. Asking Nigerian congregations to adopt Mennonite doctrines developed in North America did not seem to be consistent with indigenization.

Questions about the MCN leadership also motivated reassessment. Some of the leaders were polygamist and others seemed to have received money for introducing the recently arrived missionaries to new congregations whose members expected to receive MBM's assistance.[73] As the Weavers organized opportunities for biblical study among leaders, they found that some were illiterate.[74] In order to gain time and perspective to discern how to address these challenges in a context that was still very new to them, the Weavers sought to slow the rapid growth of MCN, start work with the leaders that were already part of the church, and rethink their strategy.

The competitive and somewhat chaotic religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria was another reason to reconsider MBM's mission strategy. Missionaries found deep friction, competition, and resentment between groups, especially between AICs and the foreign missions and their churches.[75] Many of the AICs and their leaders had left the mission churches to form their own churches.[76] Mission churches accused AICs of sub-Christian standards, and AICs accused the mission churches of being controlling and colonialist.[77] Mission churches insisted that some AICs had left the mission churches to escape discipline, that they should return to the fold, that MBM's presence in the region would only add to the confusion, and that Mennonite missionaries should find a different place to work.[78] The Weavers were convinced that AICs would not return to the mission churches, but they agreed that competition and confusion were problematic. Edwin Weaver wrote back to mission headquarters, "Never have I been in a religious situation so pathetically confused. I wonder if I have come to the right place. In a situation where there is so much religious confusion, proselyting and keen competition between the Churches can hardly be avoided. There is little in religion I dislike more. Must we now add to the confusion?"[79] Adding a growing Mennonite church to the religious mix seemed like it would

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[72] Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

[73] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), Mennonite Mission Network.

[74] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

[75] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960.

[76] By mission churches I mean those churches that were established by foreign missions that typically continued to assist them and with whom they often shared a denominational identity. AICs did not as a rule have such connections.

[77] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Matthew Ekereke et al., "Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler," February 15, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

[78] Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; W. J. Wood to E. I. Weaver, January 2, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 37, Wood, W. J.; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 6, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960.

[79] Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

only increase the competition and confusion. Instead, the ecumenical principle of cultivating positive inter-church relations became the missionary imperative.[80]

Finally, as in the Chaco, the government was taking steps to prohibit new mission activity in the region. Missionaries applied for permission for MBM to work in Nigeria from the Nigerian government and expected approval to be routine.[81] In February 1960, however, authorities denied MBM's request and did so definitively in May after the Weavers resubmitted the application twice.[82] A similar difficulty arose with visa applications.[83] When the Weavers attempted to renew their visas in May, they found that the government had already started the process to expel them from the country.[84] There seemed to be two options, either leave the country and end MBM's engagement there or find another mission agency that would allow them to work under its authority and benefit from its visa quota.

In consultation with Graber at MBM, the Weavers accepted an offer to work under the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM). The Weavers would receive resident visas in exchange for Edwin Weaver's assistance in a Presbyterian parish and for MBM's agreement to provide personnel to manage and serve at a CSM hospital in Abiriba, Nigeria.[85] MBM would recruit doctors and nurses for the hospital and the government would finance it. As such it would not be a financial burden and would not endanger the indigenous nature of the church. Under the agreement, and in accordance with the government's denial of MBM's request to work in Nigeria, MBM missionaries were prohibited from establishing a Mennonite church.[86] Of course MCN already existed, and it received official governmental recognition in August 1960 independently of MBM.[87] Subsequently MBM missionaries would be able to work with MCN, capacitating its leaders and facilitating connections to the wider Anabaptist community outside of Nigeria. However, they would never again play the role of adding congregations to the church as they had in 1959.

The agreement with the CSM allowed the Weavers to remain in Nigeria and formulate a new mission strategy, one that focused on reconciling AICs and the mission churches. They did

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[80] Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 12, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

[81] S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 21, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to Immigration and Passport Control, September 21 and "Form of Application for Permission to Engage in Missionary Work in Nigeria," September 21, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

[82] Permanent Secretary of Internal Affaires to S. J. Hostetler, February 10, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, J. D. Graber, and Edwin Weaver, February 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to The Ministry of Internal Affairs, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Akpabio, March 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 2, Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Internal Affaires, April 14, 1960 and J. C. Cousins to Edwin I. Weaver, May 30, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

[83] Edwin Weaver to the Principal Immigration and Passport Control Officer, The Nigerian Police Force, February 13, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to Principle Immigration Officer, Immigration and Passport Control, March 22, 1960 and Senior Immigration Officer to Edwin Weaver, March 28, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

[84] Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

[85] "Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC," June 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65.

[86] Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

[87] Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, August 19, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Sommerville, Rev. A. G.

not expect AICs to return to those churches but envisioned a time when each side would accept and collaborate with the other. In order to achieve their goal of mutual recognition, MBM missionaries organized a number of initiatives. They established the United Independent Churches Fellowship, made up primarily of AIC leaders, to be a medium through which to develop relationships with AICs and encourage AICs towards better communication with, and understanding of, mission churches.[88] If AICs would not engage mission churches right away because of the animosity between the two groups, creating a medium through which AICs could learn about each other and address common concerns was a workable, intermediate step that might lead to relationships with mission churches in the future.[89] The AICs that participated in the Fellowship chose to focus primarily on creating the United Churches Bible College where AIC leaders could receive training in biblical studies. AICs desired such training, and MBM missionaries and their supervisors agreed that it should be a priority, believing that it would improve the quality of these churches and prepare them for better relationships with mission churches.[90] Foreign missions had already established Bible schools in the region, but these were for their leaders and the academic level was too high for many AIC leaders.[91] MBM missionaries helped to administer the United Churches Bible College and taught classes there.[92] They focused on biblical studies, using especially the inductive method, and practical areas such as preaching, evangelism, and Christian education rather than on systematic, doctrinal formulations of the faith, which seemed especially tied to foreign ways of thinking.[93] The Bible College provided missionaries a way to develop relationships and trust with a wide range of AICs since students often invited them to preach or teach in their churches.[94]

Edwin Weaver also formed the Inter-Church Study Group, a quarterly meeting of church and mission agency leaders that focused on building better understanding of AICs. Weaver conceived of the group as a medium through which mission churches could improve relationships among themselves and work together to learn about, assist, and build relationships

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[88] Edwin Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript," 1968 and Adolph E. Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (Southeastern Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, September 21, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

[89] John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

[90] John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, November 23, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1962; Edwin Weaver to David Roberts, March 6, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous.

[91] Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963.

[92] Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; A. E. Inim, "Third Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (United Independent Churches Fellowship, November 23, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1964; Stanley Friesen, "Minutes of the Bible School Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, October 18, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript."

[93] "Teaching New African Christians," October 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Stanley and Delores Friesen, "Friesen Report," May 19, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores 1965-69; Ken Anderson, *Africa in Three Dimensions*, DVD (converted from 16mm film) (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1967); Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*.

[94] Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin, April 9, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 21, Rev G. E. I. Cockin; Edwin Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript," 1968, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 19, Weaver Background - Transcribed; Edwin I. Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 9, Inter-Church Study Group on AICs in Uyo, Nigeria.

with AICs.[95] Participants prepared and read papers about AIC related issues. Over the five years that the Study Group met, church and mission agency leaders read, discussed, and distributed fifty-eight papers that focused primarily on AICs: descriptions and survey results, discussions of their significance, examples of how to study or work with them, and aspects of their faith, doctrine, and practice.[96] The Study Group embodied a belief that there was a link between increased knowledge about AICs and better relationships between AICs and mission churches. At the beginning participants were mostly from mission churches, but with time some AIC leaders attended and the meetings became a place where they could explain AIC perspectives to other church leaders.[97]

The Study Group also gave researchers an opportunity to present their findings and get feedback from missionaries and church leaders who had extensive knowledge of the region. A number of scholars who contributed to the emergence of world Christianity as a field of study participated in the Study Group. While he held a post in the Department of Religion at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, Harold W. Turner became of confidant and advisor in MBM's work with AICs and participated in the Study Group.[98] He published extensively about new religious movements in Africa.[99] Andrew F. Walls directed the Department of Religion at Nsukka, participated in the Study Group, exchanged information about AICs with the Weavers, and arranged for the Department to reproduce and distribute the Study Group papers.[100] Walls

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[95] Edwin and Irene Weaver, "Annual Report, Ed and Irene Weaver," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 1962), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver, "An Introductory Statement for a Special Study Committee," March 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 6, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; "Report of the Meeting of the Special Committee of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, January 27, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin I. Weaver, "An Introduction to the Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 10, John Howard Yoder.

[96] "Index: Inter-Church Study Papers," 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 1, Index to Inter-Church Study Papers (Uyo).

[97] "Inter Church Study Committee," Meeting Report (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, March 3, 1962) and Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Group, May 13, 1967), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group."

[98] "Inter-Church Study Group Minutes," (Inter Church Study Committee, May 9, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Harold W. Turner to J. J. Coutts, September 16, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Howard W. Turner to Edwin and Irene Weaver, September 16, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, December 12, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver, "Inter-Church Study Group Minutes," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, April 24, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965.

[99] E. g. Harold W Turner, "Litany of an Independent West African Church," *Practical Anthropology* 7, no. 6 (November 1, 1960): 256–62; H. W. Turner, "The Church of the Lord: The Expansion of a Nigerian Independent Church in Sierra Leone and Ghana," *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1962): 91–110; Harold W. Turner, *Profile Through Preaching: A Study of the Sermon Texts Used in a West African Independent Church* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965); Harold W. Turner.

[100] Edwin Weaver, "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting Minutes," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, September 4, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Andrew Walls to Edwin Weaver, September 10, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, October 2, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, February 7, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.

subsequently became a prolific writer about non-western, particularly African, Christianity.[101] After Turner and Walls left Nsukka, Tom S. Garrett, Haus J. Greschat, and Emmanuel M. Tobiah Epelle held posts there and continued collaborating.[102] Garrett directed the department and Greschat and Epelle published about African Christianity.[103] Caroline Ifeka-Moller, Robert Mitchell, and William Reyburn contributed papers at Study Group meetings and published about African Christianity, AICs, and linguistics.[104]

Edwin Weaver also established the Inter-Church Team to assist AICs and to conduct research about them. MBM, the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, a local AIC, and the Crowther Department of Religion at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka financed the team's work and provided personnel, of which there were five including Weaver.[105] Team members taught at the United Churches Bible College and preached and taught in AIC congregations.[106] The team conducted a number of surveys of AICs around the towns of Uyo and Abak,

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[101] E. g. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity*, ed. Mark R. Gornik (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

[102] T. S. Garrett to Edwin Weaver, October 14, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to H. T. Greschat, November 26, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; E. M. T. Epelle to T. S. Garrett, December 19, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Hans-Jürgen Greschat, "A Few Suggestions Pertaining to Research Methods and Procedures and the Abak Survey," February 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25C, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #3; E. M. T. Epelle to Edwin Weaver, June 17, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.

[103] E. g. Hans-Jürgen Greschat, *West African Prophets: The Morphology of a Religious Specialization* (Birmingham: Centre for New Religious Movements, 1985); Hans-Jürgen Greschat and Hans-Hermann Münkner, *Encounter of African Religiosity with Christianity: Selected Essays on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of Africana Marburgensia* (Marburg: Reimer, 1989); E. M. T. Epelle, *The Church in the Niger Delta: With Appendix on Archdeacon Crowther* (Nigeria: Niger Delta Diocese, 1955).

[104] Edwin Weaver, A. T. U. Ekong, and O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting" (Obot Idim, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, April 23, 1966) and Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Inter Church Study Committee, July 2, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting"; E. g. Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (1974): 55–72; Robert Cameron Mitchell, "Towards the Sociology of Religious Independency," *Journal of Religion in Africa Journal of Religion in Africa* 3, no. 1 (1970); William D. Reyburn, "Certain Cameroun Translations: Analysis and Plan," *The Bible Translator* 9, no. 4 (October 1958): 171–82; William D. Reyburn, "Polygamy, Economy, and Christianity in the Eastern Cameroun," *Practical Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (January 1959): 1–19.

[105] A. G. Somerville to Edwin Weaver, May 25, 1963 and N. Eme to Edwin Weaver, February 3, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65; W. E. McBay to Edwin Weaver, January 31, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, July 12, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966; Andrew Walls to Edwin Weaver, June 10, 1965 and Andrew F. Walls to Edwin Weaver, June 24, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.

[106] "A Plan of Work for The Independent Church Team," August 1965 and I. U. Nsasak, "Independent Church Team," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 23, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Edwin Weaver, "Weaver Reflections on Inter-Church Study Group (Transcripts)" (1967), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

documenting the large number AICs and mission churches in the area.[107] Although he did not cite his sources, the statistics that David Barrett gave in *Schism and Renewal in Africa* to support his view that this region had "probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa," correspond directly with the data that the Team collected.[108] Barrett likely obtained the statistics from the Uyo and Abak surveys through the department of religion at Nsukka.

Finally, after it became clear that the Independent Churches Fellowship would focus solely on the United Churches Bible College, Edwin Weaver and the Inter-Church Team initiated regular meetings of AIC leaders, the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings. These were meant to facilitate relationship among AICs, to address common concerns, to inform AICs of the findings and work of the Inter-Church Team, and to help AIC leaders understand the thinking and attitudes of the Christian Council of Nigeria and of the mission churches towards the AICs.[109] Meetings occurred every two months, typically drawing between forty and sixty participants from as many as twenty-five different AICs as well as a number of expatriate missionaries.[110] The format followed that of the Study Group with presenters reading papers that participants discussed and that the Inter-Church Team later reproduced and distributed.[111] As most AIC leaders did not have the contacts in the wider Christian community that their mission church counterparts enjoyed, presenters from institutions such as the Bible Society of West Africa and the Department of Religion at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka introduced AIC leaders to resources of which they were not previously aware.[112]

MBM's change of strategy in favor of an approach that sought reconciliation between AICs and mission churches helped legitimize African indigenous expressions of the faith in a number of ways. Accepting that AICs would not return to the mission churches but would

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[107] O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, August 14, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to Andrew Walls and Harold Turner, June 18, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; I. U. Nsasak et al., "The Abak Story," Research Report (Inter Church Study Team, February 1967), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 3, The Abak Story.

[108] Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*, 114, 291.

[109] "Meeting of Independent Churches' Leaders," November 8, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; I. U. Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, December 17, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 18, Independent Churches, 1965.

[110] Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript"; I. U. Nsasak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders," (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, May 14, 1966) and I. U. Nsasak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, August 8, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; I. U. Nsasak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders," (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, October 31, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25C, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #3.

[111] Nsasak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders"; Y. E. O. Eta, "An Address Delivered by the Rev. Y. E. O. Eta on the 'Church Organization' to the United Independent Churches at Uyo" (Presentation, May 14, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; I. U. Nsasak, "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches," (Independent Churches Leaders, July 16, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; E. A. Okon, "An Address on Christian Stewardship," July 16, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 20, Inter Church Study Group Again.

[112] I. U. Nsasak, "Meeting of Independent Church Leaders," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, December 12, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Nsasak, "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches"; Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript."

continue to exist and that mission churches should accept and reconcile with them implicitly legitimized AICs as authentic Christian churches, despite their lack of affiliation with western denominations. Providing forums such as the Study Group meetings where mission church leaders could learn about AICs, sometimes engaging their leaders, helped to build relationships and understanding that contributed to mission churches's acceptance of AICs. Arguing that AICs needed to develop Christian belief and practice for their own contexts and providing biblical training in order to encourage leaders do so, helped prepare AICs to articulate their own theological formulations that mission churches would understand. Whether through providing training for leaders, preaching and teaching in congregations, or capacitating churches in other ways, the Weavers and their MBM colleagues offered AICs missionary services that were previously reserved for mission churches. As such, missionaries welcomed these indigenous movements into the wider community of legitimate Christian churches. MBM's engagement with AICs in southeastern Nigeria came to an abrupt end when most missionaries evacuated the region at the beginning of the Nigeria civil war in 1967. Through the end of the twentieth century, however, MBM missionaries ministered among AICs across West Africa in western Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, the Republic of Bénin, and Liberia.

Mennonite missionary engagement in southeastern Nigeria provided opportunities for missionaries and others to document the indigenous Christian expressions of the AICs. The Inter-Church Team surveys provided data about these movements. Unfortunately the material from the Team's last survey was lost when the building in which it was stored was looted during the civil war.[113] The Inter-Church Study Group provided a forum for researches to share their data and analysis and to receive feedback on their work. The collection of papers that resulted from the Study Group's meetings provides an early example of data gathering and analysis focused on indigenous expressions of Christianity in Africa. Edwin Weaver's leadership in creating such opportunities for research and data exchange made him somewhat of a pioneer among those interested in AICs. The Department of Missionary Studies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) invited him to read a paper on his work at its August 1962 conference on the AIC phenomenon in Midolo, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).[114] When the WCC's Theological Education Fund decided to provide bursaries for AIC leaders to continue their theological education, Weaver became the contact person via whom it chose recipients and provided assistance.[115] During the decades that followed, MBM missionaries gathered data on AICs in Ghana, did research on the Harrist movement in the Ivory Coast, and documented western missionary engagement with AICs.[116]

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[113] I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

[114] Victor E. W. Hayward to Edwin Weaver, April 26, 1962, Edwin Weaver to Victor Hayward, June 18, 1962, Victor Hayward to Edwin Weaver, July 4, 1962 and "Consultation on African Independent Church Movements, Provisional Agenda," September 6, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 9, Victor W. Hayward.

[115] H. W. Gensichen to Edwin I. Weaver, December 5, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; J. Walter Cason to Edwin Weaver, June 11, 1964, Edwin Weaver to Walter Cason, January 1, 1965, Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, May 20, 1965 and Charles W. Forman to Edwin Weaver," November 3, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965.

[116] Edwin Weaver to David Barrett, July 3, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 10, David B. Barrett; Edwin Weaver to David Barrett, September 15, 1970, Center For the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*, ed. Jocelyn Murray, Studies on Religion in Africa 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); James R. Krabill, *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South-Central Ivory Coast (1913-1949): A Historico-Religious Study* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995); David A. Shank, "Mission Relations with Independent Churches in Africa," *Missiology: An*

Mennonite Missionaries and World Christianity

Mennonite missionaries were not unique in the way that their work prepared, in some respect, the current focus of world Christianity, but their contribution is notable and was relatively early. It was before most scholars and mission practitioners recognized the significance of the indigenous Christian movements that were emerging around the world. The Toba and AIC engagements were after Sundkler's 1948 publication of *Bantu Prophets*, concurrent with Turner's study of the Church of the Lord Aladura, and before the publication of Barrett's *Schism and Renewal* and Bühlmann's *The Coming of the Third Church*. This section will suggest factors that may have influenced MBM missionaries' timely move in this direction.

Timing might have been a factor. MBM missionary activity started at the beginning of the twentieth century, somewhat late on the timeline of Protestant mission activity. By the time missionaries arrived to the Chaco region in the 1940s and to southeastern Nigeria in the 1950s, Christian missions had long been present and native Christian movements had emerged. Instead of encountering virgin territory as might have been the case earlier, missionaries found dynamic, local Christian movements that factored into their strategic deliberations. In addition, in these fields MBM had not yet had time to build up significant mission infrastructure such as schools and hospitals to maintain and was not invested in decades-old ways of working, as was the case for long-established missions. Missionaries likely had more freedom to suggest new ways of working than had their counterparts in mission initiatives in which traditions had been codified over decades of work. The relatively recent appropriation of the tools of linguistics and anthropology in mission activity also likely encouraged new theory and practice.[117]

Under the leadership of Graber, MBM's value of indigenization encouraged a focus on local Christian movements and the agency of local actors. Governmental policies that restricted missionary access and activity meant that self-sufficiency was crucial for the long-term survival of the movements and churches with which MBM worked. In regions such as Africa decolonization meant that foreign missionary control of churches was no longer acceptable, and local leaders had to assume responsibility for churches if such had not already happened. Increasingly self-theologizing was being added to the three-self theory of indigenization; Christians had to discern belief and practice that was faithful in their particular contexts.

Theological assumptions may have been in play. In the early 1970s missionaries and mission administrators reflected on their experience with AICs and suggested that there was an Anabaptist understanding of church that legitimized MBM's work with these churches.[118] The

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International Review 13, no. 1 (1985): 23–44; David A. Shank, *Ministry in Partnership with African Independent Churches* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1991).

[117] In this paper the use of these disciplines is noted primarily in the Chaco example. Missionaries in southeastern Nigeria, however, also appropriated anthropology in their work. They read and discussed articles in *Practical Anthropology*. See Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962, Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, and J. Stanley Friesen and Delores Friesen, "Anthropology, Anabaptists and Mission," *Mission Focus Annual Review* 8 (2000): 55. Edwin Weaver tried valiantly but in vain to acquire the services of an anthropologist to make a study of the AICs in southeastern Nigeria. See Calvin Redekop to Ed Weaver, Joe Graber, and John H. Yoder, March 31, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962, Edwin Weaver to Donald Jacobs, May 21, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R., D. Paul Miller to Edwin Weaver, November 13, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M – Miscellaneous, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, December 23, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966.

[118] John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 18, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 4, Yoder, John Howard

idea seemed to be that the Anabaptist tradition viewed the gathered local community of faith as the medium of theological discernment and that such a view legitimized AICs' development of belief and practice for their particular African context, since AICs were local expressions of the church. The sources do not show that missionaries articulated such an argument at the time they were engaging the Toba in the Chaco and AICs in southeastern Nigeria, but they may have assumed as much. In addition, the missionaries' North American sending communities were going through a period of reflection about their theological identity during the decades after World War II, motivated by Harold S. Bender's Anabaptist Vision and later the Believers' Church discussions. Perhaps such openness to reformulating theological commitments among their sending communities in some way legitimized reformulations of mission theory and practice in the minds of Mennonite missionaries.

In the Argentine Chaco and southeastern Nigeria, Mennonite missionaries' encounter with indigenous streams of the world Christian movement led to new mission approaches that prefigured, in some measure, the concept of world Christianity. As a field of study, world Christianity focuses on how a rich variety of expressions of the faith grows out of global exchanges and the particularities of diverse contexts around the world. As they adapted their mission strategies in the face of such diversity, missionaries' efforts to capacitate indigenous Christian movements and improve relationships between those movements and mission churches resulted in opportunities to legitimize and document the movements. Affirmation that such indigenous church movements are authentically Christian shows Christianity to be a diverse, multicultural, and polycentric global religion. Documenting these movements provides the grist for world Christianity to be a field of study. Mennonite missionaries were among those who prepared the way for the concept of world Christianity, a manner of understanding the faith that highlights its global character and eschews a parochial identification of Christianity as a western religion.

1970-74; Marlin Miller, "A Mennonite Statement of Policy on Cooperation with African Independent/Spiritual Churches," February 7, 1975, IV-18-13-05, Box 5, West Africa Discussions --- 73-75.