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* Central Americans Seek Meaning of Anabaptism

by Rafael Escobar Rosal

In the city of Managua, capital of Nicaragua, land of lakes and volcanoes, the 15th annual Consultation of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches in Central America (CAMCA) took place in a climate of much cordiality and friendship.

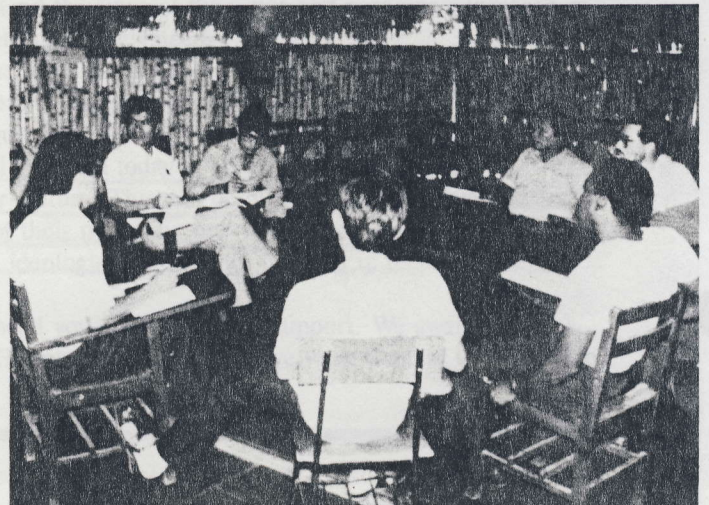
The event drew about 60 representatives from Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Puerto Rico.

The latter two countries were represented for the second time and, along with Venezuela, are interested in relating more directly with our organization. CAMCA is very open to initiating such a dialogue.

With the theme "What It Means to Be Anabaptist Today," the two stages of work began.

In the mornings, through a series of panels, participants sought to discover: (1) What would be the contributions of Anabaptism for the economic, political, social and religious reality of Central America; (2) How to confront the existing religious bases of the Mennonite churches in Central America with the biblical-theological bases of Anabaptism; (3) An

Study group at CAMCA
sessions, Managua, Nicaragua.



outline of steps, plans and strategies for the next three years toward the end of becoming biblical Anabaptist communities.

The following participated as panelists: Elier Rodriguez, vice-president for Latin America of Mennonite World Conference; Gilberto Flores, Mennonite pastor in Guatemala; Mario Higueros, dean of the SEMILLA theological education program; Juan Gohert, Isaias Flores, Damian Rodriguez and Linda Shelly.

The panels discussed each of the themes, after which small groups focused on (a) Anabaptism and the political-economic sphere; (b) Anabaptism and the church; and (c) Anabaptism and social issues.

The groups prepared written summaries which were presented to the full body and led to the editing of a final document.

In the afternoons we took care of our business sessions, hearing reports from the churches, organisms, institutions and others. It was challenging to listen to the experiences of the Central American churches struggling to give life to the kingdom of God.

Among the most significant decisions were the following:

- Making note of the presence for the first time of the Mennonite World Conference regional vice-president, it was

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decided to request such representation at all future CAMCA events. Elier Rodriguez led the group in a wide-ranging discussion of MWC. The group also felt there should be a separate vice-president for just Central America and the Caribbean, with the intent that with less geographical territory to cover, it will be possible to attend better to the needs of this area.

- Delegates discussed the urgency of a more Anabaptist hymnal. It was proposed that each convention name a person to gather and send songs to the SEMILLA office no later than January 1989.

- The assembly unanimously asked Rafael Escobar of

CAMCA Statement – 1988

We, the sixty delegates of the biblical-Anabaptist churches participating in CAMCA, meeting under the lordship of Jesus Christ the 7th to 9th of July 1988 in Managua, capital of Nicaragua, after reflecting on the theme:

What Does It Mean to Be Anabaptist in Central America Today?

Declare the following:

1. To live and promote among the communities of faith and even outside them the “shalom” of God, understood as a peace that means a full life, fraternal in the space and time that the Lord has given for the enjoyment of all.
2. To be instruments of love, liberty, solidarity and mutual help for men and women, not only at the level of good intentions, but by means of concrete actions.
3. To develop and create communities of faith and testimony according to the lifestyle of Jesus, where church activities and everyday life reflect that style of sharing, serving and distributing goods in accord with the needs of each one.
4. To maintain a permanent prophetic attitude based on a critical analysis that results from the confrontation of the Word of God with the reality that our people live, and in a

Guatemala to continue as general coordinator of CAMCA for another year.

- The next meeting was set for July 1989 in Belize. After a vote among several proposed themes, it was decided to focus on “The Pastoral Role of Women.”

- It was decided to voice our solidarity with the Mennonite churches of Nicaragua in the situation in which they and the Nicaraguan people in general are living. Therefore we make a call to Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in other parts of the world to extend moral and material support to our brothers and sisters in Nicaragua who suffer as victims of an unjust war and drastic economic measures, determined by the First World. These leave them practically in desperation; nevertheless, we see a church that is alive, trying to understand the signs of the times and accompanying each of the brethren in their needs.

These events confront us more and more every day with the discovery of our Anabaptist faith and oblige us to be people of consequence in our expression of faith. To be Anabaptist in Central America today is synonymous with being counter-culture. This can be questioned by the powers, to the point of their mistaking our vision and our mission for purely human ideologies that are not inspired in the truths of our Lord.

We need you. We await your support. We await the day when He returns. Meanwhile, we want to plant the shalom of God.

way also that motivates the search for solutions to the Central American conflicts and not palliatives that maintain the situation of injustice, pain and death.

5. To affirm that the holding of the land in few hands in agrarian societies like Central America continues to be one of the gravest causes of the socioeconomic crisis, and that, in accord with the sacred scriptures and faith:

(a) The land is a gift of God, and therefore each person has the right to enjoy the work and benefit of it;

(b) The biblical-Anabaptist communities of faith need to work at making known that we are only administrators of the Lord’s land, and that we must do it in a rational and wholistic way.

(c) It is necessary to mount efforts together with related Christian and church entities in order to propose, impel and foster concrete changes that by peaceful means will establish a just situation for all.

We exhort the churches of Central America to announce the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ and not to close their ears before the clamor of the majority of the people; to procure and maintain the ethic of the kingdom of Christ; and, without giving religious sanction to any ideology or political system, to participate in efforts that tend to help the marginalized of our society and all who suffer.

General Assembly of CAMCA. Shalom.