

Elusive Road to Mutuality in Global Mennonite Mission

Walter Sawatsky

How we think about mission does indeed affect our practice. Missiologists have usually applied the frame of reference of the academic discipline where they did their primary study to guide their own thinking about mission. In classic terms, that has meant that one can expect an approach shaped either by Biblical studies, theology, history or insights from the social sciences, primarily anthropology, though social psychology and social theory have also gained attention. That may well account for the historical approach pervading these remarks, but I would argue that to offer a study agenda for mutuality, accountability and inter-dependence in Global Mennonite mission requires taking the specific Anabaptist-Mennonite histories far more seriously than is our custom.

One of the big challenges has frequently been to retain sufficient self-awareness of the degree to which the subject matter of the mission being studied is *the ideal* of mission, or is the *actual practice* of mission. But in contrast to the Mennonite discourse on mission of a century ago, that was framed largely in terms of regaining a sense of the imperative of mission for Mennonites and finding means and locations that would also permit sustaining Mennonite commitments to nonconformity, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, *Mennonite missiology is challenged to be broadly sensitive to the worlds of thought and discourse within which we must necessarily move*. That is, our use of social science approaches needs to be attentive to more than a superficial appropriation of such means for enhancing mission techniques. To illustrate, during their reflections at an AMBS event in September 2002 on a “missiology of accompaniment” with Toba/Qom Indians in the Argentine Chaco, both Willis Horst and Albert & Lois Buckwalter underlined the imperative of taking the social sciences seriously. It was when they had reached an impasse that they had invited anthropologist Reyburn to study the setting.⁸² The result was a drastically transformed missiological stance, one that forced re-

⁸²For a recent analysis see Elmer Miller, “Toba/Qom Indians, Mennonites and the Argentine State”. *Missiology*, June 2002, p.

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examination of basic presuppositions. That changed missiological stance has also continued to shape Mennonite relationships to AICs in Africa and promises to help us think through other ownership of mission problems.

THE MENNONITE MISSION RECORD WE MEAN

The Mennonite mission record that must guide our reflections is a rather short one.

I will restrict myself to it, though to be conscious of the two millennia of the Church in mission, not just the modern movement, remains foundational. There are those who argue that a distinctive feature of the early Anabaptists was their missionary spirit, that their insistence on sharing their faith with others resulted in state and church officials seeking to suppress them. A significant part of Anabaptist-Mennonite missiological reflection currently is shaped by the vision of recovering that spirit, style and method - finding those geographic places where there will be a radical response. To follow such a missiology enables the modern practitioner to posit a network of contemporary Anabaptist movements or communities whose identification is with Anabaptist ideals and with those sharing those ideals, without necessarily affirming the longer Mennonite history or its present constellation of churches, conferences and related institutions.

Another perception of the Mennonite mission story is to begin with European Mennonite mission 150 years ago, particularly by Dutch and then Russian Mennonites - the recent set of essays by Alle Hoekema provide an illustration of thinking in terms of that tradition.⁸³

A third approach is to think of Mennonite mission as driven primarily by the discovery of a mission mandate by North American Mennonites one hundred years ago, to trace out the major trajectories of mission expansion, and to discuss changing methods in terms of moving through phases of naivete, institutionalization of mission churches and sending agencies, then professionalization of program and staff, and an “Anabaptist phase” that coincided with the rise of missiologists and mission training centers or schools of mission in the 1970s.

⁸³ Alle Hoekema, *Dutch Mennonite Mission in Indonesia. Historical Essays*. Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2001. See also his “150 Years of Dutch Mennonite Missions from a Historical

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The more disconcerting feature recently has been the emergence of a Mennonite world of practitioners and missiologists seeking global perspectives and discovering colleagues whose points of reference for thinking together about mission differ greatly from their own. As we know, the legitimacy of the way an association of Anabaptist-Mennonite missiologists is constituted is at stake, unless we manage to have around the table those working from a 16th century Anabaptist ideas stance, a European Mennonite experience in mission stance, a Canadian-American mission experience stance, and the stances of those thinking mission from the perspective of the perceived mission legacies in their part of the world.

A major problem that must be addressed is the fact that we lack scholarly histories of Mennonite mission for the recent period, or studies that provide us with critical comparisons. Indeed, serious denominational histories for the major Mennonite bodies are either lacking (Mennonite Church General Conference) or date from the 1970s.⁸⁴ That is, an understanding of the major transitions of the past thirty years that should guide responsible decision-making in our denominations and agencies is largely dependent on individual memories.

The final statement of the vision discernment team at the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Missions Consultation (GAMCo) in July 2000, appeared to attempt to speak out of this complex world of thinking. After the usual opening review of what they had heard and noticed from participants coming from many countries of the world, and comments about the complexities of our world, the team named four points that “we recognize”. The first was that “there are differing views of the mission or the church among us”.⁸⁵ To begin that way is striking, for the

Perspective.” *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, vol. 1998, pp. 173-184.

⁸⁴J.C. Wenger's *The Mennonite Church in America* (1966) did not really address Mennonite programs; S.F. Pannabecker, *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference*. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1975 has not been revised; Wittlinger, Carlton O. *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ*, Nappanee, Evangel Press, 1978, and J.A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (1975) provide an understanding of the mission trajectory to the point where "Mutuality" questions would have required major re-framing. John Ruth's massive recent history of Lancaster Conference is not really useful for understanding the EMM story, though a major study by Richard MacMaster is apparently still pending. Perhaps the most useful, short survey for the Mennonite Church is a conservative publication: *The American Mennonites. Tracing the Development of the (Old) Mennonite Church*. Ephrata PA: Eastern Mennonite Publications, 1998!

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acknowledgment of difference represented naming a reality with which participants wanted to work constructively. To differ on mission and ecclesiology is to differ on what is central to theology, no small thing. The other three “recognitions” were essentially agenda statements, calls for finding common language and metaphors, finding effective models for sharing resources in the face of unequal resources, and changing structures to “create the space” for working together, saying that organizational models of mission “need to be incarnational, empowered by the Holy Spirit”. That models of mission should be incarnational and empowered by the Holy Spirit may have seemed an Anabaptist-Mennonite special pre-occupation in earlier decades, but those are now the stated desired criteria for many mission bodies. The statement went on to delineate nine laments and nine joint commitments before presenting a five-point proposal that spoke primarily to organizational elements of mission - essentially proposing what is currently called a “Global Mission Fellowship of Anabaptist-related Churches”.⁸⁶ This fellowship - the nomenclature is in keeping with the language of koinonia and communion in recent MWC statements - is to meet triennially in conjunction with MWC events, with regional equivalents encouraged to meet more often.

THE REALITIES OF SEPARATION AS STARTING POINT FOR REFLECTION

Before setting out some of the major study tasks that these developments appear to require, let me remind ourselves of the key realities of our common story. The ebb and flow of European Mennonite involvement in mission was accompanied by regular discussion about working alone as Mennonites or working ecumenically. Even the growing trend after 1950 for Mennonites from four different countries in western Europe to work through a joint set of mission, service and peace committees was affected by the readiness of the participant churches to work ecumenically or by their resistance to that. The Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission boards that emerged in North America around 1900 had developed such a keen sense of denominational distinctiveness, that major policies to be applied in other geographic locations than their home territory, could only be decided by that Mennonite denomination. Those decisions were bathed in prayer and Scripture to help strengthen a decision’s authority, but that locus of authority was seen to be greater than a common decision with other Mennonites also engaged in mission who were

Vision Discernment Team, “Global Anabaptist Missions Consultation”, *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Vol. 8, 2000, p.155. The Proceedings, including many of the papers, were circulated to CIM members in 2001.

⁸⁶The document was circulated to CIM members on September 19, 2002, together with exec. sec. Peter Rempel's report.

being prayerfully and scripturally serious about it.

On the other hand, they found that the way to work together practically was through a central committee, Mennonite Central Committee, in service and relief programs that were done in the name of Christ. But at the point where the fruit of a common witness resulted in organizing a congregation, a church, MCC transferred responsibility to a Mennonite mission board. In so doing, that community of believers disappeared from the radar screen of the other Mennonite denominations when appeals for prayer, for support, or for discerning together continued. It also meant that these mission histories became part of specific denominational histories.

Why review the history of the separatism of North American Mennonite missions, when such statements as the one from the GAMCo discernment team, or the new proposal for a global mission fellowship focus on togetherness? We need to do so in order to test whether greater fellowship and communion is indeed our commitment and possible reality today, whether fundamental attitudes and perceptions have truly been dealt with or are being avoided the way ecclesiology was so often postponed in modern mission history. I found it troubling that there was so little discussion at the CIM meeting in January 2001 following John Lapp's presentation on the causes and consequences of our separations in mission, including the paucity of responses to it following publication.⁸⁷ Lapp's paper identified intrinsic, disruptive and tactical factors for separation which we might receive as a shopping list of topics for missiological study and reflection. Lapp ended his paper with some recommended actions that involved disciplining ourselves in cooperation. Here I wish to highlight the underlying issues that necessitate conscious rethinking, so that the learned discipline of cooperation gains more than a pragmatic or sentimental basis.

A piece of conventional wisdom hard to surrender is the notion that Anabaptist-Mennonites are necessarily anti-institutional, to be so is a sign of radical faithfulness to Christ, it is thought. We have had numerous calls for developing a theology of institutions⁸⁸ - a constructive theology that does more than bless

⁸⁷ John A. Lapp, "The Causes and the Consequences of Separations in North American Anabaptist Missions", *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Vol. 9, 2001, pp. 5-23.

⁸⁸ It may suffice to note the articles from a symposium on "Church-Related Institutions"

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Niebuhrian realism - but it remains striking how often our popular appeals rely on negative stereotypes of institutions in favor of the creative, the new, the relevant, etc. Lapp's many lists of Mennonite institutions for mission is a handy summary of the truth that the Mennonite mission dynamic was expressed in building institutions, Mennonites obviously seeing institutions as positively necessary. Lapp's list of intrinsic factors initially noted the rich diversity of Christian history and the diversity of models of ecclesiology and spiritual vitality to which Mennonites are attracted, and then went on, citing an essay by James Pankratz, that pointed out the degree to which the free church model relies on a theology of separatism, with proselytization of other Mennonite churches and other Christians as "a strong impetus for mission".⁸⁹ This is hardly a reality that the missiologist is called to perpetuate, except in carefully nuanced discussions of the plethora of issues and interpretation of the recent debates on proselytization and evangelization.⁹⁰

It is particularly Lapp's list of disruptive and tactical factors of separation that need to be restated for the challenge to missiologists that they represent. Disruptive factors included the role of personalities, of ideology, power, wealth, the free enterprise character of American culture that posits empire building, distrust (between groups especially), and the inertia of separation itself. Lapp's list of tactical factors for separation made more explicit the institutional ways in which his list of disruptive factors do function in Mennonite life. So, for reasons of specialization, for stronger appeals to specific constituencies and/or because of the opportunities that some groups insisted on responding to while others delayed, the proliferation of distinct and separate Mennonite mission agencies has continued. Since we hear the reminders of our separations too easily as stories of the past, where we now no longer disagree, it is worth pointing out that in Wilbert Shenk's review of Mennonites in mission, what he measured was new mission startups, as indicator of the shifting dynamic of Mennonite mission. The drastic increase during the 1990s was of newly created institutions for mission - surely some of them merit the

published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 1997 and to read William Klassen's article in the following issue challenging some of the claims about the anti-institutional emphases that shaped pastoral education in the 1970s. For a more extended critique see my "Mennonite Ministry and Christian History" forthcoming in Erick Sawatzky, ed. *The Heart of the Matter*.

⁸⁹ Lapp, p. 14, citing James Pankratz, "Mennonite Identity and Religious Pluralism", in Harry Huebner, ed. *The Church as Theological Community*. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990.

⁹⁰ For background see the essays and discussion summary on Proselytization and Evangelization in *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, 1998. Although proselytism remains a problem in areas of Mennonite mission presence, there has not yet been an initiative within the CIM structures to develop a position and establish guidelines.

disruptive label.⁹¹

TESTING THE MUTUALITY WE MEAN

In terms of the spirit and the letter, there appears to be nothing obviously new, no new paradigm, in recent decisions by the GAMCo committee. Rather we are seeing a continuation, possibly gradual fruition of visions, proposals that take us back as far as the first Mennonite consultation on global mission, at San Juan in 1975. It was after that consultation that the Mennonite press declared that the in-word was “Mutuality” in mission. Most of the writing since then has circled around the fact of the exercise of power - intellectual, organizational, financial - that needs to become more equitable. Yet the varieties of models for disempowerment of mission agencies or for forming global structures of mutuality, that were cited at a Cabrini conference two decades ago, seem of less relevance in light of the way power dynamics in the world as a whole have changed. For example, experiments in global restructuring of mission agencies such as EMM, MBMSI or MCC, though promising, seem dwarfed by the drastic political shift of American political and economic unilateralism, of its unparalleled grasp for global empire.

A related fact that we as missiologists need to observe with care is the makeup of the circle of participants at such Mennonite global gatherings as GAMCo and MWC, as well as that of other gatherings of Mennonites engaged in mission globally.⁹² The global consultations on mission by the Brethren in Christ family and Eastern Mennonite Missions in 1997 or the major consultations by Mennonite Brethren⁹³ were also stated exercises in mutuality. We might benefit from recalling that in the early ecumenical councils of Christianity, their legitimacy over time was measured against the representative nature of the gathering. If the decisions represented the consensus of all regions of the Church, then it was deemed appropriate to claim the phrase “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”, a

⁹¹ Wilbert Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out. Mennonite Missions 1850-1999*. Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000, see specifically pp. 84-90.

⁹² Official reports tend to treat such events as institutional gatherings, the missiologist must necessarily develop clarity on the schools of thought, and personal roles that account for the outcomes.

⁹³ First held in Brazil in February 1988, with several follow up meetings through 2002.

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formula drawn from the Jerusalem Council, for the actions they were taking. Our Mennonite record shows conscious efforts at establishing formulae for attendance at global mission meetings - we value fair representation highly. Nevertheless, paying attention to who did attend, who was poorly represented, how one sustained continuity of discussion with too many new attendees, how one attained necessary levels of expertise without creating an elite - those continue to be the necessary points to consider when evaluating such gatherings.

Given the recently published statement by Richard Showalter, "We Repent"⁹⁴ that concerned an effort by EMM staff to name its deceptive uses or abuses of power in doing and owning the mission task, in relation to its conference, to the churches in other countries and in relation to the re-structured Mennonite Church USA, it is easiest to offer an embarrassed "yes" to Showalter's concluding question 'Will you forgive us?'. More taxing is to examine together regularly the possibilities for the shared responsible exercise of power in straight forward fashion.

It is fair to say that many of the Mennonite attempts at cooperation in mission were driven by pragmatic considerations first, not by specific theological convictions about authenticity of witness or expression of global communion. North American Mennonites began consulting together regularly on mission and service when the Council of Mission Board Secretaries (COMBS) was formed in 1958. The board secretaries, as primary staff, not only negotiated with each other at these gatherings, but met with the MCC Board which then consisted of persons of recognized broad leadership in their denominations. The transition into the Council of International Ministries (CIM) in 1976 was a recognition of the need to bring the program executive staff of MCC and the mission boards together to consult. In its early years CIM met twice yearly, and formed area committees in which common actions in a given region or continent were worked out. One of the annual gatherings was usually hosted by a mission agency, thus introducing the others to its world and constituency. Economies in the mid-eighties forced a reduction to annual meetings in Chicago. Thanks to the fact that individual mission administrators and missiologists were often the same person, these meetings also included thinking together about missiology and informing each other. In recent years CIM membership included non-program entities such as the mission centers at Mennonite seminaries. In short, the meetings of the CIM constitute a series of exercises in thinking about mission.

Although the Mennonite World Conference was initiated in Europe, since 1952 the primary energy for sustaining and then transforming MWC into its present structure came from North America. Most specifically when Paul Kraybill became

⁹⁴ Richard Showalter, "We Repent", *Missionary Messenger*, September, 2002.p. 16.

part-time executive secretary of MWC after 1973, the network of persons with whom he had interacted globally were the members of CIM as well as a circle of leaders around the world, a disproportionate number of whom had studied at one of the American Mennonite seminaries. That is, the link between the seminaries, mission agencies and MCC was strong, characterized by broadly shared visions. The emergence of notions of finding a way toward inter-church relations globally that would be more inter-dependent, more mutual, more true partnership is not easily traced. Those ideas were in the air in the 1970s, whether one was reading theories of development, post-colonial international relations theory or the themes at ecumenical gatherings of Evangelical and WCC related mission consultations. Nevertheless, the fact of the relatively small network of Mennonite leaders who have been meeting together on the long road to the mutuality we seek, is important.⁹⁵

As was true in the progressions of world consultations on mission, the proportion of Europeans and Americans was nearly total in the initial meetings, then increasingly, active participants from other continents made themselves heard. If the San Juan consultation marked the beginning of seeking more mutuality, the mission consultation held in conjunction with the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita in 1978 served to create awareness within a broader North American constituency that the Mennonites had gone international - there were new songs to learn. By 1984 the discourse had moved to Europe, symbolically away from the locus of power in North America rather than as a return to old Europe. By the time of the GAMCo event in 2000, both the location and the quotas on who could attend, were deliberate efforts at re-arranging power.

The Euro-American relationship has been central to the way cooperation in mission and service has developed since World War II. Nevertheless, by now it is only a handful of CIM participants who tend to know about the series of consultations (1950, 1967, 1979, 1990 and 2002) in which MCC representatives met with European Mennonite leaders to examine common tasks and to negotiate the next stage in the relationship.⁹⁶ For each consultation MCC invited the mission boards to

⁹⁵Some biographical studies could be helpful, and the appointment/election of new leaders helps account for major changes.

⁹⁶I am referring to the papers from MCC consultations, copies in my own files. It might be a

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send its representatives, though this was different from organizing a joint meeting with agenda set jointly. What was consistently problematic was the lack of clarity on the ecclesiastical status of MCC (using Wilbert Shenk's language). In 1967 there was a serious attempt to organize an MCC equivalent for Europe that failed, eventually the International Mennonite Organization involving Dutch and German Mennonite relief bodies was formed, and the program direction of the European Mennonite Mission Committee became more united. A renewed joint board of peace, mission and service/relief work became a serious option in 1980 but within a decade this served less to facilitate thinking together than were the series of regional gatherings under MWC auspices, known as MERK, which in the 1990s began affirming mission vision statements.⁹⁷

Better known, thanks to the helpful short surveys published by Wilbert Shenk, is the story of the experiments in interagency coordination from COMBS to CIM.⁹⁸ Another *Mission Focus* pamphlet "God's New Economy: Interdependence and Mission" by Wilbert Shenk appeared in 1988. It offered a brief essay giving a Biblical foundation for then reviewing recent developments in interdependence, mission and unity. What has remained indispensable are the appendices in that pamphlet containing the concluding statements from San Juan (1975), Hesston (1978), Strasbourg (1984) and the Minneapolis Statement of 1987. Allow me a few sentences to highlight key points from the special gathering in Minneapolis in 1987, and from the one year process in 1992-93 when CIM asked its members to secure their boards' response to a new set of guidelines for cooperation in mission. The Minneapolis gathering was expanded to include more workers and representatives from sister churches abroad. It ended with a) a request that the CIM executive secretary prepare for approval a short policy statement on effective interagency cooperation, b) the formation of a task force to propose increased cooperative programs overseas, c) asked the Council of Moderators and Secretaries (NAmerica & Canada) to find ways to strengthen the unity of conferences, sought more effective global church-to-church relationships and policies for interchurch relationships, d) affirmed MWC and invited its general council to help develop appropriate structures for global mission. One might say that the GAMCo meeting in 2000 took up that task, largely by forming a continuing committee which in the summer of 2002 proposed a new Global Mission Fellowship of Anabaptist-related Groups.

service to publish an edited compendium for broader circulation.

⁹⁷ see one statement in *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, 1998. Here too, an analysis of the progressions of MERK from 1975 to 2001 could be fruitful.

⁹⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, *An Experiment in Inter-Agency Coordination*. Elkhart: CIM/Mennonite Board of Missions, 1986.

At its 1992 meeting the North American CIM developed a three point recommendation to commit its member agencies in specific ways to greater inter-agency cooperation and to place itself under a MWC framework.⁹⁹ In so doing, individual boards discussed the recommendations and submitted written responses as well as statements of their mission priorities.¹⁰⁰ Since I was invited to prepare a report and analysis of those agency responses to the CIM recommendation I found myself reading more carefully than usual a body of materials in which each responded in some characteristically different way. In some introductory remarks I pointed out that the orientation of MWC since 1990 was to “disperse the flow of power that had been too centered in North America”, that indeed well before 1990 MWC staff regularly “challenged CIM to give way to greater ‘mutuality’.” Secondly the record showed that “there have always been competing visions of the best way to focus cooperation, how best to restructure for efficiency reasons, and whether to think of a given set of specific relationships as primary or secondary.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Briefly stated they were: 1. Response to the proposal for a central Mennonite/Brethren in Christ clearinghouse such as CIM, for new long-term overseas mission and service programming, 2. That agency board empower/encourage administrative leaders to negotiate common structure for all work carried on in a given overseas country by two or more CIM agencies, 3. State whether willing to explore the feasibility of regional structures to prioritize, plan and coordinate ...in a region.

¹⁰⁰ Particularly interesting for our purposes here were remarks by Judy Zimmerman Herr when comparing the priority statements that were submitted in 1993, noting how most priority statements appeared to have emerged out of a process of consultation and conversation. Partnership language was pervasive, seven agencies listing joint mission ventures with a CIM partner, even more listing partnerships with overseas churches, MBs using the language of internationalization throughout. Herr also drew attention to gaps, so few making much of the impact of new technologies, mostly agency-daughter church partnerships, not much ‘reverse mission’, infrequent mention of MWC structures, and very little on finances, Herr arguing that in light of global inequalities, “we must look long and hard at how we share our resources.”

¹⁰¹ There was a change in attitude after 1990 that was related to some changes in leadership. Mission board leaders might have close personal ties to Paul Kraybill as MWC exec. sec. because of his long career with EMM, but they regularly responded with restraint to his calls to surrender power, fearing empire building within MWC. Larry Miller’s European base, the nature of his personal relationship to a new set of leaders, does account for greater trust that deferring to MWC was not leading to empire building, though the consideration about who really initiates and guides developments behind the scenes must be kept in mind. Further reflections will be aided by the latest historical review of Mennonite World Conference: John A. Lapp & Ed van Straten, “Mennonite World Conference 1925-2000: From Euro-American Conference to Worldwide Communion”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (forthcoming) January 2003.

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Since the resultant approved recommendations of January 1993 had the weight of mission board (plural) support behind them, they guided American participants in working with MWC in the GAMCo process. There were three basic affirmations. 1) CIM member agencies committed themselves to having CIM function as a central clearing house (or at least a consultative body to that effect) for new longterm mission and service programming overseas. This was limited to agreeing to seek counsel through CIM early in such new program plans, avoiding another layer of bureaucracy, and should apply to North American commitments - partners from other countries should also be consulted. But the concerns articulated in 1992 about competition for fund raising, confusion created by the diverse reporting systems, and a common Mennonite response to parachurch groups within our constituencies were not addressed. 2) There was a qualified “yes” vote for “common structures in a single country” to eliminate duplication of field administration, duplicate home office visits and other cost saving aspects. If such common structures would further national autonomy and would enhance local initiatives, they were affirmed, but they presumed a common vision and missiology among partners, otherwise common structures were not possible. 3) There was conditional affirmation for developing regional structures under MWC, including one for North America. What has made this affirmation steadily more certain, were the revised self-definitions of MWC as “connector”, “convenor”, “communicator”, a “forum... for significant exchange.” MWC exec. sec. Larry Miller also spoke of fair-share contributions as a device for speaking fraternally when building common budgets, and in the end the recommendation proposed building more forms of “koinonia structures” with MWC.¹⁰²

From one angle, given the many gatherings building momentum for some new structures of koinonia, the Guatemala meeting achieved little in imagining new structures. From another angle, given the many new persons present, and the “presence” of an intentionally limited number of North Americans,¹⁰³ there was extensive networking among and between participants in ways that superceded previous mission patterns. The latest proposal (August 10, 2002) for a global mission

¹⁰²For a broad discussion see Ray Brubacher, “The Globalization of Theological Education and of Christian Mission”, *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Vol. 8, 2000, 5-22. On this particular point Brubacher concluded that I had “watered down the first two recommendations” - or I might say that was required to keep faith with the pattern of responses from the board as reported back to CIM - but “expanded the third recommendation by calling for more forms of building ‘koinonia structures’ with MWC and its area committees.” p.16.

¹⁰³Missiological reflection also applies to the conduct of such international consultations, especially to the way in which the representatives of the more powerful partners foster real conversation in contrast to the subtle ways of throwing weight around through speech interventions or silences.

fellowship is remarkably brief. It outlines key theological/missiological assumptions in six points,¹⁰⁴ articulates the structural/organizational relationships of a global mission fellowship in seven points (delineating 3 types of member categories) and a four point recommendation for forming regional mission fellowships.

In the list of suggestions for missiological reflection that follows, it will be apparent that most seek to find ways to increase mutual accountability. That is the declared intent in the sixth point on missiological assumptions for a global mission fellowship, but the organizational section speaks in the indefinite tone of encouraging, sharing, cooperating, networking. Thus it would seem most urgent to address the factors that appear to inhibit more binding commitments to mutual accountability.

AN AGENDA FOR MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MUTUALITY ISSUES

¹⁰⁴The points were: “1.1 The Church at all levels - local, national, regional, and global - exists to participate in God’s mission to the world; 1.2 God’s mission through the Church involves conveying the whole gospel of Jesus Christ across spiritual,cultural, economic and political boundaries as well as within a church’s local settings; 1.3 the Church’s mission includes ministries in word and deed to persons and peoples outside the community of Christ with the goal of making disciples and bringing these new disciples into fellowships of believers; 1.4 The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed through a spectrum of evangelistic, disciple-making and humanitarian/social activities, including preaching, teaching, intercessory prayer, fasting, healing, deliverance, church planting, social services, disaster relief, development aid, peacemaking, advocacy for justice, conflict mediation, discipling, and training and equipping others for mission; 1.5 Every Church, whether at a local, national or regional level, has the responsibility to develop and sustain in biblical ways its God-given gifts for doing and being in mission; 1.6 Anabaptist-related churches and mission groups desire consultation and cooperation in order to increase capacity, mutual accountability, collaboration, and stewardship of resources for cross-cultural mission.”

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Many of the research and study suggestions that follow make more sense as issues of missiology when we recognize that the stage in the Mennonite mission enterprise that elicited the search for greater mutuality involves “New Mennonites” and established or former sending Mennonite communities reworking relationships.¹⁰⁵ Those relationships are centered on clarifying the nature of our churches - ecclesiology with a continuing missional dynamic. Initiating new places of Christian witness quite removed¹⁰⁶ from such existing Mennonite communities of faith involves a different set of missiological studies.

Upon presenting the following to the September 2002 meeting of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Association of Missiologists, I was encouraged to make more explicit several research agenda suggestions that were stated implicitly in the footnotes. One was that the CIM needs to review the proselytism problem in order to develop a position and to establish guidelines. Given the persistent theme in Pakisa Tshimika’s *Response* [following essay] it might be both more possible and fruitful to conduct such a proselytism review through the GAMCo structure. Another suggestion was for more biographical studies of Mennonite mission and service leaders and for the way in which leadership changes in the Mennonite agencies resulted in policy shifts or changes in missiological emphasis.¹⁰⁷ A third suggestion worth more scholarly attention for English language readers is both the publication of the findings (possibly position papers) from periodic consultations of European Mennonites with MCC and the mission agencies, and an analysis of the conversations on mission in Europe associated with the regional gatherings of Mennonites (MERK). Finally, perhaps the most difficult research task, since it is hard to trust each other on money matters, as Tshimika also points out, is to “look long and hard at how we share resources” - the strongest critique Judy Zimmerman Herr made when assessing the mission priority statements of CIM member agencies in 1993.

The eight agenda statements that follow are organized a bit more by scholarly category, pointing to broad studies and publications to shape how we think about mission.

1. We need to issue a *call for historical/missiological study* of North American

¹⁰⁵ Although documents for global applicability need to be quite generic, to keep consciously distinct a mutuality discourse between and among established church bodies (or conferences) of New and older Mennonites, whereas in new ministry settings we presuppose a spirit of open embrace to characterize ministry styles, but mutual accountability criteria do not apply in the same way.

¹⁰⁶ How far geographically removed to qualify for “quite removed” will be less of a stumbling block when that question too gets submitted to missiological reflection.

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The study of J.D. Graber and MBM, central to Wilbert Shenk, “Leadership of Mennonite missions, 1945-1985”, *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Volume 8, 43-54, is an illustration.

Mennonite ministries around the world. In particular, program reviews that have been done internally, or with a consultant, could contribute to comparative study and published reflections. This could be a way of testing or assessing some of the specific theologies of mission that these programs represent. At a minimum, we would benefit from the preparation of a list of recent mission histories (Morris Sider for Brethren in Christ, Peter Penner on MB mission in India, Ruth Unrau on GC mission in India, Jim Bertsche on AIMM) and of master's level theses or even term papers, written in numerous locales around the world..

2. We need to recognize that there is something disingenuous or not quite authentic in the way we in Mennonite mission leadership are skirting the question of ecclesiology. The charge has been repeated often enough that in the early flush of the mission century missionaries concentrated on presenting the simple claims of the Gospel, kept in abeyance matters of ecclesiology as potentially too divisive. The formation of COMBS in 1958 was motivated by an attempt to address the continuing uncertainties about the ecclesial status of MCC, but its status remains uncertain. Yet in global inter-Mennonite terms, the partnership understandings between MWC and MCC appear to be an integration of the financial, networking and administrative requirements for working as a global communion.¹⁰⁸ The most recent proposals of New Partnerships (from GAMCo) seem to continue to avoid *the issues of accountability or responsibility* - the pervasive language of "fellowship" and indiscriminate listing of varieties of relationships under the "partnership" label appear to empty "partnership" of precise meanings.¹⁰⁹ In his advocacy of the free church model, Miroslav Volf did address the vulnerabilities to which the free churches have been particularly prone - specifically weak on ecclesial accountability and taking the apostolic tradition seriously.¹¹⁰ *Examining the record of mutuality and*

¹⁰⁸ That is, what is the presupposition about ecclesial status of MCC and MWC, and who guides those presuppositions.

¹⁰⁹ I have in mind a presentation by Peter Rempel, attached to the mailing to CIM members reporting on the proposed Global Mission Fellowship, in which the listing of "old partnerships", "new partnership dynamics" and "new levels and forms of partnerships", that reads like a shopping list of possible, and indeed actual "partnerships", toward the end of which only criteria of viability and appropriateness get named.

¹¹⁰ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity*. Eerdmans, 1998, p. 254. John Stewart's lengthy review ("The Shape of the church: Congregational and trinitarian", *Christian Century*, May 20-27, 1998, 541-549) addresses the vulnerabilities in particular.

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partnership commitments within the CIM world in terms of free church vulnerabilities could well generate momentum toward greater accountability.

3. Further *reflection on ecclesiology and mission* by Mennonites taking seriously the ongoing ecumenical and evangelical discussions on the church, on the authority of the church, on its fragmentation when apparently a Spirit-filled church would foster common witness is *a necessary corollary for progress toward mutuality in mission*.¹¹¹ If the assumption of Miroslav Volf, that a free church ecclesiology is becoming the de facto ecclesiology in many parts of the world holds, then careful attention to the promise and the persistent vulnerabilities that he and others have drawn attention to is imperative. Not only did MWC issue a statement in July 1998 “God Calls Us to Christian Unity” which declared Christian unity to be a Biblical “imperative to be obeyed”, the text promised written materials and *leadership to guide participation in interconfessional fellowships and councils*. Since the modern movements for ecumenical renewal were rooted in the missionary experience, Mennonite missiologists may need to lead out in this task more than our record shows, particularly in fostering serious dialogue at all levels, and in creating mechanisms for assessing where specific inter-church conversations are leading.

4. Mennonite missiology is challenged to be broadly sensitive to the worlds of thought and discourse within which we must necessarily move. That is, *our use of social science approaches* needs to be attentive to more than a superficial appropriation of findings as means for enhancing mission techniques. Social geography and sociological studies need to be encouraged, while also noting the changes in the discipline of anthropology. We should remember that concerns about the capacity of Boomers and Besters - sociological labels for younger generations of Americans - to carry a mission commitment were central to the CIM self-examination in 1992-3 as it tried to be realistic about the degree of accountable mutuality it could promise the global Anabaptist-Mennonite world.¹¹²

5. Further attention to the *dynamics of cultural change*, to the *prerequisites for enculturation* of Christianity, should help us *to think through a series of ownership of mission problems* - ownership of our denomination’s programs, of the understandings of Anabaptism that are pre-supposed to be common, land ownership and transfer issues, or simply, whose money is it?, to name a few obvious ones.

¹¹¹ Specifically that includes the current NCCC Faith & Order Forum’s discussion of authority, preparations for a new Faith & Order Consultation more comprehensive than the old evangelical-ecumenical divide in America.

¹¹² Who but the missiological community must now ask whether the anxiety was well-founded, and if so, was it due to Mennonite acculturation into a culture of self-absorption, or was the manner and

6. To the degree that a fellowship of Anabaptist idealists is to become part of the koinonia and communion of the Mennonite World Conference, some effort *to articulate the ecclesial limits and accountability of such movements*, or groups, is needed in order to clarify mutual expectations. For American Mennonites to speak of the Anabaptist network in Britain in the same breath as speaking of mutuality with the Evangelical Mennonites of Congo is to confuse agendas, for example.

7. It will be difficult to speak meaningfully within a network of mission workers and thinkers globally, until there has been more scholarly attention to *the impact of the mission legacy*. That is, in a broadly comparative sense, the mission legacy refers to what was perceived from the missionaries, in contrast to the particular post-Reformation Christian tradition that the missionary thought they were being faithful to. We can anticipate that *the ongoing impetus from the Global Mennonite history project*, particularly when linked to other such

content of the mission communication to the constituency of Boomers too dumbed down?

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projects, will provide such new thought frames.

8. Since mutuality became the clarion call in mission generally, most of the writing has circled around the fact of *the exercise of power* - intellectual, organizational, financial - that needs to become more equitable. Yet the varieties of models for disempowerment of mission agencies or of forming global structures of mutuality, that were cited, for example, at a Cabrini conference two decades ago, seem of less relevance in light of the way power dynamics in the world as a whole have changed. For example, experiments in global restructuring of mission agencies such as MBMSI or MCC, though promising, seem dwarfed by the drastic shift of American political and economic global hegemony. *Our complicity* in the exercise of such power by virtue of our citizenship, and *our imprisonment in the definitions of the situation* imposed by American media, *our dependence on the English language, the American dollar, and news sources* that are the daily diet of our constituent churches has become so profound that it would be an act of responsible churchmanship, to create a program of news from between the lines, or that gets us to see from the other shore. To initiate a program whereby Mennonite specialists in Chinese, Hindi, Swahili, Russian, Spanish, French and German languages would generate a regular diet of news stories - secular and Christian - for sharing with our own church papers and the press in general, might be one of the most serious ways in which we respond anew to the call for global interdependence. The initiative through the WCC's Program to Overcome Violence web-page points in a similar direction.¹¹³

How we think about the world and God's mission in it cannot be limited to mission specialists trying to read widely. Rather we as responsible members of the Church, especially the "we" of the tradition of free churches, must rise above our own context if we hope to enter into the depths of what the gospel of "God so loved the world" is all about.

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