The Globalization of Theological Education and of Christian Mission

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I. Globalization: Definition and History of the Term

One can be both for and against globalization because it is, as Archbishop Walter Makhula of Botswana once said, both human and divine.1 Depending on how one defines the term, it can be both a sending apart or a coming together, both a process of exploitation or a process of mutual sharing, both a time of entrenchment or a time of transformation.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens describes globalization as a polarity between "skeptics" who negate the effects of globalization and "radicals" who proclaim its effects everywhere.2 The conversation about globalization is best held midway between these points. It is undeniable that some segments of a global culture are everywhere (coca cola, blue jeans, athletic shoes, English language, technological linkages, communications), but one also needs to acknowledge that local cultures are resilient and are not easily swept into one global uniculture.

Globalization is not simply modernization. It is "a complex web of translocational, multi-directional, value-diffuse processes which are driven more by economic than political or ideological interests."3 Much is written about capitalism out of control, transcending national boundaries into a vaguely defined global world where it need not be accountable since a world public policy does not exist.4 This past decade has seen the creation of global markets which "daunt local economics, render insolvent provincial industries, produce medieval working conditions in sweatshops, and exacerbate social problems such as trafficking in children for prostitution or as soldiers."5

1Deon Kitching, "Globalization and Youth Ministry: South African Perspective." Paper given at Youth Ministry Project (Princeton, NJ. August, 1999). p. 12.

2John Thomas Hastings, "Globalization and Youth Ministry: Japan." Paper given at Youth Ministry Project (Princeton, NJ. August, 1999). p. 1.

3Ibid., p. 2.

4Daniel S. Schipani, "Globalization and Youth Ministry: Latin America," Paper given at Youth Ministry Project (Princeton, NJ. August, 1999). p. 4.

5Mary E. King, "Globalization: A Powerful Opportunity for Nonviolent Struggle," *Fellowship* , Sept/Oct, 1999. Vol. 65. No. 9-10). p. 4.

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Globalization is variously blamed for a wide variety of trends: decreased power of national governments, increased migration, unemployment, crime, unequal distribution of wealth, increased use of the English language, environmental degradation, extremism (sometimes called fundamentalism), and the disintegration of traditional communities.

A South African writer describes the effects of globalization as follows:

Our children live in a time when the past is uninspiring and the future holds no promise...young people in the wealthy West are becoming more and more conservative and uncaring of the world, while people in the rest of the poor world are becoming rebels without a cause.[6]

The term "global" emerged as a substitute for the word "international" during the 1960's. But, as a technical term, it is of more recent coinage, popularized by the world systems thinking associated with Immanuel Wallerstein and Robert Robertson. They defined globalization as both "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."[7] Compression refers to the spread of technology, world markets and communications. Intensification alludes to the unstable and volatile tensions between the big and the small; between humanity and the individual on the one hand, and nation states and world system on the other. [8]

This volatile tension is alluded to in Bernard Barber's use of the terms "McWorld" and "Lebanization". McWorld refers to "a homogenized, globally shared reality that seems poised to become a single world culture," while at the same time ethnic/cultural groups entrench in more extreme forms of self definition. This simultaneous homogenization and implosion of societies, the entangled emphasis on both local and global seem to characterize global discussions much like the use of the terms First World, Second World, Third World and Fourth World did in the 1970's.[9]

There is much that is "evil" about globalization. But, as Archbishop Makhula has said, there is also much which is "divine." Conversations about globalization can also pick out the threads of expanding community, increased generosity, sharing and mutual caring.[10]

The mission of the church, as personified in Christ, is essentially global. The call of Christ was to share the good news at home, in the neighborhood and beyond. Apostle Paul was the prime example of "glocal" thinking, simultaneously reaching out to new frontiers while staying in close touch with Jerusalem, being faithful to the gospel

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[6]Kitching, p. 16.

[7]Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission and Service and the Globalization of North American Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* January, 1996, p. 19.

[8]Ibid. pp. 19-20.

[9]Robert J. Schreiter, "Christian Theology Between the Global and the Local", *Theological Education*, Spring, 1993. pp.114-115.

[10]Kitching, p. 12.

back home while also seeking to make it relevant and truthful to the local setting far away.

After Constantine, the gospel in the West became hostage to western Christian civilization, thus negating the church as a distinct society or a light on the hill. The missionary enterprise that became indistinguishable from colonial expansion gave European American missionaries the illusion that they were globalizing the gospel and the church. Actually, one could argue that they were "universalizing" the gospel, not globalizing it. Western theology was understood to be universal theology. Although missions talked of "indigenization," this was not about truth per se, but about the three-selfs (self-support, self-government, self-propagation). They did not address the fourth self, that is self-interpretation or self-theologizing. Western theology was the standard bearer. Thus, for example, the African Independent Church movement was not legitimated by the West.[11]

As the 20th century draws to a close, we are witnesses to the fact that numerically the church is now predominantly nonWestern. I believe we are at a juncture where Christian theology as we have understood it in the West can become liberated from the bondage of Western Christendom and again become more truly catholic. That is, "catholic" in the sense of the early church which intentionally embraced four very diverse Gospels, rejecting the Marcion temptation to uniformize the message. They favored a multiplicity of perspectives, within bounds of course, over uniformity.

As the church becomes more global, one could argue that "globalization" is more a Western need than a southern hemisphere need. Those in the South know more about us than we do about them. They have sat under our teachers, read our books, and have been inundated by Western technology and culture. They are making changes and calling for change. The challenge for us in the West is to listen and to learn. If we do, "globalization" can truly be the late 20th century equivalent of Pentecost.

This is also true within the global Mennonite family of churches. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 225,000 Mennonites (and related Christians) in the world, with 99% living in Western Europe, U.S. and Canada. At the end of the century, global membership exceeds one million baptized believers, thus, with family members, representing a community of two million people. More than 55% now live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Mennonites speak in 75 languages and worship in 8,000 local congregations in 60 countries.[12]

With this background, we will now attempt to distinguish some "divine" aspects of globalization, especially as they relate to theological education and to mutuality in mission. In the prior case, I will assess some implications for Associated

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[11]Justo L. Gonzalez, and Catherine G. Gonzales. "An Historical Survey," in Alice Frazer Evans, et al. *The Globalization of Theological Education,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1993), pp. 19-20.

[12]Larry Miller, "The Globalization of the Anabaptist Mennonite Family of Faith," Letter to Friends of Mennonite World Conference (November, 1999).

Mennonite Biblical Seminary as it attempts to be a training center with a "global perspective," as stated in its strategic plan. In the latter case, I will assess implications for U.S. and Canadian Mennonite mission and service agencies as they strive toward greater mutuality and accountability with the expanding churches of the "South," as expressed in the Mennonite International Study Project of the late 1980's.

II. Globalization of Theological Education: The Association of Theological Schools Experience

In 1990, the Association of Theological Schools adopted globalization as an accreditation standard. It also declared the 1990's as the decade for the "globalization of Theological Education."

The term "globalization" was not agreed to easily. Every one acknowledged that it was a term used by the economic or commercial world, and given all the evil aspects of the globalizing economy, it was not a term of choice for many. Many preferred the term oikoumene, but more conservative groups objected because of the terms association with liberal ecumenicism. Globalization was, in the end, a term of compromise.

Deciding on the term itself proved to be the easier part. What on earth should "globalization" mean for the world of theological education? Donald Browning, in a hallmark speech to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the mid 80's, presented four categories or typologies of "globalization" for theological education. These categories have framed much of the discussion through the 90's.[13]   According to Brown, globalization means:

1. Taking the gospel to all people; a renewed focus on mission and evangelism.

2. Ecumenical connectedness world-wide; a renewed focus on ecumenical cooperation.

3. Interfaith encounter; a renewed focus on dialogue with other faiths, in the spirit of Max   Muller's assertion that "Those who know only one religion know none."[14]

4. Universal struggle for justice; a renewed focus on improving the lives of the poor.

These proved to be four very different, even somewhat contradictory goals; but to promote one or two to the exclusion of the others would have divided the Association of Theological Schools. What did seem to unite the endeavor was the commitment to reach out, to build bridges, and to be changed. Even the more conservative schools could agree to those general terms. Garth M. Rosell said, "If we are to be faithful...we

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[13]Browning's categories are referred to repeatedly throughout the *Theological Education* journals of the 1980's and early 1990's.
    [14]Schreiter, p. 120.

must learn how to build bridges. Insularity is inimical to the gospel."15 It was generally accepted that theological schools need to overcome "cultural captivity."

An important part of the globalization focus was the "Pilot Immersion Project for the Globalization of Theological Education (PIP/GTE), a five year project of 12 geographically and theologically diverse seminaries. A major component of the project was sending a group of faculty and students on three week cross-cultural (usually international) immersion experiences and then assessing the impact on the participants. From what I could discern in the theological education journals, these assessments focused almost exclusively on the participants from the North American seminaries. Very little mention was made of the impact on the hosting institutions and communities. There also seemed to be very little reciprocity, that is, return hosting of international colleagues. Perhaps it was assumed that international students on North American campuses and the occasional international guest lecturer sufficed. But, even these experiences could be assessed in the name of reciprocity.

During the past decade, examples of globalization have changed from calculating the number of professors taking sabbaticals overseas and counting the number of international students on campus, to exposing more students to transcultural issues, requiring students to have an educational experience in a different cultural context, considering international students as resources for the school (rather than just recipients) and developing partnerships for ongoing exchanges and mutual learning.16

Predictably, there were objections, including the following; globalization is just an anthropological exercise based on 19th century Western liberalism (e.g., egalitarianism); it is motivated out of guilt due to white U.S. imperialism; it is based on the naive notion that we have something to learn from each other; it is driven by the hope that "out there" somewhere we'll discover a vitality that's missing in North American churches.17   Actually, not bad, for objections! Each one deserves a good probing of the spirit.

"Third World" theologians expressed fears about the globalization focus. Some expressed concern that the globalization of theological education might be too closely connected to the globalization of the international market economy and free trade and all the pain that phenomenon has inflicted.

Fumitaka Matsuoko describes some "hard facts" concerning the globalization of theological education:

1. What is the purpose of the "global" education experiences? There is a danger of "theological tourism" which provides little to really change the "tourist" or the host institution that provides the "tour bus." Will these tours really address the power

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15from the Forewards in Evans, et al *The Globalization of Theological Education*, p. xiv.

16Richard V. Vieth, "Globalization in Mid America," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1991, p. 24.

17Daniel O. Aleshire, "Words and Deeds: An Informal Assessment of Globalization in Theological Schools", *Theological Education*, Spring, 1999, p. 30.

imbalances? Not the financial differences, but the imbalances of the power of knowledge. As Francis Bacon said, "Knowledge is power." While the transformation of those on tour is highly desirable, one must guard against using people as agents of transformation. This pattern can be overcome through genuine reciprocity, mutuality and the "honoring of pain."

2. We need to "revisit our relationships in light of our histories. One way is to acknowledge that 'Northerners' tend to focus on programs while 'Southerners' are more concerned about the alienating effects of globalization."

3. The wealthy celebrate globalization; the poor fear its local impact.18

Justo Gonzalez names another fear: that globalization serves as an escape from globalization in our backyard. Schools may have a strong program with African or Jamaican communities while ignoring the African American neighborhood next door, or they may have lots of international students but no African American students.19

Through my readings of the Association of Theological Schools experience with globalization, I have distinguished the following goals or criteria for globalization. The dividing lines between them is not always clear. Nor have I established clear indicators to determine whether such goals are achieved.

III. Goals/Criteria of Globalization

A. *Globalization means being "glocal" (local-glocal-global)*

Robert Schreiter describes life in the globalizing world as "glocal," that is, simultaneously global and local because we are living in a period of the "compression of the world" which is not only multipolar politically, but increasingly unified economically.20 One cannot, however, speak of a global culture just because coca cola, blue jeans, athletic shoes, and videos are everywhere. Such elements from one culture may be universalized, but local cultures are usually resilient enough to receive and integrate such elements into their own culture in their own way. Local cultures provide a sense of belonging, of moral guidance and a framework of meaning; a global culture, to the extent that such exists, cannot. A glocal sensitivity invites us to study the connections and interplay of that which is global and that which is local.21 Schreiter therefore locates the new context for theology in the "glocal," the space where local

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18Fumitaka Matsuoka, "The Changing Terrain of Globalization at ATS Conversations," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1999, pp. 20-22.

19Justo L. Gonzales, "Globalization in the Teaching of Church History," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1993, p. 50.

20Max L. Stackhouse, "Globalization, Faith, and Theological Education," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1999, p. 70.

21Schreiter, pp. 115-116.

cultures encounter and negotiate their relationship to the global context.22   Theological education must stand at the intersection of the two.

Justo Gonzalez says the purpose of the globalization of theological education is to produce graduates who can bring a global perspective to the specificity of their ministry context.   In other words, a globalized theological education must always connect meaningfully at the local level.   Gonzalez summarized "glocality" well as follows:

> Globalization is not a permanent soaring to look at the world from a 'global'
> perspective; it is rather the exposure to alternative settings, alternative ways
> of being the church and of doing theology, in such a way that each one and
> all of us may be better theologians in our own settings.23

A "globalized" mind thus keeps the following two aspects in tension; one must not be diminished in favor of the other. The first is self-understanding; this is my story, my place. The second is a global perspective; I understand myself and my context better when I place myself into a perspective outside my own story and space.24

B.   Globalization attempts to overcome parochialism and to liberate oneself (or an institution) from cultural captivity.

Richard V. Vieth describes one goal of globalization as "overcoming parochialism," the willingness to have our identity as Christians and world citizens influenced and changed by relationships to cultures, churches, and faith traditions different from our own.25 This goal can also be described as the "uncentering" of the intellectual hegemony of the West, a letting go of the notion that the theological traditions of the West are universally valid.26

A question any seminary can ask itself is whether it is held captive to a cultural bias. This is a different question from asking if an institution has a cultural bias. No institution can be cultureless. What a globalizing seminary can decide is whether its culture is open and free to change as the Spirit of God may call.

C. Globalization means being vulnerable, to honor suffering, to release control.

According to feedback received from Pilot Immersion Project for the Globalization of Theological Education (PIP/GTE) tours, the vulnerability of participants was the condition initially most resisted but in the end most highly valued, especially by the

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22William Lesher and Donald Shriver, "Stumbling in the Right Direction," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1999, p. 9.

23Gonzalez, "Globalization in the Teaching of Church History," p. 53.

24Ibid. p. 61.

25Vieth, "Globalization in Mid America," p. 19.

26Gonzalez and Gonzalez, "An Historical Survey," p. 29.

educators. This usually involved being out of control of such things as educational input, health and personal safety. PIP tour analysts assert that if theological educators want a truly transforming education, they must find ways to heighten the degree of risk and vulnerability for participants.27

How this vulnerability should translate from tour groups to seminaries as institutions is difficult to say. Might it mean not letting accreditation criteria always be the final arbiter, or taking risks with professors whose credentials do not meet normal standards or students who do not have all the right academic background?

D. *Globalization means facing honestly the asymmetry of power and resources and acknowledging the elusiveness of mutuality.*

In analyzing case studies of seminaries working at the globalization of theological education, Judith Berling concludes that new relationships based on mutual needs and accountability need to evolve, sometimes slowly, between partners in asymmetrical settings. Quite frequently participants from the North and partners from the South play unconscious and unintended games with each other. Most of the time Northerners control the agenda and Southerners hope to benefit by being responsive. Southern partners are often too polite to assert their own agenda and thus challenge the unconscious Northern assertion of privilege.28

Schreiter suggests that in an asymmetrical relationship hope for mutuality (true equality of participation) is elusive and perhaps impossible. Dominant culture persons may offer mutuality while being unaware of all that hinders it. Thus it may be more honest to talk of reciprocity, simply an exchange, a back-and-forth of visits or contacts. Reciprocity does not mean relationships cannot eventually become equal or that participants are not of equal dignity. Reciprocity may simply point toward mutuality and remind us how much there is yet to be achieved.29

E. *Globalization leads to the transformation of both individual and institution.*

Seminarians involved in cross-cultural dialogue often discover that returning home with the perspective of someone else's home can trigger a personal crisis of meaning, faith and vocation. This dissonance offers an opportunity to distance oneself from life as usual and to see anew where we are located in society and how this shapes our understanding of the world.30

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[27]Alice Frazer Evans, and Robert A. Evans, "Globalization as Justice," *The Globalization of Theological Education* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 156-157.

[28]Judith A. Berling, "Getting Down to Cases: Responses to Globalization at ATS School," *Theological Education*, Spring, 1999, pp. 111-112.

[29]Robert J. Schreiter, "Globalization as Cross-Cultural Dialogue," eds. Alice F. Evans et. al. *The Globalization of Theological Education* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 129.

[30]Evans and Evans, "Globalization as Justice," p. 208.

The ultimate goal of globalization is not how much knowledge one acquires of another culture but what happens to our relationships with people in that culture and, every bit as important, how we are transformed in the process. Cross-cultural dialogue requires that the more powerful relinquish power and, for a time, be led by the less powerful on a journey toward transformation. Without such a conversion, globalization in theological education will be like most other forms of human globalization--another form of domination.31

IV.   Globalization of Theological Education at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary

A. Questionnaire

In order to test the above statements about globalization, I composed a questionnaire incorporating their essence. I asked three or four persons from each of the following groupings to complete the questionnaire: faculty, African, Asian, Latin American, and North American (i.e., U.S. and Canada). Since these persons were not selected at random, but rather on the basis of personal acquaintance and persons with international experience or awareness, the responses may not reflect in a rigorous way the reality at AMBS.

The main questions were as follows.

1. To what degree has AMBS achieved a "global perspective?"

2. To what degree has AMBS succeeded in connecting the global and the local?

3. During the past ten years has AMBS had a partnership with an international training institution? If yes, to what extent was the relationship MUTUALLY beneficial?

There was an occasional reference to Guatemala and SEMILLA, but also some puzzlement about apparent lack of student interest in this connection. I think this question begs clearer definition of "partnership."   It seems most or all AMBS international relationships are informal and sporadic. Whether such relationships qualify as a "partnership" is open to question. These international exchanges, observed one person, primarily benefit the students and faculty involved; AMBS seems not to nurture these relationships in a sustained manner.

4. To what degree has AMBS as a whole been "transformed" by its efforts to globalize?

This is an admittedly very arbitrary question to answer. The word "transformation" is jargon and about as variously defined as the word "development." Yet, it is an important word with strong Biblical overtones (e.g., Romans 12:1). My intent here is to ask in general whether AMBS is being changed in any way by its transcultural encounters.

31Schreiter, "Globalization as Cross-Cultural Dialogue," pp. 129 and 123'

5. To what degree is AMBS "held captive" to a particular ethnic/cultural bias?

6. What risks does AMBS take in moving toward a "globalized" education?

7. How does the asymmetry of power and resources (between the "North" and the "South" affect theological education at AMBS?

A few respondents commented that it is difficult to forge partnerships, even to have fellowship, with such stark asymmetries of power and resources. Lack of resources in the South thus weakens Southern theological input for a seminary such as AMBS.

B. Concluding Observations

1. There is certainly strong affirmation of AMBS's intent to globalize. How successful the seminary is thus far in achieving such a goal is mixed at best, according to student and faculty respondents. It seems more effort could be made to globalize the curriculum. This does not necessarily mean adding one or two courses on cross-cultural themes. We should think instead of globalization as a theme that is pervasive through all (or most) course offerings. Globalization is not something to be focused only in the missions/evangelism department. It can also include more Southern literature in the library, the bookstore and in course readings.

2. In order to develop more experience along the lines of the five principles described in III above, should AMBS establish more intentionally one or two international partnerships that would test the seminary's resolve to achieve a "global perspective" as stated in the AMBS strategic plan.

3. Similar to comments by Justo Gonzalez noted earlier, some concern was expressed by respondents that globalization can be an escape from facing globalization at home. One respondent said emphatically that AMBS is not connecting with the African American community. Take away the rich diversity of the international students and AMBS is very white. Some people talk of the "AMBS bubble."

4. In the globalization literature, there were occasional references to seminaries requiring students to do one year of theological study outside his or her home culture. Should AMBS consider this option?

5. There were a few references to declining interest in missions among students and one professor lamented that not even one missions course is required for graduation. One student observed that there are fewer "missions/service" alumni (from Mennonite agencies) on campus. Is this a broader phenomenon? James Pankratz, in his study of theological education within the global family of Mennonite Brethren churches, observed that Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary has reduced its missions teaching staff by 50% (from two professors to one).[32] What does this mean?

6. While having a cultural bias may be inevitable, should AMBS wrestle more

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[32]James N. Pankratz, "Report, Evaluation and Recommendations on Leadership Training," Report presented to Mennonite Brethren Missions/Service International (February, 1999).

with whether it is being held captive to such a bias? Perhaps a corporate cultural analysis could help the seminary look into a mirror and ask if this is the picture they want or whether work should be done to change it.

V. Globalization and Mennonite Mission/Service Agency Experience

A. Background

Indian missiologist, D. Preman Niles, in addressing a group of North American Mennonite mission administrators in 1996, said the term "world mission" arose in the 1970's, thus essentially declaring an end to the language of "foreign mission." This change in terminology signaled the emergence of a new era when the church is more truly global. The churches of the South are growing more rapidly than those in the West. The center of gravity has shifted not only numerically but also in mission outreach and self definition. In the 70's churches in Africa declared a moratorium on missionaries from the West, thus expressing a desire for space to do mission their way. These changes called for new relationships between churches in the South and those in the West.[33]

Two themes that recur with persistent tenacity are mutuality and accountability. These terms generally refer to working at power imbalances in finances, institutions, decision making, and knowledge. But it also refers to valuing each other's gifts, be they material or spiritual.

During the past 25 years, Mennonite mission and service agencies in the West (especially United States and Canada) have been repeatedly challenged to higher levels of mutuality, including being more open about decisions about resources, considering restructuring along regional lines thereby reducing established bilateral North-South relationships. Another recurring theme has been the call of Southern churches to strengthen their capacities, especially in leadership training.

These challenges for change became particularly clear in a series of mission consultations held in San Juan, Puerto Rico (1975), Hesston, Kansas (in conjunction with the Mennonite World Conference assembly in 1978), and Strasbourg, France (again in conjunction with MWC assembly in 1984). These three gatherings (all convened by MWC), while dominated by North American representatives, did have significant contingents of international participants. A fourth consultation convened by the Council of International Ministries (CIM) in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1987, was predominantly North American with a few international guests.

Robert Ramseyer, in his analysis of the first three gatherings, observed that an obvious polarity affected every issue discussed. These deliberations were between "participants who represented church as givers and those who saw themselves as

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[33]Preman D. Niles, "Partnership in Mission: A Model for World Mission Today," Paper presented to Council of International Ministries (Techny, IL: January, 1996), pp. 4-5.

receivers. This came up as part of almost any issue under discussion and effectively blocked efforts to move forward. Somehow, this needs to be resolved if progress toward mutuality is to be made."34

In a paper presented at the Hesston consultation, Ramseyer suggested that part of the problem in mutuality "stems from our inability to value all of the gifts which God has given the church."35 The first three consultations also called for greater attention to leadership training as a key to the building up of the capacity of Southern churches.

The 1987 Minneapolis gathering was composed almost exclusively of North American agency administrators and focused on greater interagency cooperation. In its concluding statement, the consultation committed participating agencies to "the importance of a cooperative ministry in order to avoid redundancy, misuse of scarce resources, and to represent our unity in Christ."36 The CIM executive secretary was asked to develop guidelines in subsequent CIM meetings.

During the late 1980's, the North American agencies focused a lot on interagency cooperation, attempting to reduce competition and turf issues and to assure field staff that "back home" the agencies had their act together. It seems, however, that in the early 1990's CIM agencies began to question whether they should be focusing so narrowly on the hegemony of North American agencies. The CIM meetings of 1992 and 1993 challenged agencies to think beyond North-South bilateralism (e.g., mother agency to daughter church overseas), to multidimensional relationships, geographic regional decision-making and a broadening role for the MWC.

Ronald Yoder, Mennonite Board of Missions (MBN) administrator and executive secretary of CIM, declared that if North American agencies continue to function bilaterally, regional groupings will not become significant. He challenged agencies to help strengthen regional structures in cooperation with MWC.37 This call was confirmed by the Mennonite International Study Project.

At the CIM meeting of December, 1992, the Findings Committee recommended that CIM serve as "a clearing house" for new long-term overseas planning, that CIM agencies negotiate common structures when two or more work in the same country, and (note this) CIM agencies state whether they are interested in "exploring the feasibility and implications of creating regional structures to prioritize, plan and coordinate"

34Robert Ramseyer, "Mutuality in Mission: How Far Have We Come?" Paper presented to Council of International Ministries (Techny, IL: December, 1986), p. 6.

35Ramseyer, "Mutuality in Mission: How Far Have We Come?" p. 3.

36See response by Mennonite Board of Missions to the recommendations of the meeting of the Council of International Ministries. Paper dated November 1, 1993.

37Ronald E. Yoder, "An Analysis and Future Perspective on International Relations Between North American and Overseas Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches and Organizations." Paper dated September, 1989.

activities jointly supported by CIM agencies and Mennonite/Brethren in Christ groups in the region.38

These recommendations were sufficiently controversial and open to interpretation to call for further definition. The following year, Walter Sawatsky redrafted the proposals for the 1993 CIM meeting. He watered down the first two recommendations, but expanded the third recommendation by calling for more forms of building 'koinonia structures' with MWC and its area committees. Encouragement was given to seek the help of other MWC regions for thinking about mission in our own North American context.39

The Findings Committee of the December 1993 meeting challenged participants to "rethink their self understanding by moving from being primarily program initiators to also being responders. First, to the invitation and call of overseas churches to partner with them. Second, to facilitate the connecting of congregations and groups with congregations and groups in other regions for fellowship, joint mission and service." MWC was encouraged to strengthen regional structures for these purposes.40

Experience thus far seems to indicate that the above two challenges have been reversed; that is, North American agencies are responding more readily to their North American constituent calls than to invitations from international partners. This perhaps should not be a surprise since North American structures are geared to respond first to their immediate constituency. In part, our structures impede implementation of our rhetoric.

Larry Miller, executive secretary of MWC, asked if Mennonites really are an international fellowship. Developing his challenge by using the New Testament term "koinonia," Miller said koinonia is about both solidarity (sharing) and accountability, both local and translocal. He continued, "I see few relations of international mutual accountability in the Mennonite World."41

Marlin Miller, former president of AMBS, challenged Mennonites to critically reassess their penchant toward congregationalism, which may have made sense in a Christendom context. A believers church, however, needs to transcend congregationalism. "If we confess that Christ is the head of the whole church, we must also acknowledge that the whole church includes all believers throughout the world..." and our structures should correspond to this spiritual reality in local, translocal, and global contexts.42

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[38]See "Addendum" to Findings Committee Report, CIM, December, 1992.

[39]Walter Sawatsky, "Mennonite Agency Responses to the CIM Recommendations of 1992." Paper presented to CIM, December, 1993.

[40]Findings Committee Report. Council of International Ministries. December, 1993.

[41]Larry Miller, "Mennonites: An International Fellowship." Paper presented to CIM, December, 1993.

[42]Marlin E. Miller, "God's Reconciled and Reconciling People in the World." Paper presented to CIM, December, 1993.

In subsequent years, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) took an initiative to be more intentional about its relationship with MWC and the global family of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. In 1997, MCC submitted a paper on "mutual expectations" to the MWC General Council meeting in Calcutta. In that paper, MCC committed itself to being of service to the MWC family (e.g., through its global infrastructure) and to bring to MWC major issues for counsel. Later that year, MCC and MWC made a commitment to have at least one executive officer of either organization attend as a "participating observer" each others executive committee meetings.

B. Mennonite International Study Project

In 1985, the Mennonite Church, at its biennial assembly, passed without much discussion an upbeat ten year vision that called for 500 additional workers for overseas ministry. According to MBM staff (Mennonite Board of Missions is the official mission board of the Mennonite Church) this vision for 500 workers was a last minute addition to the proposal, was not processed at all with MBM staff and certainly not with any overseas partners. For MBM staff such a unilateral proposal smacked of neopaternalism. It was this concern that motivated MBM to propose a world-wide listening process. This idea was shared with three other Mennonite Church mission boards (Franconia, Eastern Mennonite Mission, and Virginia) and MCC. These five agencies then invited Nancy Heisey and Paul Longacre to implement a two year listening process, focusing on conversations with Mennonite and other church leaders around the world. The primary questions revolved around what international partners expect of North American mission and service agencies and how all of us could work better together. This research was implemented from mid 1987 to mid 1989. The final report was published in 1990. The endeavor became known as the Mennonite International Study Project (MISP). Heisey and Longacre visited 45 countries and interviewed approximately 1,450 people.

This study focused anew the big issues of greater mutuality, accountability, leadership training and capacity building. At a meeting of the five participating agencies in December, 1989, to discuss the MISP report, they agreed to the following (among other things):

a. Commit more resources to enable overseas churches to send representatives to North America to minister and to share among our churches.

b. Commit more resources to increase South-South exchanges.

c. Become more "decentralized" in decision-making by: i) being more open with

overseas partners about what resources are available and to welcome partner participation in allocation decisions; ii) shift from bilateral

relationships with overseas partners to a more regional/multilateral process of decision-making.

d. Much greater attention to leadership training, especially training in the local context of the churches.

In November and December of 1999, I did some research (questionnaires and interviews) with the five sponsoring agencies to see how seriously the MISP recommendations were taken by the agencies. The interviews were done only with MBM administrators, given their proximity to AMBS. Having been the director of MCC's international programs from 1989-1999, I will presume to speak for MCC.

C. Responses to MISP Survey

Not surprisingly, since it was the initiating agency and the one needing to respond to a direct denominational mandate, MBM took MISP the most seriously in terms of wrestling with its policy implications. This was especially true in the early 1990's. In the mid 1990's, MBM implemented a project called Cana Venture which was the flip side of the MISP coin. Through this endeavor MBM listened in very thorough ways to its North American constituency. The Cana Venture recommendations were taken very seriously. In fact, MBM was dramatically restructured as a result of Cana Venture.

MCC administrators did not spend a lot of time talking about MISP or proposing policies to implement MISP. Rather, MCC leaders frequently asked themselves if "this" or "that" program direction was consistent with the intent of MISP. As did MBM, MCC also carried out a listening process with its North American constituency. This process was called Connecting Peoples. The recommendations emanating from the Connecting Peoples process included a strong affirmation of direct linkages between people groups for mutual sharing and benefit. This direction included an affirmation of local initiatives by congregations in the U.S. and Canada to reach out to other groups around the world, in both a receiving and giving mode. South to South linkages were also encouraged.

Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) was the only agency to write an extended formal response to the MISP report and recommendations.[43] Much of the document was an outline of EMM's goals, most of which would probably have been EMM's goals whether or not MISP had been implemented. But, there are some pointed references to MISP which are instructive.

EMM is clear about maintaining its bilateral relationships with the international churches it spawned through its missionary endeavors. EMM affirms the more decentralized regional approach suggested by MISP but only in those regional contexts

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[43]Eastern Mennonite Missions, "Response to the Mennonite International Study Project," (Salunga, PA: April, 1990).

where "there is a specific ministry focus which brings these regional clusters together."44 The impetus for any such regional co-operations should emerge from the local churches themselves. North American agencies need to be cautious about unduly urging such regional notions less these efforts be simply "another form of north to south power."45

EMM fully affirmed the Mennonite Church's ten year goals to expand missionary activity by committing themselves to expand missionary personnel (presumably North American) by up to 100 persons. Much of this expansion has been through youth and young adult programs, an area where EMM has taken considerable leadership.

The seriousness with which MISP was taken by the three remaining agencies is difficult to assess. In some cases, current administrators have come on the scene more recently and are barely aware of MISP (which of course says something).

What is virtually impossible to determine is whether the agencies would have done what they did even if MISP had not been done. One agency response to the questionnaire indicated that they are doing some of the things I mentioned, but not because of MISP. MBM and MCC administrators indicated that MISP recommendations sometimes affirmed directions they were inclined to take anyway. At other times, they would ask if "such and such" violates the intent of MISP or is in line with MISP.

One such example would be the immense surge of short term, mostly young adult, program initiatives. I think it would be hard to argue that MISP affirms the immensity of this direction. In fact, one could argue that our agencies are shifting, because of this surge, to becoming a mission/service education program for youth, thus spending proportionately more on self than on traditional mission functions such as training, evangelism, service, etc.

How can we then justify this direction in light of MISP? Perhaps it can be seen as an investment in mission for the future; i.e., more longer term mission/service workers. Another option could be to discuss this surge in North America as a "need." In other words, this is something good for our youth to do. It is good for their well-being, for the spiritual growth, as well as for the future of the mission/service enterprise. Having laid it on the table with international partners in this way perhaps opens up new possibilities for mutuality, each side expressing "needs" and how each might respond to the other.

Perhaps the most difficult recommendation suggested in MISP and also hinted at in the earlier discussion on CIM is this one: Become more "decentralized" in decision making by: 1. being more open with overseas partners about what resources are available and welcome partner participation in allocation decisions; 2. shift from

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44Ibid. p. 01.5.
45Ibid. p. 01.6.

bilateral relationships with overseas partners to a more regional/multilateral process of decision-making.

These directions certainly do address some of the globalization goals/criteria mentioned earlier, like vulnerability, mutuality, asymmetry of power and resources. But, why complicate our lives by throwing open our financial books? Why let go of the historic relations of "founding" mission and "birthed" church?

These questions do raise the profile of MWC and the regional groupings under its umbrella. But, MWC is in many ways a fledgling, weak organization. It is powerful only to the extent that member churches and their agencies give it power, by calling on it and the regional structures to perform certain tasks. It seems that some Southern leaders are calling for a more intentional global role for the MWC around the world. Some persons are beginning to refer to MWC as a "communion" rather than a "conference." There is, as yet, no clear definition of what is meant by "communion," but informal conversations seem to indicate that communion is about more mutuality and accountability. Something more intentional and significant than holding a big assembly every six years.

Given that MCC does not have a history of "mother church-daughter church" relationships around the world, it may be no surprise that of the five sponsoring agencies of MISP (or any other Mennonite agency) MCC has been the most intentional in defining a relationship vis a vis MWC. Contributing a large grant for MWC's Global Church Sharing Fund (GCS) was relatively easy to do although there are some critics who may feel the project should have had greater clarity of purpose right from the beginning. One could say that this is a good example of giving up control over the use of resources. Perhaps. But, if we are talking about vulnerability, the decision to "walk together" for a few years and for MCC to offer to bring "big questions" into the MWC space is a better example. What makes MCC vulnerable is this: to what extent is MCC really willing to have its style and ethos affected by such conversations? How will MCC respond if in an MWC forum MCC is asked why it hires non-Christians or why it partners in some places with Islamic organizations?

D. Possible Directions

1. In line with the revised CIM recommendations of December, 1992, I would like to see North American agencies seek more forms of building "koinonia structures" with MWC and the network of regional groupings under the MWC umbrella. This might involve discussions of a global structure for missions; but, it may make more sense to work within regional groupings as they naturally develop or, as cited in reference to EMM earlier, where they develop functional foci. In any case, North American agencies need to resist expanding or solidifying Northern structures.

2. As we think of broader global and/or regional procedures, agencies must not alienate congregations in the process. As Peter Rempel has said, "We need to balance the globalization of mission discernment and the localization of mission activity."46

3. As Robert Ramseyer indicated in the Hesston 1978 consultation, all gifts in the global church need to be valued. This, he contends, is one of the biggest impediments to mutuality. Ramseyer said that churches in the West depend much on the gifts of money, formal knowledge and organizational skill. The gifts God has given to the global church are much more rich than just these. The "Gift Inventory Project" currently being initiated by MWC is a step in the right direction. This project is an attempt to have churches in all parts of the world make an inventory of their "giftedness" and through the MWC structure these gifts will be made known to the wider community.

As delegates gather from around the world at the Global Anabaptist Missions Consultation (convened jointly by MWC and CIM) in Guatemala City in July, 2000, the Mennonite family will again have the opportunity to address the persistent questions of mutuality and accountability. Some voices are calling for nothing more than a time of celebration and fellowship. Others are calling for more advances in structural issues. Will the voices of the South (this time perhaps closer to a majority) be adequately heard by the North? Will their gifts be valued equally? Above all, may the Spirit of Christ be heard and followed.

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