Anabaptist Witness

A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission

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Mission & Education

BOOK REVIEWS

Editorial

When various Anabaptist groups joined the global Protestant mission movement in the nineteenth century, their outreach efforts soon included education. To take one example, in the late 1800s a small group of mission-minded young people from Pennsylvania met to discuss how they might reach out to their neighbors through Sunday schools and service projects. This led to the initial formation of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (now Eastern Mennonite Missions, or EMM) in 1914, and in the 1930s the first Mennonite missionaries were commissioned to go to Shirati, in present-day Tanzania. The missionaries initially focused on planting churches and fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20). However, it wasn't long until the need for literacy in the churches and communities became a critical focus, leading to the formation of primary schools and other forms of education. Since then, many other Anabaptist groups have engaged in similar mission efforts in their home communities and around the world.

In this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, we intended to explore how Anabaptists and Mennonites define mission in relation to education, or education in relation to mission.

Steiner puts it simply, saying, "Education is mission!" He sees the vocation of teaching as a call to Christian ministry and addresses how Anabaptist educators could be missional in various settings and forms, emphasizing contextualization as critical. Steiner first provides definitions of mission and education and then draws upon teacher education programs at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA), public schools, private schools, and international schools to exemplify how Anabaptist educators could be missional in respective contexts.

Jesus modeled relationship-building and care for the whole person throughout his earthly ministry. Amstutz's first-person account as a retired pastor and current high school teacher also highlights the importance of "being with" his students and creating space for them to "be with" each other. Students feel seen, heard, and cared for as they are given the opportunity to share at a deeper level about their experiences, challenges, and faith, resulting in a genuine learning community.

In a similar vein, Minchala and Santillán (in their article written in Spanish) share a bit of their experience as teacher and student where education along with faith and character formation takes place within a literature classroom context. Together, through text and original illustrations, the authors engage in a dialogue around a focus text and their responses to five questions. Their perspectives confront the heteronormative patriarchy that has traditionally been the lens for mission and the Anabaptist high school experience.

Hershberger's essay on his teaching experience in Iraq could be juxtaposed with the caution about cultural insensitivity that Steiner discusses regarding formal schooling within an international mission context. Hershberger names it "the thorn of cultural imperialism." He reviews his role as missionary and teacher in Iraq from various perspectives using Jesus's parable of the sower.

From another international context, Lapp recounts the history of Mennonite Central Committee's response to the invitation from Egyptian church and educational leaders to provide nursing and English language training. This has led to a more recent emphasis on peacebuilding education. Lapp argues that while some might see this as a Western imperialist agenda, Egyptians identify these educational services as an asset leading to progress at both individual and national levels. This has opened the door to the gospel of peace in Christian and Muslim relations.

Rahma shares a bit of her story in which she, along with her Indonesian husband and two sons, are responding to the need for education in an urban slum community in Jakarta. With a heart for young children and their families in this marginalized context, Rahma recounts their experiences of starting House of Hope, a school that lays an educational foundation while also embodying the love of Jesus.

Glick examines theological education as mission in late twentieth-century England. His historical account showcases how theological education evolved and became "cross-pollinated" between North American missionaries and indigenous Christians in England.

Also within the context of theological education, Moya shares from his vast experience over several decades of missional tasks in various Latin American contexts as well as the United States. He calls us to engage in mission that "abandons conformity to the systems and assumes conflict with them, resisting through nonviolent means in order to participate in God's work of reconciliation." Moya also warns against the temptation to claim the inside track on our understanding of theological truths without regard for others' perspectives, experiences, and cultural insights.

Throughout this particular issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, you will have the privilege of reading about and learning from the various perspectives and experiences shared by the contributing authors. Serving state-side and/or internationally, each person shares part of their story, and you will be challenged to consider some of the opportunities and challenges that emerge when the goals of education and mission intersect.

The issue closes with book reviews on topics such as African Independent Churches, Christ-followers in various religions, and Mennonite Central Committee's Peace Section.

Guest Editors:

Shin Ji Kang (James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA)
Ron Shultz (Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA)

Education Is Mission

Don Steiner

Education is mission!

This assertion is active in its aims and creative, constructive, and engaging in its delivery. For Anabaptist educators, the vocation of teaching is a call to Christian ministry regardless of the type of education or the location of that ministry. To posture "education *as* mission" diminishes education's importance. Education is not next to mission nor is it of less importance or value than other forms of ministry. Rather, the thesis "education *is* mission" declares a dynamic encounter with others, a presence with students to share in their struggles and successes. For some, this will necessitate a redefinition of mission from an obligation to "an alignment with God's purposes in the world."[1] Accordingly, all Christians are missional. Teachers, however, by nature of their roles are in a unique position to minister and influence their students. They engage students, ask probing questions, and tell the truth. In the scriptures, they are revered and hold a sacred trust.[2]

"Education is mission" asserts an emphatic claim that schooling is a valid means of working toward God's ultimate purpose of redemption. We may ask: From an Anabaptist perspective, what missional framework, then, is useful for educators teaching in formal schools, in both local and global contexts? By what means? By what message? And with what results? What do we need to learn, unlearn, relearn from present and past attempts to make schooling an effective means for sustaining and transforming lives to bring healing, shalom, and hope to those in distress while providing life-giving energy to those who are flourishing?

Donovan D. Steiner (PhD, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale), is faculty emeritus at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He has taught at the K–12 levels and has served as a teacher educator for over fifty years. He continues teaching online courses in education and serving in interim teaching and administrative positions. He and his wife, Rita, are members of Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, and are founding board members of Lezha Academic Center in Lezhe, Albania. They have three adult children and enjoy being with their eight grandchildren.

1 Stanley W. Green and James R. Krabill, eds., *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Perspective* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2015), 14.

2 See, for example, 2 Timothy 2:24; Luke 6:40, Ephesians 4:11–12.

My focus in the following is on how Anabaptist educators can be missional within the context of formal public and private education from preschool through seminary while considering contextualization as a means of missional practice.

Missional Approach

Being missional requires that the good news of Jesus be "rooted in scripture, lived in community, enunciated in word, [and] enacted in deed."[3] When Christian educators meet these criteria in their respective roles, missional initiatives occur. For Anabaptist educators, the first two criteria form a foundational pedagogy where beliefs and practices are deeply rooted in scripture and caring communities exist in classrooms. The third criterion, enunciation of faith, appears repeatedly in Mennonite school and university documents as well as in classrooms and interactions with faculty; when "enunciation of faith opportunities" are limited or denied in public education, it is still possible to embody a theology of presence. Missiologist Calvin Shenk proposes, moreover, that "meaningful presence cultivates love and openness in contrast to imposition of one's convictions."[4] A theology of presence demonstrates the gospel and opens doors to faith building, ever patient and fully extended though authentic relationships. Illustrating the fourth criterion, "enacted in deed," theologian Stanley Hauerwas observes that Christian community lives a set of values "visible to the world," where they strive for reconciliation, "tell the truth, honor the poor, . . ., and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God.[5]

To be missional is to be attuned to God's passion to redeem the world, as exemplified by Jesus. Accordingly, missiologist Wilbert Shenk affirms, "At the very heart of Anabaptist belief is the unquestioning centrality of Jesus, who is understood as the clearest reflection we have of God's purposes in the world."[6] Anabaptist educators can take advice from Ephesians 5:1–2 to act as Jesus would. Consequently, their students will build a narrative about who God is as they interact with their teachers who model Jesus. Proselytizing is not needed; sharing God's kingdom is! Further guidance comes from Titus 2:7, whereby all teachers

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3 Green and Krabill, eds., 15.

4 Calvin E. Shenk, "Presence and Patience," in *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*, eds. James R. Krabill et al. (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2005), 230–34; 231.

5 Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 46.

6 Wilbert R. Shenk, *Why Missional and Mennonite Should Make Perfect Sense*, eds. James R. Krabill, et al. (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2005), chap. 1, https://web-s-ebscohost-com.amproxy.palni.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=c777edbe-9719-402e-acdc-7d89f-c2e084a%40redis&vid=0&format=EK.

are admonished to show themselves in all respects to be models of good works, and in their teaching to show integrity and dignity.

To determine how Anabaptist educators become missional in public arenas, we will first define education and then explore how Anabaptist educators can function in public school settings.

Education Defined[7]

Philosophies of education, with a continuum stretching from behavioristic teacher-centered approaches to inquiry student-centered approaches, and how one defines education are likely to determine the content of curriculum and means of delivery for formal education school structures, whether those structures are public, private, or alternative approaches such as homeschooling or online instruction. Historian Bernard Bailyn describes education as "the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across generations."[8] This definition implies that education is a conversation between generations, with the transfer of knowledge and values as primary aims. Parker Palmer uses the metaphor of dance to describe education: "It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn."[9] Catholic educator Thomas Groome sees education as an ontological involvement that shapes "the very 'being' of people—both who they become and how they live in the world."[10] And William Butler Yeats is said to have authored the well-known quote, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."[11] Of these various definitions, those that affirm learning as empowering, invitational, and relational are most consistent with Anabaptist missional purposes, which all focus foundationally on growing relationships of healing and hope.

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7 Types of education include formal, nonformal, and informal. Formal education is based on a set curriculum and is usually viewed as schooling. Informal education includes online communities or discussion forums, while nonformal education includes community, early learning programs, and adult education. This discussion is limited to formal education.

8 Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 14, quoted in Thomas H. Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1998), 35.

9 Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 13, 25.

10 Groome, *Educating for Life*, 35.

11 Robert Strong, "'Education Is Not the Filling of a Pail, but the Lighting of a Fire': It's an Inspiring Quote, but Did WB Yeats Say It?," *The Irish Times*, October 15, 2013, https://www.irishtimes.com/tags/robert-a-strong/.

Education is also defined by the personhood of each teacher. In Palmer's words, teachers "teach who [they] are"![12] Thus, it is significant that Anabaptist teachers in public schools are not white knights on a mission to save education but rather servant leaders who, through a calm and confident presence, build relationships with their students, promote scholarship and inquiry, challenge inequities, advocate for justice, and provide life-giving opportunities. In the process, they address the very soul and spirit of the students they teach.

Public education in the United States has traditionally been represented by students in a "melting pot" of ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and various socioeconomic levels characteristic of a pluralistic society. It has been a great experiment in democracy, with a primary aim of bringing together students of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds to forge a national community. When carried out well, such education enhances human development and leads to increased mobility and economic progress.

This traditional representation is quickly changing, however, to a "tossed salad" concept of recognizing individual learning preferences and ideological, religious, and gender differences that often contribute to political polarization. Anabaptist educators, regardless of where they teach, have been taught to honor the diversity among their students and to advocate for all. They are invitational and relational in their praxis, and they seek solutions for broken systems. As a result, their students often find success and satisfaction in their classroom learning and extracurricular and intramural activities despite the ferment surrounding them.

So, can Anabaptist educators be missional in their respective educational settings? The answer is an emphatic yes! But it requires contextualization.

Contextualization

Given the dynamic and changing nature of society in the twenty-first century, what are the implications for Anabaptist educators, regardless of whether they teach in public, private, or alternative settings in the United States or abroad? The global world is rapidly evolving, and the demographics of many communities are quite different from what they were one century ago. The predictions of the 1960s that the minority population will become the majority is fast becoming a reality. According to the Pew Research Center, if all the refugees and migrants lived in one country, that country would be the fifth most populous country in the world.[13] Harrisonburg City Public Schools system is a good example of this

12 Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, 1.

13 Phillip Connor, "International Migration: Key Findings from the U.S., Europe and the world," Pew Research Center, December 15, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/15/international-migration-key-findings-from-the-u-s-europe-and-the-world/.

population shift. The district has 10 schools and 6,505 students, with 68 percent minority enrollment, 37 percent classified as English Language Learners, and migration as the primary driver.[14]

In the 1990s anthropologist and missiologist Paul Hiebert projected that in the new global era "we must move beyond anti-colonialism to world thinking" and recognize the emerging interlocking sociocultural systems throughout the world. Hiebert asked, "How do we bring theology and the social sciences together in missiology?"[15] This is a question for Anabaptist educators to answer regardless of their education setting.

Missiologist and anthropologist Darrell Whiteman says, "Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context."[16] For Anabaptist teachers, contextualization includes teaching with culturally relevant strategies and providing leadership in cultural proficiency not only in the classroom but also in policies and practices of schools as bridge-building processes.

Much could be written about "education is mission" within the context of Mennonite higher education. The following description of Eastern Mennonite University's undergraduate and graduate teacher education program seeking to contextualize provides just one example of such.

Teacher Education at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, Virginia)

While Eastern Mennonite University's (EMU's) undergraduate and graduate teacher education program accommodates life in schools as it is, it also promotes engaged learning, competence in knowledge, reflection in decision-making, and an "ethic of care" more aligned with Groome's and Yeats's definitions of education (above). Specifically, a major role of the teacher preparation program is to engage teachers and teacher candidates in the broader curricular discussions involving faith values. This helps empower teachers and administrators in public and private arenas to influence change and transform structures.

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14 "Overview of Harrisonburg City Public Schools," Harrisonburg City Public Schools website, accessed March 29, 2023, https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/virginia/districts/harrisonburg-city-pblc-schs-110399. (Note: This report is based on data from the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 school years.)

15 Paul G. Hiebert, "Missiological Education for a Global Era," in *Missiological Education for the Twenty-First Century: The Book, the Circle, and the Sandals*, eds. J. Dudley Woodberry et al. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 34–42; 37.

16 Darrell L. Whiteman, "Three Functions of Contextualization," Mission Musings, July 22, 2017, https://munsonmissions.org/2017/07/22/three-functions-of-contextualization/.

EMU's undergraduate and graduate program uses the byline *becoming teachers who teach boldly in a changing world through an ethic of care and critical reflection*, with the distinction of integrating Anabaptist principles within the profession of teaching. These principles—which emphasize community, caring relationship, service to others, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and stewardship of resources—help EMU graduates embody and enact culturally responsive caring in their classrooms. This includes, for example, using restorative justice and trauma and resilience practices in public schools. As a result of learning these restorative practices, many EMU graduates have taken the concept back to their respective schools for implementation, and EMU's graduate teacher education program has become highly influential in this area of practice, not only in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia but also in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.[17]

Although EMU's educational philosophy is generally aligned with curriculum used in local public and private schools, there are times when philosophical differences are acknowledged. Nevertheless, in its leadership role as innovators in education over the years, the Education Department at EMU has contributed to teacher development literally throughout the world, including local and regional public schools and Mennonite Education Agency-affiliated schools. Many EMU graduates are on the "teaching mission field" now serving in public schools, private schools, Mennonite schools, and online schools, in both nonformal and informal education contexts. Others leave a rich legacy of service, where their commitment to excellence and their dedication to their students and communities continues to make an exponential difference over the years.

Role of Anabaptist Educators within Public Schools

So what specific roles do Anabaptist educators serve within public school structures? Some would respond, "None!" These respondents may cite separation of church and state, with the caveat that personal witness is neither acceptable nor legal—and they would be correct. On this matter, however, school law generally addresses situations whereby schools impose rather than expose religious teachings. For example, although some of the larger public schools offer a course in biblical literature, they would challenge outright the practice of praying on the fifty-yard line of a football game, opening a school board meeting with prayer, or including an alter call at a school assembly.

Other critics may say that, given the aims of public education, the problems inherent in the educational system are too great and complex and therefore

17 While it is true that many public schools of education prepare their teachers to practice conflict transformation in public schools, doing so does not make them proclaimers of the gospel; that is not their mission. However, in many cases the "healing and hope" message is conveyed nevertheless.

Christian teachers should not engage.[18] They say education is not capable of solving the malaise that grips society, that curriculum is obsolete and riddled with inequities and structural racism. They assert that schools are layered with Eurocentric and gender-biased curricula, have poor learning performance, and are beyond reform. School violence and complaints from parents about losing control of their "share" of the public enterprise predominate in the news. Teachers are weary and stressed, torn apart and exhausted.

While critics of formal education can be harsh, often they are accurate in their indictments. The list of faults perpetrated by education is long. However, one only needs to read the historical foundations of education to find that controversies, calls for reform, and politics have taken place throughout the decades and centuries and have become ingrained in the institution over time. Ferment over public education is not new.

Criticisms of education that plague public schools will continue to be ongoing since schools reflect the aspirations and values as well as the angst of broader society. This bedevilment manifests itself from generation to generation and is certainly a reality to be addressed. But what better place for Anabaptist teachers to serve than in bringing leadership to this environment, precisely at a time when the world needs new vision to make society better for all? Theirs is not only a constructive task but also a healing ministry. As our Anabaptist theology reminds us, connecting God's healing and hope with a broken and hurting world will require engagement with that world.

To illustrate, two EMU teacher educators, Kendal Swartzentruber and Jesse Rodriguez, began teaching special education in local public schools. They collaborated to create a peer mentorship program that featured a classroom blog with videos, photos, and text published by their students. Both educators, now in the service of the Virginia Department of Education, currently coordinate the "I'm Determined" project, a statewide project involving special educators to resource youth with special needs and their families.[19] As Kendal and Jesse fold justice, love, and humility into their teaching, both of them experience their work as an expression of Anabaptist values.[20]

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18 For example, some believe that Anabaptist educators who teach in public schools are contributing to the very problems of society, such as structural racism, and therefore should not participate or seek employment in public education. These critics see public schools as a new form of colonialism.

19 Lauren Jefferson, "Alumni Educators Co-produce Short Film Series on Teenagers in the Disability Community," *EMU Weekly News Digest*, March 21, 2023, https://emu.edu/now/news/2023/alumni-educators-co-produce-short-film-series-on-teenagers-in-the-disability-community/.

20 Emails from Kendal Swartzentruber and Jesse Rodriguez to the author, March 28, 2023. Other educators claiming no religious background have contributed in special ways as well to the project.

Some Anabaptist educators experience more academic freedom than others to express their faith in public schools. This is often true for those who serve as professors in various disciplines in public universities as opposed to those teaching at the public K–12 levels. For instance, one Mennonite mathematics professor, now retired, who taught at a state university always sought to integrate his faith with learning. On a routine basis he introduced himself at the beginning of each semester with his own faith statement, which resulted in follow-up conversations with his students about the meaning of life. Some of his former students still correspond with him today.

Roles of Anabaptist Educators within Private Schools

While public education invites educators to address a myriad of challenges, private education is also a major arena of service for Anabaptist educators. Although the contexts of private school educators vary, most allow more latitude than public schools do to "enunciate the word" as an expectation for meeting the mission statements of their respective schools. These educators teach in Mennonite preschools, elementary schools, and secondary schools as well as Mennonite universities and seminaries, where the expectation is that all criteria for being missional is explicit.

What are the specific roles of these Anabaptist educators? Palmer Becker reminds us that Anabaptist Christians aspire to "help reconcile people to God," "reconcile people to each other," and "be ambassadors of reconciliation to the world" to enable the transformation of hearts and minds.[21] This is the work of Mennonite education. Educator and historian John Roth asserts, and correctly so, that "at its core, education is the means by which humans negotiate how they relate to each other, how they engage with the natural world, and how they understand ultimate questions of goodness, justice, and truth."[22]

Andrea Wenger, director of advancement for Eastern Mennonite School (K–12) in Harrisonburg, Virginia, shares the following incident that illustrates this connection between education and mission:

> Shannon Roth, Eastern Mennonite School U.S. history and government teacher, went to college to pursue a career in ministry. Midway though, she changed her Bible major to secondary education.

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21 Palmer Becker, "What Is an Anabaptist Christian?," in *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Perspective*, eds. Stanley W. Green and James R. Krabill (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2015), chap. 13, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.amproxy.palni.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=7200e7ad-e886-460c-9304-8889388088d9%40redis&vid=0&format=EK.

22 John D. Roth, *Teaching That Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2011), 16.

> "I didn't become a minister," Shannon has been heard to muse.
>
> The high school principal, Justin King, calls her out, saying "You ARE a minister! Our teachers are ministers in the Anabaptist-tradition every day. And the world needs Anabaptist education now more than ever.[23]

Anabaptist Formal Schooling within an International Mission Context

In 2004, Klementina and Dini Shahini, native Albanians, were living and working in Chesapeake, Virginia. Klementina proposed to Virginia Mennonite Missions (VMM) a plan that grew out of her master's thesis—to start a Christian school with an Anabaptist perspective in their native city of Lezhe, Albania. In 2007, VMM sent Klementina and two couples to Albania to conduct a feasibility study in Lezhe. One of the couples was well versed in business and the other in education. While conducting their study, the group had a chance encounter with the Prime Minister of Albania, Sali Berisha, who inquired about their purpose. When he heard about their desire to start a Christian school, he offered encouragement, saying, "We are in need of quality education, and we would welcome such a school."

Four years later, when enough resources had been generated stateside to start operations, the Shahinis moved back to Lezhe from Chesapeake. In 2011 Virginia Mennonite Missions launched Lezha Academic Center (LAC). The inauguration of the new school occurred that September, with an official approval letter signed by Prime Minister Berisha. Local dignitaries helped cut the ribbon.

That fall LAC opened with twenty students and four expatriate teachers; three of the teachers were recent graduates of Eastern Mennonite University's teacher education program, and one was a new graduate of Messiah University (Grantham, Pennsylvania). A retired public school educator and his wife from Ohio joined Klementina in providing administrative guidance.

Now, twelve years later, having survived an earthquake and the Covid pandemic, LAC is a bustling school with one hundred eighty students grades 1–12, with eleven Albanian teachers, three expatriate teachers, and a retired cardiologist and his wife from Pennsylvania who teach each spring semester; he teaches biology, and she serves as a teacher's aide in the elementary grades. Of the twenty-five or so graduates of LAC each year, most enroll in universities in Albania, Europe, Canada, and stateside. Many attend Mennonite colleges, with a higher percentage gravitating to Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg, Canada, or LCC International in Lithuania. Currently, LAC is an affiliate member of

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23 Andrea Schrock Wenger, "Mennonite Teachers: We See You," Mennonite Church USA (blog), May 03, 2022, https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/mennonite-teachers-we-see-you/.

Mennonite Schools Council, a network of Mennonite early childhood through grade twelve schools sponsored by Mennonite Education Agency.

This grade 1–12 school, developed as an *education is mission* school, serves as a case study for missions in an international context. While LAC is entrusting the future of their missional program to God, for now there are strong signs that the school is contributing in significant ways to both church and community.

Three Lezha Academic Center (LAC) Graduate Profiles

Oriola, an LAC student, was baptized by Dini Shahini while in high school. She attended law school at the University of London, England, and is now a practicing attorney in London. In June 2022, she interpreted the sermon at the joint Virginia Mennonite Missions and Lezha Academic Center's tenth-year celebration.

Three Roma sisters,[24] all graduates of LAC, now live in Winnipeg, Canada. Two graduated from CMU: one is currently a nurse, the other employed. The younger sister is enrolled at CMU.

Donaldo, an LAC student who transferred to Central Christian in Ohio and then was encouraged to attend Eastern Mennonite University by his counselor, is now in medical school in Cyprus.

Building Community through Education

More missional stories of the unfolding of God's kingdom could be told. The following anecdote, for example, shows how Klementina Shahini has built local community capacity through LAC.

One day a Roma father came to Klementina's office wishing to enroll his son and daughter at LAC. The father told her, however, that he had no job and no money for tuition. Sensing the sincerity of the request, Klementina asked a local contractor and supporter of LAC if he would consider hiring this Roma father so he might provide for his family and pay tuition for his son and daughter. Today, both son and daughter are enrolled at LAC, and the Roma father is a faithful participant in the local Mennonite-affiliated church's weekday literacy program.

Challenges of Formal Education in an International Context

When evaluating formal schooling within an international context, critics observe that mission schools and teachers purvey Eurocentric curriculums insensitive to local culture. Thus, they suggest that any engagement in such an enterprise cannot and should not be considered missional since it is likely to result in unintended negative consequences that disassociate students from their heritage, such as cultural domination. While this certainly is a danger, it is an insufficient reason for not moving forward. Formal schooling within an international context is a

24 "Roma" people are sometimes referred to colloquially as "gypsies."

worrisome endeavor, but to disengage and not attempt to learn from the colonialistic past is not an option if we are to participate in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20).

Some critics also assert that "institutional building" is counterproductive, especially in international or cross-cultural settings, and that they would not support establishing a school such as LAC. They maintain that we need more church plants through which to proclaim the message of Christ, not more missional institutions. Others remind us that that the research for "schooling" as a means for missional outreach is deeply flawed and that endeavors such as LAC will likely result in a curriculum that is not only insensitive to the local culture but also a "brain drain" on the community.

Such criticisms can be helpful since listening is important to the process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. The anecdote to addressing these concerns is authentic contextualization. When successful partnerships are formed and sustained, cultural barriers diminish. As a result, expanded opportunities for youth are created and leadership capacity emerges for the future.

Today's global world calls Anabaptist educators to equip young people with "tough sandals" and spiritual direction so they can discern where to go and how to serve.

Education Is Mission

In conclusion, we again consider the question posed at the beginning: "From an Anabaptist perspective, what missional framework is useful for Anabaptist educators teaching in formal schools in both local and global contexts?" In a fast-paced changing world, Anabaptist educators will seek solutions with reflection, all the while advancing the sacred task of transforming lives, building community capacity, and walking alongside those with whom they relate. In so doing, they will incorporate elements of Christian discipleship such as restorative justice and an ethic of care, which serve as markers of the essence of being missional—proclamation of the gospel. Such work is a Holy Task!

In a paraphrase of Daniel 12:3, Groome reminds us that "those who teach others unto justice shall shine like the stars of heaven forever."[25] And from the book of Matthew, he adds: "It seems that the decisive criterion by which our lives will be measured for eternity is how we have cared for the neighbor most in need."[26] This is why education is mission!

25 Groome, *Educating for Life*, 35.

26 Groome, 86.

Being with People

Jim Amstutz

This is one of the tragedies in education today. We have a lot of people who don't recognize that being a teacher *is* being with people.

—bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

When schools across the world shut down during the Covid pandemic, I realized within days the essence of why I teach: it's being with the students. Imparting information via Zoom could not recreate the living, breathing, shared space of my classroom. Sure, we could talk about the lesson, share anecdotes, and stay caught up with one another. But we were not *with* each other.

While on staff at Bluffton (OH) University I read Thomas Groome's *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*.[1] This became a foundational work for my understanding of education and mission. When I began teaching at Lancaster Mennonite School (LMS)[2] after a career with church-related ministries and twenty-five years of pastoral ministry, I knew intuitively that simply imparting knowledge was not the goal. It was about information informed by action and reflection, plus the inspiration of the biblical story and discernment of the classroom community. That's shared praxis. Knowledge alone does not lead to wisdom unless there is analysis of power and awareness of its impact. Teaching high school juniors and seniors about church history, practical theology, and spiritual formation is most effective when we are sharing the same space.

Jim S. Amstutz teaches and coaches at Lancaster (PA) Mennonite High School following twenty-five years of pastoral ministry. He serves as a trustee at Bluffton (OH) University and chair of the Community Action Partnership Board in Lancaster. He earned a DMin degree from Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA) in missional leadership in 2008. He is the author of Threatened with Resurrection: Self-Preservation and Christ's Way of Peace *(Herald, 2002) and numerous articles/chapters on peacebuilding, appreciative inquiry, and missional leadership. Jim is married to Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, and they have three adult children and four grandchildren. They attend Blossom Hill Mennonite Church in Lancaster.*

1 Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991).

2 LMS is a private pre-K to Grade 12 school in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, with increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity.

Table 5 from fall 2021 Spiritual Formation class at Lancaster Mennonite School out for a meal before heading to college in 2022. From left to right: Sarah Steckbeck, Hiedi Gbote, Allison LePrell, Sean Swartley, and Ryan Walker.

In her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, the late bell hooks reflects on how she created space for everyone in her classroom: "Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy. . . . Who speaks? Who listens? And why?"[3] Jane[4] spoke to me after class one day in a panic, exclaiming, "I can't do my Capstone project!" When I asked her why, she said, "Because I've been homeless for almost the whole semester."

Like countless teens across the country, Jane had been couch-surfing after her guardian kicked her out of the house for violating curfew. At the time, I was still Chair of the Lancaster County Coalition to End Homelessness and invited Jane to do her Capstone project on youth homelessness. I gave her links to data from the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and one of the guidance counselors agreed to be her mentor for the Capstone research and presentation. "On a single night," Jane wrote, "nearly 36,000 unaccompanied youth were counted as homeless. I was one of them." Jane found the courage to lean into her circumstance, claim her voice, and own her story. Another family at school took Jane in for the rest of the school year, and she graduated on time.

3 hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 39–40.

4 The student's name has been changed to protect their identity.

In *Whistling Vivaldi*,[5] social psychologist Claude Steele demonstrates the power of stereotypes and their impact on learning. His strong case for collaborative learning is one of the reasons I chose to incorporate large six-sided tables in my classrooms instead of desks. We learn from and with one another, especially when the groups are diverse. Vivian Gussin Paley writes in her insightful book *White Teacher*: "It is often hard to learn from people who are just like you. Too much is taken for granted. Homogeneity is fine in a bottle of milk, but in a classroom it diminishes the curiosity that ignites discovery."[6]

Table groups in "Spiritual Formation," the dual enrollment course I teach through Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA), function as small groups during the semester-long course at Lancaster Mennonite. I intentionally place students in groups outside of their friend group and try to balance gender, race, and socioeconomic backgrounds. I invite them to create community over time, with a common commitment to keep Christ at the center and love one another into a safe and brave space. I know that I can only *position* the students to have this experience; it cannot be forced. But when it happens, students point to that group experience and say, "I thought I knew my classmates, but now I realize we rarely share our truth at that deeper level."

Honesty and trust can lead to vulnerability and the love shared within genuine friendships. Many table groups have stayed in touch after graduation and are intentional about getting together in person. After all, true community is situated in teaching and in being with people.

5 Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 100.

6 Vivian Gussin Paley, *White Teacher* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, 1989), 56.

Exhalando la educación disfrazada de bondad

Educación, arte y fe

Doménica Santillán y Jonathan Minchala

Este es un ensayo creativo/entrevista sobre educación, arte y fe. Para comenzar quisiera hacer una breve introducción sobre dos ideas centrales que vivo desde mi quehacer educativo y como persona de fe que se ubica dentro de la tradición anabautista.

Primero, me parece útil marcar la diferencia entre «instrucción» y «educación». Charles L. Glenn afirma que la «instrucción se refiere a la enseñanza de habilidades e información, y educación, a la formación de carácter, valores y el desarrollo de la persona».[1] Por lo tanto, continúa Glenn, no podemos hablar de educación sin «presuponer una idea de lo que es el bien».[2] Si esto es así, resulta ingenuo pensar que podemos ser neutrales a la hora de involucrarnos en la educación. Más bien debemos preguntarnos, como ya he apuntado en otro escrito comentando a Alasdair MacIntyre: «¿en qué historia o tradición están ubicados

Doménica Santillán Manjarrez (Quito, 2005) es artista y estudiante «Senior» de colegio. Está interesada en muchos tipos de artes: toca el piano a escondidas, es cantante y dibujante emergente. Ha participado en obras teatrales como «A Christmas Carol» y «The Boy Who Fell into a Book». Formó parte del Summer program en SCAD en Savannah, Georgia. Tiene planeado escribir muchos relatos para exorcizar algunos demonios o simplemente asustar a sus compañeros. Su página de ilustraciones es @Lazzuzli. Todas las ilustraciones que acompañan este artículo son de Lazuli, la voz de la escritura y de los dibujos de Doménica Santillán.

Jonathan Minchala Flores (Guayaquil, 1991) estudió grado y posgrado en comunicación, literatura y estudios de la cultura. Actualmente cursa el doctorado en Literatura Hispanoamericana sobre literatura y teología de la liberación en clave deleuziana. Constantemente tentado por la teología, ha sido co-host en el podcast Merienda Menonita y A Imagen y Semejanza. Es profesor de Literatura, Investigación y Justicia, sirve en la mesa directiva de la Iglesia Unida de Ecuador, y también es miembro de la Red Ecuatoriana de Fe y de la Fundación Josías.

1 Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff, eds., *Schooling Christians "Holy Experiments" in American Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 90.

2 Ibíd., 90.

nuestros juicios, valores y virtudes que compartimos a nuestros estudiantes?».[3] En mis clases, me ubico abiertamente como un seguidor de Jesús de tradición anabautista. Desde ese lugar de enunciación gesto mis aproximaciones académicas. No trato de parecer neutral pero sí intento acoger la diferencia de la que estamos llamados a aprender por el hecho mismo de ser cristianos y no simplemente por parecer «civilizados» y tolerantes. Tal como afirma Rowan Williams:

> El cristiano no se pregunta cómo sabe que la religión cristiana es exclusiva y universalmente verdadera; simplemente trabaja sobre la base de la visión «crística» para el bien humano, comprometiéndose con creyentes de otras tradiciones sin inquietud ni proselitismo, ni una actitud defensiva, sin reclamar una perspectiva «exclusivista» que invalide a otras, ni una absorción «inclusivista» de otras perspectivas en la suya propia; ni siquiera una metateoría «pluralista», situando a todas las tradiciones en un único mapa y relativizando sus vidas concretas.[4]

Este diálogo «crístico» trato de implementarlo en mis clases. Reconocer a Jesucristo en las caras de mis estudiantes y en prácticas religiosas incluso lejanas al anabautismo. La tradición anabautista, al enfocarse en el discipulado y no simplemente en creencias proposicionales, nos permite participar de un diálogo creativo y abierto que no se agota en simples certezas absolutas sobre temas que pueden ser incluso controversiales.

En segundo lugar, creo que es fundamental reconocer que nuestros aprendizajes, tanto dentro como fuera de la iglesia, se gestan en una comunidad donde tenemos modelos que podemos seguir. Tal como ha apuntado Luis Marcos Tapia en otro escrito en esta misma revista: «la imitación es exactamente el punto clave que diferencia un/a pastor/a anabautista».[5] Creo que la imitación es también el punto clave que diferencia a un profesor/a que se reconoce como cristiano anabautista. La educación post pandemia se inclinó hacia una virtualidad que me parece peligrosa porque, aunque necesaria en su momento, confunde educar con instruir. No estoy hablando de la necesidad de una institución para que se pueda otorgar educación sino de hacer presente el cuerpo, las prácticas y la vitalidad que conecta el material que estudiamos con la cotidianeidad y el carácter.

Siguiendo a James W. McClendon, Jr. y aplicándolo a la educación, no podemos reducir la educación (discipulado) a una mera transmisión de proposiciones.

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3 Jonathan Minchala, «Ética de la imprudencia», en *Anabaptist World*, 4 de abril de 2022: https://anabaptistworld.org/etica-de-la-imprudencia/.

4 Rowan Williams, «Trinidad y pluralismo» en Gavin D'Costa, ed., *La unicidad cristiana reconsiderada: El mito de una teología de las religiones pluralista* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 39.

5 Luis Marcos Tapia, «"Imítenme a mí", el rol pastoral en una comunidad de fe anabautista», en *Anabaptist Witness*, 10 de agosto de 2016: https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/2016/08/imitenme-a-mi-el-rol-pastoral-en-una-comunidad-de-fe-anabautista/.

> Desafío la afirmación reduccionista de que, en la medida en que la ética narrativa es ética, puede ser reducida, sin perder su contenido, a proposiciones que expresan principios morales. En resumen, contra la afirmación de que la ética narrativa no necesita narrativa. Mi defensa es que la reducción presupone que existen de hecho narrativas morales cristianas, por ejemplo, los Evangelios. Busca mostrar cómo los Evangelios transmiten, si bien no mediante principios proposicionales, su enseñanza moral. Lo hacen principalmente identificando personajes (Jesús y los discípulos) y un ámbito o escenario (el reino venidero). Estos personajes están unidos por un argumento: la historia del evangelio. Esta historia se convierte en una exigencia moral, en una guía moral, en un telos moral para los lectores solo en la medida en que captamos el sentido de la historia, reconocemos al que allí se llama Cristo como nuestro Señor y, por tanto, nos confesamos entre los discípulos del reino [...] De esto se deduce que la ética narrativa, que es la ética habitual de toda comunidad cristiana formada por historias, no puede ser sustituida por una ética reducida, no narrativa, de principios [...].[6]

Para aprender y aprehender una educación verdaderamente cristiana de tradición anabautista debemos ser capaces de comprender la dimensión narrativa y a nosotros como personajes que somos instruidos y formados no solo por las Escrituras, la tradición y la verdad que encontramos en las diferentes disciplinas académicas, sino por el seguimiento de sus santos y santas de carne y hueso que reflejan a Cristo.

Escribo esto con alguien que en poco tiempo dejará de ser mi alumna en un colegio cristiano privado en Latinoamérica, Doménica Santillán. La conozco hace casi tres años, ha sido mi estudiante de las clases de Literatura Latinoamericana, AP Español Literatura y Cultura, Investigación y Justicia. En un intento de comprender la relación profesor-alumna y la pedagogía de una manera que escapa a los circuitos tecnocráticos educativos, consumistas y de pedagogía de la mera instrucción de información, decidimos escribir esto, compartiendo reflexiones desde diferentes lugares de enunciación pero con la convicción de que la educación importa, de que el aprendizaje puede ser apasionante, de que arte, educación y fe pueden y deben estar relacionadas y de que las instituciones educativas no tienen la última palabra en cómo nos situamos como aprendices, maestros y sujetos deseantes.

Doménica, en una de las exposiciones sobre las diferentes formas de relacionar a las iglesias y el Estado, para la clase de Justicia que imparto desde una perspectiva anabautista, dijo que ella se ubica más cerca de los anabautistas porque siguen las enseñanzas e historias de Jesús. Dome también cuenta historias con su escritura, sus dibujos, su música y sus *performances*. Me recuerda que creación y creatividad

6 James W. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002, 2ª ed. rev.), 342-43.

comparten el mismo vocablo latino *creare*, y como cristianos podemos conectar con Dios a través de formas alternativas de aprendizaje como el arte. Rowan Williams afirma que:

> El cristianismo como tal no impone un único proyecto institucional o un futuro en su encuentro con otras religiones, sino que su futuro concreto debe ser concebido en términos de humanidad cristificada, humanidad liberada de la sumisión esclava a un poder divino extraño y participante así en la actividad creadora de Dios. Se compromete en el diálogo para descubrirse a sí misma de modo más veraz, para proponer a otras tradiciones la pregunta que surge de su propia historia fundacional, y para proponer un enfoque para la esperanza y la acción humana común.[7]

Pedagogía, arte y fe están íntimamente unidas desde una perspectiva cristiana porque trabajan con los deseos, porque nos recuerdan que estamos insertos en una narrativa que da sentido a nuestras acciones.

Aquí nuestra propuesta:

Entrevistas

bell hooks comienza un texto sobre el pedagogo brasileño Paulo Freire de la siguiente manera:

> Juego en este texto a dialogar conmigo misma, Gloria Watkins, en conversación con bell hooks, mi voz en la escritura. Quería hablar de Paulo y de su obra así porque este formato me permite una intimidad (una familiaridad) que no me parece posible alcanzar con un artículo. Y esa es la manera que he encontrado de compartir la dulzura, la solidaridad de la que hablo.[8]

bell hooks sabe que la forma no está separada del contenido y a veces debemos buscar maneras de decir que salgan del canon tradicional de escritura para poder acceder a nuevos sentidos y nuevas preguntas. Con Doménica Santillán, realizaremos una entrevista mutua de cinco preguntas usando, a modo de juego, limitaciones parecidas al grupo de experimentación literaria OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, Taller de literatura potencial), como responder en un máximo de 280 caracteres (tuit), hacer dibujos, responder con citas de un libro de literatura, y desde el «corazón».

(Aquí mi entrevista a Lazuli (L), la voz de la escritura y de los dibujos de Doménica Santillán).

1. *La activista y educadora bell hooks relata un recuerdo de cuando tenía 16 años y comenzó a asistir a un colegio mixto (blancos y negros). Tenía*

7 Williams, «Trinidad y pluralismo», 48.

8 bell hooks, *Enseñar a transgredir* (Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2021), 67.

un amigo blanco que era criticado por llevarse con ella. Un día la invitó a su casa y después de horas de debate con sus padres sobre los peligros que podía conllevar asistir a su casa, ella decidió hacerlo. bell hooks dice que esta experiencia marcó su vida porque aunque conocía gente que quería desaprender el racismo, la mayoría se «alejaban en cuanto se encontraban con obstáculos, rechazo, conflicto y dolor».[9]

¿Estos peligros siguen latentes?, ¿Qué tipos de peligros?, ¿Con cuáles grupos?

L. Sí, claramente estos peligros siguen latentes. A veces siento que no quieren que las personas de la comunidad LGBTIQA+ escribamos nuestros nombres en el mapa del mundo. Por eso, para mi monografía final del colegio, estoy investigando cómo lograr que las personas que forman parte de esta comunidad, que han sufrido traumas, logren sanarlos o por lo menos enfrentarlos por medio del arte.

Para ampliar mi respuesta necesito otras voces, así que voy a citar frases de dos libros que han sido significativos para mí, para repensar mi proceso educativo y mi proceso de autoconocimiento: *Aristóteles y Dante se sumergen en las aguas del mundo*[10] de Benjamín Alire Sáenz y *Punching the Air*[11] de Ibi Zoboi y Yusef Salaam. El primero es sobre el encuentro de dos adolescentes en su proceso de descubrir que son parte de la comunidad LGBTIQA+ y el segundo sobre la opresión negra y el problema de sentirse inseguro en un mundo que juzga sin compasión y que hace del odio el motor de la vida.

«El mundo en el que quería vivir no existía. Y estaba luchando por amar el mundo en el que si vivía. Me preguntaba si era lo suficientemente fuerte o bueno para amar un mundo que me odiaba».[12]

«Quería ser otra versión mía... a quien le gustan las chicas, y sentir cómo sería formar parte del mundo y no solo vivir en sus rincones». «Ari más Dante era igual a amor, pero también era igual de complicado... era igual a jugar a las escondidas con el mundo».[13]

«Me preguntaba si a Dante y a mí alguna vez nos permitirían escribir nuestros nombres sobre el mapa del mundo. A otras personas les dan instrumentos de escritura... y, cuando van a la escuela, les enseñan

9 hooks, *Enseñar a transgredir*, 47.

10 Benjamín Alire Sáenz, *Aristóteles y Dante se sumergen en las aguas del mundo* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2021).

11 Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam, *Punching the Air* (New York: Balzer + Bray, 2020).

12 Alire Sáenz, *Aristóteles y Dante*.

13 Ibíd.

a usarlos. Pero a los chicos como Dante y como yo no les dan lápices o plumas o pintura en aerosol. Quieren que leamos, pero no quieren que escribamos. ¿Con qué escribiremos nuestros nombres? ¿Y en qué parte del mapa los escribiremos?»[14]

Y es triste, sabe profe. Que una niña que está experimentando un pequeño *crush*, por primera vez, tenga que recurrir a esconder su corazón, a esconder su verdadero yo. ¿Cree usted que esconder su verdadera forma de ser es ético? ¿Cree que está bien no ser libre de mostrar su verdadera forma de ser por miedo, enojo, rechazo e incluso soledad? Ser parte de la comunidad LGBTIQA+ en un colegio religioso es una de las cosas más duras que he tenido que superar en mi vida. Que me recuerden constantemente acerca de mi condena al infierno, por el simple hecho de que te guste alguien de tu mismo sexo. Y es verdad, nadie quiere ir al infierno, ninguna niña de catorce años quiere ir a un lugar lleno de sufrimiento y condenación. Y no solo es una niña, hay millones de niños y niñas que se encuentran en esa situación: escondiendo sus corazones con el propósito de encajar perfectamente en el ambiente-que-ayuda-a-chicos-y-chicas-a-acercarse-a-Jesús para no ser juzgados, para ahorrarse el sufrimiento del infierno, un sufrimiento que con el tiempo irá creciendo en sus corazones.[15]

¿Debería seguir escondiéndome?

2. *La crítica literaria Josefina Ludmer usa el término «las tretas del débil», para designar aquellas tácticas que permiten sortear las limitaciones que pone el superior o la autoridad al subalterno. Este gesto consiste en aceptar el supuesto lugar al que se somete al subalterno y las reglas que se le impone pero desde ahí responder de una manera que, sin contradecirlo frontalmente, cambiaba su enfoque y las categorías con las que estaba trabajando: «no decir pero saber, o decir que no sabe y saber, o decir lo contrario de lo que sabe».*[16]

¿Qué tretas has usado para resistir las imposiciones de una educación heteropatriarcal?

L. Me siento observada y juzgada como si no entrara en las categorías de los que ellos llaman cristianos. Pero en lugar de alejarme de Dios, trato

14 Ibíd.

15 Minchala, «Ética de la imprudencia».

16 Josefina Ludmer, «Las tretas del débil» en Patricia Elena González, y Eliana Ortega, eds., *La sartén por el mango: Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1984).

de mostrar otro Dios diferente al de ellos. Por eso enfrento su anatomía con la mía, la de mis entrañas.

Ilustración por Lazuli.

3. *Fernando Bárcena y Walter Kohan dicen que educar es hacer que la voz de los y las estudiantes puedan ser conversables y que esto se logra a través del ejercicio de la amistad; una amistad que une la afectividad y la pasión por pensar [crear]. La amistad entonces permite que aprendamos a ser «discutibles, o lo que es lo mismo, dejar de ser incontestables [...] aprender a ponernos entre paréntesis».*[17]

¿Cómo has vivido este proceso como estudiante con tus amistades y profesores?

L.

> «En el país de la amistad todo ser humano —cada uno de nosotros— es como un país. Puedes rodearte de muros para protegerte, para mantener a los demás fuera, sin dejar que nadie te visite, sin dejar jamás entrar a nadie, sin dejar jamás que alguien vea la belleza de tesoros que llevas dentro. Construir muros puede llevar a una existencia triste y solitaria. Pero también decidimos darle visas a la gente y dejarlos entrar para que puedan ver por ellos mismos toda la riqueza que uno tiene para ofrecer. Puedes decidir permitir a los que te visitan ver tu dolor y el coraje que has desarrollado para sobrevivir. Dejar a los otros entrar —dejarlos ver tu país—, esa es la llave de la felicidad».[18]
>
> «Esa es la cosa con los amigos. Cada uno es distinto. Y cada amigo sabe algo de ti que tus otros amigos no saben. Supongo que parte de ser amigos es que compartes un secreto con cada uno de ellos. El secreto no tiene por qué ser un gran secreto. Puede ser uno pequeño nada más. Pero compartir ese secreto es una de las cosas que los vuelve amigos. Se me ocurrió que eso era bastante increíble. Estaba aprendiendo muchas cosas sobre vivir en el país de la amistad. Me gustaba vivir en ese país. Me gustaba muchísimo».[19]

17 Facundo Giuliano, *Rebeliones éticas, palabras comunes* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2017), 23.

18 Alire Sáenz, *Aristóteles y Dante*.

19 Ibíd.

Este mismo artículo surge de querer la visa al país de mi profesor. El mismo que me ayudó a renovar mi vis[d]a al país de Dios. Tenía que deshacerme de mí antiguo pasaporte con información ya caducada y renovarlo, para poder obtener la visa al país de Dios.

Para la clase de Justicia hice la siguiente oración:

«Inhala la comunidad
Exhala el odio

Inhala el amor
Exhala el temor y los miedos

Inhala la vida, los amigos y los enemigos
Exhala los rencores, los malos pensamientos

Inhala el olor de estar aquí congregados para el arte de la justicia
Exhala la definición de una justicia maliciosa

Inhala las palabras de amor que un día alguien te dio
Exhala los impulsos guiados por el mal que te controlan

Inhala la compasión para las comunidades oprimidas
Exhala la religión de maldad disfrazada de bondad[20]

Y luego recuerda que estás aquí
Que todavía hay personas con buen corazón en este mundo
Agradece a las nubes el nuevo día, a las estrellas una nueva luna llena
Así como la luna, recuerda que tenemos que pasar por fases de abismos para sentirnos plenos de nuevo»[21]

4. *La teórica de género Judith Butler afirma que para que la educación sea liberadora debemos darle espacio al humor y el error. «...creo que deberíamos pensar un poco más desde el humor en la educación y lo que implica cometer errores. Sobre esto digo: «comete tu error y encuéntralo magnífico, comete tu error y encuéntralo enorme». Se trata de pensar una manera de vivir el error como una forma de aceptar nuestra perspectiva limitada, aceptándolo como parte de lo que implica estar vivo, ser, devenir. Esto es*

20 De aquí se toma el título de este ensayo creativo/entrevista, solo se le cambia la palabra «religión» por «educación».

21 Oración hecha para la clase de Justicia.

muy distinto a pensar a la persona donde el error es marcado como falta. Debería haber una manera de vivir el error afirmativamente; y creo que eso debería también suceder en la educación».[22]

¿En tu espacio educativo cómo has vivido tus «fallas», tus «errores» y tus «imprudencias»?

L.

- Poner chupetes en el baño como premio si siguen las instrucciones de un juego.
- Dar barquitos, aviones de papel, flores, dibujos y regalos creativos a chicas.
- Llegar tarde de clases.
- Pintar en el pizarrón mis sentimientos.
- Pintar con sangre.
- Pedirle al profesor de música que me ayude con la música de una canción que habla del amor de una chica por otra.
- Llevar a una amiga, de la que sospechan que estamos saliendo, a cocinar con la directora.
- Salir con seis personas en menos de un año.
- Cortarme el pelo muy corto.
- Diseñar mi propio uniforme del colegio.

¿Fueron realmente errores o solo lo consideran errores por el contexto en el que me encontraba? Si me hubiera encontrado en otro contexto, ¿hubieran sido llamados logros en lugar de errores? Si fuera hombre ¿seguirán contando como errores o acaso serían celebrados?

5. *Dome, leímos el artículo «La bala» de Paul B. Preciado. Podrías recordar cómo acogiste este texto:*

> La homosexualidad es un francotirador silencioso que pone una bala en el corazón de los niños que juegan en los patios, sin importarles si son niños de pijos o de progres, de agnósticos o de católicos integristas, no le falla la puntería ni en los colegios de zonas altas ni en los de las zonas de educación prioritaria. Tira con la misma pericia en las calles de Chicago que en los pueblos de Italia o en las barriadas de Johannesburgo. La homosexualidad es un francotirador ciego como el amor, generoso como la risa, tolerante y cariñoso como un perro. Cuando se cansa de disparar a los niños, tira una ráfaga de balas perdidas que van a alojarse en los corazones de una campesina,

22 Facundo Giuliano, *Rebeliones éticas, palabras comunes* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2017), 187.

> de un conductor de taxi, de un paseante de parques...La última bala alcanzó a una mujer de ochenta años mientras dormía.
>
> [...]
>
> Hay médicos e iglesias que prometen extirpar la bala. Dicen que en Ecuador cada día abre una nueva clínica evangelista para reeducar homosexuales y transexuales. Los rayos de la fe se confunden con descargas de electricidad. Pero nadie ha logrado nunca extirpar una bala. Se puede enterrar más profunda en el pecho, pero no extirpar. Tu bala es como tu ángel de la guarda, siempre estará contigo.
>
> Yo tenía tres años cuando sentí por primera vez el peso de la bala. Sentí que la llevaba cuando escuché a mi padre tratar de sucias tortilleras a dos chicas extranjeras que caminaban de la mano por el pueblo. Sentí en ese momento que el pecho me ardía. Esa noche, sin saber por qué, imaginé por primera vez que me escapaba del pueblo para ir a un lugar extranjero. Los días que vinieron después fueron los días del miedo, de la vergüenza.
>
> [...]
>
> Sus padres gritan para que las niñas lesbianas, los niños maricas y los niñes trans no vayan al colegio, pero ellos saben que llevan la bala dentro. Por la noche, como cuando yo era un niño, se van a la cama con la vergüenza de decepcionar a sus padres, con miedo quizás de que sus padres les abandonen o que deseen su muerte. Y sueñan, como yo cuando era un niño, que huyen hacia un lugar extranjero, o a un planeta lejano, donde los niños de la bala pueden vivir. Yo os hablo a vosotros, los niños de la bala, y os digo: la vida es maravillosa, os esperamos aquí, todos los caídos, los amantes del pecho agujereado. No estáis solos.
>
> París, 15 de febrero de 2014.[23]

L. Recuerdo que se lo había enseñado a mi mamá... «mi mamá... que mujer tan buena, fantástica y valerosa es. Y si mi vida será una guerra porque te amo, lo que significa que me gustan las chicas, entonces vaya suerte que tengo de tener a mi mamá peleando esa guerra a mi lado».[24]

No estoy sola y aunque tengo esa bala impregnada en mí, tengo a mi mamá, a mi profesor, amigos y amigas y a Jesús de mi lado.

(Preguntas de Lazuli a Jonathan Minchala que además de su profesor es colega de escritura, editor, hermano de la misma iglesia, consejero y también amigo).

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23 Paul B. Preciado, *Un apartamento en Urano* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2019), 100-2.

24 Alire Sáenz, *Aristóteles y Dante*.

1. *«Nos ven como quieren vernos, en los términos más simples, en las definiciones más convenientes. Pero lo que descubrimos es que cada uno de nosotros es un cerebro... y un atleta... y un caso perdido... una princesa... y un criminal. ¿Eso responde a tu pregunta?» «Ella nunca me ha visto/Solo ve mis pinturas y dibujos/como si yo y mis creaciones fueran dos mundos diferentes».*[25]

Ilustración por Lazuli.

«Ella es artista», dice la mayoría de mis profesores, pero ni siquiera saben qué es lo que me inspira a hacer arte. Aunque para ser sincera no les gustaría saber que ellos son parte de mi inspiración, porque ellos solo ven mis «hermosos» dibujos pero no me ven a mí como en realidad soy. ¿Por qué los profesores categorizan a sus alumnos sin conocerlos? ¿Cree usted que los profesores deberían tomarse el tiempo de conocer a sus alumnos y no solo pasarles una fría información sobre la materia?

J. A veces creo que el problema no solo es tomarse el tiempo de conocer a sus estudiantes sino dejarnos conocer también por ellos. Por un lado, para algunos/as es muy difícil lograr esto porque como profesores no quieren mostrarse vulnerables, quieren siempre tener el control de todo. Pensar que los y las alumnas pueden ver sus debilidades les resulta impensable. Por otro lado, no me gusta ubicar al profesor como una especie de científico o de etnógrafo que analiza su «objeto de estudio» con paternalismo para sacar conclusiones absolutas que hagan del estudiante un número más de la estadística. Estoy en favor de establecer una relación honesta donde, a pesar de los diferentes roles y el poder que un profesor pueda tener, se implementen cercanías, juegos, proyectos, conversaciones, arte, etc. que nos lleve a pensar más allá de lo identitario y nos haga reconocernos en los y las estudiantes y ellos/as en nosotros.

2. *«Si ignoramos algo, entonces pagaremos el precio. A los gobiernos les encanta ignorar las cosas que no son convenientes. Nadie gana nada fingiendo que*

25 Zoboi and Salaam, *Punching the Air*.

no está ahí. Todos sufriremos por ello».[26] *A veces pienso que los colegios son como un gobierno, ¿qué piensa usted?*

J. Hay colegios que son más un gobierno frágil que una institución educativa. En ambos se fijan reglamentos. En ambos quedan espacios grises. Ahí preguntamos: ¿Qué se escoge ignorar? Cuando los ignorados causan incomodidad al sistema pulcro de la institución, entonces viene la represión.

3. *«¿Qué quieres ser cuando seas grande? no solo tiene que ver con la profesión que escojamos. La verdadera pregunta es ¿qué tipo de persona quieres ser? ¿quieres amar? ¿o quieres seguir con el odio? El odio es una decisión. El odio es una pandemia emocional para la que nunca hemos encontrado cura. Elijan amar.»*[27]

Yo elijo amar. ¿Qué elige usted?

¿Cree que en los colegios nos preparan para responder esa pregunta?

J.

1. Entrenarnos en el «ser» antes que en el «hacer» es una vieja fórmula aristotélica y cristiana que debemos rescatar, sobre todo en este mundo individualista y competitivo. Las virtudes contra una ética de decisiones.

2. Elegir amar en las dificultades es difícil, más aún cuando no nos han enseñado herramientas que nos ayuden a diferenciar entre el amor, la dependencia y la manipulación. El asunto es que, como toda virtud cristiana, esto se aprende más por imitación que de manera proposicional.

4. *«Los maestros eran importantes. Podrían hacerte sentir que formabas parte de la escuela, que podías aprender, que podías tener éxito en la vida...o» podrían hacerte sentir así: «Mis profesores me vigilaban tanto, tan de cerca, que me sentía como si intentara escapar de la cárcel, aunque sólo fuera la escuela.»*[28]

¿Cree que mis sentimientos están justificados?

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26 Alire Sáenz, *Aristóteles y Dante*.

27 Ibíd.

28 Zoboi and Salaam, *Punching the Air*.

J. Siempre debemos darle espacio y validez a nuestras emociones. Voy a hacer trampa. Responderé con tres párrafos de menos de 280 caracteres:

Mi amigo y teólogo Luis Marcos Tapia dice: «Ser cristiano es vivir un ethos específico desde el seguimiento de una persona concreta, Jesús, que al no estar ya en medio de nosotros sólo es posible seguir desde la imitación de sus discípulos y discípulas...»[29]

Los maestros desde una perspectiva anabautista son indispensables porque, parafraseando y ampliando a Hauerwas, en un mundo sin fundamentos epistemológicos, todo lo que tenemos es al otro para lograr un verdadero aprendizaje. El profesor como modelo incluso con sus imperfecciones.

Dome, la escuela como cárcel es una idea muy foucaultiana, es el panóptico que nos hablaba Michael Foucault donde nos vigilan y regulan. Pero el deseo persiste, escapa. Yo tuve una maestra que me enseñó esto y que también me ayudó a escapar de las miradas que me aprisionaban. Lo más duro es darse cuenta que a veces la mirada más difícil de enfrentar es la nuestra.

5. *Tomando en cuenta la última frase de la pregunta anterior y este dibujo, me podría decir ¿Por qué los profesores hacen que una estudiante se sienta así?*

J. Quieren aumentar la cuota de culpa que todos tenemos. Operar el control no solo en la mente sino en las emociones, en el cuerpo. Disciplinar, controlar y normalizar a los estudiantes. Tapar las luces, obligarlo a caminar sobre su propia sombra para que no se pueda reconocer. Lamentablemente, para algunos sin la diferencia es más fácil trabajar.

Ilustración por Lazuli.

Reflexiones finales

Estaba en la cocina con Stanley y me estaba ayudando a decidir si ir a Duke o a otra universidad donde me habían aceptado. Me dijo: «Bueno, si vas allí, tal y cual te convertirías en un buen ironista liberal». Yo era joven y tonto y pensaba que *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* era uno de los mejores libros que jamás había leído, pero no era tan

29 Marcos Tapia, «"Imítenme a mí".

> tonto como para preguntar: «¿Cuál es el problema con eso?». Así que en vez de eso le pregunté: «Y si vengo aquí, ¿en qué me convertirías?». Me miró a los ojos y gruñó: «En un malvado hijo de puta».[30] —Peter Dula

Stanley Hauerwas dice que no tiene la carga de hablar más sobre justicia y fe porque su ex estudiante, Daniel M. Bell, ya lo ha hecho por él.[31] Creo que este debería ser el anhelo de cualquier profesor que tome en serio su trabajo. Dome en muchos casos ha podido decir mejor lo que yo no he sabido cómo hacer. El arte y el lenguaje de la oración a veces se vuelve meramente intelectual para mí pero parece estar inscrito en el cuerpo y los deseos de ella. La última presentación de Dome para la clase de Justicia, sobre las injusticias que históricamente han pasado las mujeres, se basó en la definición del amor de bell hooks, el trabajo sobre los deseos y la justicia de Daniel. M. Bell y su crítica a la teología de la liberación, y el libro del apóstol Santiago sobre el amor, las buenas obras y la lengua. Todo esto lo hizo desde una perspectiva anabautista con la convicción que el Estado no es el agente principal de cambio en nuestra sociedad sino las pequeñas prácticas, los puntos de fuga y resistencia agenciados desde nuestro propio deseo. En medio de su presentación resignifica la palabra 'puta' para recordarnos que muchas veces se la utiliza para condenar a aquellas mujeres que deciden no ceder ante los deseos de otros y hacerse cargo de su propia forma de amar en libertad. Sin embargo, Dome no presenta esto simplemente como una lucha entre hombre contra mujeres sino contra un sistema injusto donde todos y todas de alguna forma hemos sido cómplices. Dome se ha hecho cargo de esto en su propio recorrido con sus dibujos, escritos, poemas, oraciones y canciones. En las injusticias que ha enfrentado no ha puesto su esperanza en que alguna institución le haga justicia, sino en que el arte y la espiritualidad pueden transformar la ira santa y el resentimiento en un manifiesto. Siendo consciente que debe darse espacio y concederse a sí misma un lugar para el perdón y la misericordia. Encarnando la máxima de Santiago de que «la misericordia triunfa sobre el juicio».

Que podamos orar juntos, tal como lo hizo un estudiante agnóstico en mi clase de Justicia, «Señor no sé si estás ahí pero quiero decirte que...». La oración-conversación continúa.

30 Charlie M. Collier, *The Difference Christ Makes: Celebrating the Life, Work, and Friendship of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 71.

31 Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Thorns, Seed, Sower, and Soil

MCC's Educational Partnership with the Chaldean Catholic Church

Nathan Hershberger

Teaching is like casting seeds to the wind. I tell myself this on hard days, when blank stares greet my every effort. My job is to plant seeds; the rest is up to God. This is my mantra now, teaching in a Mennonite high school in Virginia. And it was my mantra while serving from 2014 to 2017 with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Iraq, where I taught in a high school, a seminary, and a refugee camp.

During that time in Iraq, I didn't know if I was making an impact. And looking back at MCC's two decades of education partnerships and teaching secondments with the Chaldean Catholic Church,[1] I don't know if we contributed something valuable. I can point to specific successes—funding for displaced children to attend a preschool run by an order of Iraqi nuns, dozens of short- and long-term English teachers from North America forging connections with Iraqi teachers and students, and more. But what fruit has this work borne? What has it all added up to?

Jesus's parable of the sower (Matt 13:3–9) captures the sense of promise and risk I feel when I think about teaching in general and MCC's education work in Iraq in particular. Like the farmer in Jesus's parable, I am to plant seeds; the rest is up to God. But one thing I have learned about Bible stories—parables in particular—is that it is never safe to think of oneself as just one character in the story. I am not only the sower but also the seed. Sometimes I am the good soil, and sometimes, perhaps, I am the thorns.

Sometimes the Thorns

MCC began partnering with Iraqi churches and organizations amid crippling US sanctions in the 1990s, and that work intensified after the US-led 2003 invasion.

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1 The Chaldean Catholic Church is an Iraqi Christian church with roots in the second century.

Our partnerships have taken place under the shadow of US military, economic, and cultural dominance. By teaching English, I couldn't help but participate in that domination.

I remember experiencing my presence as a thorn as I was teaching a high school world history class at Mar Qardakh School in northern Iraq, one of three Chaldean Catholic institutions at which I taught. One student named Ninweh had difficulty choosing a topic for an independent research project. Despite her creativity and thoughtfulness, she kept returning to ideas in which she had no interest—the causes of the American Civil War, the role of women in the US Constitution. I expressed support but gently suggested thinking about a topic closer to her own interests and life. She worried, however, that the International Baccalaureate examiners were only interested in American history. Perhaps she thought the same was true of me. The thorn of cultural imperialism threatened to choke out her independent agency. I couldn't fully escape being an agent of that imperialism.

Sometimes the Sower

But the little successes kept and still keep me teaching.

One day when Ninweh half-heartedly suggested yet another topic in American history, I responded in exasperation, "Ninweh, do you *really* want to write about American history?" When she replied "No!" I asked, "What do you want to write about?" And she said, "The Assyrian genocide."

The Assyrians were targeted alongside Armenians and other Christians during the Armenian genocide in 1915 and suffered later attacks in 1933 from the Iraqi government and tribal groups because the British had used them as auxiliary troops in their occupation of Iraq after WWI. Ninweh told me she was afraid to write about this topic because it would show the British in a bad light. I helped her find sources that would ground the polemical side of her essay, and soon she began interviewing her grandparents about their early memories and started to write. She produced a moving and thoughtful essay about how her family experience intertwined with the Christian witness of the Assyrian church in Iraq.

In this situation, the seed I planted was merely the stimulation to help Ninweh follow her own confidence and drive. When I think about not only my time in Iraq but also that of dozens of other short- and long-term MCC teachers who served there, I imagine the multitude of such seeds sown and am encouraged.

Sometimes the Seed

We were not the only sowers. We ourselves were seeds transplanted from the United States, and our church partners planted us in the rich soil of Ankawa, a city that had become a magnet for Christian refugees from across Iraq.

Upon our arrival in our new home, my wife and I quickly realized that our placement could become very isolating. We could seek insular connections in small pockets of expatriates here and there, but that soil would not sustain us. We wanted to befriend Iraqi neighbors, and did, but the linguistic and cultural barriers were often high and the continuous effort exhausting.

We did not and could not plant ourselves, but with the surrounding community's support, we found ourselves taking root. For starters, MCC's long partnership with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a Chaldean order of nuns, meant that when we arrived, platters of *dolma*—stuffed grape leaves, onions, and peppers—greeted us, along with an invitation to join a local choir. In addition, the students and rector at St. Peter's Seminary expected us to join them for Mass, a weekly meal, and soccer games. Friends and contacts who knew previous MCCers also reached out to support us again and again. Two decades of partnership sustained us. Like humus slowly accumulating on the forest floor, the rich earth of all those inherited relationships—especially through MCC's direct teaching secondments—nurtured our growth.

Sometimes the Soil

And sometimes we were that rich earth for others. MCC's presence in partnership with the church has been the soil in which other seeds grow. I think of one teacher from Winnipeg, Canada, who came to Iraq several times after an initial summer teaching stint. That presence blossomed into many different friendships with Iraqi teachers. It even allowed one particular displaced family in Iraq from Mosul to be sponsored by a Canadian church. Such sponsorships are not a primary goal of MCC's presence in Iraq,[2] but this connection between Canadians and Iraqis represents so many friendships borne out of this long partnership.

All of It Is Grace

While I celebrate the growth stemming from MCC's teaching partnerships in Iraq, I don't do so with a spirit of triumph. The questions that plagued me then plague me still: How can international English teaching avoid reinscribing Western cultural and political dominance? How can we relate well to our MCC partners when our goals come into conflict with theirs? Does today's lesson plan make any sense in the context of these young Iraqi students' lives? What growth might I be choking out?

But when I envision education along the lines of the parable of the sower, I am freed from one root of my worries—my desire for control. We do not author the

2 MCC's primary purpose in Iraq is to strengthen local churches and civic organization to enable Iraqis to flourish once more in their native land.

parable; we are caught up in the plot, just as our partners are. Always the outcome is a little beyond us, caught up in the interplay between seed, soil, sower, and sun.

To us it falls simply to grow where we're planted, to see both our fruitful and weedy selves honestly, to nourish those we find around us, to scatter the love of Christ we have been given. None of it is a possession. All of it is grace.

MCC's Steps toward Peacebuilding Education in Egypt

John F. Lapp

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has engaged in educational ministries in Egypt for more than fifty years, sending generations of North Americans to teach nursing and English and to otherwise support ministries of a wide range of Egyptian churches. This history of MCC presence in Egypt embodies respect for and response to the Indigenous church's invitation and valuing of MCC's philosophy of education. Over the decades, MCC's program has shifted from peacebuilding as a byproduct of its educational activities toward peacebuilding education as its primary focus.

MCC-Egypt Partnership: A Brief History

MCC began working in Egypt in 1944, providing relief aid to Eastern European refugees displaced in Egypt. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, MCC responded to the enormous refugee situation in Egypt and soon began coordinating with the Coptic churches, both Evangelical and Orthodox. Early support largely took the form of material aid, but during the 1970s the relationships shifted toward providing Canadian and US nurses/nursing education for church hospitals and English teachers for Christian schools of all levels. While an international agency's emphasis on English-language fluency could be considered an imperialist function, by the 1970s Egyptians themselves strongly valued proficiency in English as critical to both individual and national progress. By the 1980s, MCC was providing many teachers to Egyptian church schools, in Upper and Lower Egypt and in Cairo.

John F. Lapp and his spouse, Sandra Shenk Lapp, have been the MCC representatives in Egypt since January 2022. Lapp graduated from Goshen (IN) College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. After assignments with MCC in Washington, DC (1982–84) and Palestine (1988–96), he worked as an international program administrator with Mennonite Mission Network (1997–2021), based in Elkhart/Goshen, Indiana. The Lapps currently reside in Cairo.

Christian-Muslim Relationships in Egypt

Egypt has one of the oldest of the Orthodox churches (founded by the Apostle Mark in ca. 42 CE) along with numerous other Christian denominations. Together, Christians make up about 10 percent of the largely Muslim 110 million total population of Egypt today. While the leaders of these large Muslim and Christian communities have mostly cordial and respectful relationships with one another, sectarian tension remains just under the surface—and sometimes emerges as localized violence. "In this context, MCC's church partners speak of having a prophetic voice and being salt and light, taking responsibility for a role in improving society and for peaceful community relations."[1] And "MCC's most satisfying involvements have been with partners who see [MCC's] services as a resource for the entire community, bringing Christians and Muslims together in a service the church provides."[2]

Shifting to a Peacebuilding Focus

As MCC increasingly incorporated such attitudes, its 2007 program review proposed "that peace-building become the focus of and lens through which the MCC Egypt program is developed."[3] Indeed, while providing English-language skills in a developing country was extremely important—both for individuals and the nation's advancement—with the transition to a new century, MCC recognized that its language-education resource was also a strategic and effective incarnation of God's will that God's children live together in peace.

Keith Miller (Cairo 2000–2003; Beni Suef 2006–2009) relates two stories capturing both these aspects from his Beni Suef experience:

> In one of my [English] classes, I had two young students named Girgis. They were friends, always came half an hour late, seldom did their homework, and giggled the whole way through class. I had little hope for them. They only took two classes, and then I didn't see them for half a year. I next saw them at a wedding. They came up and thanked me for my classes. Both had gotten plum jobs in Cairo: one in a bank, the other in a travel agency. For both, English proficiency had been crucial in getting the job. The Girgises taught me that I often can't know the effect I'm having: each student is precious.[4]

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1 Mennonite Central Committee Workbook, "Egypt" (unpublished report, 2007), 58–60; 59.

2 MCC Workbook, "Egypt," 60.

3 Ronald J. R. Mathies, Amany-Haidy Ishak, and Giacomo (Jack) Hijazin, "'We Are More than Partners, We Are Family': A Country Program Review (2002–2007) of MCC Egypt" (unpublished, 2007), 14.

4 Keith Miller, "Stories from My Time as an English Connection Teacher," MCC Peace Office Newsletter 41, no. 1 (January–March 2011), 5–6.

In another of Miller's classes, group dynamics did not seem very good, apparently because one of the students was a priest, which made the others uncomfortable.

> But as they got to know each other, they learned to laugh and chat together. One of the other young men, a Muslim, sat next to young Father Elias (pseudonym). Father Elias had a car and they lived near each other, so they used to drive back to Beni Suef together. During our private lessons, Father Elias confided to me that his relationship with [this other student] was the only friendly relationship he has ever had with a Muslim.[5]

Hisham Rasmy, MCC Egypt associate, spent his formative years in Beni Suef. He remembers a Muslim friend sharing how deeply he appreciated the opportunity to learn with the MCC teachers. This same friend, when hearing another Christian student complain about how difficult it was to learn English, encouraged him: "These teachers are very good, and we will be thankful in the future."[6]

And the students learned more than just English:

> The teachers encouraged those of us who were more able, to help those having trouble. Even as a child, I would help my younger "brothers" in the orphanage. Now, I make sure my children are learning, and I encourage them to learn good English. Also, I always felt great respect from all of the MCC service workers who taught us. They really wanted to build good relationships with the people here. One teacher once told me: "Don't say bad things about Muslims or any other people. Have respect for everyone." Mennonites taught us respect, not only for Muslims but for other Africans, and people of any color speaking any language."[7]

Training the Trainers

With a transition away from long-term teacher appointments for Egypt, occasioned both by local (political/security) and global factors, MCC has moved into a more "training of trainers" mode. Maintaining the peacebuilding lens for its work in Egypt, Ayman Kerols serves as a peacebuilding associate, overseeing how the MCC program pursues this agenda. Kerols—a former International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) participant and graduate of Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) and Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI)—is proud that MCC has provided opportunities for international peace education.

Many Egyptians are now aware of Restorative Justice theory and techniques, including the importance of forgiveness in dealing with personal and societal

5 Miller, "Stories."

6 Hisham Rasmy, personal interview with author, September 5, 2022.

7 Rasmy, personal interview.

trauma. Kerols is convinced that such advanced training, building upon the foundation of the "safe space" such as that found in MCCers' English classes, helped create a newfound sense of community. Kerols notes that such community was exemplified, for example, during the 2011 revolution, when Beni Suef avoided the destruction of churches that other Egyptian locations experienced; the city's churches were actually guarded by Muslim friends![8]

Kerols understands "peace" as fundamentally different from other development work. With most development, one can observe an immediate impact. But peacebuilding is a process of education that can only be measured in attitudes and behavior over time. It is hard to change habits, so it is a matter of planting seeds and hoping for the best. When we support educational opportunities for potential peacebuilders, Kerols notes, we do not simply hope that the newly trained peacebuilders will go out and train others and then move on. We hope and pray their very lives will be changed—and that their changed lives will impact those watching them.[9]

Teaching the Children

Over the decades, although MCC has engaged people of all ages in creative peacebuilding efforts, the agency has strategically focused its education work on children because children can be taught a culture of peace from scratch. They don't have to unlearn bad habits. A focus on setting children on a path toward lifestyles of peace has led MCC in central Africa to develop a program known as "Peace Clubs." Kerols has helped coordinate an online Peace Club "Training of Trainers" for partners in several Middle East countries, with an initial plan to take the concept and contextualize "Peace Clubs" within this region:

> We hope this will not only be used in church/Sunday school settings but could also be used in all the churches' primary/secondary schools. We are excited that many of our Egyptian church partners have really jumped onboard with this program. We are hopeful that the children-at-risk programs might change not only the individual kids, but really change whole families and communities—including male-female dynamics—and reduce conflict and abusive behavior of all kinds.[10]

MCC's Continuing Partnership with Egypt

MCC partners have noted the many benefits that English education has brought to communities throughout Egypt. MCC's unique style in this sphere has con-

8 Ayman Kerols, personal interview with author, September 8, 2022.

9 Kerols interview.

10 Kerols interview.

currently contributed to a broader recognition and understanding of the Gospel of Peace. Individuals and communities have expressed deep gratitude for both explicit and implicit "peacemaking" training as they look for new ways to work at longstanding challenges.

Emil Wadie, Egyptian friend of MCC, colorfully describes how God can work cross-culturally:

> MCCers changed the stereotype view of US people, generally viewed through movies and TV series. . . . The presence of MCCers in Egypt all those years has baffled the minds of almost every Egyptian they met. Many Egyptians dream of going to the US to work and live there. For the opposite to happen was almost unbelievable to many of the people MCCers encountered. The effect of bafflement faded to some extent, and a look of appreciation and probably admiration took over in the hearts of many Egyptians to see that some people in the world still have the spirit of serving God as they serve some of his people.[11]

MCC will continue to listen and learn from our partners in Egypt, always seeking to better contextualize witness and service in this beautiful and ancient culture.

11 Emil Wadie, email letter to the author, October 15, 2022.

Education in the Slums

Anita Rahma

"*Selamat siang, Kak* Anita," a six-year-old boy calls to me from the field near our house—"Good afternoon, *Kak* Anita." His name is Miko,[1] and I have known his family since before he was born. His shirt is torn, he goes barefoot, and his hands and feet are dirty. His family makes their livelihood as garbage scavengers, sometimes begging on the streets of Jakarta as well. They join more than one billion people in our world today who live in urban slum communities[2]—areas that suffer from "inadequate access to water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding and insecure residential status."[3]

For the past decade, it has been my joy and privilege to get to journey with children like Miko. Today I mourn as I see him, knowing that he already dropped out of our kindergarten program a few months ago. I wonder what possible hope there is for his future, and I pray that more people will follow God's call to respond to the needs of those in urban slum communities.

When I graduated from Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA), I thought I was done with academia for a long time. Tired of the classroom, I

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1 All names have been changed.

2 United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: "Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable," United Nations, January 2023, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11.

3 Ash Baker, *Slum Life Rising: How to Enflesh Hope within a New Urban World* (Birmingham, UK: Urban Shalom, 2012), 21.

A canal runs through the slum community where the author and her family make their home. ***Photo courtesy of the author.***

plunged myself into life in a slum community[4] in inner-city Jakarta. Serving with Virginia Mennonite Missions and Servants to Asia's Urban Poor, I spent the first year as a learner, focusing on language learning and culture learning. I had no clear ideas or agenda about what I could possibly offer in such a complex location as a twenty-two-year-old foreigner. But as time went by, the Lord tugged at my heart and showed me the needs—and the gifts—of the children around me.

Too many children in Indonesia do not have access to kindergarten programs. Government schools start at first grade, and so families who want their children to attend kindergarten must have the money to pay for a private school. Since most of my neighbors in the slum community could not afford kindergarten, they began elementary school significantly behind their peers' education. Our team, which at the time was made up of myself and two Indonesians, decided that providing elementary school education would be a practical way we could serve the community the Lord had planted us in.

What began as a coloring club grew into a school, called House of Hope, that offers a free kindergarten and afterschool program for elementary school kids in our neighborhood. The school has served about one hundred children a day for the past ten years.

Through House of Hope we have been able to meet hundreds of families (perhaps more than a thousand by now) over the years. Families that primarily

4 I use the phrase "slum community" as a descriptive rather than a derogatory term. When speaking Bahasa Indonesia, we use the word *kampung*, which literally means "village." However, there is no sugar-coating the distressing physical reality faced by more than a billion people in the world today living in such tenuous housing environments. For lack of a better word, I use this term when speaking English. The United Nations also uses the term "slum" or "informal settlement."

make their livelihoods from Jakarta's trash—collecting garbage and scavenging for recycling—have become our dear friends.[5]

When joining a new community, it is all too tempting to bring with us power, money, and education that we end up using to disempower those around us. Even if that is *not our intention*, too often it is what actually happens. Aiming to avoid this common pitfall, House of Hope instead sought to become "alongsiders" (see Craig Greenfield's new book *Subversive Mission*[6]) by inviting three moms from the community to become teachers themselves. One of my great joys over the past three years has been training these women and seeing them become beautiful teachers, despite that fact that they had not even graduated from middle school. Through this teacher education, we are intentionally serving alongside our Muslim neighbors—joining together in our common belief that children in our neighborhood are valuable and longing for a better future for them.

Collaborating with the three moms has been such a positive experience that we plan to continue training more women from the community every year. We hopefully will be able to open up more schools as our teaching capacity increases. Recently, we recruited two new teachers, who formerly were our students in elementary school. It is a joyful thing to watch them become empowered as teachers, to see them coming to believe that they can help the children around them learn to read and write and do basic math.

Education in itself, however, is not the end goal. While it is a beautiful thing to watch children learn to read and write, and we firmly believe this is worthwhile, we also long for our Muslim neighbors to meet Jesus and experience new life in his Kingdom. While we try to live into Kingdom realities through our actions in the classroom at House of Hope, we also try to be alert to opportunities to humbly share about Christ through words. We believe in holistic ministry, both word and deed together.

Over the past decade, House of Hope has given us the opportunity and privilege of visiting hundreds of students and families in their homes. Many of the dwellings are make-shift shacks, pieced together from plywood scraps, with asbestos for roofing. Physically, our students often suffer from sicknesses almost unheard of in North America: typhoid, dengue, dysentery, measles, mumps, rubella, and the list could go on. When students or their parents are sick, we often have the opportunity to pray for healing in Jesus's name. We share stories about Jesus and his Kingdom, and we pray that the seeds that are sown will one day grow.

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5 For years, a mini-mountain of raw trash claimed a spot in our community. It has now been shut down by the government, and new shacks have sprung up on top of what once was trash. These dwellings are safer from floods, but the ground is still squishy.

6 Craig Greenfield, *Subversive Mission: Serving as Outsiders in a World of Need* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022).

Children play on top of a small mountain of garbage. This illegal dump site was shut down by the government a few years ago, and now many new shacks are springing up on top of the old trash. ***Photo courtesy of the author.***

Many neighbors make their livelihoods scavenging for recycling. They often pull carts or carry sacks to put recycling into. ***Photo by Yosiah (author's husband).***

And engaging with the community has been brutally hard. We have faced heartbreaking situations again and again. Mission teams fall apart. Students drop out. Girls continue to get married underage. The cycles of poverty and oppression continue over and over again, seemingly untouched by our presence here. But we cling to the hope that nothing is in vain. We believe that somehow this work is important. That teaching ABCs and 123s to Muslim children in this particular slum community is very valuable in the eyes of Jesus.

We also believe there are countless opportunities awaiting the church if followers of Jesus would take the risk of asking Jesus to open our eyes and help us step outside of our comfort zones. According to the United Nations 2109 report, the proportion of the urban population living in slums worldwide continues to rise, with estimates that by 2030 three billion people will require adequate and affordable housing.[7] Unfortunately, the Western church is largely unaware of this global reality, and thus ministries and missions focused on reaching slum areas are few and far between. If we do read about slums, the statistics can seem overwhelming and hopeless. But each one of those people has a name, a family, a story—and is valuable in the eyes of the Lord.

I believe the Lord is calling more Anabaptists—those who have grown up rooted and grounded in Christ's love and the vision of God's shalom for the world—to dare to give their lives in service in slum communities around the world. We must resist, however, the temptation to arrive as "white saviors"; we must come first as learners, looking for where God's Spirit is already active and at work, and praying for how we can join in that movement. Frequently, providing education can be a wonderful way to bless the community we are living in and to offer hope for future generations. However, we must do so humbly, focusing on how we can partner with the local people around us, empowering and training new teachers from within the community itself. This will have a much greater, longer-lasting impact on the communities we are serving than importing all of the teachers.

There are many "Mikos" in our world today—children literally growing up on top of piles of trash, with little or no access to affordable education. Wherever we are, even in the West, there will always be children slipping through the cracks of educational systems. Can the church dare to be creative, to find new ways to use education in missions? Through afterschool programs, literacy tutoring, or informal kindergarten programs in slum communities, followers of Christ can and are finding unique ways to respond with love to the needs of the children around them. One does not have to have a degree as a teacher (none of the teachers at House of Hope have degrees in education), but one does need a patient, willing heart.

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7 United Nations SDG Goals, "Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable."

Theological Education as Mission in Late Twentieth-Century England

David Glick

In this article I examine the use of theological education in one missional context—England in the late twentieth century, where I find the education methods and models used by the Mennonite missionaries to have been both thoughtful and insightful. I begin with the post-WWII Mennonite missionary work in London and the opening of the London Mennonite Centre. I then show how the use of theological education grew as the mission matured, especially after Alan and Eleanor Kreider became the Centre directors. I contend that the theological education the missionaries offered indigenized over time, as more British teachers were incorporated and the language used became less "Mennonite" and more "Anabaptist." My hope is that this article can, by detailing one mission's example, demonstrate how theological education may be used creatively in secular missional settings.

North American Mennonite missionaries in England used lay theological education as a primary outreach method for the duration of their involvement in the country. They started with children's Bible schools in postwar London. Then in the 1980s and 1990s, North American missionaries and British Anabaptists developed lay theology courses, including "Cross-Currents" and "Workshop." Especially in the 1990s, Anabaptist theological education indigenized alongside the remainder of the English mission. As the Mennonite Board of Missions' London mission grew and matured, Anabaptist study groups, the Anabaptist Network, and other institutions were initiated and led by British leaders and conveners, while Mennonite missionaries played a supporting role. Alongside the change from North American leadership to British leadership, the use of

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the term "Mennonite" decreased, and British Christians increasingly used the word "Anabaptist" instead.

The transition to British leadership of Anabaptist-oriented educational resources fit the missionaries' strategy: they did not attempt to plant Mennonite churches and create a denomination credentialing Mennonite pastors. Instead, they adopted a "leavening" missional strategy and sought to influence British Christians and their churches with Anabaptist teachings. Although the Mennonite missionaries were careful to avoid remaking British society and churches in their own image, they did believe that Anabaptism had something unique to offer England, and so they participated in mission through engagement with lay people who were looking for creative ways to revitalize their churches' community life in a secularizing society.

Post-World War II: The London Mission Begins

The Mennonite mission in England had its beginnings in the shadow of World War II. When German troops surrendered on V-E Day in May 1945, rebuilding efforts began immediately since many of the continent's cities had sustained significant damage. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the relief and development organization of nearly all North American Mennonite churches, was among those who responded. Within months of the war's end, the organization sent relief workers in droves to European cities, alongside aid packages in the form of food, clothing, and rebuilding supplies.

It was a pivotal moment for Mennonite mission agencies in Europe as well. Not only were Mennonite churches in Europe finally safe again but countries that had been closed to missionaries for decades were asking for aid and personnel to be sent. And so as MCC was responding with short-term relief, Mennonite mission agencies were taking notice. The Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (Mennonite Board of Missions, or MBM, after 1971) stated in its 1945 report: "Whereas, the war in Europe has come to an end, we recommend . . . that we utilize the potentialities of both men and money in the hearty support of the post-war plans of expansion which our Mission Board has outlined in meeting the challenge of a needy world."[1] And indeed, in some European countries at least, Mennonite relief workers would give way to long-term missionaries as European recovery progressed.

London was among the European cities that MCC sent workers to in 1945. Those workers joined other Mennonites who had been in the city throughout the war. Among the new arrivals were John Coffman and Eileen Pell. Both were Canadian and in their thirties, and amid the air raids and clothing distributions,

1 "Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities," 1945.

they fell in love. They soon married, and, although they moved back to Canada at the end of the war, they later returned to the city where they had met and served together, but this time they went as part of a permanent initiative. MBM had decided that London would be one of the bases for its new, long-term work in Europe, and the Coffmans were invited to join the team.[2] Mennonite mission to England had begun.

In 1948 MBM proposed that when "suitable personnel become available"[3] the organization would open a Mennonite Gospel Center in London. This was not an unusual mission strategy for the time; the Board of Missions was employing the same method in other strategic cities on the continent where relief and aid had opened the doors to a long-term work, including Brussels and Paris. But it was not until 1953 that another couple—Quintus and Miriam Leatherman—agreed to move to London, and the search for a building began in earnest. Among the purposes of the proposed center was "to conduct a witness of Christian teaching in England" and "to distribute information and literature regarding Mennonite faith and way of life."[4]

A year later, MBM settled on 14 Shepherd's Hill, a large residential structure in the Highgate neighborhood of North London, and purchased the property. As providence would have it, the new Gospel Center was only a few doors down from the property from which John Coffman had distributed clothing more than a decade earlier. The Leathermans moved into the building, and a new era of Anabaptist witness in England began.

Early Education in the London Mission

From the beginning of the London mission, Bible education was used as an evangelistic tool. Within a few months of the Leathermans' arrival in London, Miriam and her two daughters assisted with the first Bible school at the Finsbury Mission, where John Coffman was serving as superintendent. Eileen, too, was a teacher at the inaugural class, and two visiting Mennonite girls from the United States served as teacher's aides. A month later, the Coffmans and Leathermans repeated the Bible School, this time at the Kentish Town Free Gospel Hall. The response, Quintus wrote, was good at both locations.[5] One report noted that

2 The Coffmans would remain in London for the rest of their lives. Eileen blessed the London Mennonite Centre with her green thumb, and John was fond of taking Centre visitors on his "Anabaptist Walk" around the city. A profile of John during WWII can be found at https://mcc.org/centennial/100-stories/name-christ.

3 Forty-Third Annual Meeting: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, "50th Anniversary of Foreign Missions," 1949.

4 Forty-Third Annual Meeting.

5 Quintus Leatherman, "Witnessing Opportunities Grow in London," *The Power of the Gospel in a Changing World* (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 17, 1954).

"two girls accepted Christ as their personal Saviour."[6] The Mennonite teachers hoped that the children who attended the schools would introduce their parents to the gospel as well.

Summer Bible schools, Sunday schools, and other forms of Bible education continued throughout the next two decades. In 1955, in coordination with the Coffmans and Leathermans, MBM purchased the Kentish Town Free Gospel Hall, and the missionaries expanded their Bible study offerings to include young adults. John Coffman recruited students from the nearby London Bible College—a new evangelical school—to teach some of the classes, an arrangement that seemed to work well for all involved. Short-term Mennonite volunteers from North America continued to arrive each summer to assist at the annual Bible schools, and, at both Finsbury Mission and Kentish Town (where the Coffmans now lived), interest and participation continued to grow through the 1950s and into the 1960s. No adult programs were offered beyond regular Bible studies hosted by the Leathermans at the Centre.

While this early missionary activity may not properly be called "theological education," a foundation of Mennonite presence and Bible education was being laid in London, and it would soon be built upon.

Speaking Theologically

Mennonite missionaries in England first began to use theological education in their mission efforts in the 1970s and '80s. In 1972, Alan and Eleanor Kreider answered a call from MBM to move to London and become the new directors of 14 Shepherd's Hill, which was by now called the London Mennonite Centre.

It is difficult to imagine anyone better suited to the unique requirements of the London assignment. Both Alan and Eleanor had deep roots in the Goshen-Elkhart region of Indiana, where North American Mennonites had settled in the 1820s. As Eleanor described it, their families carried embodied Anabaptist Mennonite "habitus."[7] The mandate to missions ran deep in both of their lineages. Alan's father, Carl, was a longtime professor of economics at Goshen College and was very involved in the Mennonite mission fervor of the 1940s and '50s. He also chaired MBM's Overseas Missions Committee in the 1970s, at the time Alan and Eleanor were called to England.[8] Eleanor, too, was from a missional family. Her parents, J. D. and Minnie Graber, had served in India as

6 Leatherman, "Witnessing Opportunities Grow in London."

7 Eleanor Kreider, "How We Speak Together" (unpublished, 2000).

8 Carl, while a Goshen student in the 1930s, was recruited by Harold Bender to return as a professor after graduate studies. As professor and dean, he was a crucial part of Goshen College's mid-century renaissance. His dual concern for academics and mission reflected the nature of many of the Mennonite Church's scholars during this era.

MBM missionaries for seventeen years, and Eleanor was born there. After their return to the states, J. D. served as the general secretary of MBM for many years, where he was influential in rousing a missionary spirit in Mennonite churches across the country with the phrase "Every church a mission outpost."[9] Both Alan and Eleanor lived and breathed the Christian mission, and their unique blend of zeal and kindness made them a great fit for the London Mennonite Centre.

Alan and Eleanor were appropriate choices for another reason as well—they thought theologically about the Christian life, and they were skilled teachers. Curiously, beyond their church and family formation, neither was theologically trained. Both had graduated from the local Mennonite institution, Goshen College—Eleanor with a degree in music and Alan with a history degree. Both then received advanced degrees in their fields and returned to teach at Goshen College in the years before moving to London. Though they had no formal theological training, they were passionate about theological education, and they believed that Anabaptists had something to offer the larger body of Christ. Their unique giftings and passion for Anabaptist values and practices would be called upon frequently during their thirty years in England.

In the beginning, the opportunities for educating theologically came through speaking engagements. The requests began to come, mostly for Alan, soon after the Kreiders moved across the pond. The London Mennonites' connection with the London Bible College now developed further, and Alan was asked to speak in the college's Reformation classes regularly. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, an evangelical university outreach, heard about the Mennonites and asked Alan to speak on "The Christian and Revolution" for an upcoming gathering of British youth. When Alan suggested that he speak on pacifism instead, the organizers declined and explained that they considered the topic largely irrelevant. Alan, not about to turn down the invitation to share his Anabaptist perspectives, agreed to speak on revolution instead.

The organizers' stance embodied British evangelicalism at the end of the 1960s. Couched mostly within the "low church" portion of the Anglican faith, the evangelical movement had, by the 1960s, lost much of the spirit of social change that the early abolitionist William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect had given it in its beginnings. The British historian David Bebbington would state in 1989 that evangelicals were marked by four attributes: conversionism, activism,

9 "Graber, Joseph Daniel (1900–1978)," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, accessed October 28, 2022, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Graber,_Joseph_Daniel_(1900-1978). As Secretary of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, J. D. was an important force behind much of the mission outreach of the Mennonite Church in the mid-twentieth century.

biblicism, and crucicentrism[10] But at the genesis of the 1970s, though three of the four attributes were strong themes among British evangelicals, "activism" rolled in as a distant fourth. Alan lamented, "The evangelicals aren't interested in pacifism. Their interest in social issues of any sort is in its infancy."[11]

A long-time distinction of British evangelicals was that, unlike their North American counterparts, they did not adhere strictly to the political right in Britain. Now, Alan worried, that too was beginning to change, and the tension between the social and the political factions of the evangelical movement threatened his ability to gain a hearing for a "radical Christian" perspective on social issues. "The [London Bible] College is much worried by criticism from the evangelical right,"[12] he reported. If he were forthright with his Mennonite beliefs on nonviolence, would he be shunned altogether? Yet, the evangelicals were, at this point, among the few Christians willing to give him a hearing, and so when the speaking requests came he usually accepted.

Throughout the 1970s, Alan continued to speak on theological matters when asked. The speaking requests, he found, came mainly from Christian organizations rather than churches. London pastors—whatever their personal beliefs about war, nonviolence, and social issues—could hardly afford to incite their flocks unnecessarily by way of the local Mennonite scholar. In those early years, the Quakers seemed the only British Christians to whom the idea of pacifism was not unthinkable. But as time went on, Alan sensed an increasing openness to his radical theology. He became involved with the Shaftesbury Project on Christian Involvement in Society and joined its "War, Violence, and Revolution" study group. There, he was surprised to find he was not as alone in his views as he had supposed. "I continually am amazed to find out how many quiet pacifists there are among evangelicals," he exclaimed. "We must organize!"[13]

And organize they increasingly did. A new generation of young evangelicals was increasingly disquieted by social concerns like inequality, war, and poverty, and open to radical Christian perspectives that tried seriously to address those needs. Evangelical Peacemakers formed, with Alan as a founding member. And increasingly he had an audience for the issues *he* wanted to speak about, including pacifism.

In the early 1980s, Alan and the London Mennonite Centre received two speaking engagements that greatly increased the Mennonites' reception among

10 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, UK: Routledge, 1989), 2–3.

11 Alan Kreider, "Alan Kreider to Wilbert Shenk," June 14, 1978, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Records, 1975–79, Mennonite Church USA.

12 Alan Kreider, "Letter to Wilbert Shenk, M.B.M.," June 29, 1977, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Records, 1975–79, Mennonite Church USA.

13 Kreider, "Letter to Wilbert Shenk."

British Christians. First came an invitation from Greenbelt, an evangelical Christian music festival held outside of London. Begun in 1974, the festival was near its heyday by this time, drawing crowds of about fifteen thousand every year. For a fringe Anabaptist group, this would be an unprecedented audience, and it was a prospect that excited Alan and MBM greatly. Even more exciting was the topic they were asked to speak on: "Christian Attitudes to War." Alan, Eleanor, and other Centre staff worked hard to prepare a multimedia presentation that would befit the youthful setting. Would the youth, they wondered, really be interested in what *Mennonites* had to say?

The other speaking engagement that opened doors for the Mennonites was of a very different nature. In 1982, Alan was asked to debate at the annual London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity on the topic of the arms race. Although the lectures were begun in the same year as Greenbelt, the two settings could scarcely have been more different. Designed to "stimulate Christian thinking on some of the burning issues of the day,"[14] these talks were the brainchild of John Stott—longtime leader of All Souls, the Anglican church at the center of the evangelical movement in London. In one sense, the lecture series represented intellectually the growing wing of British evangelicalism that was committed to engaging social issues. In another sense, however, the setting was a strange one for a Mennonite because John Stott, more than perhaps any other figure, represented the intellectual and spiritual center of the evangelical movement, and not its youthful fringe. Although he had been a pacifist in his early ministry, he now held avowedly to a "just war"[15] position on the issue of violence. And Alan's debate partner? A national military figure, Sir Neil Cameron, the recently retired head of the British Armed Forces. Was Alan being invited as a diversion? Would his peace position be dissected by experts on the Mennonites' most public stage yet? Alan accepted anyway and began to prepare in earnest.

Both events went off satisfactorily. At Greenbelt, when the day of the presentation came, much to the surprise of Alan, Eleanor, and the other Mennonites in attendance, the tent was packed. Around fifteen hundred people attended the two-hour show, and Alan and other presenters proffered unapologetically the Anabaptist case for peace. Even more importantly, Alan estimated that about fifty attendees stayed behind to discuss things further with the presenters. "We may be witnessing the painful birth of a scrawny but living Evangelical peace

14 John Stott: London Lecture website, "About Us," accessed November 3, 2022, https://www.johnstottlondonlecture.org.uk/about.

15 "Just war theory" is a Christian ethical framework that attempts to discern when it is (or is not) morally permissible to go to war. Born from the thought of Catholic theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the theory attempts to chart an ethically justifiable path for Christians to fight on behalf of their country so long as the conditions meet certain moral criteria.

movement," Alan reflected afterward. "Praise the Lord."[16] And at the London Lectures, on the final night of the prestigious week-long event, Alan and Sir Cameron went head-to-head. Although Cameron presented a logical case for the need for military intervention, Alan believed that his own Anabaptist case for a theology of peace came across well too. While he felt he could have spoken more clearly, he was happy not to have misrepresented his theological convictions. The Mennonites were getting an audience, and peace was getting a chance among at least some evangelical Christians in Britain.

After this, speaking requests came to the London Mennonite Centre thick and fast. The combination of the Greenbelt presentation and the arms debate at the London Lectures solidified the perception of Anabaptist theology across much of British evangelicalism, and the 1982 Falklands War seemed to increase young evangelicals' desire for a theology of peace in the church. Alan continued to speak on the Bible and theology at Christian conferences and organizational gatherings across England, but increasingly he spoke at churches too. By now, "England's best-known evangelical pacifist"[17] could speak freely, and his talks on peace, nonviolence, and radical discipleship to Jesus were welcomed in a new way.

Theological Teaching Programs

The mid-1980s marked a distinct shift in the delivery of Anabaptist theological education in England. Enabled by the growing openness to radical theological stances in the evangelical church as well as the flurry of speaking requests coming to the Centre, Mennonites and Anabaptists founded two teaching programs for theological training: "Cross-Currents" and "Workshop." Neither program was explicitly Mennonite or Anabaptist, yet both embraced the radical themes of peace, community, and discipleship to Jesus, at a time when such themes were controversial or rare. Both were intended for lay Christians rather than academics, and both placed an emphasis on everyday faithfulness, on theological ideas applied to the Christian life. Through these programs, the Mennonite and Anabaptist influence in the wider British church increased sizably.

In 1986, the staff of the London Mennonite Centre formed their very first training program—"Cross-Currents." The name was an apt one for the Mennonites and represented Alan and Eleanor's hope that even as they themselves were learning from the English church traditions surrounding them so the British church might have something to learn from Anabaptists.

16 Alan Kreider, "Alan Kreider to Wilbert Shenk," August 17, 1980, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Records, 1980–84, Mennonite Church USA.

17 Mennonite Board of Missions, "Kreiders Seek to Bring Anabaptist Vision to England," October 3, 1984.

The idea for a teaching program had been brewing for a year or two. Baptists and evangelical Anglicans were finding the Centre with more frequency, and the Mennonite ideas it embodied were increasingly welcomed among British Christians. One evangelical leader wrote to the Kreiders: "It seems to me that the Mennonite tradition has come of age. . . . For centuries the evangelicals have said the Mennonite tradition would not work. But as our society is growing ever more fragile and disturbed, simplicity, community, and peacemaking are becoming lively concerns for all."[18] By now, Alan was receiving more speaking requests than he could accept, and a question began to form: What if, instead of traveling to churches and conferences, they created a weekend teaching program and invited interested Christians to learn about Anabaptist theology on their own terms?

The theological task of Cross-Currents was to present an integrative view of radical Christian discipleship. Alan and Eleanor worked on the goals together: "to represent Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives in conversation with Christians of other traditions" and "to foster Christian thinking and acting at the grassroots level."[19] The program would be flexible in its approach, they decided, and more concerned with asking questions about what it meant to follow Jesus than with giving the "right" answers. It would be an immersive learning experience, and participants would worship, pray, and eat together, in addition to attending lectures. The Centre would not try to become accredited; this would not be an academic environment but a residential one. Cross-Currents, they hoped, would be the kind of theology program where lay Christians of any denominational background could ask difficult questions about faith and life.

The beginning of Cross-Currents also marked an indigenizing moment in the Centre's theological training. Up to this point, Alan had been the primary face of the Mennonite presence in England, and it was he who traveled far and often to speak and teach. But, he and Eleanor felt, this need not continue to be so. By this time, the membership of the Centre's Mennonite Fellowship had grown larger, and they could no longer meet in the building's fifty-seat chapel. The Centre itself was now a live-in community for a number of the church members, some of whom had strong Anabaptist convictions and also theological training. Why couldn't they teach too?

For the first course offering, Alan and Eleanor decided, they would ask Chris Marshall—a PhD student in theology who lived at the Centre—to teach alongside them. Based on Chris's thesis material, they called the course "Faith and False Faith in a Time of Crisis" and described it as a "combined Bible study in the Gospel

18 Alan Kreider, "London Mennonite Centre: CrossCurrents Programme—Draft IV," June 23, 1984, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Records, 1980–84, Mennonite Church USA.

19 Kreider, "London Mennonite Centre: CrossCurrents Programme."

of Mark, worship, and application to the contemporary world."[20] Together with the Centre staff, they ran the course on three different weekends—one in Leeds, one in Belfast, and the final one at home in the London Mennonite Centre. The final weekend was, for the Kreiders, the most moving. At the end of the closing worship, a hushed silence fell upon the small crowd of participants, and not a single person moved; no one was ready to break the atmosphere of spiritual awe. One participant described how she "came into a place of peace and submission to Christ and met Jesus in a new and powerful way."[21] The responses encouraged the Kreiders, and they began to plan in earnest for the next course.

"Social Holiness" was the next weekend offering, and this time Alan and Eleanor taught alongside David Nussbaum, a British theology student and member of the Mennonite Fellowship. After that came courses on justice, worship, the early church, conflict management, and many other theological topics. The Centre staff continued to run several Cross-Currents courses every year throughout the next few decades, and the program became a staple of the London Mennonite Centre's witness efforts. Alan and Eleanor usually taught, often alongside other members of the church (which had become Wood Green Mennonite Fellowship by then). There continued to be, Alan noted, a felt sense of God's presence and a sense of expectancy among the diverse groups of Cross-Currents participants.[22]

After the Kreiders moved to Manchester in 1991, the teaching program continued under the leadership of Nelson Kraybill, the new Programme Director at the Centre, and the staff continued to choose theological topics based on the research and interests of the teachers within the local fellowship. The program remained important to the witness of the London Mennonite Centre well into the twenty-first century. And the ongoing use of British teachers—alongside North American Mennonite missionaries—continued the indigenization of the Mennonite mission to its English setting.

Cross-Currents was not the first Anabaptist theology teaching program in England, however; "Workshop" was. The course was the contrivance of Noel Moules, who, like Alan and Eleanor, was the son of missionary parents. Also like Eleanor, Noel was born in India, but he grew up in English boarding schools. While attending a theological college in Devon in the 1970s, he became involved in the charismatic bloc of the evangelical church, of which the Southwest of England was a hotbed at the time. Years later, after marrying and moving north to

20 Alan Kreider, "Alan Kreider to Blanche Sell, MBM," June 27, 1985, MBM Global Ministries Division, 1985–1990, Mennonite Church USA.

21 Alan Kreider, "Alan Kreider to Blanche Sell, MBM," January 6, 1986, MBM Global Ministries Division, 1985–1990, Mennonite Church USA.

22 Alan Kreider, "From Mennonite to Anabaptist: Mennonite Witness in England since 1974," in *History and Mission in Europe—Continuing the Conversation*, Mission Studies (Herald, 2011), 246.

Sunderland to take a job as a schoolteacher, Noel became involved with Teamwork, a network of about fifty churches that attempted to think in new ways about faith and life. No two of the network's churches were alike. Many were Baptist, some were house churches. Most were excited about the gifts of the Spirit, and all were trying in their own way to live out the radical teachings of Jesus. It was from this womb that Workshop was born.[23]

The fledgling network desperately needed theological education, Noel saw. His own theological training background was a rarity among the church members, many of whom had neither the time nor the means to attend an accredited Bible college. What if the church offered a lay theological training program, he wondered? Since it would be catered to people with full-time jobs, could weekend courses be offered, maybe at a few different locations around the country? It was a plan strangely like the one that birthed Cross-Currents a few years later, without any connection between the programs. There was simply, in both cases, a desire for people to learn to live out the teachings of Jesus and to be trained in the theology of the Christian life.

From the very beginning it was, in Noel's words, "like throwing a match on petrol."[24] Noel served as Workshop's primary teacher from the program's onset, and his passion for "shalom" and the kingdom of God proved deeply winsome to all who came. To his great surprise, word of the program spread rapidly, and, within a few years, hundreds were showing up to many of the weekend classes.

For the next thirty years, Noel, alongside other teachers, ran Workshop all over the United Kingdom. All in all, tens of thousands turned out for its weekend offerings. Unlike the Cross-Currents courses, it was a widespread phenomenon in the British church. But like Cross-Currents, Workshop taught practical theology, from Noel's deep belief that Christian theology must be about the Christian life. As with Cross-Currents, Workshop was filled with worship, prayer, and deep theological interaction between participants. It too emphasized the importance and power of life around the table, and Noel insisted that "once you've got food in front of you, things can happen."[25] Each weekend ended with a feast that Noel had dubbed the "peacemeal." Workshop, in true Anabaptist fashion, was about making the teachings of Jesus available to a wide Christian audience and inviting people to live accordingly.

But was Workshop Anabaptist? Not explicitly, no. Noel was introduced to Anabaptism as a historical movement during his theology training, but he did not, by his own admittance, know that it was a living tradition. Yet the new training program was, in his own words, "Anabaptist before I even knew there

23 Workshop no longer holds teaching weekends, but its teachings have been archived online through present-day.

24 Noel Moules, Interview by David Glick, September 22, 2022.

25 Moules, Interview.

were Anabaptists alive!"[26] Nonresistance, discipleship, and community were themes throughout the program's teachings, and were all encapsulated under Noel's "shalom vision."[27] The centrality of Jesus's teachings permeated the coursework, including a distinct emphasis on peace. When Alan and Noel finally met some years later, Alan remarked on Noel's inner faith and fire and reported him to be "on the Anabaptist wavelength."[28] And through meeting Alan and other Mennonites, Noel began to identify as Anabaptist, even while he maintained that, though he hadn't known it, he had been one all along. Workshop was, as Noel Moule was, thoroughly Anabaptist.

By this time, the gradual terminological switch from "Mennonite" to "Anabaptist" within the movement was well underway.[29] In many ways, as Alan had realized, this change was a crucial element of the mission's indigenization to its British setting.[30] Institutions founded by the North American missionaries—like the London Mennonite Centre and the Wood Green Mennonite Church—retained their Mennonite identity throughout their respective lifetimes, and many of Wood Green's British members referred to themselves happily as "Mennonite." Yet many others, while intrigued by the values and stories of historic Anabaptists, did not feel any particular affinity to the Mennonite tradition. And so, as indigenous British who were influenced by Anabaptism began and facilitated their own initiatives, "Anabaptist" increasingly became the common moniker within the small movement.[31]

Workshop and Cross-Currents reflected the shift toward theological education programs in the Mennonite (now Anabaptist) mission in England. As time went on, there was increasing cross-coordination between the programs, and Alan and

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26 Moules, Interview.

27 Shalom, the Hebrew word often translated "peace" or "wholeness," embodies, for Noel, the kingdom of God. As such, topics like justice, forgiveness, and salvation are all elements of shalom. Noel is a self-proclaimed "shalom activist."

28 Alan Kreider, "Triennial Report, May–August 1992," April 24, 1992, Mennonite Mission Network Global Ministries (Overseas) Files, 1990–1995, Mennonite Church USA.

29 Walter Sawatsky, a Mennonite historian, has written on the use of "Anabaptist" and "Mennonite" in missional settings, most particularly in "Centers for Historical and Mission Studies in Anabaptist World," *Mission Focus*, Annual Review, 19, no. 2011 (n.d.): 208–23.

30 Kreider, "From Mennonite to Anabaptist." Alan uses the gradual switch from "Mennonite" to "Anabaptist" to tell the story of the Mennonite mission in London, including his and Eleanor's involvement in it.

31 One example of this is the birth of the Anabaptist Network. When its founders were deliberating over what to name the new network, "Mennonite" fell out of the running quickly given that British Christians tended to associate the name with horses-and-buggies and plain bonnets. Although "Radical Reformation Network" was considered, they settled on "Anabaptist." See Stuart Murray-Williams, Interview by David Glick, May 31, 2022.

Eleanor would sometimes teach during a Workshop weekend, as Noel would for Cross-Currents. Neither program contained explicit Anabaptist theology, although Cross-Currents' formal connection to the London Mennonite Centre left little doubt as to which theological tradition it most drew from. Rather, the teachers relied on biblical themes that were dear to historical Anabaptists and modern-day Mennonites: the kingdom of God, peace, nonviolence, radical discipleship, community, justice. With Cross-Currents, British Mennonites first engaged in formal theological education alongside North American Mennonite missionaries. In Workshop, an indigenous Anabaptist teaching program was born from English initiative alone. And so each, in its own way, marked an important moment in the indigenization of the Mennonite mission in England.

"Cross-Pollination" in the British Mission

The term "indigenization" describes adequately the way MBM's London mission grew and morphed in the late twentieth century, including the rise of British leaders, the shift in terminology, and the intention shown by North American Mennonite missionaries in empowering locals. But the term is inadequate to capture another fact about the relationship of the missionaries to their British setting and counterparts—that they received as much as they gave. In their interactions with the British church and culture, the missionaries were students as well as teachers. The Kreiders, especially, were deeply shaped by their time in England. From their Anglican friends they learned the power of liturgy and praying the Daily Office. British evangelicals showed them how to study the Scriptures with confidence, and charismatics taught them to be "expectant in prayer and passionate in worship."[32] These elements of British Christianity enriched not only the Kreiders' personal lives but also their teaching ministry.

Such "cross-pollination" between North American missionaries and British Christians happened in various ways. As British Anabaptists were grateful for the Mennonite witness in London, so the visiting Mennonites were often eager to learn from the British church. MBM administrators desired to use their resources to foment Anabaptist ideas in England, but they viewed their organization's presence in England with another purpose too: they wanted their missionaries to learn from the British church how to be faithfully Christian in a secularizing society, and then to impart those attributes to the North American Mennonite church upon their return.[33] Such was the relationship between North American missionaries and the British Christians they interacted with. Mennonite

32 Eleanor Kreider, "Widening Horizon: Our Life as Missionaries in England," talk given February 11, 2013, Mission Peace Colloquium, AMBS, Elkhart, Indiana.

33 David Nussbaum, Interview by David Glick, September 9, 2022. Nussbaum recalls this from a conversation with Larry Miller, a senior administrator at MBM.

missionaries were students of the British church, and the pollination between the two groups was often reciprocal.

Theological Education after Mission

In 1992, a few British Anabaptist leaders, including Stuart Murray, founded the "Anabaptist Network" in the United Kingdom.[34] The network's beginning marked not only another progression in the indigenization of the Anabaptist movement in England but also a shift in the theological education that Mennonites and Anabaptists offered. Stuart's background as an urban church planter influenced the new network's shape, and missional themes and the gospel of Jesus remained central within the movement. Yet Stuart was also a professional academic, as were an increasing number of British Christians who were finding the Centre and the Anabaptist community in England.

Anabaptist ideas, some perhaps influenced by Alan's widespread teaching in the 1970s and '80s, now began to take form slowly within British Christian academia. From its beginning, the new Network included two particularly academic features: an annual Anabaptist Theological Forum and a journal publication, *Anabaptism Today*. Two years later, in 1994, Spurgeon's College, a Baptist school in South London, introduced a master's program in Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, and Bristol Baptist College hired a lecturer who belonged to the Anabaptist Network. The academic turn was perhaps an inevitable one, and yet, for a tradition with few professional theologians in its nearly five-hundred-year history, a bit of unease accompanied this development. It did, however, represent yet another moment of indigenization for Anabaptist education in England.

Not all of the new Anabaptist Network initiatives were academic ones. From its beginning, the new institution included a vision for a network of Anabaptist study groups. The concept was simple: in locales where a few (or more) Christians were interested in the Anabaptist tradition, they could form a study group and explore Anabaptist history and values together. Such groups were not an entirely new conception. A Radical Reformation study group had met in London since 1987, and Stuart Murray was one of its members. It was from this group that the idea for an Anabaptist Network was born, and its founding members encouraged others around the British Isles to do something similar in their own context.

Within a year, six groups had formed—in London, Bristol, the Midlands, Manchester, and even one in Northern Ireland. The gatherings represented wonderful diversity; the members of one group read about Anabaptist views on economics, while another group explored the history of the Lollards in England. Those who gathered in Manchester sang Anabaptist hymns and "[ate] marvelous

34 "Anabaptist Mennonite Network," https://amnetwork.uk/.

scones."[35] As with Cross-Currents and Workshop, a meal nearly always took center stage at the gatherings.[36] These study groups represented an important "lay theology" component within the Anabaptist Network and made the study of the Anabaptist tradition accessible to all.

In 2010, the trust overseeing the London Mennonite Centre closed its doors and sold the Shepherd's Hill property, ending an era of Mennonite mission, education, and hospitality. A British Anabaptist witness continues, however. The Anabaptist Network remains, as do its study groups and annual Anabaptist Theological Forum. *Anabaptism Today*, revived as an online-only journal, still releases three issues a year and, like the rest of the Network, is led largely by British Anabaptists. Academic theological training, too, has moved online, and Bristol Baptist College offers master's and doctoral degrees in Anabaptist Studies to students from anywhere in the world.[37]

These programs are all led and facilitated by British leaders, and, as such, represent an exciting indigenous continuation of the education programs once offered by Mennonite missionaries.

35 "Anabaptist Network News," *Anabaptism Today*, no. 3 (June 1993): 25.

36 Andrew Francis, a member of the Anabaptist Network, has written on the importance of food in Christian discipleship. See his essay on its use in the Anabaptist movement in England: https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/journal_entry/food-in-the-contemporary-uk-anabaptist-movement/.

37 Online education and its advancements in the Covid and post-Covid era are exciting developments for British Anabaptists, as they are for everyone. Yet, the question arises: If the history of Anabaptist theological education is one of theology that takes form in the Christian life, can such an education transfer to an online experience? Surely, practically speaking, there can be no substitute for table fellowship and for learning in community together, in the embodied presence of living, breathing Christian brothers and sisters. Can online theological education be truly "Anabaptist"? The next generation of Anabaptist missionaries and educators will certainly be faced with this question.

Challenges for the Missional Task from a Theological Education Approach

A Perspective from Latin America

César Moya

The missional task and theological education are closely related; there is no mission without education and no education without mission. What I mean by this is that, on the one hand, the missional task implies theological education—either formally or informally—through methods appropriate to the culture and context in which the education takes place. On the other hand, the purpose of imparted theological education is to carry out the mission.

My wife, Patricia, and I reached this affirmation through our experiences of carrying out mission in Latin American contexts of violence and exclusion. Our missional work has been connected not only with missionary organizations or the local church but also with educational institutions of other organizations, including theological teaching at the popular and university level. In addition, we were involved in church planting in Colombia through Mennonite Church Colombia (IMCOL—Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia) (1986–1999), and in Ecuador through Mennonite Mission Network in partnership with Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC) and IMCOL (2000–2014).

This article aims to identify the challenges of the missional task as viewed through the lens of our personal experience in theological education in different contexts of Latin America and the United States. To this end, we will highlight the most relevant aspects of our experiences throughout four decades, taking into

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account the social and political conjunctures of each era as well as the authors and people—both from Latin America and North America—who influenced our thinking and inspired us in doing mission.

Our journey has led us to rethink some aspects of mission, and we hope this writing will (1) contribute to understanding the significance of the *Missio Dei* in relation to theological education, (2) help as a guide for those who are serving or wish to serve in contexts of exclusion and marginalization, and (3) generate dialogue between Anabaptist theology and other theologies in each missional context.

Our Missional Journey

Our first missionary experience dates to the early 1980s in my hometown of Ibagué, Colombia, during the fervor of Liberation Theology, the end of several dictatorships in Latin America, the political enthusiasm for "perestroika," the war between Iran and Iraq, the emergence of the so-called Integral Mission,[1] and the confrontation between Christianity and communism. Movements such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), in which I participated as a university student, lived through these confrontations. As a Christian missionary movement, the IFES espoused three key principles: evangelize, edify, and send, which included placing "converted" youth in a church—evangelical or Catholic. Theologically, the movement took its cues from René Padilla and the Latin American Theological Fraternity, which endorsed (among others) Juan Mackay's *El Otro Cristo Español*,[2] a book that inspired me. This first experience awakened a missionary spirit in both my wife and me.

Then, in the mid-1980s, the Mennonite Church of Ibagué (Colombia), our mother church, received a vision of expanding the Anabaptist testimony to the city of Armenia and invited Patricia and me to go as "workers." We were to devote part of our time to church planting and working in our respective professions, even though our theological training was rudimentary at that point. During that time, we approached Anabaptist theology more intentionally, especially through a seminar on John Driver's book *Contra corriente*.[3]

The '90s began with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the so-called Cold War, privatizations in Latin America, and the end of the armed conflict in

1 C. René Padilla, *Misión Integral: Ensayos sobre el Reino y la Iglesia* (Grand Rapids-Buenos Aires: New Creation and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). See also C. René Padilla and Tetsunao Yamamoru, eds., *Misión Integral y Pobreza: El testimonio evangélico hacia el tercer milenio; Palabra, espíritu y misión* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2001).

2 Juan A. Mackay, *El otro Cristo español: Un estudio de la historia espiritual de España y América Latina*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1988).

3 Juan Driver, *Contra Corriente: Ensayo sobre Eclesiología Radical* (Ciudad de Guatemala/Bogotá: CLARA-SEMILLA, 1998).

El Salvador and Guatemala. During that time, I finished my theological studies at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia (SBMC—Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia) and entered the Conflict Transformation Program that Justapaz carried out with Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA), complemented by studies in Conflict Resolution with the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá). That training included practical actions such as attending military parades to collect signatures in support of conscientious objection; participating in marches for human rights; joining public actions in front of the cathedral of Bogotá in response to the murder of the Alvarado spouses,[4] who were human rights defenders; and providing pastoral support to communities displaced by violence. In addition, we experienced death threats firsthand against those who led the church; in one of our visits to the Urabá region of Antioquia, we came close to losing our lives at the hands of an armed group.

These experiences along with studies at SBMC drove me to search for connections between Anabaptism and Latin American Liberation Theology. I was especially impacted by the theological teachings of Robert J. Suderman, a Commission for Overseas Mission (COM) worker who served as rector and professor of the SBMC, and Elsa Tamez, one of the most renowned Latin American theologians and professor at the Latin American Biblical University (UBL), San Jose, Costa Rica. Their teachings showed not only the importance of nonviolence but also how to actively confront the violent reality of the context.

But it was the course on "History and Theology of the Radical Reformation" taught by Enrique Dueck, a retired missionary, that awakened a spirit of dissatisfaction within me about the system of injustice and violence in our context as well as the traditional way of being a church. My thinking expanded further through two additional sources: (1) the "Anabaptism and Liberation Theology" course taught jointly by Peter Stucky—Executive Secretary for IMCOL at that time—and the Carmelite priest Hugo Canavan, and (2) a publication with the same name as the course, authored by LaVerne Rutschman, who had served as a COM missionary at SBL and IMCOL.[5] These sources helped me see the relationships between sixteenth-century Anabaptism, with its emphasis on nonviolence, and Latin American Liberation Theology, with its emphasis on the option for the poor. At the same time they helped me understand the meaning of costly discipleship.

Anabaptist missionaries and other Latin American theologians also played a significant role in our peace training. They influenced our thinking through

4 See Daniel Osorio, "En el crimen de Mario Calderón y Elsa Alvarado aún no se conoce a los responsables," *El Espectador*, May 19, 2022, https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/en-el-crimen-de-mario-calderon-y-elsa-alvarado-aun-no-se-conocen-los-responsables/.

5 LaVerne A. Rutschman, *Anabautismo Radical y Teología Latinoamericana de la Liberación* (San José: SEBILA, 1982).

theological education and service while modeling practices of active nonviolence, conscientious objection to military service, anti-militarism, and community life and work for the most vulnerable in our society. At the same time they facilitated the dialogue between Anabaptism and the Latin American reality. Their influence prepared me for the task I would face later in life.

At the beginning of 2000, Patricia and I received an invitation from the Mennonite Board of Missions (later Mennonite Mission Network, or MMN), in partnership with Iowa-Nebraska Conference (later Central Plains Mennonite Conference, or CPMC) and IMCOL, to support the biblical and theological training of the indigenous evangelical churches[6] located in the province of Chimborazo, through the Indigenous Center for Theological Studies (CIET—Centro Integral de Estudios Teológicos).[7] The Center functioned as a branch of UBL in Ecuador and was strongly influenced by Liberation Theology. The assignment came amid political upheaval and revolts led by social and indigenous movements in the wake of dollarization replacing the Sucre (the national currency), a bank freeze that caused exaggerated inflation, and the loss of savings for hundreds of thousands of Ecuadorians.

A few months after arriving in Ecuador with our three children, we began expanding our theological teaching beyond the indigenous churches—in workshops at the Centro Integral de la Familia (CIF), Bible courses at the Divine Word Bible Center (Catholic), and workshops at the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI—Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias). In addition, the Christian University, which leaned evangelical, invited us to be part of the staff of the Licentiate program in Religious Sciences and Theology. There we taught courses such as "Conflict Analysis and Transformation," "Political Theology," and a seminar in ethics for all levels.

At that time of our journey, we found ourselves positioned in our educational work between two theological tendencies: liberationist and evangelical. The former emphasized commitment to and preferential option for the poor, which we came to understand experientially through being part of the struggles of the communities. The latter emphasized moral issues. Of course, both tendencies affected exegesis and interpretation of the Bible. These differing approaches not only showed us the importance of sharing our Anabaptist theological perspective[8]

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6 See César Moya, "Mennonites and Theological Education among Indigenous Churches in Ecuador: A Perspective from the Last Two Decades," *Anabaptist Witness* 1, no. 1 (October 2014): 121–34.

7 Julián Guamán and Peter Wigginton wrote a summary of the work developed by the partnership, titled "The Wind Blows Where It Wants: 30 Years of Walking in the Anabaptist Faith in Ecuador," *Missio Dei*, no. 30 (2021).

8 Our Anabaptist theological perspective has been significantly influenced by the writings and teachings of John Howard Yoder, John Driver, and John Paul Lederach,

but also helped us see other realities. This confirmed for us the importance of dialogue between the Anabaptist tradition inherited from the North and the Latin American reality of violence and exclusion.

Our theological teaching in a variety of spaces aroused interest in the Anabaptist perspective, especially among those who sought a connection between theology and their individual realities as well as between theology and the social and political realities of the country. After Patricia and I had served in Ecuador for one year, the first Mennonite Church in Quito was planted. This led to the development of several important projects, among them the care of refugees, later supported by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

While serving in these missionary roles, Patricia and I received further theological training, with each of us completing a master's degree in theology at UBL. My master's thesis, "Social Reconciliation in Latin America,"[9] led me to learn about the theological thought of Juan (John) Driver and John Howard Yoder, and the experience of John Paul Lederach in the field of transformation of social conflicts. The three of them served as references for the Mennonite churches in Latin America. In my thesis I find relationship between their thoughts and the contents of the truth and reconciliation commissions of several countries.

Thanks to the support of Linda Shelly, MMN Latin American director, our service with MMN also included short periods of teaching and visiting in other countries and institutions:

- In 2002 we taught at UBL in Costa Rica.
- In 2003 and 2004 we taught a course in Venezuela titled "Conflict Analysis and Transformation" with Pentecostal and Mennonite churches at the time of the so-called Bolivarian revolution.[10] In both Costa Rica and Venezuela, some institutions expressed an open attitude toward Liberation Theology and an affinity with Anabaptist theology.
- Between 2005 and 2006 we took the opportunity to visit more than thirty-five of the congregations that made up the CPMC, getting to know them and learn from their tradition.
- In 2008, among the Mennonite churches in Paraguay, we taught a course

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among others. Thus, it is important to recognize that our perspective may be in tension with other Anabaptist perspectives that are also engaged in the *Missio Dei*.

9 The thesis led to two publications: César Moya, *Conflicto, liberación y reconciliación: Ética teológica para la reconciliación de las víctimas en América Latina* (Quito: CLAI, 2010); and César Moya, *Verdad y ética de la paz: Un diálogo necesario para posibles acuerdos en sociedades divididas* (Quito: CLAI, 2014).

10 Elisabeth Claus, "La Revolución de Hugo Chávez," *La Vanguardia*, Febrero 1, 2019, https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/junior-report/20190201/4696511795/venezuela-revolucion-bolivariana-hugo-chavez-simon-bolivar.html.

titled "Gender Equity," based on the book *Mujeres y obispado*[11] that I had just published. The book admittedly caused discomfort in some who took the course.

- In 2009 we taught "History and Theology of Radical Reformation" to the Mennonite churches in Chile, which, at the time, were discerning whether to join Mennonite World Conference (MWC).
- Between 2009 and 2010 we taught "Violence and Mission of the church" with the South American Ministerial Seminary (SEMISUD—Seminario Sudamericano). During that period, I was invited to be one of the writers of the *Journal of Latin American Biblical Interpretation* (RIBLA).
- Between 2010 and 2011 we served as visiting scholars at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). There, during the fall of 2010, Patricia and I joined Professor Walter Sawatsky in teaching the master's level course "Transformation of Latin American Christianity." I also gave a few lectures in Professor Gayle Gerber Koontz's Anabaptist theology courses as well as in several peace colloquiums. At the same time, I was doing my doctoral dissertation[12] and the AMBS faculty became my academic community of reference. This stay allowed us to communicate our theological thought from the South to Mennonite scholars in the North. The resulting North-South exchange generated very good dialogue that helped identify complements between Anabaptism and Latin American theology and, at the same time, to carry out the missional task from the South to the North.

Meanwhile, the coming to power of President Rafael Correa in Ecuador improved the living conditions of many Ecuadorians. This gave us some hope because the president's vision was very close to the connection we saw between Anabaptism and Liberation Theology. At the same time, the relations we had established over the years with CLAI and the Evangelical Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (FEINE—Federación de Iglesias Indígenas Evangélicas de Ecuador) led to an agreement with MMN to publish *Booklets of Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Formation*. For this project, indigenous people defined the content and dynamics for teaching based on the needs of their community. The booklets reflected the transversal topics of the indigenous worldview, interweaving with one another: gender, justice and peace, inclusion, social and political participa-

11 César Moya, *Mujeres y obispado: A propósito de Primera de Timoteo* (Quito: CLAI, 2008).

12 See César Moya, "Hacia una Hermenéutica Anabautista Latinoamericana" (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2019). There I delved into the Anabaptist Christology of John Howard Yoder and the Liberation Theology Christology of the Jesuit priest Jon Sobrino.

tion, Bible, and theology from a Latin American perspective.[13] The booklets also helped to integrate the Anabaptist, liberationist, and evangelical perspectives of MMN, CLAI, and the indigenous people of FEINE. And, in the process, the indigenous people became visible as subjects of theology.

Like the heart, which both pumps and receives blood, so was our missional experience in relation to theological education: as we taught, we also learned. And the result of this walk in theological teaching was concretized in the creation of the Latin American Network of Anabaptist Studies (RELEA—Red Latinoamericana de Estudios Anabautistas). Together with other leaders of the Mennonite churches of Latin America, we helped bring into being this new network using the framework of the Latin American Anabaptist Consultation held in Guatemala City in February 2014. RELEA's main objective is to publish once-a-year reflections from the Anabaptist perspective from Latin America.[14]

In 2014 we returned to Colombia, during which time dialogue between the government and the guerrilla group FARC-EP began and would later end with the signing of the Peace Agreement.[15] In this context, we taught several courses at the SBMC and visited several territories of the country, supporting reconciliation processes through JUSTAPAZ[16] and using public advocacy as a strategy. Later, the universities became a mission field, especially where I currently work at the Reformed University (UR—Universitaria Reformada) in Barranquilla, Colombia. There, the contribution from an Anabaptist perspective involved organizing two international seminars on "Reconciliation, Nonviolence, and Sustainable Development,"[17] in which several Mennonite scholars from Latin America, Europe, and the United States participated. In addition, the "Biblical

13 See Consejo de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Evangélicos de Ecuador et al., *Programa de Pastoral Indígena: Cartillas de Formación Bíblica, Teológica y Pastoral* (Quito: CLAI, 2006).

14 RELEA has published several issues in which Mennonites and other Anabaptists from Latin America have written about topics such as People of God and Peace (2017); The Political, Justice and Peace (2018); Migration with Hope (2019); COVID-19 in Context (2021); Church and State (2022).

15 After fifty years of armed conflict, on November 24, 2016, the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-FARC signed the Peace Agreement, which included the following points: 1) comprehensive rural reform, 2) political participation, 3) end of the conflict, 4) solution to the problem of illicit drugs, 5) victims, 6) implementation, verification, and endorsement. For more information, see Special Jurisdiction for Peace, *Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera*, November 24, 2016, https://www.jep.gov.co/Marco%20Normativo/Normativa_v2/01%20ACUERDOS/Texto-Nuevo-Acuerdo-Final.pdf?csf=1&e=0fpYA0.

16 Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción Noviolenta.

17 The contributions of the first seminar are found in César Moya, ed., *Reconciliation, Nonviolence and Sustainable Development* (Barranquilla: CUR, 2020).

Hermeneutics" and "Contemporary Theology" classes have enabled dialogue on the themes of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and conscientious objection to military service, as well as the orientation of various undergraduate research projects related to peace and reconciliation.

We also traveled beyond the classroom to accompany ex-combatants and signatories of the Peace Agreement in the countryside. In doing so, we gained firsthand understanding regarding the process of reintegrating into civilian life for people who had used weapons for several decades.[18] In addition, we participated in the regional dialogues for the "total peace" proposal by the new national government.[19] In this case, the missional task moved to the political context, demonstrating that missional work continues no matter where we are.

What Does It Mean to Be Missional?

In the Anabaptist perspective there is no church without a missional task, and missional theology has the mandate to contextualize in times of post-Christianity, based on the classical doctrine of the *Missio Dei*: God the Father sends the Son, and God the Father and the Son send the Spirit . . . And all three send the Church into the world.[20] James Krabill states: "We will foster a missional understanding of the church. Mission is much more than simply one among many activities of the church, existing alongside Christian education, leadership training, mutual aid, and others. Rather, it is embedded within the very character of the church."[21]

This understanding of what it means to be missional is related to that of "integral mission,"[22] described as follows: "At a minimum, it is preaching the word, healing the sick, making peace, building communities of grace, and helping the poor achieve stability and dignity."[23] To this should be added the concept of transforming the realities of injustice and oppression in the world. Also, to

18 See César Moya, "The Path to Peace Is Not Easy, but Necessary," *MMN archives*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.mennonitemission.net/blog/4756/The-path-to-peace-is-not-easy-but-necessary.

19 In this respect, see Juan Moya, "'Total Peace' for Violent Colombia? Mennonite Leaders Reflect on the Hope for Change a New President Brings," *Anabaptist World* (October 28, 2022), https://anabaptistworld.org/total-peace-for-violent-colombia/.

20 See David W. Boshart, *Becoming Missional: Denominations and New Church Development in Complex Social Contexts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 12–22.

21 James R. Krabill, ed., "Explorando la Obra de Dios en el Mundo: Juntos en Misión; Convicciones, Valores y Compromisos Centrales de la Red Menonita de Misión," *Missio Dei*, no. 10 (2006): 9, https://assets.mennonites.org/Downloads/MissioDei10.E.pdf.

22 C. René Padilla, *Misión Integral*. See also Padilla and Yamamoru, eds., *Consulta Misión Integral y Pobreza*.

23 Krabill, ed., "Explorando la Obra de Dios en el Mundo," 10.

"recognize that anywhere and everywhere in creation is a mission."[24] And, in the same way, the concept of integral mission is related to participation—that is, cooperation in different parts of the world to respond to the opportunities to carry out God's mission,[25] as we have felt called to do in our missional journey.

Being missional carries with it a number of connotations.[26] The first has to do with the vocation and *raison d'être* of the church. The church participates in the *Missio Dei*. Thus, the whole life of the church must be one of witness to the world—witness that is not limited to seeking others to come to be committed to Christ or to live in *koinonia*. Rather, all the actions of the church, both internal and external, testify to the world. In this sense, Patricia and I gave our educational work as a witness of the church to the world. We were sent by the church—first our mother church, Ibagué, then the IMCOL through a partnership with MMN and CPMC to be a witness in Ecuador and other unplanned areas.

The second connotation is related to the context of the church. In a dominant culture where life is not necessarily promoted, or where Christian values are ignored or dismissed, the church should embrace missional work rooted in the promotion of life, dignity, social justice, and nonviolence. Hence, to become *missional* is to proclaim and be a living sign of the gospel; to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the story of Jesus—as normative for Christian ethics. In the various contexts in which Patricia and I served, we used theological education to announce the gospel with its life-giving, life-embracing implications.

The third connotation has to do with a community's particular ecclesiology. A missional perspective understands that the church is constituted through God's mission and functions as an alternative community in dialogue with the cultures around it. It does not accommodate to ethics that hinder life but rather follows the path of abundant life exemplified by Jesus Christ. The missional church aims to function as part of the kingdom of God, depending on God's action not only in the past but also in the present and the future. The missional task must lead to the creation of new communities of faith, as happened in Ecuador with the Mennonite Anabaptist Christian Church of Ecuador (ICAME—Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador).

The Missional Task Amid Theological Education Challenges

The path Patricia and I have traveled in theological education has left us with teachings that have also become challenges for the missional task. One of these

24 Krabill, ed., 10.

25 Krabill, ed., 11.

26 Lois Y. Barret, "Defining Missional Church," in *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, eds. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 177–83.

challenges is the use of the term "missionary," which seems to evoke images of the invasion, violence, and acculturation by which the gospel was made known in the Global South between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Because of this, we prefer to refer to the educational experiences described in this article as "missional."

In our teaching experiences over the years, we found that the missional church paradigm is particularly relevant to theological education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean.[27] A recent study by Matías Preiswerk, for example, shows that in the dominant neoliberal context any ecclesial institution with economic resources can open a university and a faculty of theology. While some of these institutions have a solid theology, whether of Catholic or Protestant tradition, others function with a weak theological foundation or lack the professionals to carry out the educational task.[28]

Another significant challenge of theological education in the Latin American context is confrontation with inequality, exclusion, and injustice that—still in many cases—seeks ideological legitimacy in "Western and Christian" values.[29] In addition, as Nicolás Panotto states, theological curricula lack interdisciplinarity, as demanded by today's world; that is, curricula lack integration and interrelatedness with other topics and concepts, such as social analysis tools.[30]

These challenges join those identified by Justo González: finances; migration; sectarianism; secularization processes; the diversity of Christianity and theological schools; the lack of official recognition of studies; cognitive rather than practical emphases; the absence of integration into the socio-humanistic discussions and problems of current life; lack of articulation of the biblical, theological, and humanistic sciences[31] with interculturality; inter-religiosity and ecumenism; human rights; sustainable development; and interdisciplinarity. This situation,

27 As for theological education, we agree that it is "a special dimension of the broader teaching ministry of the church and also as a special place and process for the theological task of the church. Our common fundamental assumption is that we participate in theological education for the welfare of the church in the world in light of God's reign." See Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani, eds., *Theological Education on Five Continents: Anabaptist Perspectives* (Strasbourg: Mennonite World Conference, 1999), 9.

28 Matías Preiswerk, *Contrato intercultural: Crisis y refundación de la educación teológica* (Quito: CLAI, 2011), 105.

29 Preiswerk, 174.

30 Nicolás Panotto, "Nuevos aires en la formación teológica latinoamericana: El ejemplo de gemrip," *Methodist Magazine*, no. 217 (March–April 2016): 11–12.

31 Benjamin Wayman, "Justo González: Seminars Need More Latinos," *Christianity Today*, November 13, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/october-web-only/justo-gonzalez-we-need-more-latinos-in-seminary.html.

González notes, risks traditional theological schools disappearing if the vision of mission and ecclesial ministry is set aside.

To avoid this, theological education programs and schools that are open to integrating Christian diversity are required. It is no longer possible, he states, to create theological schools for a single membership. Instead the curricula of theology must be rethought as an integration of studies in the Bible, biblical theology, religion, and a combination of the social and human sciences in an interdisciplinary, ecumenical, interreligious program that respects diversity, cares for nature, and trains church leaders.[32]

In each of the above contexts, missional theology would have pertinence and relevance. This was certainly confirmed in our educational experiences, where the Bible was read from the experience of the vulnerable people; the reality of the social, economic, and political context was taken into account; there was openness to dialogue with other beliefs; and the social sciences were taken into account when doing theology. In addition, simple projects were generated that had a positive impact on the community.[33]

As we attempted to work within a missional paradigm of theological education in the midst of these challenges, we had to look for alternatives of infrastructure, methodologies, curricula, and partners that would allow us to resist the traditional and exclusive business models. Freire's[34] and Piaget's[35] pedagogies and the transformative education method[36] were very useful tools in carrying out such educational work.[37]

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32 We found the most evidence of such integration in UBL's theological program.

33 Some of these projects in rural areas include The Indigenous Foundation for Development (FUIDE—Fundación Indígena para el Desarrollo) and the Ñucanchic Yachay Elementary School (Our Wisdom School). In the urban area are the Project of Education for Peace and the Refugee Project of Quito Mennonite Church.

34 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York/London: Continuum, 2011).

35 On Piaget's pedagogy, see, among others, Pedro J. Saldarriaga-Zambrano, Guadalupe del R. Bravo-Cedeño, and Marlene R. Loor Rivadeneira, "La teoría constructivista de Jean Piaget y su significación para la pedagogía contemporánea," *Dom. Cien*. 2 (Dic. 2016): 127–37, accessed December 9, 2022, https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5802932.

36 Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, *Educación Transformadora 1, 2, 3: Una guía para facilitadores de la comunidad*, Primera edición en Español (Ciudad de Guatemala/Bogotá: Clara-Semilla, 1992).

37 Freire's pedagogy is based on the idea that education should be a liberating process that allows people to become aware of their reality and act to transform it. In Piaget's pedagogy, learning must be active, experiential, and constructive.

Learning a way of understanding an Indigenous Theology[38] along with their holistic worldview[39] was also particularly helpful. For the indigenous peoples, everything is interrelated. Therefore, one aspect of life is affected by another. In this way, missional theology integrates the sacred, socio-political, natural, individual, and community dimensions.[40]

Three Additional Challenges: The Great Commission, Intercultural Dialogue, Redefining the Mission

Three additional theological education challenges include aspects related to (1) the biblical mandate of the Great Commission, (2) intercultural dialogue, and (3) redefinition of the mission.

Let's begin with the text known as the Great Commission in the gospel of Matthew (28:18–20). We have traditionally been taught that this passage communicates an imperative for mission via the phrase "go and make disciples"—in other words, that making disciples is an inescapable mandate for the church. Although we do not doubt the connotations of the text to carry out missionary work, we question the understanding of the text as a mandate. In Greek, while the imperative is "make disciples," the verb "going" (πορευθεντες) is in the aorist tense, which indicates urgency. This verb, whose root is common—"to go," travel, walk (πορευομαι)—means movement. We find it several times in the biblical accounts of Paul's travels as well as the texts regarding the journeys taken by Jesus. Something that stands out, however, is that these journeys or movements are almost always related to the way of the cross. So, a better approach from our perspective, which we believe deserves more research, would be to translate such a text "as you go," "while you go," or "while you live."[41] Our preference would be "while going in the way of the cross." Regardless of translation, however, the verb clearly is not imperative; it does not say "go" in the form of an order. A more natural translation is that the disciples are on their way. Within this understanding, our post-missionary assignment and educational experience continue to be a missional task; that is, our missional work does not end at the completion of an assignment through a mission board.

In intercultural dialogue, which includes the religious, it must be recognized that we not only give to others what we have but we also receive from others

38 See Eleazar López, *Teología India: Antología* (Cochabamba: Verbo Divino, 2000).

39 Victoria Carrasco, *Ñaupa, Ñaupa Pacha: Mitos, tradiciones, memoria histórica, Ritos de los pueblos indígenas* (Quito: INPPI, 1996).

40 See César Moya, "Mennonites and Theological Education among Indigenous Churches in Ecuador: A Perspective from the Last Two Decades," 127–30.

41 See John H. Yoder, *Theology and Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, eds. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 75–90.

their wisdom, which brings with it a transformation of thought and therefore of lifestyle, as stated by Romans 12:1. This dialogue leads to the recognition that everything created by God is good (Gen 1), creation is diverse, and God is the God of Life who moves in all peoples, cultures, and religions, with their particularities.

The above thought is in line with that of M. Thomas Thangaraj, whose remarks on how the interaction occurs between followers of the Christian faith and other religions and their followers can be of great help, we believe, in enriching our understanding of mission. Like us, he recognizes that the world is made up of people of different religions (beliefs), which should lead us to ask ourselves how to relate to them and who our neighbors are. He also recognizes the plurality and diversity of humanity and creation not as an error of God but as part of God's plan. Amid this reality, we believe that Christians remain called to testify to God's love in the world through following Christ. We believe as well that the presence of the light of Christ is also in those who profess, with gentleness and reverence, confessions of faith other than the Christian one.

Thangaraj recognizes a range of approaches that Christians can take regarding dialogue with other faiths, including 1) We know and they know not; 2) Perhaps we know, perhaps they know; Who knows? 3) What we have is good for us; what they have is good for them; 4) We know in full, they know in part; 5) We know and know that we know; they know and know not that they know; and 6) We and they together need to know more (partnership).[42]

Our missional work through theological education helps evaluate these approaches. It is no longer possible for us to say that "we know and they know not" or to doubt the knowledge of different perspectives. On the contrary, our journey through various cultures and encounters with different theological and faith perspectives leads us to recognize that in the missional task both we and those with whom we relate harbor knowledge that has been forged throughout our respective personal, family, ecclesial, and social lives. Therefore, the last statement, "We and they together need to know more," is most in line with what our experience has been—a partnership that ends up becoming a support network between different institutions, cultures, and people.

Other approaches must be added, such as "We know, and they also know." In other words, in the missional task, we arrive with knowledge; at the same time, those who receive us also have knowledge. Consequently, for the missional task to be complete, mutual openness is required to know the theology and perspectives of each culture. The partnership built for the work in Ecuador is a good example of this.

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42 M. Thomas Thangaraj, *Relating to People of Other Religions: What Every Christian Needs to Know* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

This missional model of being open to dialogue with the other and committed to the dispossessed, the weak, marginalized, vulnerable, and unprotected—the victims—is different from the model carried out in the first centuries in Latin America that attempted to reach people through conquest.[43] Quite the opposite, the missional church carries out the *Missio Dei* in a way that respects the unique interpretation of the gospel by each people group, culture, or congregation. It carries out "mission without conquest" by emphasizing the message and teachings of Jesus while allowing the people to beget their own traditions and customs as they understand the Word of God teaching them. In the missional paradigm, the missionary—fraternal worker—must arrive "as a visitor, not as owner, warrior, leader, manager, or leader... [and] respects the owners, shares life, gets to know the customs, knowledge, and abilities of their hosts, and tries to locate themselves properly so as not to cause problems or divisions."[44]

Changing Theological Education: Following Christ in Solidarity with the People

In this article I have identified challenges for the missional task as viewed through the lens of personal experiences that my wife, Patricia, and I gained through offering as well as receiving theological education over the course of four decades in various contexts of Latin America and the United States. This article provides a "tour" of the most relevant aspects of this experience, considering the social and political conjunctures of each period as well as authors and people—both from Latin America and North America—who were key in this journey.

The identified challenges led to our recognition that the focus of the missional task must change. Today's mission must correct the mistakes of the past wherein theological education concerned itself more with doctrine than with the carrying out of theology. This led to limited understandings of the biblical text and distortion of the image of Christ; Christ became distant from the social and

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43 To take into account the "other" is to recognize otherness. Consequently, individuality must be sacrificed for the benefit of the general, subjectivity must be subordinated to the whole, the particular to the general, and so on. In this sense, whoever justifies war—and I include the use of force—seeks totalization and ignorance of the other, seeks their own happiness, is unable to recognize diversity and difference, seeks to equalize the subjects in a homogeneous and impersonal discourse. This produces violence. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalidad e Infinito*, Séptima edición (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2006). In addition, sensitization by the other is required: "The other is assigned to me and forces me without possible escape to put myself in his place, not to supplant him, but to suffer for him . . . The other imposes himself on me until I awaken my compassion and my love." See Emmanuel Levinas, *De otro Modo que Ser o Más allá de la Esencia*, Quinta edición (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2011), 31.

44 Willis Horts et al., *Misión sin conquista: Acompañamiento de comunidades autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2009), 69.

political reality and was crucified by God's design rather than as a consequence of his commitment to justice and raising up the poor and the weak.

The mission to be carried out today must abandon a conquering and expansionist spirit and instead walk alongside the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded, offering pastoral action in solidarity with the people's struggles and demands for human rights. It must be a mission that abandons conformity to the systems and assumes conflict with them, resisting through nonviolent means in order to participate in God's work of reconciliation and seek the transformation of negative realities. Contextual realities demand this of us. Following Christ demands it of us.

In other words, the mission carried out through theological education—whether at the formal or informal level, the university or popular level—must provide spaces for listening and learning from other cultures' conceptions and experiences of God. The main temptation in theological education is to believe that we arrive at it with all "the truth" from our Western perspectives—perspectives that have their origins in none other than domination over other peoples, since the time of the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century in the case of Latin America. To the contrary, a theological education that resists a conquering approach to doing mission must respect other ways of thinking, living, and acting, even while recognizing a very real struggle with syncretism. We have much to learn from other cultures, perspectives, and peoples, especially from the indigenous peoples.

Missional work, we have learned, continues wherever we are following Jesus's footsteps.

Book Reviews

Review Essay

Thomas A. Oduro, Jonathan P. Larson, and James R. Krabill, eds., *Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites*, Langham Global Library, Carlisle, Cumbria, 2021. 240 pp. $7.95. ISBN: 978-1-83973-271-3.

On a visit to Botswana as a young Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) administrator, I received the laying on of hands. This blessing, offered only once in my more than forty years of service in church-related leadership roles, was completely unexpected yet has resonated in my memory ever since. Hosts of Mennonite Mission in Botswana had chosen my attendance at this Sunday service to share a first-hand experience of their participation with one of the African Independent Churches (AICs) with whom they were involved.

I don't know if my Mennonite hosts were expecting what happened; I certainly was not. My work had made me comfortable with being called on to lead public prayer, or even to preach on short notice. But to be called forward by the bishop and offered such a benediction both shocked and amazed me. The memory is brief and fragmentary but suffused with sunlight; I cannot forget a sensation of electric peace—so different from the frenetic pace of a normal MCC administrative visit.

That event rushed to center-front as I read Oduro, Larson, and Krabill's collection of reflections and experiences from over sixty years of interaction between leaders and members of AICs and North-American-appointed Mennonite mission and service workers. The editors, veterans of this interaction, have organized the chapters in the collection with themes drawn from the title: tilling, sowing, germination, growth, pollination, weeding, watering, and harvesting. Their introduction asserts that this book is "not an exhaustive history" (2), although it is helpfully foregrounded with a historical overview by premier Mennonite missiologist Wilbert Shenk (d. 2021), under whose leadership important parts of this story emerged (9–21).

While I could not always discern why a particular episode appeared in a particular chapter, I valued the chance to observe the editors working with the diversity of anecdotes and reflections from thirty AIC colleagues and more than forty North American workers. The cover blurb asserts that *Grain of Wheat* is "an excellent resource for lovers of story," an idea that had also come to me as

I read, imagining preachers and teachers drawing out accounts to share with their audiences.

Inserted among these personal, often poetic, stories are observations of "professional" missiologists, including Dana Robert (Boston University), Miriam Adeney (Seattle Pacific University), Darrell Whiteman (Asbury Theological Seminary, emeritus) and Jehu Hanciles (Candler School of Theology). The insights of Nicta Lubaale, general secretary of the Organization of African Instituted Churches, provide a formal, continent-wide African consideration of the stories (186–89).

North American storytellers describe struggling to stay awake during long (often overnight) services, encountering strange prayer and healing practices, and experiencing an overwhelming sense of community in the midst of difference. Jon Rudy recounts waking in pain while on a home stay in Swaziland:

> In my agony that night on the homestead, my Western logic screamed, "Get me to a doctor!" Yet *Babeh* continued his prayers for my healing. . . .
>
> As I pondered *Babeh's* insistence on prayer before the doctor visit, I was reminded that my Swazi father caught sight of things I could not see. (81)

More formal activities aroused similar reflections. Rachel Hilty Friesen, who wrote a history of the Spiritual Healing Church, describes her interviews with one elderly leader:

> My thoughts strayed from the track of historical scholarship. . . .
>
> . . . Could I open my mind and heart to manifestations of God's power and grace which seemed so foreign to my own experience? (91)

AIC women and men from Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Swaziland recount a variety of ways that they learned about and from North Americans. Hortense Assah of Benin described her leadership in *Le groupe des handicapés* after meeting and being helped with her wheelchair by Lynda and Rod Hollinger-Janzen (74–75). Motibe, a local Bible teacher in Botswana, remarked as he concluded a visit with the family of B. Harry Dyck, "This was the first time that I have ever received a drink in a white man's real teacup" (56).

One of the book's "outside observers," Casely Essamuah, secretary of the Global Christian Forum, comments: "In an increasingly polarized world, missionary activities from the Western world are usually either uncritically celebrated or unfairly vilified" (148). Essamuah's observation suggests that experiences portrayed in *Grain of Wheat* avoid either extreme.

As one who hears more often from those who question mission enterprises as "postcolonial," I wondered at times whether the accounts were too simplistic, or protective of the North American perspective on AIC life and witness. The

collection, however, does include critique. Bruce Yoder describes "two Nigeria stories," one of which concerns North American agencies that interpreted Nigerian churches as part of the AIC movement—while Nigerians were deeply dissatisfied that Northerners dismissed their desire to be Mennonites (136–38). Enole Ditsheko, a younger Motswana[1] leader in the Spiritual Healing Church, indicts North American Mennonites for their unwillingness to involve themselves in the "internal politics" of AICs. As a result, he observes,

> These older folks have now died with whatever skills they acquired. . .
>
> [and the] sad reality of not investing in youthful people. (140)

Grain of Wheat does not outline what, if any, commitment North American Mennonite agencies have in the twenty-first century to friendships like those described in its pages. The book's editors, as am I, are at the later stages of our mission-related careers. Still, it was enlivening to read Jonathan Larson's description of his ordination, which took place at the end of his Mennonite assignment in Botswana at the request of leaders from "The Head Mountain of God Holy Apostolic Church in Zion, The Spiritual Healing Church, The Holy Banner Mission Church of Africa, The Eleven Apostles Healing Spirit Church, and the St. Michael's Apostolic Church." Consultation had taken place with North American administrators, who approved this unusual credentialing. Yet later, "the paperwork formally documenting this event . . . disappeared from the archives of the Mennonite Church USA" (176–78).

Could it be that the long-ago Batswana blessing I received was all the credentialing I needed for my life's work? If so, what might that mean for the witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ—in Africa, in North America, and elsewhere, who are now in the thick of the task?

Nancy R. Heisey retired in 2022 from twenty-three years of teaching at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, VA) after serving in several roles at Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite World Conference, and Mennonite Mission Network.

Darren T. Duerksen, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions: The Global Witness of Insider Movements*, Regnum, Oxford, UK, 2022. 206 pp. £15.00 paperback, ISBN: 978-1-914454-64-6; £6.00 e-book, ISBN: 978-1-91445-46-39. (See forty-minute interview with Duerksen on this publication: "Darin Duerksen and Christ-Followers in Other Religions," Multi-Faith Matters YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eCFO7Qbqzo&t=2s.)

1 Motswana (plural Batswana) is the name for a person from Botswana.

In Darren T. Duerksen's book *Christ-Followers in Other Religions*, readers should be prepared to encounter testimonies like this one from Mazhar Mallouhi, a Muslim follower of Christ:

> Islam is the blanket with which my mother wrapped me when she nursed me and sang to me and prayed over me. . . . I inherited Islam from my parents, and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ. Islam is my mother. You don't engage a man by telling him his mother is ugly. . . . I have an emotional attachment to my culture which I imbibed along with my mother's milk.[2]

Statements like this will strike many as provocative, perhaps even troubling. But there is more. Like the story of Yussef, the South Asian who turned his back on his Muslim identity and heritage to become a Westernized Christian, then later, after a long spiritual journey, moved away from the mission compound that had become his home and returned to his extended biological family to apologize. "I am a Muslim," he told them, "but I follow Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah). He's my Savior. That's all. Otherwise, I'm a Muslim. I am born Muslim. It was wrong to say that I am a Christian. I apologize to you" (71).

Are such statements even possible? Apparently so. In fact, in recent decades, hundreds of thousands of Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Native American people have claimed faith in Jesus and look to the Bible as their authoritative guide, all the while considering themselves members of their religious communities of origin. The term "insider" is increasingly applied to this phenomenon as explored extensively by fifty authors from more than ten nations in the nearly 700-page anthology *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015). Not surprisingly, the movement has generated considerable interest and has variously been described in missiological conversations as controversial, syncretistic, messy, and perilous as well as God-breathed, a true revelation, a recalibration, a redefinition, a fresh outbreaking of the Holy Spirit, and a new chapter in mission history.

Duerksen—who currently serves as Associate Professor and Director of Intercultural and Religious Studies at Fresno (CA) Pacific University—jumps into the fray with this important volume by challenging the Western church and world Christians significantly shaped by Euro-framed mission history and perspectives to join with God's Spirit in creating "alternative missiological imaginaries" through an in-depth examination and appreciation of insider groups and individuals. Such willingness, openness, and curiosity offers to the global church,

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2 Mazhar Mallouhi, "Comments on the Insider Movement," in *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities*, eds. Harley Talman and John Jay Travis (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), 111, quoted in Duerksen, *Christ-Followers in Other Religions*, 88.

according to Duerksen, an "invitation to consider the new works of the Spirit among non-Christian religious communities. Insiders do *not*," he insists, "present us with a perfect, or even preferred, way of following Christ amongst religious communities. The world, and God's kingdom, is much too rich and diverse for such blueprints. Rather, insiders and their imaginaries help us see a glimpse of God's mending and patient mission among those who have been 'marginal' to the dominant forms of Christianity. And they invite us," he asserts, "to quietly listen, learn, and join with that mission as God leads" (175).

Duerksen is keenly aware of the monumental task he faces in convincing his readership to join him—and insider followers of Christ—on this journey of discovery. To do so, he devotes considerable time to defining key terms frequently discussed in missiological circles—terms related to the general field of religion, religious tradition and hybrid religiosity, contextualization, and people group realities and identities (chapters 2 and 3). He helpfully situates the conversation historically by turning to the New Testament church and the dynamics at play as Hebrew believers navigated their way into the new realities of faith in Christ.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the spiritual itineraries of two late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "Christ-follower imaginaries" in the persons of Black Elk, a Lakota Native American medicine man, and O. Kandaswamy Chetti, a Hindu reformer, both of whom remained convinced that "Christ could work within and *through* their religious tradition and communities to bring healing and wholeness to their people" (63). Other testimonies are more contemporary, embedded in the religious realities and identities of current Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, and Native American communities. Full chapters are additionally devoted to specific themes central to the topic—themes related to religious revelation in the interpretation and application of the Bible and other sacred texts, written and oral (chapters 6 and 7), questions concerning the meaning of salvation (chapter 8), the journey of conversion (chapter 9), and the socio-religious impact of family realities and identities (chapter 10).

Duerkson's case studies and illustrative testimonies are, in large part, situated geographically in South and Southeast Asia and among a few select native communities in North America. Harold W. Turner has documented similar phenomena wherever "primal" religious realities have come into contact with Western Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa; North, Central, and South America; and throughout Asia and Oceania.[3] It would be an instructive exercise to compare Duerksen's work here with Turner's helpful typology of new religious movements as they pass back and forth between phases of identity and change from what Turner refers to as neo-primal, synthetist, Hebraic, independent churches

3 See, for example, Harold W. Turner, "A Typology for African Religious Movements," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1 (1967): 18–21; and "A Typology of Modern African Religious Movements," *Journal of Religion and Religions* 1, no. 1 (1967): 1–34.

and movements with primary influence shaped by Western mission-founded initiatives.

Likewise, sub-Saharan Africa—the current heartland of world Christianity—is entirely absent from this conversation. Had Duerksen expanded his reflections to this continent, he would have found insights in the work of fellow Mennonite missiologist David A. Shank on conversion and the religious itinerary of African Christians from traditional religion to New Testament faith.[4]

There are a few minor typos in the *Christ-Followers* volume, but they do not detract in any significant way from the colossal challenge that Duerksen lays out before the world Christian community to spark "imaginaries" of how God might be at work in and through insider Christ-followers and how their understandings of and witness to Christ might challenge, enrich, and de-center current Western understandings of Christian mission and discipleship.

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Urbane Peachey, *Making Wars Cease: A Survey of MCC Peace Section 1940–1990*, Mastof, Morgantown, Pennsylvania, 2022. 312 pp. $20.00. ISBN: 978-1-60126-792-4.

We always read with the double awareness of our own experiences and the world of the author. In Urbane Peachey's *Making Wars Cease*, regular synchronicities emerged between my life and the world Peachey evokes in his questions about ecumenism, justice, higher education, and politics against the backdrop of one particular part of the larger MCC apparatus—the Peace Section[5]—between 1940 and 1990. My own biography, three decades later, feels woven around many of the institutions and themes Peachey addresses. For example, I worked one summer as an intern in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Washington Office, my PhD examined the peacebuilding and development work of MCC in East

4 David A. Shank, *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (co-published by Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, IN, and Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 2010), chapters 12 and 13.

5 The MCC Peace Section was established in 1942 as the "direct successor" to the Mennonite Central Peace Committee organized in 1939. See Mennonite Archival Information Database, "Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section" (International and U.S.), accessed September 23, 2022, https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/mennonite-central-committee-peace-section-international-and-u-s.

Africa, I currently serve as Vice Moderator of the World Council of Churches' Commission on International Affairs, and I teach Peace and Justice Studies at a university in New York City. In addition, I come to these positions as a Mennonite wrestling with what it means to live faithfully in the world.

Peachey sets out two tasks for himself: (1) to preserve the fifty-year work and witness of the MCC Peace Section and (2) to interpret it. In this particular moment in which the United States Congress is again considering changes to the Selective Service System and global conflicts loom large in our collective consciousness, the relevance of the Section's work feels more germane than ever.

Much of the first two-thirds of the book summarizes the statements, conference proceedings, and decisions undertaken by the Peace Section, with little analysis from Peachey. On one hand, this lack of argument or analysis left me unsatisfied. On the other hand, it provides a comprehensive summary of the considerable archives of the institution. And, given the lack of digitalization of many Mennonite archives, these summaries may serve a broader audience of scholars who are unable to travel to MCC headquarters to review the documents themselves.

Making Wars Cease is at its best when Peachey brings the full weight of his personal experience and considerable analysis to the history. Chapters 14 and 15 are outstanding and deserve a much wider reading and audience. Many of the questions that most troubled me earlier in the book are resolved in these two chapters. It is here that Peachey makes clear his driving research question that has motivated this project and that continues to be relevant today—Can an institution forged under certain pressures and a particular moment in history translate its mission and expertise into something more expansive over time?

Peachey interprets this question through the work of the Peace Section, which was semi-autonomously organized to support the conscientious objections of Mennonites. Over time, the Peace Section attempted to broaden its scope and take on even more complex issues of disarmament, apartheid, the war in Vietnam, and structural violence—both domestic and international. Peachey charts these changes primarily through summarizing the Peace Sections' many conferences, statements, and study groups on them.

Chapter 14 takes a serious and critical look at the shortcomings of the Section and doesn't shy away from annunciating ways in which a Mennonite tendency toward conflict avoidance may have hampered more prophetic advocacy. Peachey is unafraid to assert, "On some grand scale, perhaps Peace Section failed. On the other hand, the Peace Section network, including the arduous efforts of conference peace committees and leaders, was transforming and life-giving for many" (263). This articulation between the intentions of the Section and its impact in the world is an important distinction that meaningfully applies to many contemporary crisis points now, including the struggle for racial justice. Peachey writes, "But at no point did the Section or MCC shift in its statement

of principles and theology, from its reactive mode to events to a full-throated vocation of advocacy for equality, ethics for public life, and human rights in the world—taken as seriously as we took a vision for service and defense of our own positions" (262). I believe this analysis is crucial, and, as I kept underlining and annotating sentence after sentence in these two chapters, I found myself wishing I had read this book when I was writing my PhD dissertation.

Peachey quotes a statement by Frank Epp and Edgar Metzler about MCC's rationale for action in Southeast Asia with the phrase "We found ourselves saying at almost every juncture: why not sooner? Why so cautious?" (273). These questions resonate both throughout the work of the Section and within Peachey's book itself. The powerful analysis and insight that Peachey offers us is withheld until the end. Tellingly, it is in these two chapters that Peachey switches from an authorial third person to first person.

Several aspects of *Making Wars Cease* left me longing for a stronger editorial hand in the book's formatting. The chapters range greatly in length from fewer than five pages to more than fifty pages, and sometimes Peachey resorts to dictionary definitions or Wikipedia references to make a point. Also, the book would become more accessible to scholars if it provided an index as well as a list of acronyms particularly for a non-Anabaptist audience.

Nonetheless, through careful excavation and interpretation of the past, Peachey offers us a way to understand dynamics that continue to shape Mennonite self-understanding now. I found myself reconsidering some of the outcomes of the "New Wine, New Wineskins" review and restructuring that MCC undertook and the wider reckonings that the Mennonite world continues to experience as we wrestle with what to do with this very particular heritage and tradition.

The final chapters of the book are a gentle call for us to go even further in dismantling structural violence, healing trauma, and working for racial justice and decolonization. In a culture that often wants to discard the past entirely, this book is a reminder of the shoulders that we stand on and the longer arc of the social change we might commit ourselves to continue.

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Chris K. Huebner, *Suffering the Truth: Occasional Sermons and Reflections*, CMU Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2020. 111 pp. $19.99. ISBN-13: 9781987986075.

Suffering the Truth: Occasional Sermons and Reflections captures the heart and spirit of John 18:36, where, in response to Pontius Pilate's questioning, Christ says: "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to

this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (NRSVUE).[6] Although John 18:36 may not include every nuance of *Suffering the Truth*, these two sources share two themes of importance: Christianity's distinct existence and Christ's call to surrender control. To renounce violence is to renounce power over a situation. Thus, when Christ bookends his kingdom's countercultural identity around the doctrine of nonviolence, he stresses his hope for peaceable action and calls for Christians to cease their quest for control.[7]

In *Suffering the Truth*, Chris K. Huebner echoes Christ's words and calls for Christians to embrace Christianity's tough assignment of cruciformity. Rather than viewing something uncontrollable or surprising as chaos in need of management, Huebner challenges Christians to embrace the "grammar of gift"—to equate the unexpected nature of Christianity to the unpredictable nature of a gift (4, 62–63). Since the giver maintains primary control over the nature and purpose of a gift, receiving a gift precludes the recipient's control; similarly, Christians should see their lives and Christ's truth as God-given gifts and not objects to be controlled (20–21).

Huebner unveils how much of our lives revolve around our conscious and unconscious efforts to gain or maintain control. Many harmful behaviors, such as violence and coercion, possess an underlying motivation—the search for mastery—that is the same as some relatively harmless and routine behaviors, such as searching for love, knowledge, and comfortable exegesis (26, 34, 72). *Suffering the Truth* showcases the author's concern for the latter behaviors.

To articulate this point, Huebner delves into the relationship between the concepts of self and power. Someone's pursuit of control takes many forms, and Huebner often identifies such pursuits as symptoms of self-orientation—i.e., our need to control stems from our need to maintain luxury or comfortable ideologies (59, 107). Such goals, however, will misguide our steps: "In our lust for comfort we are often pointed in a direction that causes us to miss the heart of the gospel" (56).

For example, in the opening chapter, Huebner calls upon Dante's character development in *The Divine Comedy*. After unmasking self-serving preaching—when the pulpit becomes a platform from which preachers exchange performances for the audience's praise—Beatrice, Dante's guide, encourages Dante to see

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6 Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references and quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* (NRSVUE).

7 In Chapter 11, titled "Suffering the Truth," Huebner references John 18:38 and later concludes: "The truth of Christ is not that of the world. And yet we who claim to be shaped by it also live in the world. And so Christianity names a life that is simultaneously truthful wisdom and the most absurd folly" (77–78). Jesus's words in the Gospel of John serve as formative words for Huebner's assessments and conclusions.

creation as something to serve instead of something to conquer (1–4). Instead of focusing on ownership and self-absorption, Huebner challenges his readers to live sacrificially (3). Another example pertains to the church's knowledge of the Triune God. Instead of conforming to Christ's image, Christians often mold Christ into their image and create a proverbial Christ—a Messiah that imitates their norms—in an attempt to understand him (15–16). In Huebner's words: "We long for a messiah who seems familiar, a friend we feel like we already know. . . . The emphasis is not on a God with whom we are becoming increasingly familiar, but on a God who remains exceedingly strange" (16). Huebner calls for the church to step out in faith and embrace the uncontrollable and mysterious nature of the Triune God (15–17; also see 35, 48, 59, 66, 78).

In lieu of control, Christians should seek the truth only found in Christ and reject "any version of Christianity that offers a means to escape suffering" (76). Huebner rightfully places suffering at Christianity's core to underline the challenge of preaching Christ's "upside-down" gospel to a "right-side-up" world (77).[8] Thus, Christians joyfully and painfully bear the message of the cross since we simultaneously experience Christ's truth and the world's rejection (77). Moreover, Christ's truth is gifted to creation, not uncovered, and truly understood amid suffering and infirmity (hence the book's main title) (78).

Additionally, Huebner ties the distinct nature of Christianity to not only orthopraxy and orthodoxy but also time. *Suffering the Truth* correlates our distinction from the world to the liturgical calendar, and by structuring the book around this calendar, Huebner demonstrates how our uniqueness arises from our special occasions (9–10). Our existence stems not only from our theology but also from our temporality, thus speaking to the strange and occasional nature of our lives and worship (hence the book's subtitle) (9–10).

Each chapter challenges commonly held beliefs regarding the Christian calendar, relating most holidays to abdication and rejoicing in God's mysterious nature. In the final chapter, for example, Huebner challenges Mennonites who think they have fully grasped the concepts of peace and justice (107–8). While addressing Peace Sunday, he says: "I suspect Mennonites may be tempted to feel a certain sort of triumphalism. . . . We might be tempted to think that we have got this peace thing figured out. . . . This happens, for example, when we speak of peace as an ideal and see ourselves as those whose task is to work toward it in a sort of linear fashion" (107). Huebner calls for Mennonites to rethink their comfortable beliefs and to welcome the difficult, unknown journey at the forefront of seeking *shalom* (107).

Huebner calls for Christians to live according to the values of God's kingdom, not the world's, and underscores how we should see the concepts of self and con-

8 In line with this thought, another source to consider is Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1990), 35.

trol. *Suffering the Truth* spurs reflection on the unhealthy levels of individualism in many churches and ideologies. An increase in individualism occurs when dying to self does not define someone's theology of power and self-understanding. When this happens, we cast aside our cruciformity and see the cross in terms of how it serves us instead of how we should serve it.

When control and individualism undergird the doctrine of salvation, the cross becomes an object to control as opposed to a call for self-sacrifice. Instead of submitting to the cross, salvation becomes solely about ensuring control. In extensive detail, Huebner articulates salvation's sacrificial nature and the theme of abdication to guide us away from serving ourselves and toward the service of others (4–6). Huebner illuminates this path to encourage the servitude needed for *shalom*.

Furthermore, glorifying religious violence demonstrates a distortion of the cross rooted in the world's link between control and violence. Religious violence arises from "dominion theology," which offers a violent reading of Genesis 1:28: God created humankind "in the image of God" and bestowed authority and dominion upon creation, which dominionists see as an entitlement to rule.[9] Thus, dominion theology encourages violence to ensure dominance and establish a theonomy.[10] *Suffering the Truth* unveils the motivations behind dominionists. Their concept of self stems from a violent reading of *imago Dei*, propelling them to seek control over creation. As such, conforming to Christ's meekness counters their identity and purpose.

Among other things, a motivational factor behind dominion theology is securing control over the eschaton. Dominion theology sees Christian rule as the catalyst for the second coming, meaning violence and conquest in Christ's name will lead to his return and the realization of God's kingdom.[11]

For dominionists, the waiting period between Christ's ascension and the *parousia* is within our grasp. Scripture's ultimate test of patience—suffering for Christ's gospel without knowing when he'll return—is sidelined in the name of control. Subsequently, dominionists sideline Christ's authentic image to control the uncontrollable. The unrecognizable, nonviolent Lamb who calls for cruciformity becomes a recognizable, combative leader asking Christians to fight on his behalf—an example of, in Huebner's words, when "we long for a messiah who seems familiar, a friend we feel like we already know" (16). Moreover, whereas

9 Paul Maltby, "Fundamentalist Dominion, Postmodern Ecology," *Ethics and the Environment* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 119.

10 Maltby, 120. Also see T. David Gordon, "Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (1994): 23–43; 23.

11 Maltby, 120. Also see George Hough, "American Terrorism and the Christian Identity Movement: A Proliferation Threat from Non-State Actors," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 83.

Huebner calls for Christians to relate Christ's Advent to God's unpredictable nature, dominionists see Advent as an event within their power, and religious violence becomes the catalyst for peace (15). Ultimately, Christian dominionists find hope inwardly—in their power.

Huebner calls for the church to relinquish control and accept the mysterious nature of God and our faith. His book should be an encouragement to any Anabaptist—whether teacher, preacher, missionary, or layperson—who serves God's kingdom in areas where pressures to conform to the world are present. Anabaptists have historically found themselves on the margins of society, and Huebner challenges us to stay true to our convictions in the midst of our challenging placement in the world.

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