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Mennonite missionaries and African
Independent Churches: the
development of an Anabaptist
missiology in West Africa:
1958-1967

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Dissertation

**MENNONITE MISSIONARIES AND AFRICAN
INDEPENDENT CHURCHES: THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN ANABAPTIST MISSIOLOGY
IN WEST AFRICA: 1958-1967**

by

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DEDICATION

To Nancy, fellow companion on the journey.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes Mennonite missionary engagement with African Independent Churches in West Africa. The engagement between missionaries and indigenous churches gave rise to a novel mission interaction with a non-western form of Christianity. It led to the early development of mission strategy and theory from an intentionally Anabaptist perspective. Based upon close analysis of archival material, the dissertation examines the extended encounter between missionaries and Independents in southeastern Nigeria between 1958 and 1967. It places the encounter within the context of the religious history of both groups and outlines the influence of the experience on subsequent mission work. This case study sheds new light on the emergence of African indigenous Christian movements and western Christians' interaction with those movements during the period of decolonization and African nationalism.

The history that this study constructs shows that the religious and missiological assumptions that each party brought to the encounter complicated their relationship. The Independents' religious history led them to expect missionaries to establish traditional mission educational and healthcare institutions that would reinforce their well-being. Missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver and their colleagues were hesitant to do so, since their experience in India had convinced them that such institutions caused dependency on foreign funds and impeded indigenization. They focused, rather, on encouraging better relationships between estranged Independents and mission churches, capacitating Independent churches through biblical training, and reinforcing Independents' indigenous identity. Yet some Nigerian Independents insisted on a traditional mission relationship and its accompanying Mennonite identity. Missionaries borrowed mission theory about indigenization from the wider missionary movement, but applied and modified it over time, finally incorporating it into an Anabaptist missionary approach for work in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and the Republic of Benin.

This study suggests that while relationships between streams of the Christian movement are conditioned by their different religious histories and cultures, they nevertheless generate missiological insights. Through this engagement missionaries articulated an Anabaptist missiology that became influential throughout Africa. In turn, the Mennonite missionary presence enabled some Nigerian Independents to network successfully with the world Christian movement via their Mennonite affiliation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
AICs	African Independent Churches
AMM	American Mennonite Mission
CCG	Christian Council of Ghana
CCN	Christian Council of Nigeria
CPS	Civilian Public Service
CSM.....	Church of Scotland Mission
EMBMC.....	Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities
GNTI.....	Good News Training Institute
ICLM.....	Independent Churches Leaders Meetings
ICSG	Inter-Church Study Group
ICT	Inter-Church Team
IMC	International Missionary Council
IMM	India Mennonite Mission
IPC.....	Inter-Confessional Protestant Council
MBI	Mennonite Broadcasts, Incorporated
MBMC	Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities
MCC.....	Mennonite Central Committee
MCI	Mennonite Church in India
MEBB	Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board
NCC	National Council of Churches

PMM	Primitive Methodist Mission
QIC.....	Qua Iboe Church
QIM.....	Qua Iboe Mission
TEF	Theological Education Fund
UCBC.....	United Churches Bible College
UICF	United Independent Churches Fellowship
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCC	World Council of Churches

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Project Description

This dissertation reconstructs the history of Mennonite missionary interaction with African Independent Churches (AICs) in southeastern Nigeria and its effect on further mission engagement in West Africa.¹ In 1958 a group of AIC congregations in the region declared themselves Mennonite and invited the North American Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) to send personnel to work with them. The mission responded with visits by missionaries based in Ghana and the assignment of a resident missionary couple a year later. The thesis of the dissertation is that this encounter prompted the mission to modify its missionary practice and was an impetus for the development of a Believers' Church missiology. Although they collaborated in the establishment of Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) and continued to work with it, missionaries shifted their focus to work primarily with churches unaffiliated with western denominations. They sought to encourage better relationships between estranged AICs

¹ AICs (also called African Independent, Indigenous, Initiated, or Instituted Churches) functioned outside the control of western missions or churches. Africans established them in significant numbers during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, sometimes in schisms from existing churches, as prayer groups or revivals that evolved into churches, or through the initiatives of local Christian evangelists, healers or prophets. AICs are a movement, not one denomination, within which there is a variety of belief and practice. While their early defining trait was their autonomy, later many AICs were characterized by the continuity of their religious practice and belief with African traditions. Afe Adogame and Lazio Jafta, "Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), 271–87; Kevin Ward, "Africa," in *A World History of Christianity*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 221–23.

and mission churches, capacitate AICs through biblical training, and reinforce their indigenous identity in the face of western missions' attempts to assimilate them. MCN, on the other hand, resisted the shift in focus and insisted on maintaining its Mennonite identity. This dissertation explains why missionaries and mission administrators arrived at a new Believers' Church mission approach of dialogue and how they implemented it in Nigeria and other West African countries. It also describes and explains MCN's resistance to the shift.

Significance of the Project

Mennonite and Anabaptist Missions

The primary significance of this study is for the area of Mennonite and Anabaptist mission history. It demonstrates how the Nigeria experience prompted MBMC to adjust its strategies of "indigenization" and provided an opportunity to appropriate anthropological reflection in its missiological deliberations. In addition, the experience led missionaries to critically engage theories about mass movements toward Christianity and to articulate a uniquely Anabaptist contribution to mission theory with a new articulation of a Believers' Church missiology.

The missionaries arrived in Nigeria after decades of work in India, and their Nigerian experience presented them with new contexts and expressions of Christianity they had not seen before. Missionaries had been accustomed to envisioning and working toward the autonomy of churches that they had planted and mentored. This they understood to be a process of "indigenization" in which the Indian church would come to govern itself, finance its own activities, propagate itself, and develop an Indian

comprehension of the Christian faith instead of uncritically appropriating western understandings.² In Nigeria missionaries found churches that were already “indigenous” but that desired to initiate a relationship with MBMC and to take on a “Mennonite” identity. This defied the indigenization theory to which missionaries subscribed and opened a debate about how to proceed. What was to be the place of missionaries and/or a western mission agency in relationship to an African church that was already indigenous and not organically related to the mission or its sponsoring church? The previous challenges of indigenization in India and the new post-colonial context of Nigeria and the larger West African region would influence the development of their new missionary strategies and theory.

The growing influence of anthropological reflection among Mennonite missionaries and missiologists highlighted the importance of adapting mission activity to the particularities of local cultures. In the early 1950s MBMC and Goshen Biblical Seminary, one of the seminaries serving the Mennonite constituency, together sought to introduce the study of new linguistic and anthropological theories and methods into missionary training programs.³ As a result of a linguistic and anthropological study by William and Marie Reyburn, missionaries in the Chaco region of Argentina adapted their strategy to the culture of the Toba people. They abandoned the goal of establishing a Mennonite church in favor of providing Bible translation and leadership training to

² John A. Lapp, “The Struggle to Indianize the Church,” in *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 173–89.

³ Harold S. Bender to John H. Mosemann,” March 29, 1951 and Levi C. Hartzler, *Conference on Missionary Linguistics and Anthropology*, Meeting Report (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, Linguistics and Anthropology 1951-53.

indigenous congregations.⁴ Their decision established an important precedent for the mission's engagement in Nigeria where missionaries were attuned to the challenges of working in cultures other than their own and would look to anthropological insights to guide their work.⁵

J. Waskom Pickett's analysis of twentieth century mass movements towards Christianity in India motivated MBMC missionaries to adjust their strategy to take advantage of such movements.⁶ Donald McGavran popularized missiological reflection about mass movements and became an important interlocutor of Mennonite missiologists as they developed strategy for their West Africa work.⁷ While they eventually differed with his proposals, interaction with McGavran's ideas motivated the mission to articulate a missionary approach tailored for West Africa.

⁴ William David Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco an Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1954); Albert Buckwalter, *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, (Nam Cum, Argentina: Chaco Mission Council, August 18, 1954), IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; Albert Buckwalter, *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, Meeting Minutes (Nam Cum, Argentina: Chaco Mission Council, September 11, 1954), IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55; Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairos, 2009), 41, 65, 84, 193-7.

⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

⁶ Jarrell Waskom Pickett and National Christian Council of India, *Christian Mass Movements in India, a Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933); S. Jay Hostetler, "Soul Winning Methods That Have Proved Successful in India," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 94-101, IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1933-1938.

⁷ Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 3, 1956 and no date, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, McGavran, Donald 1956-64; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, November 13, 1956 and January 2, 1937, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, McGavran, Donald 1956-64; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 28.

Their interaction with AICs in Nigeria led MBMC missiologists to articulate a new mission approach that was consistent with their religious tradition. Earlier Mennonite mission initiatives were dependent on the wider Protestant mission movement for their theology and methods.⁸ The experience in Nigeria pushed the mission to articulate a justification for working with AICs instead of following the more traditional approach of developing a church that would be organically connected to a North American denomination.⁹ Mission interaction with AICs led MBMC to move beyond the missiology it received from the wider missionary movement and to develop its own theory and practice that was consistent with its Anabaptist, Believers' Church religious tradition.

The development of a Believers' Church missiology is an example of how the re-appropriation of the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement among North American Mennonites affected Mennonite mission theory and strategy during the last decades of the twentieth century. Discernment among Mennonites about the significance of their Anabaptist roots, especially Harold S. Bender's *The Anabaptist Vision* and the subsequent reflection that it generated, provided them a useful and an identity-

⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999*, Occasional Papers, Institute of Mennonite Studies 20 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 38-42, 116.

⁹ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, February 13, 1974 and Marlin Miller to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 21, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Miller, Marlin and Ruthann 1970-74; Willard E. Roth, *Notes, West Africa Think Group*, Meeting Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 8, 1975), IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; "Ministry Among African Independent Churches," January 30, 1980, IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

constructing history during the post-World War II decades.¹⁰ MBMC's development of a Believers' Church missiology in response to its experience with AICs is an example of the salience of that Anabaptist-inspired identity on North American Mennonite thinking and witness and its influence on relationships with southern churches.

While Mennonite missionaries have reflected on their engagement with Nigerian AICs in a number of publications, a fresh telling of this story adds new data and analysis to the history of Mennonite and Anabaptist missions. Edwin and Irene Weaver, MBMC missionaries to Nigeria, wrote *The Uyo Story*, an account of their experience in Nigeria, and *From Kuku Hill*, an account of their work with AICs in the wider West African context.¹¹ These largely autobiographical works explain why they chose to focus their work on AICs instead of on the growth of a traditional, denominational church structure with organic ties to the West. They advocated for this new approach. A number of additional works analyzing Mennonite engagement with AICs in Nigeria and across West Africa show how the experience influenced the mission's subsequent approach in Africa and what it meant for mission strategy and theory in general.¹² This dissertation examines

¹⁰ Paul. Toews, "Search for a Usable Past," in *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 84–106; Albert N. Keim, "The Anabaptist Vision," in *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 306–31; Gerald Biesecker-Mast, "The Persistence of Anabaptism as Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, 1 (2007): 21-42.

¹¹ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1970); Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, *Missionary Studies* 3 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1975).

¹² Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission Agency and African Independent Churches," *International Review of Mission* 63, no. 252 (1974): 475–91; Wilbert R. Shenk, "'Go Slow Through Uyo': A Case Study of Dialogue as Missionary Method," in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century*, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles van Engen, and Hendrik Vroom (New York: Rodopi, 2005), 329–40; James R. Krabill, "Evangelical and Ecumenical Dimensions of Walking with AICs," in *Evangelical, Ecumenical,*

source data that these previous works did not consider and provides a more thorough description of the engagement and its implications for Mennonite and Anabaptist mission history.

African Independent Church Studies

Since the change in mission approach that this project examines took place within the context of ministry among African Independent Churches, the study provides some data and analysis about these movements and western interaction with them. Early works about AICs often highlighted them as examples of ecclesiastical division, referring to them as separatist or breakaway movements.¹³ By the early 1960s a growing number of scholars and church leaders sought to understand, explain, and evaluate this stream of the world Christian movement in a more positive light.¹⁴ Subsequently scholars such as Harold Turner and Marthinus Daneel would provide windows into the thought patterns of AIC religious understandings.¹⁵ Mennonite missionaries in Nigeria came to identify with

and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk, ed. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles Edward van Engen (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006); David A. Shank, "Reflections on Relating Long Term to Messianic Communities" and "John Howard Yoder, Strategist for Mission with African-initiated Churches," in *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010); R. Bruce Yoder, "Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria: Changing Contexts and Strategy at the Dawn of the Postcolonial Era," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 138–44.

¹³ E.g. Robert H. W. Shepherd, "The Separatist Churches of South Africa," *International Review of Mission* 26, no. 4 (1937): 453–63.

¹⁴ E.g. J. W. C. Dougall, "African Separatist Churches," *International Review of Mission* 45, no. 3 (1956): 257–66; Victor E. W. Hayward, ed., *African Independent Church Movements*, Research Pamphlets 11 (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1963).

¹⁵ Harold W. Turner, "Patterns of Ministry and Structure within Independent Churches," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 44–59; Turner, *Profile Through Preaching: A Study of The Sermon Texts Used in a West*

the new, more positive assessment. When MBMC missionaries first encountered the vigorous AIC movements in southeastern Nigeria in 1958 however, scholars had not yet analyzed the indigenous Christian movements in the region. Missionary Edwin Weaver formed an Inter-Church Team that implemented surveys in order to gather data about AICs.¹⁶ The team collaborated with the Department of Religious Studies at the nearby University of Nigeria at Nsukka where Andrew Walls and Harold Turner were engaged in a similar data-gathering project.¹⁷

The outbreak of the Nigerian civil war forced the team to stop its work and the missionaries to evacuate the region. Much of the data that the Inter-Church Team collected and the material housed at Nsukka were destroyed during the war.¹⁸ Because the war resulted in heightened governmental mistrust of missionaries and increased tension between the Ibo and Ibibio peoples, it was not possible to resume surveys of AICs in the villages and towns of southeastern Nigeria after the cessation of hostilities in January 1970.¹⁹ Weaver evacuated the region in 1967 with his personal papers that included a modest amount of AIC documentation, only a portion of what the team

African Independent Church (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965); M. L. Daneel, *All Things Hold Together* (Unisa: Unisa Press, 2007); Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987).]

¹⁶ Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 115.

¹⁷ Shenk, “‘Go Slow Through Uyo’: A Case Study of Dialogue as Missionary Method,” 339.

¹⁸ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Andrew F. Walls, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15, no. 4: 146-155; "Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh: Epelle, E.M.T.," <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/3/18.htm> (accessed May 7, 2014).

¹⁹ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968.

collected. This dissertation analyzes the documentation that Weaver carried with him as well as the material he had sent to MBMC headquarters earlier.

The religious vitality of the AICs in southeastern Nigeria is well known, but the reasons for that vitality are less clear. A year after Weaver evacuated the region David Barrett, in his ambitious work about AIC movements, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, identified the region where the MBMC missionaries had worked as having “probably the densest concentration of independency [AICs] in all Africa.”²⁰ In 2005 nearly half a century after the Mennonite mission arrived in Nigeria, Wilbert R. Shenk noted that the reasons that southeastern Nigeria “produced such vigorous religious innovation” had yet to be identified.²¹ This project seeks to help address this void by analyzing the context that shaped the vibrant and diverse AIC movements that Mennonite missionaries encountered.

Method of Investigation

The method of this dissertation is both historical and missiological. An historical approach is appropriate because the study addresses a period in the past, from 1958 to 1967. Its primary sources are archival materials. Historical narrative shapes its conclusions. A missiological approach is appropriate because the thesis has to do with mission practice and theory, and the subjects were missionaries. Since the questions that the thesis addresses are qualitative and because the primary sources of the study lend

²⁰ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 291.

²¹ Shenk, “‘Go Slow Through Uyo’: A Case Study of Dialogue as Missionary Method,” 340.

themselves to qualitative analysis, the research approach is qualitative rather than quantitative. Significant quantitative data for the location and period concerned are not available.

The history that this study reconstructs is built around a case study of Mennonite missionary engagement with AICs in southeastern Nigeria from 1958 to 1967. A case study is a useful approach when: research investigates questions of why and how; the researcher has little or no control over the behavior of the actors involved; or the context is relevant to the issues that the study addresses, the boundaries between the context and the issues not being clear.²² This study meets these criteria. It addresses questions of why and how missionaries modified their mission theory and practice upon encountering AICs. As it is an historical study, the behavior of the actors is in the past and cannot be manipulated. Since the cultural particularities of given contexts are important for missiological reflection, the cultural and religious belief systems in mid-twentieth century Nigeria are significant factors in the analysis of the missionaries' theory and practice.²³

The issues, geographical locations, and people that provide the focus of this dissertation emerge from the Nigeria case study. The case study is bounded with respect to time, location, and the actors involved and focuses on the period from November 1958 to July 1967. It concentrates attention on southeastern Nigeria and gives priority to the

²² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc, 2009), 1–2, 13, 18.

²³ While experts in case study methods such as Robert Yin differentiate between historical and case study approaches, preferring to think of case studies as addressing contemporary phenomenon, they also note that research methods overlap and that researchers can use multiple methods in any given study. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 2, 13.

area that is today Akwa Ibom State, where the AICs with whom missionaries interacted were located. The case study focuses on MBMC missionaries and mission administrators and the AICs with whom they interacted. Mennonite missionaries from the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church who worked in northern Nigeria and those from the Church of God in Christ Mennonite who worked east of the Niger River are not included.²⁴

This dissertation considers events outside of these boundaries when they add information that helps explain the case and its significance for the mission's evolving mission theory and strategy. For example, it explores previous experiences of MBMC missionaries in India that are important for explaining the approach that missionaries later developed in Nigeria. It looks to the religious history and experience of the Ibibio people and to that of the mission to help explain the religious belief systems that influenced the AICs and missionaries as they interacted. This study draws on the previous mission experience among the Toba Indians of Argentina since the work there influenced the attitudes of mission administrators to the Nigeria situation. It considers the archival material produced by mission administrators in the years immediately following the Nigeria experience as they came to discern and articulate the impact that it would have on their subsequent theory and practice. Finally, it describes the mission's West Africa mission activity that grew out of the encounter with Nigerian AICs.

²⁴ The Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church became the United Missionary Church in 1947 and the Missionary Church in 1969. "Mennonite Brethren in Christ - Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online," http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_in_Christ (accessed May 19, 2014).

Since case study methodology allows for consideration of real-life situations in which causal relationships are complex, it provides a helpful framework for missiological research.²⁵ In its evaluative and theoretical deliberations, missiological reflection highlights the importance of the context of mission practice. It is multi-disciplinary, drawing on the methods and theory of the disciplines of anthropology, history, religious studies, and theology to study missionary practice.²⁶ This dissertation makes use of studies from diverse disciplines to identify the complex causal relationships between the religious and social context of southeastern Nigeria during the period and the religious and missiological decisions that Nigerian Christians and missionaries made.

The dissertation implements careful reading, analysis, and critique of primary sources to provide an interpretation that explains why and how missionaries adjusted their mission theory and practice and why and how Mennonite Church Nigeria resisted that change. While taking into consideration the ideas and circumstances that shaped the ideologies of the subjects and being attentive to the conventions of their time and place, it develops a chronology of Mennonite missionary engagement with AICs and of missionary reflection about that engagement. It outlines the influence that engagement and reflection had on the new mission approach that missionaries articulated. This dissertation also demonstrates that the factors that motivated such changes were complex, including the subjects' religious understandings and their socio-political context. It

²⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 18–19.

²⁶ See for example the range of disciplines represented in the Index of Articles of the *International Review of Mission*. Christopher A. Smith, *International Review of Mission Index, 1912-1990* (Geneva: International Review of Mission, 1993).

compares the approaches of different missionaries as well as the various options that missiological conventions of the epoch offered them. Finally, it identifies links among the experiences that missionaries brought to Nigeria, mission theory and strategy, MCN's resistance to the missionaries' novel approach, and the strategies that MBMC eventually adopted. The development of a chronology of missionary/AIC interaction that identifies causal factors, the comparisons of different approaches and options, and the linkages with previous missionary experience and mission theory and strategy provide a meaningful narrative that explains why and how missionaries changed their mission theory and practice as a result of their interaction with AICs.

Sources for the Project

This study depends principally on primary sources from the Mennonite Church USA archives in Goshen, Indiana and a few documents from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Massachusetts and from the archives of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society at Défap, 102 Arago Boulevard, Paris, France. The bulk of the primary sources are the letters and reports that missionaries and mission administrators generated as they engaged in their missionary work, but there is also material from the AICs that invited MBMC to the region. Secondary sources provide background information to construct the religious history and belief systems of the Nigerian AICs as well as that of the missionaries.

In its use of secondary sources, this dissertation prioritizes studies that provide first-hand accounts from southeastern Nigeria, especially those that focus on the geographical areas in which the AICs that invited the mission to the region were located.

This area corresponds with what is today Akwa Ibom State, the traditional home of the Anang and Ibibio peoples.²⁷ With respect to the missionaries, those sources that illuminate the particular assumptions and approaches of those who worked with these Nigerian AICs are more important than others. This means that the focus is on MBMC and the North American Mennonite Church that it represented, instead of on other Mennonite missions and other Mennonite churches.

Contents of the Dissertation

The content of this dissertation is organized into seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter two constructs a religious history of the AICs in southeastern Nigeria. It relies on the work of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, Africanists, and missiologists who have published studies of southeastern Nigeria and, as available, primary sources to construct a narrative of the development of religious identity and belief systems in the region during the decades leading up to the arrival of the missionaries. It pays particular attention to religious understandings and customs that help explain the character and actions of the AICs that Mennonite missionaries encountered. Chapter three constructs a religious and missiological history of the missionaries. It relies on the work of sociologists, historians, theologians, and missiologists who studied the development of a missionary vision among North American Mennonites. It focuses especially on MBMC initiatives during the twentieth

²⁷ Some consider the Anang to be a sub-group of the Ibibio while others view them as two separate ethnic groups. This dissertation refers to both groups together as the Ibibio and only refers to the Anang when making a point that concerns them uniquely. In the literature the orthography varies, “Anang” and “Annang.”

century and pays particular attention to missiological understandings that help explain the character and actions of the missionaries and mission administrators who interacted with the Nigerian AICs.

Two chapters construct a history of the engagement between Nigerian AICs and Mennonite missionaries during the period from 1958 to 1967. Chapter four uses primary sources to construct a narrative of the engagement from July 1958 to December 1960 and the missiological, theological, and ecclesiological discernment that resulted from it. It highlights questions that missionaries raised that challenged accepted theory and practice. Chapter five relies on primary sources to construct a narrative of the engagement between the missionaries and the AICs from 1961 to 1967 and the development of a new approach that missionaries and mission administrators forged as a result.

Chapter six analyzes MBMC's West Africa mission engagement subsequent to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. It describes the experience of the missionaries who worked at the Abiriba hospital in the Biafran zone during the war, outlines the mission's contribution to the Church of the Lord Aladura seminary in Lagos, Nigeria, and describes Mennonite missionaries' work with AICs in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and the Republic of Benin. It highlights the importance of the post-colonial socio-political context for the mission's relationship with its African church partners and describes the relationship between the mission and Mennonite Church Nigeria after the Nigeria civil war.

The concluding chapter seven outlines the way missionary engagement with AICs resulted in the development of a Believers' Church missiology. Mission work with AICs,

the missiological reflection that it engendered, and the recovery of an Anabaptist heritage among North American Mennonites prompted MBMC to move beyond its appropriation of strategy and theory from the larger Protestant missionary movement to articulate its own Believers' Church missiology.

Taken as a whole this dissertation reconstructs the history of interaction between Mennonite missionaries and AICs in southeastern Nigeria from 1958 to 1967 and explains the significance of that interaction for subsequent MBMC strategy and theory. It provides enough historical background of both sides and sufficient analysis of the Nigerian context and of wider missiological discussions to identify factors that explain the outcome of the engagement. In doing so it offers new insight into the development of Mennonite and Anabaptist missiology during the twentieth century and provides new historical analysis of AICs in southeastern Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS INNOVATION AMONG THE IBIBIO

When the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) entered southeastern Nigeria in 1958, there was already a long history of missionary engagement and religious change in the region. MBMC arrived in response to letters of invitation from African Independent Churches (AICs) among the Ibibio that requested a missionary presence, religious instruction, and material assistance. Mennonite missionaries found a highly Christianized context with much religious innovation and competition. In fact, a decade after their arrival David Barrett acknowledged this novel religious context when he identified the region as having “probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa.”¹ This was in contrast to the mission’s previous experience in India where Christians composed a small minority of the population even after decades of missionary effort. In Nigeria MBMC missionaries and mission administrators reassessed their mission purpose and strategy because of this new situation.

This chapter provides an overview of the religious history of the AICs in southeastern Nigeria in an attempt to explain the context of religious innovation and competition that missionaries found in the region. First it shows the change in the size of the Christian movement that occurred over the first six decades of the twentieth century.

¹ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 291.

At the beginning of the century there were only a handful of Ibibio Christians, but by the time MBMC arrived on the scene in 1958 missionaries reported that 95% of the population of the area where they worked was Christian. The argument of this chapter is that this significant change is the result of the interaction of three forces: the introduction of Christian faith by multiple Christian missions, the establishment of British colonial rule, and the traditional religious assumptions of the Ibibio people. The introduction of Christianity provided a new religious framework at a time when the traditional religion was no longer meeting people's expectations. The establishment of colonial rule exposed the traditional religion's inability to protect the Ibibio and opened up the interior of Ibibioland to missionaries. Ibibio religious beliefs were eclectic enough to provide a hearing for the new faith and primed people to expect that their religion should contribute to their well-being, an expectation that Christian missions met by providing schools that prepared students to succeed in the new colonial economy. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of these the forces of missions, colonial rule, and traditional religion and argues that together they resulted in the high participation in the churches and schools of the new religion.

The second part of this chapter outlines an explanation for Ibibio religious innovation that produced a large number of AICs and the competitive religious milieu in the region. First it looks to scholarship about AIC movements in other parts of Africa to identify factors that have encouraged the emergence of AICs and identifies those that help to clarify the reasons for their prevalence in Ibibioland. These include competition between Protestant missions, Christian missions' failure to adapt their expressions of the

faith to the idioms of African cultures, Africans' need to find a medium of resistance to colonial oppression, the prevalence of colonial attitudes within Christian missions, and the inability of the missions, because of a lack of resources, to serve the large number of Africans who wanted to affiliate with them. All of these factors were operative in southeastern Nigeria.

In addition, the second part of this chapter appropriates the Nigerian nationalist critique of indirect rule to show that there is an additional socio-religious reason for the strong presence of AICs in Ibibioland. The nationalist critique was that because political authority in southeastern Nigeria rested with local communities, the attempt of the colonial authorities to appoint native chiefs to oversee large areas that included multiple communities was bound to fail. The argument here is that since political and religious authority rested in the same local structures and leaders, Christian missions' attempt to establish large ecclesial structures along the lines of a western, denominational model was similarly bound to fail. Ibibio Christians' socio-religious assumptions led them to prefer churches in which religious authority was local and did not depend on a larger ecclesial structure. Finally, this chapter suggests that the large number of Christian churches and missions, the large presence of AICs, a history of religious competition, a decrease in religious regulation, and the Ibibio desire for Christian amenities such as schools that equipped people to succeed in the colonial economy, resulted in the innovative and competitive religious milieu that Mennonite missionaries found in southeastern Nigeria in 1958.

The Move Toward Christianity in Southeastern Nigeria

This section explains how and why the Christian movement in southeastern Nigeria grew significantly over the first six decades of the twentieth century. It uses missionary sources, academic studies, and census figures to outline the growth of the movement. It identifies a number of reasons that scholars have proposed to explain the success of the movement and offers its own description of the move towards the new faith. This section argues that the arrival of Christian missions, the establishment of colonial rule, and the traditional religious beliefs of the Ibibio people combined to encourage people to affiliate with the movement.

From Slow Beginnings to Mass Movement

Early in the twentieth century Ibibio adherence, or even exposure, to Christianity was minimal, but by mid-century large segments of the population identified with the new religion. This subsection outlines this change. At the beginning of the century, the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) was present in the region around Calabar and had opened two outposts along the Cross River to the north-- Ikotana in 1884 and Unwana in 1888.² The Qua Iboe Mission (QIM) was well established at Ibeno along the Qua Iboe

² The roots of the Church of Scotland Mission work in Nigeria are found in the Scottish Missionary Society that ceded the work to the United Presbyterian Church. The United Presbyterian Church united with the Free Church of Scotland to form the United Free Church that itself united in 1929 with the Church of Scotland. The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria formally inherited the Nigeria work in 1960. To simplify matters this study will refer to this stream of work as the Church of Scotland Mission. "National Library of Scotland, Manuscripts Division: Church of Scotland Board of World Mission," <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/14/1032.htm> (accessed May 27, 2014); A. G. Somerville and E.A. Onuk, *Announcement of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria*, Public Announcement (Abakaliki, Nigeria: Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, July 29, 1960), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Edet Akpan Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52," in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (London: Longman, 1980), 159–81.

River not far from the Atlantic coast and had opened stations north of there at Okat in 1894 and Etinan in 1898.³ The Primitive Methodist Mission (PMM) had only just arrived on the Ibibio side of the Cross River.⁴ The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) of the Anglican tradition, and the Society of Holy Ghost Fathers (SHGF) of the Roman Catholic tradition were well established in Iboland but not yet in Ibibioland.⁵

The total number of Ibibio Christians at the beginning of the century was not large. By 1902 the QIM had admitted “about 700” into membership, and the PMM reported 239 church members.⁶ The CSM reported only 295 members in 1911.⁷ It was a humble start considering that the CSM had arrived in 1846 and the QIM in 1887. King Eyo of Calabar and other African traders were the middlemen between inland villages and foreign traders and initially sought to block the Scottish missionaries’ access to the interior via the Cross River.⁸ Along the Qua Iboe River, Samuel Bill and his QIM

³ Richard J. Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1984), 105, 144.

⁴ S. K. Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Eastern Nigeria* (Oron, Nigeria: Manson Publishers, 1985).

⁵ K. Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, 2nd ed. (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1962); Ikenga R. A. Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1931* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Etukokwu Publishers, 1988).

⁶ Robert L. M’Keown, *In the Land of the Oil Rivers: The Story of the Qua Iboe Mission* (London: Marshal Brothers, 1902), 153; Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Eastern Nigeria*, 28.

⁷ John B Grimley and Gordon E Robinson, *Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 342.

⁸ Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1863), 418–419, 456; Hugh Goldie, *Memoir of King Eyo VII of Old Calabar: A Christian King of Africa* (Old Calabar: United Presbyterian Mission Press, 1894), 37–38.

colleagues succeeded at Ibeno but were frustrated in their desire to move north into the heart of Ibibioland.⁹ Archie Bailie opened their second station at Okat in 1894. The people there seemed indifferent to Bailie's preaching. The audience was largely limited to his house servants and the sick who attended his medical dispensary. Bailie's materials were pilfered, he clashed with the local chief over the practice of killing twins, and the coffee plantation he established came to nothing.¹⁰

If the extension of the Christian faith was unimpressive in southeastern Nigeria during the early years of mission activity, the first half of the twentieth century saw a dramatic change with large numbers of people opting for the new faith. In December 1913 the QIM reported five thousand applicants for baptism, and from 1937 to 1939 there were so many seeking to join the church that missionaries could not cope with the situation.¹¹ Among the Ibo people too, who resided north and west of the Ibibio, the first fifty years of mission activity produced only about one thousand baptized converts, but by 1921 the Nigerian census claimed that 284,835 were Christians, about seven percent of the total Ibo population.¹² Scholars have even described the subsequent twentieth century influx of Ibo into the faith as a mass movement.¹³

⁹ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 105-109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-109, 126, 145.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 285, 495.

¹² Richard Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2008), 50.

¹³ Felix K Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*, (London: Cass, 1972), 146-147; Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (1974): 61;

The changes in the Christian percentage of the population in the province of Calabar are instructive. The 1921 Nigerian census estimated that of the total population of 979,189, which included all of Ibibioland and part of Iboland, there were 165,202 Christians, 17% of the population.¹⁴ By 1953 the census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria put the population of the province at 1,540,091 and the number of Christians at 1,186,653, 77% of the population.¹⁵ In 1953 the two coastal divisions of Ibibioland, Opobo and Eket, were respectively 84.2% and 90.8% Christian while the Uyo division in the heart of Ibibioland was 91.3% Christian. The two divisions where Christianization was the lowest were Abak and Ikot Ekpene in western Ibibioland with 59.3% and 63.7% respectively.¹⁶

Some have contested the accuracy of the Nigeria census data. In 1921 the population count in the provinces was in many cases an estimate as was the data collected about religious affiliation.¹⁷ Whether providing hard data or estimates, the numbers reflect a significant religious change towards Christianity during the first half of the

Christopher Steed and Bengt Sundkler, *History of the Church in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 252–253.

¹⁴ Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, vol. 4 (London: F. Cass, 1969), 104.

¹⁵ Nigeria, Department of Statistics, *Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953*. (Lagos: Census Superintendent, 1955), 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ S. A. Aluko, "How Many Nigerians?: An Analysis of Nigeria's Census Problems, 1901-1963," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1965): 371-92; Dmitri van den Bersselaar, "Establishing the Facts: P. A. Talbot and the 1921 Census of Nigeria," *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 69-102.

twentieth century and corresponds with the description of the highly Christianized context that Mennonite missionaries found when they arrived in the late 1950s.

Explanations for the Movement to Christianity in Southeastern Nigeria

An exploration of the causes of this massive change of religious affiliation is necessary to understand the religious context that the missionaries engaged. This subsection outlines four proposals that scholars have advanced to explain the movement to Christianity in southeastern Nigeria. Since there are not studies that focus exclusively on the Ibibio, these proposals include neighboring peoples in their analysis. They provide an intellectual context for the argument that this section makes about the growth of the Christian movement in the region.

The first proposal comes from Robin Horton, who took the Kalabari people of the Niger Delta as his case study.¹⁸ The Kalabari resided about one hundred kilometers west of Ibibioland, so his proposition did not address the specific situation of the Ibibio. As a study of religious conversion among a neighboring people in southeastern Nigeria, however, it does provide a point of reference with which to compare the Ibibio case.

Horton proposed an “intellectualist theory of conversion.”¹⁹ He argued that Africans who were confronted with social changes that resulted from modernity chose to readjust their cosmological understandings. International commerce, the rise of nation

¹⁸ Robin Horton, “African Conversion,” *Africa : Journal of the International African Institute* *Africa / International African Institute* 41, no. 2 (April 1971): 85–108.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

states, and communication with the wider world caused them to regard local or lesser spirits as increasingly irrelevant. The supreme being, on the other hand, took on greater importance as they engaged the world beyond their local setting. Horton theorized that it was the world religions such as Christianity and Islam that provided a framework for Africans to adjust allegiances in this way. The move towards a world religion in which the supreme being was actively engaged corresponded with their experience of new interactions in a world beyond the microcosm of the traditional village life. The religious shift was the result of Africans theologizing about the changes they experienced in the modernizing, colonial world of twentieth century southern Nigeria. In that sense his theory prioritizes African agency.

For Caroline Ifeka-Moller, attention to changes in the social context is a more accurate way to account for the change in religious affiliation than is theorizing about intellectual structures.²⁰ Ifeka-Moller compared changes in religious affiliation in an area that included villages and towns in parts of both Iboland and Ibibioland. She found that people experienced the significant social changes of twentieth century southeastern Nigeria differently. Some, such as those in Onitsha division of Iboland, had early exposure to European traders and missionaries and were able to adjust to social changes over a span of decades that started before direct colonial control. They adapted by integrating themselves into the new trading relationships, by appropriating opportunities of western education to find employment in the colonial structures, and by participating in political initiatives. The villages in the heart of Ibibioland, however, had a different

²⁰ Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966."

experience. Their engagement with western people and western ways happened brusquely during the first decades of the twentieth century when the colonial powers met any show of resistance with brutal and deadly force. In these areas resistance to colonial rule lasted longer and the population lagged behind in its appropriation of western education for the benefits of employment and participation in political movements. Ifeka-Moller characterizes these Ibibio villages as having been excluded from secular power, as having experienced radical internal change in the traditional order, and as having faced communal deprivation. In these latter communities there was significant change in religious affiliation towards Christianity, while in the Ibo communities the growth of churches was sluggish. The 1953 Census showed that the Onitsha division had a low rate of adhesion to Christianity, 36.2%. The divisions in the heart of Ibibioland, on the other hand, showed a significantly higher rate, ranging from a low of 59.3% to a high of 91.3%. Ifeka-Moller proposed that it was the social factors brought on by the establishment of colonial control that explain religious change in Ibibioland.

The third proposal acknowledges both the social factors imposed by colonialism as well as the agency of Africans who made the decision to change religious allegiance. In his history of Presbyterianism in southeastern Nigeria, which included both Ibibios in the Cross River area and Ibos just north of Ibibioland, Geoffrey Johnson highlighted the tendency of both peoples to understand life in an integrated way; they did not appear to separate the secular from the sacred.²¹ Hence secular happenings, such as the

²¹ Geoffrey Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), 57–63.

establishment of colonial rule via punitive military raids into Ibibioland and eastern Iboland, had theological importance. The social crisis that followed the destruction and upheaval of the raids seemed to indicate that the traditional religion no longer provided what was necessary to live a rich and full life. Since the conquering British seemed to have mastered the challenge of how to live successfully in a dangerous and capricious world, people looked to the British religion and its schools for a new way to understand and engage the world. During its first half-century in Nigeria, the Presbyterian CSM had only marginal success, and that was limited to the coastal region of Calabar. The growth in membership and in the number of congregations would become significant only after the military raids into Ibibioland and eastern Iboland and the solidification of British colonial rule.

Richard Graham's study provides the fourth analysis of conversion and focuses specifically on Ibibioland. His PhD dissertation outlined the experience of the QIM from 1887 to 1945 and found a dynamic similar to what Johnson described. The mission's early success was limited to the coastal Ibeno area.²² After the military raids Graham describes the Ibibio as becoming increasingly agnostic with respect to their traditional religion; villages in the interior came into the church as they sought ways to enhance their well-being in the new order of things. Scholars who have studied the rapid movement to Christianity in neighboring Iboland during the same period describe similar dynamics.²³

²² Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 20, 54, 78-79, 184.

²³ E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966), 157-158; Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution*, 50; Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*, 146-149; Elizabeth Isichei, "Seven

These proposals focus alternatively on African agency in theological reflection, social disruption caused by the advent of colonial rule, and a combination of both to explain religious conversion in southeastern Nigeria. The argument in the next subsection has more in common with the proposals of Johnson and Graham than with the other two. It is different, however, in that it provides a deeper explanation of the three forces of Christian missions, the advent of British colonial rule, and Ibibio traditional religion and how they interacted to encourage conversion to Christianity in Ibibioland.

A Narrative of the Movement Toward Christianity among the Ibibio

When Mennonite missionaries arrived in 1958, they found Ibibioland to be full of Christians and their churches. This was quite a contrast to the situation six decades earlier when missionary activity was limited to the coastal regions, and there were a mere handful of Ibibio Christians. This subsection will outline a narrative of Ibibio conversion that attempts to explain how such a change took place. It provides an account of the arrival of Christian missions to the region, of the British colonial appropriation of Ibibioland, of the religious understandings that were prevalent among the Ibibio, and of the way these factors combined to encourage people to affiliate with the new religion. Starting in the mid nineteenth century, Christian missions arrived in southeastern Nigeria. They provided both a new religious option and educational opportunities in their schools. The establishment of British colonial control over the inland regions of Ibibioland during the first two decades of the twentieth century resulted in social upheaval and raised

Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3, no. 3 (1970): 209, 212–213; Steed and Sundkler, *History of the Church in Africa*, 252–253.

questions for some about the efficacy of their traditional religions and institutions. Over time it became clear that the colonial government was there to stay. Those who associated with the new religion and gained schooling in mission schools were better prepared to participate in the new colonial economy than those who did not. As a result people became convinced of the efficacy of the new religion and joined mission schools and churches. By the 1950s it had become clear that there had been a mass movement to Christianity.

Christian Missions

The arrival of Christian missions to southeastern Nigeria starting in the mid nineteenth century provided the Ibibio with new religious options and the possibility of schooling that would be useful during the colonial period. This subsection describes foreign mission initiatives in the region starting with Portuguese contacts around the beginning of the sixteenth century until the arrival of Mennonite missionaries in 1958. It focuses primarily on the missions that arrived during the last half of the nineteenth century.

Early Mission Initiatives

From the late fifteenth century European traders and missionaries visited what is today the Nigerian coast and sought to convince the African peoples with whom they interacted to follow the Christian faith. The Portuguese made contact with the kingdom of Benin, some 350 kilometers southwest of where Mennonite missionaries would later

work, in 1485.²⁴ Under the Padroado agreement their envoys represented diplomatic, commercial, and religious concerns simultaneously. In 1514 the Oba, ruler of Benin, sent envoys to Portugal asking for missionaries, although his motives were likely more political than religious since he also requested arms.²⁵ The Portuguese were careful to prohibit the sale of arms to non-Christian rulers and responded to the Oba's request by sending missionaries and explaining that arms would be forthcoming only after the Oba had truly proven his adherence to the Christian faith. The Oba did not convert. Aside from the conversion of a few individuals, missionary efforts were not successful and the Portuguese did not provide arms. The Portuguese implemented another missionary attempt in the 1530s that proved no more successful. The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide sent Capuchin missionaries to Benin a number of times during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without success.

In the Kingdom of Warri, some 100 kilometers south of Benin, mission initiatives were somewhat more successful. A company of Augustinian monks founded a Christian settlement there sometime during the third quarter of the sixteenth century.²⁶ The Olu, ruler of Warri, consented to the baptism of his son, christened Sebastian, who continued in the newfound Christian faith even after becoming Olu himself. There was a missionary

²⁴ A. F. C. Ryder, "The Benin Missions," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 2 (1961): 231–59.

²⁵ Ibid.; J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891, The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 2-5; Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 77–78.

²⁶ A. F. C. Ryder, "Missionary Activity in the Kingdom of Warri to the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 1 (1960): 1–26; Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, 119–120; Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891, The Making of a New Elite*, 2–7.

priest in residence in Warri until the early seventeenth century when volunteers dried up because of the difficult life there. Sebastian, despite his advanced age, took on the task of instructing the people in Christian doctrines and organizing religious processions. European visitors reported that a minority of the population continued to participate in Christian observances. In the mid seventeenth century the Sacred Congregation revived mission visits in Warri, but they were few because of the scarcity of missionaries, unreliable transportation, and health problems aggravated by the inhospitable climate. Reports from missionary visits over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were mixed, sometimes lamenting persistent idolatry and other times reporting that the people were zealous in their Christian faith. This is in contrast to the markedly unsuccessful initiatives further north in the Kingdom of Benin.

The Church of Scotland Mission

Of the numerous western missions that were active in southeastern Nigeria during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) was the first to establish a permanent presence in the region. In 1846 CSM missionaries arrived at Calabar, about 50 kilometers southeast of where Mennonite missionaries would later work.²⁷ This initiative grew out of excitement in the mission's Jamaican churches about the proposals of Thomas Fowell Buxton.²⁸ Buxton suggested that legitimate commerce with Africa could replace the slave trade, that Christian nations had a responsibility to

²⁷ Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858*, 241; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 3.

²⁸ Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, 206-208.

help such a change to happen, and that freed African slaves in the British West Indian Colonies could carry out such a vision.²⁹ Newly freed slaves in the Jamaican churches resolved to send their own missionaries to introduce the gospel in the land from which their ancestors had come.

The Jamaican churches' proposal fell on fertile ground in the Calabar region. Two local kings, Eyamba V. and Eyo Honesty, responded by letter, asking for assistance.³⁰ Since British forces were imposing a blockade against the slave trade, the kings were looking for new trading opportunities. They also asked for teachers who could teach reading and writing as well as instruct them in the ways of the white man's God. The Jamaican churches acted immediately with the formation of a new missionary society and appointed Hope Masterton Waddell, Scottish missionary to Jamaica, to lead this new initiative that would include both Scottish and Jamaican personnel.³¹

Waddell and his companions arrived at the mouth of the Cross River in 1846, and the mission would work there for the next half-century. Along with their regular Sunday services at Eyo Honesty's palace, they established a school and started translating portions of scripture into the local Efik language.³² Their work during the second half of the nineteenth century was largely confined to the Calabar region. King Eyo and his African counterparts were careful to limit the range of missionaries and traders as their

²⁹ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1840), 491–522.

³⁰ Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, 208–211, 663–666.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 209–212.

³² *Ibid.*, 241–267, 336–358.

livelihood depended on being the exclusive middlemen between the products of the African interior and the European trading vessels.³³ In addition, there is no indication that the missionaries received invitations from the interior as they had from the chiefs along the coast. During the first twelve years they established five stations.³⁴ By the end of the century the mission had been able to consolidate its work around Calabar but was not able to progress into the interior, neither west into Ibibioland nor to the northern reaches of the river.³⁵

With the coming of direct British colonial control of Nigeria in the last years of the nineteenth century, the situation started to change as British officials sought to open up the interior to British traders. The CSM was quick to respond, opening a station upriver at Itu from where penetration west into northern Ibibioland and northeastern Iboland was possible.³⁶ The mission's indomitable Mary Slessor was a pioneer in this region and her tireless zeal to push the boundaries of the mission west from the Cross River did much to open the region for mission stations and the schools and medical

³³ Ibid., 407-457; Johnson, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 18-19.

³⁴ Johnson, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 20.

³⁵ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 1-28; E. U. Aye, "The Foundations of Presbyterianism Among the Calabar Clans: Qua, Efic, Efut," in *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria: 1846-1996*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory Press, 1996), 1-27.

³⁶ Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns*, 32-67; Enyi Udoh, "Growing Witness Among the Ibibio," in *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria: 1846-1996*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory Press, 1996), 28-49; Ogbu U. Kalu, "The River Highway: Christianizing the Igbo," in *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria: 1846-1996*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory Press, 1996), 50-95.

institutions that were inevitably attached to them.³⁷ This is part of the area where Mennonite missionaries would work during the period from 1958 to 1967.

The CSM became an important partner of the Mennonite missionaries who worked in southeastern Nigeria. When Edwin and Irene Weaver, the first resident MBMC missionaries, were facing the prospect of leaving because the government refused them permission to establish a Mennonite mission, the CSM included them in its own missionary quota, facilitating the acquisition of long-term visas.³⁸ While other missions advised the Weavers to leave the region, the CSM suggested that they might play a mediating role in the conflictual relationship between the mission churches and the AICs.³⁹ The CSM's Presbyterian Church of Nigeria seconded one of its Nigerian pastors to Edwin Weaver's Inter-Church Team that researched and worked with AICs in the region. In return for the CSM's assistance with its visa difficulties, MBMC took over the management and staffing of the Presbyterian hospital at Abiriba and provided teachers for short-staffed Presbyterian schools. In addition, the Weavers moved into the CSM mission house at Ikot Inyang, just five miles from Mary Slessor's last mission station,

³⁷ Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer, *God and One Redhead: Mary Slessor of Calabar* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 121–141.

³⁸ "Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC," June 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65; A. G. Somerville to John H. Yoder, July 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; *Executive Committee Minutes*, Meeting Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 2, 1960), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4-5.

³⁹ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1970), 27–38, 47–51.

where Edwin gave some of his time to preaching and teaching in that district of the Presbyterian Church.⁴⁰

The Church Missionary Society and the Niger Delta Pastorate Church

The second western mission to arrive on the scene during the nineteenth century was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of the Anglican Church. The CMS used the Niger River that passed about 150 kilometers west of where Mennonite missionaries would work as a highway into the interior.⁴¹ Similar to the Church of Scotland Mission, the Anglicans caught the spirit of Buxton's proposals and used teams of British missionaries and freed African slaves from the British colony of Sierra Leone to evangelize the Nigerian coastal regions. In 1857 the Anglicans sent Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a liberated Yoruba slave from Sierra Leone who had been working as a missionary among his own people west of the Niger, to establish mission stations along the river.⁴² Crowther appointed J. C. Taylor to the Onitsha station, the eventual headquarters of the Niger Mission, in Ibo country. Taylor was an Ibo ex-slave and convert from Sierra Leone. He immediately threw himself into the missionary tasks of preaching, visiting, and starting the construction of mission buildings. One of his most

⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴¹ Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, 1-15.

⁴² Lamin Sanneh, "The CMS and the African Transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Opening of Nigeria," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 173-97; Steed and Sundkler, *History of the Church in Africa*, 242-244.

important tasks was to open a school, which he did with twelve students within a week of his arrival.⁴³

A significant part of the story of the Niger Mission is the CMS goal of making it indigenous. Henry Venn, CMS Secretary from 1841 to 1873, developed a concept of the indigenous church in which the missionary goal was to establish a church that was self-propagating, self-financing, and self-governing.⁴⁴ This would free up missionaries and other mission resources to enter new fields that were not yet evangelized. Venn secured Crowther's appointment as bishop of a large swath of the West African field, putting him in charge of the Niger Mission staffed by African missionaries from Sierra Leone.⁴⁵ During the 1880s the CMS received reports that progress was less than expected and that members of Crowther's team were engaging in questionable activity. The CMS sent a number of young, European missionaries who, over time, put leadership back into European hands and dismissed Crowther's Sierra Leonean missionaries from their positions. Crowther died soon afterwards. Other African leaders were indignant at the imposition of European control, and congregations in the Niger Delta declared their autonomy from the CMS, forming the Niger Delta Pastorate Church (NDP) under the leadership of Crowther's son D. C. Crowther.⁴⁶

⁴³ Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, 13.

⁴⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Henry Venn's Legacy," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 2 (April 1977): 16-19.

⁴⁵ Steed and Sundkler, *History of the Church in Africa*, 242-246; Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, 343-349, 388-393.

⁴⁶ G. O. M. Tasié, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864-1918* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 83-201.

The NDP eventually came back into the Anglican fold but retained its African leadership and much of its autonomy so that there were two Anglican missions. When Mennonite missionaries arrived in southeastern Nigeria in 1958, both the CMS and NDP had an active missionary presence west and southwest of where MBMC missionaries worked. The CMS collaborated with the Mennonite missionaries' inter-church initiatives and seconded one of its Nigerian pastors to Edwin Weaver's Inter-Church Team that researched and worked with AICs in the region.⁴⁷

The Society of Holy Ghost Fathers

Roman Catholic missionaries were also active in southeastern Nigeria starting in the ninth decade of the nineteenth century. The Society of African Mission entered the region in 1884, but it was the Society of Holy Ghost Fathers (SHGF) that arrived the next year and was active in the area where Mennonite missionaries would work.⁴⁸ The SHGF began its work in Onitsha and expanded east into Iboland and eventually to northern Ibibioland.⁴⁹ Later it established a center in Calabar and moved west into southern Ibibioland from there. The SHGF sought to win converts by liberating slaves through purchase, establishing orphanages and Christian villages, winning over the elite class, and

⁴⁷ W. E. McBay to Edwin Weaver, January 31, 1965 and G. E. I. Cockin to Edwin Weaver, February 12, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Irene Weaver to Esther Graber, February 9, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential.

⁴⁸ Ikenga R. A Ozigboh, *Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1931* (Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers, 1988), 36-40.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

by providing schools.⁵⁰ During the twentieth century schools would become its primary means of evangelization in the fierce competition with Protestant missions. The urgency with which the CSM invited Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) to undertake the management of the Abiriba hospital was motivated by the fear that the SHGF would actualize plans to build a hospital nearby and win the area for the Catholics.⁵¹

Early in their work in southeastern Nigeria, Mennonite missionaries sympathized with the Protestant side in the intense Protestant/Catholic rivalry.⁵² Towards the end of their stay they warmed to the idea of collaboration with the SHGF, and some of the Catholic missionaries participated in the MBMC's Inter-Church Study Group.⁵³ One of the five AICs that collaborated with Mennonite missionaries in the establishment of the United Independent Churches Fellowship and its Bible school for AICs was of SHGF origin.⁵⁴

The Primitive Methodist Mission

The Primitive Methodist Mission (PMM) arrived to the region after having established a foothold on the island of Fernando Po off the Nigerian mainland. The first

⁵⁰ P. B. Clarke, "The Methods and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1905," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 2 (1974): 81-108.

⁵¹ A. G. Somerville to J. Jackson, April 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Sommerville, Rev. A. G.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, August 1, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

⁵² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

⁵³ Edwin Weaver to Jerry Creedon, August 29, 1966, Creedon to Weaver, September 16, 1966, and Weaver to Creedon, September 23, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.

⁵⁴ Edwin Weaver, "File IV, 1966, Inter-Church Study Group, Transcript," n.d., HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

PMM missionaries arrived to the island on February 21, 1870 in response to an invitation from native Christians whom Baptist missionaries had converted.⁵⁵ In 1893 the missionaries started work on the mainland in an area that would become part of present-day Cameroon. Six years later they established a mission at Jamestown on the Nigerian side, just west of the CSM at Calabar, at the invitation of King James Egbo Bassy. King Bassy had heard of their work at Fernando Po, had started a school for his own people, and desired missionary assistance. From Jamestown and from a second mission station at Esuk Oron, the missionaries advanced inland, reaching Ikot Ekpene on the northern border of Ibibioland in 1909.⁵⁶ Unlike the CMS, the CSM, and the Qua Iboe Mission, the Primitive Methodists had to use land routes to expand into the interior, as there was no river in its territory. Poor funding and a shortage of missionaries also plagued its efforts.⁵⁷ When work began on the Port Harcourt – Enugu Railway in 1913, the missionaries established a series of stations along the new corridor and its arterial roads, thus providing nuclei for new circuits and missionary outreach.

Despite poor funding, shortages of missionaries, and a lack of waterways for transportation, Methodist churches were well established in southeastern Nigeria by the time Mennonite missionaries arrived in 1958. Methodist leaders were at first cautious about collaborating with the Mennonite initiative to engage the AICs, fearful of the

⁵⁵ Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church in Eastern Nigeria*, 1–13; Edet Akpan Udo, “The Methodist Contribution to Education in Eastern Nigeria, 1893-1960” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1965), 65-70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 142-160.

⁵⁷ Ogbu U. Kalu, “Primitive Methodists on the Railroad Junctions of Ibgoland, 1910-1931,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16, no. 1 (February 1986): 44–66.

influence that AIC practices might have on their church members.⁵⁸ They eventually warmed to the idea and offered to admit AIC leaders into the Methodist Church Lay Training Center, collaborated with the Inter-Church Study Group, and even solicited MBMC workers for their schools, clinics, and agricultural work.⁵⁹ MBMC, by then providing numerous personnel for CSM and Qua Iboe Mission institutions, did not have sufficient resources to respond positively to the request.

The Qua Iboe Mission

Mission comity agreements had assigned most of Ibibioland to the Qua Iboe Mission (QIM). It occupied the territory bordered on the east by the PMM and CSM, on the southwest by the PMM, and on the west by the NDP and CMS.⁶⁰ This is the region where Mennonite missionaries would be most active between 1958 and 1967. QIM work started in 1887 at the mouth of the Qua Iboe River when Samuel Alexander Bill, an Irish evangelical from Belfast, responded to local chiefs' request for a missionary.⁶¹ The chiefs had been in contact with the CSM in Calabar and there were Sierra Leonean Christians

⁵⁸ Edwin I. Weaver, "Commentary on the Inter-Church Study Group Papers," September 1968, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

⁵⁹ Principle of Methodist Church Lay Training Centre to Edwin Weaver, October 29, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; John M. Lewars to J. E. Stringfellow, September 14, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; *Inter-Church Study Group Minutes*, (Inter Church Study Committee, May 9, 1964) and *Inter-Church Group* (Inter Church Study Group, November 4, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Lloyd Fisher to John H. Yoder, May 6, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1965.

⁶⁰E. A. Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52," in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, ed. O. U. Kalu (London: Longman, 1980), 159-181.

⁶¹ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 30-37; Eva Stuart Watt, *The Quest of Souls in Qua Iboe* (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, 1951), 1-19.

who lived and traded in the area. Having observed the mediating role that missionaries could play in disputes with European traders and with the hope that a European presence would deter threats from Opobo traders who sought to monopolize trade in the region, the chiefs sent a letter to Calabar requesting a resident missionary. The letter found its way to the Harley Missionary Training College in London where Bill was a student, and he responded positively to the chiefs' request.

The QIM moved north from the coastal region into the interior of Ibibioland. It used the Qua Iboe River as its highway and complemented its Gospel message with the schools and dispensaries that were an integral part of missionary work of the epoch.⁶² Bill and his colleagues established a mission station at Okat in 1894 and another at Etinan in 1898. British punitive military campaigns around the turn of the century caused African leaders to become increasingly convinced of the futility of resisting the imperial advance. They also became convinced, however, of the utility of missionaries who could play a mediating role between villages and colonial forces.⁶³ This facilitated mission penetration into the Eket and Ubium areas and the continued advance north to the Abak, Aka, and Itam areas within the first decade of the 20th century. After that it was a matter of consolidating the advance with the multiplication of outstations. From the beginning the QIM missionaries provided schools and dispensaries at their stations. They understood

⁶² Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 40-42, 105-270; Watt, *The Quest of Souls in Qua Iboe*; David Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J. D. Y. Peel*, eds. J. D. Y. Peel and Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 413-39.

⁶³ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 148, 178, 193; Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission."

that Ibibio village leaders often considered such assistance more important than the Gospel message they offered.⁶⁴

The QIM resisted MBMC work in Ibibioland since comity agreements had designated the area to be its territory. Among the group of AICs that had invited MBMC to the region there were former QIM churches. Qua Iboe missionaries argued that AIC leaders often chose to establish their own churches simply to escape disciplinary measures or to provide baptism for those who preferred an easier, undisciplined, and substandard Christianity.⁶⁵ They advised MBMC to leave the area without responding to AIC requests. Although the QIM maintained its position that MBMC was unwisely and unfairly encroaching on its territory, with time the relationship between the two missions improved. MBMC provided missionary teachers for Qua Iboe schools and gave scholarships for some AIC leaders to attend the QIM theological training center.⁶⁶ Eventually some of the Qua Iboe African leaders participated in the Inter-Church Study Group that MBMC initiated.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 40-42, 265.

⁶⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, July 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin Weaver, "Weaver Commentary on Correspondence (Transcript)," September 1968, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 19, Weaver Background Commentary.

⁶⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Delbert Snyder, September 30, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Snyder, Delbert and Lela Nigeria 1962-65; A. N. Udonsak to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 6, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969.

⁶⁷ O. Mbuk, *Inter-Church Study Group*, Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, August 14, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

The Second Wave of Missions

By mid-century the CSM, CMS, NDP, PMM, QIM, and SHGF were not the only missions active in the region. A number of additional missions formed a second wave that did not respect the comity agreements that the Protestant missions had established. By 1928 the Salvation Army, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Mission, and the United Native African Church had entered the region, and in the next decade the Lutheran Church, the Apostolic Church, and the Assemblies of God arrived on the scene.⁶⁸ The Cleveland Tennessee Church of God arrived in 1949 and the Church of Christ in 1952.⁶⁹ By the time MBMC missionaries arrived in 1958 they found additional groups: Pentecostals, Nazarenes, the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Seventh Day Adventists, and many others “too numerous to mention.”⁷⁰ This second wave of missions came at the invitation of Ibibio Christians who were not satisfied with the older missions, particularly the QIM with whom the new missions were often in direct competition.⁷¹

In addition, Ibibio Christians sometimes formed their own AICs that refused to submit to the religious authority of any of the foreign missions. By the mid 1960s a

⁶⁸ Monday B Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission: Towards a History of an Ibibio Independent Church,” *Africa*. 59 (1989): 496–516.

⁶⁹ Wendell W. Broom, “Growth of the Churches of Christ Among Ibibios of Nigeria,” (MA thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1970), 84-105; Reda C. Goff, *The Great Nigerian Mission* (Nashville: Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ, 1964), 1.

⁷⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

⁷¹ Edet William Amankpa, *A Short History of Ibesikpo* ([Place of publication not identified]: [Amankpa?], 1979).

survey of churches within a five-mile radius of Uyo found 225 congregations belonging to over forty different denominations.⁷² A similar survey of Abak, ten miles from Uyo, found 250 congregations in fifty denominations within a five-mile radius of the town center.⁷³ Ibibioland had become heavily Christianized. Upon arrival in the region MBMC missionary Edwin Weaver reported, “Never in my life have I seen a place so full of Churches and their institutions.”⁷⁴

The Establishment of Colonial Rule

This subsection describes the establishment of British colonial rule in Ibibioland. It was only with the solidification of colonial rule that the missions were able to advance their work from the costal and riverine areas into the interior. British military campaigns forced the Ibibio to allow colonial officials, British traders, and missionaries to have access to villages in the interior. The violent efficacy of the encroachment is one factor that caused the Ibibio to start to question their faith in traditional Ibibio religion. It is, therefore, one of factors that motivated the Ibibio move towards Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century.

While the move to bring the whole of Ibibioland under British colonial control commenced at the close of the nineteenth century, British engagement with the region started much earlier. Trade relationships, including slave trading, had existed for several

⁷² Weaver and Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 106.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 62.

⁷⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

centuries.⁷⁵ With the abolition of slave trading, Britain used its navy to patrol the West African coast and intercept slave-trading ships, and officials became increasingly proactive in their goal to increase other kinds of trade with Great Britain.⁷⁶ An industrialized Europe had less need for slaves but more need for African products. Africa was both a source of raw materials for its factories and a growing consumer market for its manufactured goods such as liquor, guns, and cloth.⁷⁷

The goal was to protect and encourage British trade without the expense of full colonial rule. The role of British consuls in the region was to intervene in African affairs only when it seemed imperative to keep the trade routes open.⁷⁸ But such a mandate was elastic and open to interpretation. Consul Beecroft intervened in Calabar when it seemed that a slave revolt was brewing in order to protect British merchants and property.⁷⁹ He even presided over the election of a successor for one of the Calabar kings in 1852. This “informal sway” of British influence was successful. Palm oil was perhaps the most important export from the region and was a raw project in the manufacture of soap,

⁷⁵ J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 26–60.

⁷⁶ Monday Efiog Noah, “Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900,” in *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, ed. Monday B. Abasiattai (Enugu, Nigeria: Harris Publishers in Association with University of Calabar Press, 1990), 90–108.

⁷⁷ Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906*, 280-281.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-35; Noah, “Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900”.

candles and lubricants in Britain. Imports into Liverpool rose from 150 tons in 1806 to 13,600 tons in 1838.⁸⁰

Britain sought to increase its access to raw materials in the region while at the same time to exclude competitors such as France and Germany. Before the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, the British government made treaties with local chiefs in order to strengthen its claims in the face of advances from other colonial powers.⁸¹ This allowed for the establishment of a British protectorate over the region, a move that was less expensive than colonial control but would exclude the French and Germans. There was also the matter of increasing the palm oil supply and the market for British goods in Nigeria. Merchants had always traded with African middlemen on the coast who controlled the trade with the sources in the interior. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the British sought to increase their profits by accessing the interior by themselves, but local trade habits and interests worked against this move. For example, the small states along the Cross River north of Calabar collected tolls on trade that passed through their areas.⁸² The smallness of the states and the informality of the toll arrangements lead the British to characterize this practice as an impediment to free trade. Pressure mounted to overthrow local rulers who hindered direct trade with the interior irrespective of the treaties that they had signed earlier. By the last decade of the century

⁸⁰ Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906*, 280–281.

⁸¹ Ibid., 61-177; Noah, “Social and Political Developments: The Lower Cross Region, 1600-1900”; Monday B. Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule: Colonial Subjugation and Administration,” in *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, ed. Monday B. Abasiattai (Enugu, Nigeria: Harris Publishers in Association with University of Calabar Press, 1990), 161–84.

⁸² Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906*, 95-96.

the British government moved to establish direct political control of the protectorate, both the coastal areas and the hinterland, and started laying the basic infrastructure for the colonial state. Between 1892 and 1904 the value of exports from the region to the United Kingdom would rise from £446,570 to £1,079,544, an increase of 242%, and the value of imports from the United Kingdom to the region would rise from £576,263 to £1,416,554, an increase of 246%.⁸³

Not surprisingly, the Ibibio people did not readily accept the British change of status from trading partners to rulers; so British officials used their powers of persuasion and their military might to open the interior of Ibibioland. Between 1894 and 1897 British officers traveled inland attempting to establish effective political control.⁸⁴ They found the Ibibio unimpressed with British might and sometimes found that villages blocked or threatened them and forced them to beat a hasty retreat. One official reported that when he sought an interview with an Ibibio chief on the authority of Queen Victoria, the chief replied that he “would honor the invitation just that time, but should another such invitation be contemplated in [the] future, he would prefer the ‘Big White Queen’ coming herself to see him rather than sending her agents.”⁸⁵

Officials became convinced that a show of force would be necessary to persuade the Ibibio to accept British rule. During the last years of the nineteenth century and the

⁸³ Ibid., 337.

⁸⁴ Monday Efiang Noah, “The Establishment of British Rule among the Ibibio, 1885-1910. Part One, The Military Approach,” *Nigeria Magazine* no. 148 (1984): 38-51; Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule.”

⁸⁵ Noah, “The Establishment of British Rule among the Ibibio, 1885-1910. Part One, The Military Approach.”

first years of the twentieth, military expeditions became the primary means of establishing colonial rule.⁸⁶ The first such expedition took place in 1898. In the fall of 1896 Qua Iboe missionary John Kirk had informed the assistant District Commissioner that plans were underway at Mkpok to practice a traditional burial in which there would be a human sacrificed.⁸⁷ When commissioner Bedwell investigated the townspeople fled, and Bedwell and his team gave chase. There was a skirmish and the commissioner was injured. Consul-General Ralph Moor responded to this event and reports of Ibibio opposition to free trade, the practice of human sacrifice, and insults of the Queen with a punitive expedition.⁸⁸ Troops destroyed Mkpok and arrested its chief, Chief Ofon. They burned down villages that had given shelter to Ofon and obliterated those that did not accept British rule. The British spared the villages that accepted the new regime.

Over the next decade such punitive expeditions became routine, and British officials established a “native” court system to dispense justice. Protectorate forces disarmed villages of their guns, required them to accept British rule, and established military garrisons from which annual patrols invaded regions not yet subdued.⁸⁹ They fined and often destroyed villages that resisted. In theory policy dictated that after being

⁸⁶ Ibid.; Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule”; Anene, “Southern Nigeria in Transition,” 204, 206, 216–217; P. Amaury Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, Cass Library of African Studies 31 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), 293–297.

⁸⁷ Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission,” 114–115.

⁸⁸ Noah, “The Establishment of British Rule among the Ibibio, 1885–1910. Part One, The Military Approach.”

⁸⁹ Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885–1906*, 246–249; Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule.”

subdued, chiefs would rule their own communities and dispense justice themselves.⁹⁰ British authorities would only intervene to prevent injustice and check abuses. The reality was otherwise. In villages that had resisted, colonial authorities considered the village elders *personae non gratae*. When they chose others to sit on the native courts, those they chose had no traditional claim to authority.⁹¹ Communities often continued to dispense justice in their traditional ways when they could do so without government knowledge.⁹² Thus two parallel systems of rule and justice worked alongside each other. Since the native courts had the backing of the new government, with time their presence undermined the traditional authorities and further consolidated British rule. They were the middlemen through whom the government handed out punishment and penalties. This created opportunities for corruption and intimidation; court clerks and messengers exploited their positions to sell decisions for their own enrichment.⁹³

The British and the Nigerians experienced the establishment of colonial rule in southeastern Nigeria differently. From the perspective of the British, the “pacification” patrols opened up southeastern Nigeria to traders; allowed for the establishment of basic infrastructure such as roads, post-offices, government guesthouses, and a telegraph

⁹⁰ Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906*, 250-279.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 257-269; A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929* (London: Longman, 1972), 287-295.

⁹³ Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule”; Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 274-276.

system; and brought law and order to an uncivilized people.⁹⁴ From the perspective of the Nigerians, the patrols created chaos in the society by undermining traditional authority structures and replacing them with a system that was corrupt and unjust.⁹⁵ As Chief Ogueri of Uboma explained, “Immediately white men came justice vanished.”⁹⁶ Solidification of British rule had precipitated a crisis in Ibibio society.

The Traditional Religious Assumptions of the Ibibio

Another factor in the narrative of Ibibio conversion is the Ibibio traditional religion. Its orientation towards providing a full and abundant life and its practical and eclectic approach contributed to the Ibibio move towards Christianity during the twentieth century. When Christian missions seemed more successful at providing a full and abundant life through their schools or health services than was the traditional religion, Ibibio religious assumptions increasingly led them to choose the new religion. Ibibio traditional religion’s eclectic and practical nature meant the people more easily appropriated Christianity or aspects of it without having to infringe on doctrinaire formulas or beliefs. This subsection outlines aspects of Ibibio traditional religion that will help explain the Ibibio move towards Christianity.

Reconstructing an outline of Ibibio traditional religion before the beginning of the twentieth century is not possible because of the lack of sources. The earliest sources available come from the ethnographic observations of P. Amaury Talbot, a British

⁹⁴ Abasiattai, “The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule.”

⁹⁵ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 249-295.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 282–283.

colonial officer in southeastern Nigeria in the early twentieth century, and his wife D. Amaury Talbot. P. Amaury became District Commissioner in southern Nigeria in 1911 and in 1920 became Census Commissioner for the 1921 census of the southern provinces.⁹⁷ The two Talbots spent ten months among the Ibibio.⁹⁸ P Amaury published his ethnographical observations in *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, and D. Amaury published her observations about Ibibio women in *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People: The Ibibios of Southern Nigeria*.⁹⁹ These are the most important sources available for understanding Ibibio religious sensibilities in the early twentieth century.

The Talbots' description of the Ibibio shows a people whose primary focus was a quest for vitality in life that found its paradigmatic expression in a long life lived in prosperity with many descendants. The family and friends of an aged person who died accepted the event with an even temper.¹⁰⁰ The death of a young person, on the other hand, resulted in feelings of deep loss and much sorrow. The body of one whose life ended prematurely through sickness or in childbearing did not receive normal burial rites. The quest for prosperity and well-being was evident in supplications, generous offerings, and sacrifices of animals, or even humans, to the appropriate deities at planting and

⁹⁷ C. K Meek, "Amaury Talbot: 1877-1945," *Man* 47 (1947): 13-14;

⁹⁸ P. Amaury Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, 2nd ed., Cass Library of African Studies 31 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), x.

⁹⁹ P. Amaury Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, 2nd ed., Cass Library of African Studies 31 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967); D. Amaury Talbot, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People: The Ibibios of Southern Nigeria* (London: Cass, 1968) First published 1915.

¹⁰⁰ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 150-151.

harvest times and at the beginning of the fishing season.¹⁰¹ This was to ensure bountiful harvests and catches. Prosperity was not just an issue of this life but of the next as well. The inclusion of clothing, pots, and other riches, and sometimes even servants and favorite wives, in the tomb and the sacrifice of numerous beasts for funeral feasts ensured that the deceased would have abundant resources in the afterlife.¹⁰² Families impoverished themselves to give the dead lavish funerals since otherwise Abassi (God), would refuse them entry into the town of the ancestors and send them “to the place of the poor and those of no account.”¹⁰³

The high value that the Ibibio placed on procreation manifested itself in a number of ways. Women and couples commonly made prayers and offerings to local deities to seek their intervention for fertility, to overcome barrenness, and for a successful birth.¹⁰⁴ A newly married girl could divorce her husband if she did not become pregnant within the first year of marriage.¹⁰⁵ The mother of Abassi was Eka Abassi, and the Ibibio called her “Bestower of Fertility” for she was the giver of babies.¹⁰⁶ For women, motherhood was “the crown of life” and barrenness the “greatest curse.”¹⁰⁷ Those local deities that could grant fertility or remove barrenness were held in greatest reverence. Without

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 13, 22, 36-38, 281.

¹⁰² Ibid., 139-142.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 282-283, 304; D. Talbot, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 18, 81, 109-110.

¹⁰⁵ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 211.

¹⁰⁶ D. Talbot, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 15, 18.

descendants one lived in sadness since there would be no one to carry out proper burial requirements and pour libation to one after death.¹⁰⁸ For the Ibibio, fertility was a basic value that brought together the pursuit of prosperity and progeny. Productive lands for farmers, fecund creeks and rivers for fisher folk, and abundant human offspring were united in a concept of fertility as a condition of well-being. The ancestors and specific local deities were sources of blessing and power for both productivity and descendants.¹⁰⁹ Blessings for human fertility and offerings of gratitude for the birth of children were arranged to coincide with the planting and harvest offerings.

The quest for vitality took place not only within the material world but also within the spiritual realm. According to P. Amaury Talbot the Ibibio's chief deity was Abassi Obumo, the Thunder God, although Talbot and later sources normally refer to him simply as Abassi.¹¹⁰ Abassi Obumo's home was in the sky, far removed from human concerns, which he left to local deities. He had designated sacred places, often pools and groves, where humans could find local deities and protection from evil. Most sacred places contained a stone that represented Eka Abassi who conferred fertility upon women.

The local deities, Ndem, dwelt in the sacred places: rivers, pools, springs, trees, and rocks. The most powerful Ndem lived in water.¹¹¹ They were commonly concerned

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 81, 85-86, 109-110; P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 13, 29, 37-38,

¹¹⁰ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 7-13; Cyril Daryll Forde and G. I Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 78; Justin S Ukpong, "Sacrificial Worship in Ibibio Traditional Religion," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 1982): 161-88.

¹¹¹ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 7, 20-22.

with the growth of crops and the birth of babies. While they did not usually mix with humans, Ndem did respond to prayers and sacrifices and were guardians over specific towns or families. Being agents of fertility, they demanded sacrifices especially at planting and harvesting time. The Mbiam, in contrast, made up a branch of Ndem that represented the forces of revenge and death.¹¹² They were only approachable through their priests, and with their aid and medicine one could harm and extract vengeance on an enemy.

The Ekpo, or ancestors, also participated in the quest for vitality for the living. Like the Ndem, they responded to sacrifices and were helpful in increasing fertility with respect to crops and children.¹¹³ People considered them to be nearer and friendlier than the Ndem. The Ibibio consulted the Ekpo about all matters of importance through a diviner or priest or through personal interviews. Ekpo resided in ghost country for one or two years before reincarnating, usually in the family from which they came unless they had found themselves to be mistreated in the previous life. Those who died young, before they were ready, who were murdered, or for whom survivors did not perform proper sacrifices, offerings, libations, or burial rites, lingered on earth and brought misfortune to the living.

The Ibibio sometimes found themselves confronted with misfortune that inhibited their quest for well-being. Angry Ndem or Ekpo could cause poor crops or barrenness,

¹¹² Ibid., 46-56.

¹¹³ Ibid., 123-136.

but it was from fellow humans that barriers most often arose.¹¹⁴ Some used witchcraft, wizardry, or the assistance of a Mbiam to attack their enemies, causing illness, impoverishment, barrenness, and even death.¹¹⁵ In the face of such impediments, the Ibibio exploited the resources at their disposal to ensure prosperity and descendants. Prayers, offerings, and sacrifices ensured abundant crops, plentiful catches, and many children. To protect themselves from attacks, the Ibibio sometimes used Ibok, medicine that a native doctor or wise man made by mixing ingredients such as herbs and blood.¹¹⁶ Ibok was also useful, sometimes with the help of Mbiam, to weaken or eliminate those who impeded the quest for vitality.

Ibibio traditional religion appears to have been flexible and practical in nature, thus likely more open to change than if it had been more doctrinaire. Historian G. I. Jones described the different traditional religions in southeastern Nigeria as open-minded, empirical, and eclectic.¹¹⁷ He suggested that these characteristics made them vulnerable during periods of rapid cultural change. Isichei's analysis of the neighboring Ibo religion supports this claim, and it appears to have been the case with the traditional Ibibio religion.¹¹⁸ Graham found a case in which a sacred grove was transferred to the mission

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 57-71, 123.

¹¹⁵ D. Talbot, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, 131.

¹¹⁶ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 21.

¹¹⁷ G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers; a Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

¹¹⁸ Isichei, "Seven Varieties of Ambiguity."

for Christian use, without apparent contradiction in the minds of the people.¹¹⁹ In other cases leaders of the traditional religion moved to associate themselves with the new religion.¹²⁰ In the minds of the Ibibio, religion was flexible and practical.

In the Ibibio world that P. Talbot described, natural and supernatural forces and beings were in constant interaction. Success in the natural or material world was inseparable from the forces at play in the supernatural world. He noted this integrated approach in his description of the Ibibio understanding, “To him the world is a vast organization and all phenomena are set in motion, and controlled, by hierarchies of beings, ranging in power and responsibility from the highest conceivable God down to the lowest rock elemental, each in strict subordination to its superior.”¹²¹ The spiritual and the material were mutually supportive and existed in one integrated world. Within that world the Ibibio utilized the means available to them to clear impediments and to pursue long life, prosperity, and abundant progeny in their quest for vitality.

The Move Towards Christianity

In Ibibioland the change in religious identity, from a traditional religion to Christianity, issued from the interaction of these three forces: foreign missions’ introduction of Christianity, the British establishment of colonial control, and Ibibio religious assumptions. While early twentieth century mission activity was limited to the coastal and Cross River regions, British rule and the infrastructure that came with it not

¹¹⁹ Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission,” 78-79.

¹²⁰ Pratten, “Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission,” 417.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

only opened up the hinterland to direct trade with interior markets but also allowed missionaries to travel and live inland.¹²² The colonial government built roads, railways, and courthouses where missionaries lodged as they itinerated.¹²³ Postal and telecommunication facilities allowed for better communication. The subjugation of village authority to colonial rule meant that local leaders could no longer block missionaries and Christian traders from contacting interior villages. In a very practical sense the establishment of the new regime allowed more freedom of movement and access to the hinterland, thus facilitating the spread of the Christian faith.

The inability of traditional social and religious institutions to impede the establishment of colonial rule or to provide for people's well-being would have logically prepared them to question the efficacy of the religious power that they understood to undergird those institutions. Ibibio tradition's integrated character meant that it did not make a clear distinction between mechanisms of social control and religion, between laws and supernatural taboos.¹²⁴ For example, both laws and taboos forbade adultery with a father's wife.¹²⁵ Therefore, those guilty had both to offer a sacrifice to purify the house

¹²² Henry Nau, *We Move into Africa: The Story of the Planting of the Lutheran Church in Southeastern Nigeria* (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1945), 75–79; Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 434–435

¹²³ Abasiattai, "The Old Calabar Province under Colonial Rule: Colonial Subjugation and Administration," 179; P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, 258–262.

¹²⁴ Adiele E. Afigbo, "Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 437–438; James R. Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan: A Structural-Functional Analysis of the Nsits of Nigeria* (Denver: University of Denver, 1965), 17–18; P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 220.

¹²⁵ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 220.

from pollution and to pay damages for the transgression of the law. The inability of village social structures to stop British encroachment raised questions about their efficacy and that of the religious power that should have supported them.

The imposition of colonial rule challenged Ibibio religious tradition in direct ways. In some cases the colonial authorities proscribed laws meant to please the Ndem, so that the people felt alienated from those spirits and feared they might be angry and no longer assist those who asked for their help.¹²⁶ Authorities sometimes destroyed Ndem shrines, demonstrating their impotence.¹²⁷ The British destroyed an important shrine called the Long JuJu at Arochukwa in late 1901.¹²⁸ Afterward four columns of troops swept southwest through Ibibioland, reinforcing colonial rule.¹²⁹ In traditional Ibibio society political and religious authority were fused, both by legitimizing each other and because the power of both was vested in the same people and structures.¹³⁰ Therefore the overthrow of traditional political structures in the face of British colonialism resulted in encroachment on traditional religious authority. Talbot noted that the people regretted that white rule had “made an end to the laws of the old Jujus.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹²⁸ Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition*, 230-232.

¹²⁹ Noah, “The Establishment of British Rule among the Ibibio, 1885-1910. Part One, The Military Approach.”

¹³⁰ Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 17–18.

¹³¹ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 34.

Qua Iboe missionaries reported that people had started to question the efficacy of their traditional religion. Graham's study of the mission's work found that those cases in which the Ibibio responded positively to the mission's message typically followed "a period of questioning the validity of their religious tradition."¹³² Missionaries recounted that some Ibibio communities asked why their crops were doing so poorly despite the offerings of food and sacrifices they had made.¹³³ They noted that when Christians at Big Town prayed for rain to wash out a traditional religious ceremony, the rains did come and washed it out.¹³⁴ As a result many believed the Christian God to be the stronger. People noted that Christians appeared to ignore the Ndem and their demand for sacrifices without ill effect.¹³⁵ District Commissioner P. Talbot reported that students of the mission schools stole manilas (local currency) from the sacred shrines without fear, and that marital infidelity increased since people no longer believed that the Ndem enforced social norms.¹³⁶ People appeared to ignore ancient taboos and customs. The perceived inadequacies of the traditional religion seem to have created a vacuum that Christian missionaries were only too happy to try to fill.

The flexible and practical nature of Ibibio traditional religion likely also facilitated movement towards Christianity. Graham found that the transfer of the sacred

¹³² Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission," 20.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹³⁶ P. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 39-41.

grove at Ibeno to the QIM church there provided a traditional continuum that did not question the sacredness of the new religion in the people's eyes.¹³⁷ It was sometimes those who were the most powerful and knowledgeable practitioners of the traditional religion who were among the first to embrace the new faith.¹³⁸ As more and more of the Ibibio lost respect for traditional religious practices, this practical approach to religion facilitated their movement to mission schools and churches.

The provision of education by missionary schools was another factor that drew people to Christianity. Schools were a significant part of the work of the four missions most involved in Ibibioland, the PMM, the CSM, the SHGF, and the QIM.¹³⁹ African leaders realized that schooling in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic skills was necessary for successful trading relationships with the Europeans and participation in the new colonial economic and political milieu.¹⁴⁰ Upon arrival to a new site missionaries typically started a school or took over one that local leaders had already started.¹⁴¹ Missionaries understood that often it was the provision of schooling and not the desire to

¹³⁷ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 78-79.

¹³⁸ Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 417.

¹³⁹ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 40-41, 53; Okpo, *A Brief History of the Methodist Church*; William H. Taylor, "The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, no. 3 (1983): 163-17; Clarke, "The Methods and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1905.

¹⁴⁰ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914*, 289-292; Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 244, 296; William H. Taylor, "The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria."

¹⁴¹ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 400-401, 480-481, 197; William H. Taylor, "The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria;" Nau, *We Move into Africa*, 223-243.

join a new religion that attracted people to them.¹⁴² As the colonial authorities solidified control of southeastern Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century, they and expatriate firms hired those who had the basic skills of reading and writing as clerks, messengers, or minor officials.¹⁴³ Under the new regime such employment, along with trading, was one way to earn a respectable livelihood. If the Ndem of the traditional religion had once provided prosperity and fertility, the mission schools of the new religion could now provide an education and seemingly assured one's well-being in the new colonial context.

The desire for schools was so acute that villages invested significant resources to acquire them. They built schools on their own or funded teachers' salaries, sometimes to attract missions to their villages.¹⁴⁴ Missionaries capitalized on this felt need among the Ibibio.¹⁴⁵ They recognized that people who attended their schools would likely associate with their church and used schools as a means of evangelization. SHGF Superior Leon Lejeune wrote to his superiors in 1901 that "it is perilous to hesitate, the Christian village must go and all our concentration must be on the schools otherwise our enemy the Protestants will snatch the young."¹⁴⁶ Missions competed fiercely to provide schools that

¹⁴² Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 262-266.

¹⁴³ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914*, 289-292.

¹⁴⁴ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 262-266, 296; Nau, *We Move into Africa*, 213-216; Udo, "The Methodist Contribution to Education in Eastern Nigeria, 1893-1960," 114; Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission," 498-499.

¹⁴⁵ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 197.

¹⁴⁶ Clarke, "The Methods and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1905."

they hoped would bring the Ibibio into their churches.¹⁴⁷ The competition was such that villages were sometimes able to negotiate more assistance for their schools by offering to choose one mission over the other. In Ibibioland the zeal for schooling became part and parcel of the move toward Christianity.

The first part of this chapter has argued that the movement of large numbers of the Ibibio towards Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century was the result of the interaction of three forces: the introduction of Christian faith by foreign missions, the establishment of colonial rule, and the traditional religious assumptions of the Ibibio people. Christian missions provided a new religious framework at a time when the traditional religion was no longer meeting people's expectations. The establishment of colonial rule exposed the apparent impotence of the taboos and customs that undergirded traditional social structures and opened up the interior to missionaries. Ibibio religious beliefs were flexible enough to provide a hearing for the new faith and prepared people to expect that their religion should contribute to their well-being, an expectation that Christian missions exploited by providing schools that prepared students to succeed in the new colonial economy.

Religious Innovation among the Ibibio

When Mennonite missionaries arrived in southeastern Nigeria just after mid-century, they found a dizzying array of African Independent Churches (AICs). Their

¹⁴⁷ Magnus O Bassey, "Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Southern Nigeria, 1885-1932.," *Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 1 (1991): 36-46; Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 253, 303-309, 525-526; Udo, "The Methodist Contribution to Education in Eastern Nigeria, 1893-1960," 155-157.

engagement of a highly competitive and innovative religious context led the missionaries to reorient their mission strategy to assist these indigenous Christian movements. The emergence of such movements was not unique to the region but was characteristic of the growth of the Christian movement in numerous areas across sub-Saharan Africa in the post World War II colonial context. Increasingly during the twentieth century Africans started their own churches outside of western missionary control. Among missionaries and scholars these movements became an important theme and their particular expressions of faith gained credibility from mid-century onward. One of the first studies that attempted a comprehensive analysis of this “independency” was David Barrett’s *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*.¹⁴⁸ He identified Ibibioland as having “probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa.”¹⁴⁹ Why were these movements so prevalent in this area? Nearly half a century later mission historian Wilbert Shenk would observe that the reason behind the vigorous religious innovation there remained a mystery.¹⁵⁰

The second part of this chapter is an attempt to outline an explanation for the strength of “indigenous” or “independent” forms of Christianity, AICs, in the region. First it draws on studies of AICs in the wider African context to identify reasons for their emergence that might shed light on their prevalence in Ibibioland. Those that it finds

¹⁴⁸ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 291, 114, 121.

¹⁵⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk, ““Go Slow Through Uyo’: A Case Study of Dialogue as Missionary Method,” in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century*, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles van Engen, and Hendrik Vroom (New York: Rodopi, 2005), 340.

operative for the region include competition between Protestant missions, Christian mission's failure to adapt their faith expressions to the idioms of African cultures, Africans' need to find a medium of resistance to colonial oppression, the prevalence of colonial attitudes within Christian missions, and the inability of the missions, because of a lack of resources, to serve the large number of Africans who wanted to affiliate with them.

In addition, the second part of this chapter draws on the nationalist critique of British indirect rule to show that there is a socio-religious reason for the prevalence of AICs in Ibibioland. The critique was that the attempt of colonial authorities to appoint native chiefs to oversee large areas that included numerous communities was bound to fail because political authority in southeastern Nigeria traditionally rested at the level of local communities. This section argues that Christian missions' attempt to establish large ecclesial structures after western, denominational models was similarly bound to fail because political and religious authority rested with the same local structures and leaders. Ibibio Christians' socio-religious assumptions led them to prefer churches in which religious authority was local and did not depend on a larger ecclesial structure. Finally, this section argues that the large number of Christian churches and missions, the prevalence of AICs, the history of competition between missions, and the Ibibio desire for mission amenities such as schools that equipped people to succeed, encouraged an innovative and competitive religious milieu that Mennonite missionaries found upon their arrival.

Reasons for the Emergence of African Independent Churches

This subsection outlines a number of explanations that scholars have suggested for the decision of some African Christians to form ecclesial structures separate from the mission churches instead of remaining within them. Some have seen the emergence of AICs as primarily a reaction to macro-political situations characteristic of colonialism. They argued that since colonial structures dominated their societies and disenfranchised Africans of their political agency, Africans appropriated forms of Christianity in order to embody cultural and political resistance. Georges Balandier saw twentieth century messianic movements in the Congo as the transfer of political reactions to the religious sphere.¹⁵¹ People were more familiar with religious language than they were with the language of political activism. Jean Comaroff argued that the some Zionist churches provided a way for the Tshidi people to resist the impact of colonialism.¹⁵² Leaving the mission churches became a way to symbolically reject the larger social order, something they found difficult or too costly to do in a more tangible way. Balandier and Comaroff focused primarily on the political and social ramifications of colonialism to explain the salience of AICs.

Mission historian Stephen Neill focused on the racism prevalent within mission churches and noted that Africans were not allowed into some white churches. He wrote, “It is because of the failure of the white man to make the Church a home for the black

¹⁵¹ Georges Balandier, *Sociologie Actuelle de l’Afrique Norie: Dynamique des Changements Sociaux en Afrique Centrale*, Bibliothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1955), 64–66, 477–481.

¹⁵² Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 165–166, 175–176

man that the latter has been fain to have a Church of his own, and to seek Christ outside of the official Churches.”¹⁵³ Neill gave most weight to issues of power and control within the mission churches to explain the emergence of AICs.

In southern Africa Bengt Sundkler saw both the larger political context of colonialism as well as racism in the churches as motivating factors for AICs. He identified the South African Native Land Act of 1913, the increasing exclusion of blacks from positions of skilled labor, as well as the segregation within mission churches as directly contributing to the movement.¹⁵⁴ African leaders found that positions of leadership were often reserved for white ministers. Sundkler understood AICs to be the result of the political, social, and denominational context of South Africa.

Efraim Andersson, Lucy Mair, and Allan Anderson have argued for a complex understanding of multiple reasons for the emergence of AICs, including political, cultural, and religious factors. In his study of messianic movements in the Congo, Andersson argued that economic, social, and political factors influenced the origins and development of AICs.¹⁵⁵ In addition, he observed that through their inability to appreciate the cultural and religious life of Africa, Christian missions often encouraged the growth of such movements.¹⁵⁶ Mair saw a correlation between the existence of African messianic

¹⁵³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission*, 2nd ed., The Pelican History of the Church (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 454.

¹⁵⁴ Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 32–37, 179.

¹⁵⁵ Efraim Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*, vol. 14, *Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells boktr., 1958), 258.

¹⁵⁶ Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*, 266.

movements and an absence of African political voice. She recognized that these movements appropriated religious language to formulate political protest but also argued that Africans sometimes founded AICs in order to keep customs that were meaningful to them but which missionaries condemned.¹⁵⁷ Anderson noted that Protestantism encouraged competition between churches, increased secession, and invested significant authority in the Bible.¹⁵⁸ Biblical authority relativized missionary authority when African interpretations differed from those of the missionaries. Politically, AICs were a response to colonialism as well as to mission churches that refused African advancement to positions of church leadership and greater indigenization of Christian doctrine and practice. For Andersson, Mair, and Anderson the colonial situation, AIC's cultural adaptation of Christianity, and the mission churches' monopolization of power to control African advancement and define doctrine and practice were all significant factors for the emergence of these movements.

In *Schism and Renewal in Africa* Barrett measured the likelihood of the rise of AICs based on eighteen factors, which he found to correlate with the presence or absence of AICs. These he used to configure a scale to measure the propensity of AICs to arise called the Zietgeist, "the social-religious climate of opinion favoring independency, protest, or renewal in a given tribe at a given time."¹⁵⁹ Missionaries, he proposed,

¹⁵⁷ Lucy Philip Mair, *New Nations*, The Nature of Human Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 181–182, 184.

¹⁵⁸ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 23–41.

¹⁵⁹ Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*, 110.

mounted an attack on indigenous African society with their attitude towards issues such as reverence for ancestors, witchcraft, and polygamy.¹⁶⁰ This represented a failure of love on their part that manifested itself in paternalism, poor communication, and the stifling of African attempts to creatively appropriate the gospel. Eventually many African Christians reacted by separating themselves into their own ecclesial structures.

Harold Turner and Gerhardus Oosthuizen insisted on the primarily religious nature of AICs without denying their social import. Responding to those who argued that these movements were responses to a breakdown of African society, Turner recognized that AICs were in varying degrees social, economic, and political forces but insisted that they were primarily religious movements that should be studied and evaluated in religious terms.¹⁶¹ Similarly, Oosthuizen described AICs in South Africa as religious movements that had political significance for the exercise of leadership in the church. He wrote, “Although the deepest motive of many of the independent movements has been religious, one of their essential points is the transferring to the spiritual and ecclesiastical plane of opposition to white authority, which could be made effective only by reconstructing the African communities under African leadership.”¹⁶²

Inus Daneel, Frederick Welbourn, and Bethwell Ogot focused heavily on cultural factors in the emergence of AICs. In his analysis of the Rhodesian (now Zimbabwe)

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 116–124, 154–157.

¹⁶¹ Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), 10–13, 18–19.

¹⁶² Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968), 7.

situation, Daneel suggested that Shona AICs' success was largely due to the way their leaders developed new and indigenized patterns of church life which "inevitably had a greater appeal to certain layers of the population than the Mission institutions with their somewhat foreign modes of worship and organization."¹⁶³ Daneel sought to show how AIC prophets met "the need of their 'patients' for effective countermeasures against mystical threats by supplanting the traditionally used magical objects with symbolic objects directly representing the curative power of the Christian God."¹⁶⁴ He highlighted AIC leaders' deft embodiment of the Christian gospel in the cultural context of the Shona peoples as an explanation for their emergence and success. Similarly, Welbourn and Ogot argued that AICs provided Kenyans a familiar sense of belonging that was absent in mission churches. They preached a message that was immediately relevant to their members.¹⁶⁵

Adrian Hastings suggested that AICs were predominantly a characteristic of Protestantism but that factors such as colonialism, racialism, insufficient mission resources, and missionary inability to make cultural adjustments were also important. Protestant tradition, he argued, has acknowledged the validity of separation on the grounds of truth and encouraged an appeal to the Bible that raises the opportunity for

¹⁶³ M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol. 2, Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques*, Change and Continuity in Africa (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 3.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Frederick Burkewood Welbourn and Bethwell A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

divergent interpretations.¹⁶⁶ Catholicism, on the other hand, had no such tradition of separation, focused less on the Bible, and was more tolerant of African custom than Protestantism. A second factor that Hastings noted was the context of colonialism and racialism; African ministers often remained second-class as compared to even their most junior and inexperienced missionary counterparts who exercised authority over them. Also, AIC leaders generally understood the influence of African indigenous religions, especially regarding health and healing, on the Christian faith better than did the missionaries. Finally, the rapidly expanding number of Christians on the continent outpaced the capacity for mission churches to accommodate them. When there were not enough missionaries or mission trained catechists to meet the needs of the increasing numbers, Africans simply started churches themselves. Ultimately Hastings considered the Protestant culture of separation and the political context of colonialism and racialism to be the most significant factors motivating independency.

These attempts at an explanation for the emergence of AICs in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon as the weight of different factors change according to the particularities of the different movements and the different disciplines and methods of the researchers. These researchers did not consider indigenous social structures to be a primary motivating factor for the emergence of AICs as will the argument about Ibibioland that follows in the next subsection. Some of them did, however, identify it as a possible contributing factor, and B. A. Pauw's study of the

¹⁶⁶ Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, 527-533.

Tswana provided the strongest suggestion that indigenous social structures were an important factor for the strength of the AIC option.

Citing the Zulu custom of “kraal splitting,” sons leaving a kraal and building homes away from their father’s place, Sundkler proposed that Zulu church leaders who lead schisms out of their home churches saw their actions as simply following a time-honored custom.¹⁶⁷ He suggested the need for further study writing, “It is quite possible that a comparative study would reveal, much more consistently than has even been attempted in this book, a morphological correspondence between the “pattern” of tribal culture and the type, or types, of Christianized prophetic movement which it tends to produce.”¹⁶⁸

Daneel noted the importance of family units in Shona society and that organizational and leadership structures of the AICs followed those of the family units. He wrote of the importance of this correspondence in terms of kinship and found a pattern “of superordinated kinsmen influencing their juniors to become Church members, of husbands persuading their wives.”¹⁶⁹ In this case indigenous structures influenced the growth of particular AICs but not necessarily their emergence.

Of all the AIC researchers B. A. Pauw was the one who found indigenous social structures to be most significant for the emergence of AICs, though he did not provide hard data to that effect. Pauw noted that the largest corporate Tswana group was the tribe,

¹⁶⁷ Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 168.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁶⁹ Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol. 2, Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques*, 179.

that religious solidarity did not extend beyond the tribe, and that tribal splits were not uncommon.¹⁷⁰ He added, “Moreover, the ancestor cult really centered in the family or family group. This was the regular cult group – a very small unit which did not retain its unity indefinitely but tended in time to split.”¹⁷¹ Hence, the idea of the church as an entity that transcends familial limits and remains united indefinitely was a foreign concept. Pauw’s is the strongest argument here for social structures as a significant factor in favor of the creation of AICs.

In *Schism* Barrett discounted consideration of social structures that, if he had incorporated, might have provided a helpful comparison for this study of AICs in Ibibioland. He wrote, “From the evidence, the social stratification of a tribe did not appear to be significant; unstratified societies were not very much less likely to produce independency than complex states.”¹⁷² He added, “And, finally, size of political system was excluded because of its close relation to tribe population size; the latter was a more exact indicator and had a higher correlation with independency.”¹⁷³ That exclusion is problematic since it assumes the tribe to be the most significant political entity. This was not the case in Ibibioland.

¹⁷⁰ B. A Pauw, *Religion in a Tswana Chieftdom*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 236–237.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*, 105.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 108.

African Independent Churches in Ibibioland

Ibibioland appears to have been a hotbed of AIC activity. In *Schism* Barrett's scale gave the Ibibio an index of 13 out of a possible 18, the tendency towards independency rising with larger numbers.¹⁷⁴ Barrett included them in the category of "massive involvement in independency" with over 50,000 adherents.¹⁷⁵ He wrote, "Several of these tribes are heavily involved; some have extraordinary concentrations of separatism, of which the most massive is among the Ibibio of eastern Nigeria, where along roads a separatist building is found every mile with concentrations of up to two hundred in the vicinity of towns."¹⁷⁶ He noted that there were "countless prayer houses" and wrote, "On the 53 miles of road from Ikot Ekpene to Opobo through the rain forest, 57 of 113 solid church buildings are separatists... Similarly, in the triangle 20 miles east then 20 miles south from Ikot Ekpene, 78 of 230 churches and missions are separatist... Within a five-mile radius of the centre of Abak town, 33 of 50 different denominations with 251 congregations are separatist. This is probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa."¹⁷⁷ While the last quotation highlighted the number of separatist congregations and denominations, the rest of Barrett's study focused on the number of Christians in the combined group of AICs in any one tribe as the measure of the strength of independency. In fact, the index that Barrett developed showed twenty-

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 307.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 291.

three other tribes with the same tendency towards independency as the Ibibio, 13 out of 18 on his index, and thirty-three tribes with a higher tendency.¹⁷⁸ If Barrett identified the Ibibio as having the densest concentration of independency, it seems to have been due to the relatively large number of AIC denominations and congregations in Ibibioland rather than to his statistical analysis and the resulting index.

Barrett did not give a source for his statistics about the high number of AICs in Ibibioland. Such reference would add strength to the argument here. It is likely that one of Barrett's sources was Mennonite missionary Edwin Weaver who in 1966 organized an Inter-Church Team that did a survey of congregations within a five-mile radius of Abak and found 250 congregations representing 50 denominations.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, ten miles from Abak at Uyo he found 225 congregations within a five-mile radius of the center of town.

This subsection draws on the previous subsection's overview to outline the possible causes for the high number of AICs in Ibibioland. These include competition between a number of different Protestant missions, the missions' failure to express Christian faith in the idioms of African cultures, Africans' need to resist colonial oppression, the prevalence of colonial attitudes among missionaries, and the inability of the missions to serve the large number of Africans who wanted to affiliate with them because of limited resources.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 305–312.

¹⁷⁹ Weaver and Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 62, 106.

Competition Between Protestant Missions

One can appropriate themes from the preceding survey of causal factors of the emergence of AICs to identify the reasons for their prevalence in Ibibioland. Several of the authors argued that Protestant missions, especially when there were a number of them competing in a particular area, were more likely to contribute to the rise of AICs than their Catholic counterparts. Though the missionary societies had divided southeastern Nigeria between themselves via a number of comity agreements starting in 1904, northern Ibibioland was where the spheres of influence of the different missions came together, resulting in overlap and competition.¹⁸⁰ The Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) were advancing east from the Niger River, the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) was advancing west from the Cross River, the Qua Iboe Mission (QIM) was advancing north along the Qua Iboe River, and the Primitive Methodist Mission (PMM) was advancing northwest between the CSM and the QIM. The missions' spheres of influence clashed in the area between Uyo, Abak, Ikot Ekpene, and Itu, about half of which corresponds to the Ikot Ekpene triangle of concentrated AICs that Barrett described.

In theory the lines separating the different spheres were clearly drawn, but in practice there was overlap as the missions competed for the loyalty of villages in the area. In fact, the meetings in which the missions negotiated the comity agreements were often arranged precisely because they disagreed about territorial claims.¹⁸¹ For example, the

¹⁸⁰ Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52."

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

PMM, feeling itself hemmed in by the CSM and QIM, set up a station at Ikot Ekpene directly in the line of advance of the QIM in 1909 and later did the same in CSM territory. In 1909 and 1917 the missions held conferences to find solutions to these and other territorial disagreements. The solutions involved exchanges that passed congregations from one mission to another. Additional conferences took place in 1926, 1927, and 1932. Africans were angry that the missions had established spheres of influence without their consent and organized a conference of their own to call for an end to the boundaries.

Villages played missions against each other, choosing the one that offered the best amenities, usually schools. In the village of Ibesikpo in the Uyo division the first church, affiliated with the CSM, opened in 1912.¹⁸² The village switched to the QIM and eventually seceded from it to form the Ibesikpo United Church in 1931. That initiative gave way to the Lutheran Church in 1938 when the village successfully lobbied an American Lutheran mission to come to the area, hoping that it would bring “the Best Church and will Teach us the Pure Word of God, Build a Normal College for the training of our Teachers and a Bible College for the training of our Preachers.”¹⁸³ From early in the twentieth century this Protestant culture resulted in religious competition and easy transfer from one denomination to another. Despite the comity agreements that functioned relatively well in some areas, by the 1930s the northern half of Ibibioland was

¹⁸² Amamkpa, *A Short History of Ibesikpo*, 26–33.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.

a place of overlap and competition, sitting as it did on the fault lines between the spheres of influence of the different missions.

Colonial Oppression

The context of colonialism appears to have been another factor in the emergence of Ibibio AICs. The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission, an AIC that grew out of a spiritual revival dubbed the “Spirit Movement” that started at the QIM station at Uyo in 1927, embodied resistance to colonial domination and attempted to appropriate the colonizers’ power.¹⁸⁴ Members dug deep holes in the ground looking for minerals or manilas explaining, “...that God has been proved [sic] this Spirit to you white people before, and by it you found the mentioned things in the ground: 1. Cement, 2. Silver, 3. Gold, 4. Metal lead, 5. White-wash...”¹⁸⁵ The church’s hymns contained themes of liberation such as:

Because in olden times Moses led the Hebrew
Onto the Red Sea Saibrenidiom Saibrenidiom
The Hebrew had to go, the Hebrew had to be free

Chorus: Let the Ibibio go, let the Ibibio be free
[You] who dwell in the depths and ascend an iron pillar
Let the Ibibio go, let the Ibibio be free.

Let them pass onto the glorious Kingdom which you gave to them
So that they may partake of their glory,
[You] who dwell in the depths and ascend an iron pillar
Let the Ibibio go, let the Ibibio be free.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission;” Timothy Abia Offiong, “The ‘Oberi Okaime’ Christian Mission as a Protest Movement.,” *Nigerian Heritage; Journal of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments* 9 (2000).

¹⁸⁵ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaime Christian Mission,” 506–507.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 512.

The existing conditions encouraged people to look for ways to resist colonial domination. The Spirit Movement that gave rise to the Oberi Okaime Christian Mission and many others like it came between the World Wars when palm oil prices were decreasing, direct taxation was beginning to be implemented, and the economic situation was deteriorating for many Ibibio, thus creating discontent.¹⁸⁷

In some instances the QIM collaborated closely with the colonial government. QIM founder Samuel Bill served as clerk of the Ibeno Native court and recommended fourteen chiefs that the government appointed to it.¹⁸⁸ The court enforced policies that the church advocated such as the prohibition of human sacrifice, twin infanticide, and trial by ordeal.¹⁸⁹ Missionaries lodged at the government courthouses as they traveled the region, brought punishment to communities by reporting human sacrifice to the government, and vouched for villages to save them from attack during British military expeditions.¹⁹⁰ At Ibeno Bill took charge of building the courthouse for the government, printed the court's summons forms on the mission's printing press, and received government assistance for his industrial school.¹⁹¹ Given the collaboration between mission and government, resistance to the mission via the Spirit Movement that spread outside its control and the

¹⁸⁷ Abia, "The 'Oberi Okaime' Christian Mission as a Protest Movement."

¹⁸⁸ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 149.

¹⁸⁹ Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 434.

¹⁹⁰ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 113; Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 432, 434-435, 437.

¹⁹¹ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 176-177, 145.

establishment of parallel and competing AIC structures were ways an oppressed people could strike out against the colonial government. Certainly the colonial authorities understood the revival partly in terms of anti-colonial subversion. They found American religious tracts that they labeled “subversive” from Faith Tabernacle and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and maintained close vigilance of new religious activities that they feared might be influenced by American churches of “Christian Science leanings.”¹⁹²

Colonial Attitudes Within the Missions

Colonial attitudes within the missions were another reason that Ibibio Christians might start their own churches. For example, the situation within the QIM demonstrated that all was not well. Some church members resented the rigid, ascetic moral codes that missionaries imposed, including monogamy and a ban on Ibibio teachers living with their sisters and other female relatives.¹⁹³ Although they were few in number and often absent on leave, European missionaries monopolized leadership positions. Chronically short of funds, the mission required its churches to buy mission kerosene even when the mission store was kilometers away and it was less expensive elsewhere. This could not but increase resentment. The QIM missionary at the Uyo station, J. W. Westgarth, sensed among his flock a feeling that the missionaries were holding back, not sharing their secrets of success with the Africans. Of his African helpers he wrote that they felt “that the European has a knowledge which he does not communicate to this flock, or thinks it

¹⁹² David Pratten, “Mystics and Missionaries: Narratives of the Spirit Movement in Eastern Nigeria,” *Social Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 57–59.

¹⁹³ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission,” 499–500; Udo, “The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52,” 175–176.

wise to withhold,” and that “the possibility remains that they thought the missionary knew of this power [religious power unleashed by the Spirit Movement] all the time, but had not communicated it to them.”¹⁹⁴ Resentment on the part of the QIM church members made it more likely that they would initiate and join new AIC ecclesial structures.

Culturally Familiar Expressions of the Faith

A further impetus for the emergence of AICs in Ibibioland was the desire on the part of converts to embody the new faith in a culturally familiar way. The foreign missions tended to ignore the differences between their own western religious cosmology and that of their Ibibio converts.¹⁹⁵ They refused to address issues of witchcraft, local spirits, the ongoing presence of ancestors, and the need to find spiritual solutions to problems such as barrenness, poverty, and misfortune in business. Missionaries were not yet ready to allow for an Ibibio expression of Christianity that took indigenous religious assumptions as its point of departure.¹⁹⁶

AICs, on the other hand, developed familiar religious understandings and expressions under the Christian umbrella that met the felt needs of the people. The manner in which the different AICs embodied indigenous Ibibio sensibilities in their

¹⁹⁴ J. W. Westgarth, *The Holy Spirit and the Primitive Mind: A Remarkable Account of a Spiritual Awakening in Darkest Africa* (London: Victory Press, 1946), 16–17.

¹⁹⁵ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaima Christian Mission,” 500.

¹⁹⁶ Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945,” 10, 410–411, 415.

Christian understandings varied.¹⁹⁷ In some cases they treated church buildings as shrines and believed that God or the Holy Spirit dwelt in the altar. During the years of the Spirit Movement some AIC members found themselves possessed by the Holy Spirit and shook their limbs, rolled on the ground, climbed trees and houses, spoke the voice of God, had visions, and foretold the future, all acts that resembled the indigenous possession of the ancestor cult. Westgarth reported that one who had been touched by the Spirit Movement prayed, “Lord, we thought this new religion was white man’s wisdom, but Thou has visited us Thyself and we thank and praise Thee.”¹⁹⁸ Despite their contextualization of Christianity in indigenous forms, they fought forcefully against the indigenous Ibibio religion, attacking its shrines and claiming that it was Satan who inspired its beliefs and rituals.¹⁹⁹ Hence, AICs in the region emerged partly as a way for people to express attachment and loyalty to Christianity in forms that made sense and felt familiar within their indigenous religious framework.

Inadequate Mission Resources

The emergence of Ibibio AICs was also due partly to the lack of mission resources, both personnel and institutional. The northern half of Ibibioland was on the outskirts of the different missions’ spheres of influence, far from the CMS, NDP, and

¹⁹⁷ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission,” 496, 500–501; Graham, “The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945,” 407–415; John C Messenger, “Anang Acculturation: A Study of Shifting Cultural Focus” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1957), 248–261.

¹⁹⁸ Westgarth, *The Holy Spirit and the Primitive Mind*, 45.

¹⁹⁹ Abasiattai, “The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission,” 501; Messenger, “Anang Acculturation,” 249; Pratten, “Mystics and Missionaries: Narratives of the Spirit Movement in Eastern Nigeria.”

CSM strongholds of the Niger River basin and the mouth of the Cross River where church institutions and headquarters were well established.²⁰⁰ The QIM was advancing from the south, but it was a nondenominational mission without the backing of a specific European church and often had financial difficulties.²⁰¹ In 1937 Lutheran missionaries found the Ibiono clan, just north of Uyo, under-served despite the presence of the QIM, CSM, and Society of Holy Ghost Fathers (SHGF).²⁰² It had no formal QIM stations, a few poorly staffed SHGM outstations, and a few CSM congregations in the borderlands where Ibibioland met Iboland. The three divisions in northern Ibibioland, Uyo, Abak and Ikot Ekpene, were the most densely populated in Calabar Province with 670, 667, and 622 persons per square mile respectively.²⁰³ Hence, the most heavily populated areas were far from the missions' respective strongholds and had garnered the least amount of attention. The missions simply did not have the resources to train leaders and establish congregations and schools fast enough once the number of converts to Christianity exploded in the aftermath of the Spirit Movement and then again in the 1940s.²⁰⁴ Logically, Ibibios responded by doing church themselves.

²⁰⁰ Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaike Christian Mission," 500.

²⁰¹ Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 435–436; Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52," 175.

²⁰² Nau, *We Move into Africa*, 365.

²⁰³ Nigeria, Department of Statistics, *Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953*, 24.

²⁰⁴ Messenger, "Anang Acculturation," 252; Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 525–529, 533.

Mid twentieth century southeastern Nigeria appears to have shared many of the factors that motivated the establishment of AICs in other regions of the continent. There was significant competition between Protestant missions, a feeling of being oppressed by the colonial system, colonial attitudes within mission structures, little attention to culturally appropriate expressions of the faith on the part of missionaries, and insufficient resources to meet the demand for mission services among the Ibibio. At this stage of the argument it is important to add the affect of the socio-religious assumptions of the Ibibio on the emergence of AICs in the region.

Implications of the Ibibio Preference for Local Religious Authority

This subsection argues that the indigenous Ibibio assumption that religious authority is lodged at the local level provides another significant reason for the proliferation of AICs in Ibibioland. The two most important assumptions for the argument is that political and religious authority were integrated and that such authority rested at the local level. Political and religious authority legitimized each other and the power of both was vested in the same people and structures.

James Scarritt's study of the Nsit clan of the Ibibio found integrated social structures. The same structures and authorities performed political, social, educational, economic, and religious functions.²⁰⁵ Every level of the social structure was vested with religious significance and normally the chief at each level was also the religious head. Hence, political and religious authority and control were mutually reinforcing. Scarritt

²⁰⁵ Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 17–19.

noted, “This utility of religious and political authority was symbolized by consultations with the gods as part of the process of making and executing political decisions, by the promulgation of these decisions in the name of the gods, and by the existence of separate and autonomous gods for each level of social structure.”²⁰⁶ Other researchers found the same dynamics at play.²⁰⁷ The elders who made up the councils at each segment were also the intermediaries between the living and the ancestors who exercised authority in the spiritual world and legitimized the political realities in this world. Spiritual and political authority was at the very least mutually reinforcing, perhaps even unified.

Ibibio indigenous religious beliefs and practices were locally focused. Local deities, Ndem, that were associated with the different segments provided the most immediate means of religious connection and power.²⁰⁸ Abasi, the High God, gave these lower deities the responsibility of looking after human affairs, each one responsible for a certain domain such as fertility or success in trade. It was to the Ndem that people offered sacrifices and made petitions. The ancestors were below the Ndem in the spiritual hierarchy but provided access to them and so ultimately to Abasi. The ancestors were naturally tied to their local lineage, and it was the elders who could provide the Ibibio with access to them. Hence, both the important sources of religious power and authority and

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁰⁷ Monday B. Abasiattai, “Ibibio Traditional Religion and Cosmology,” in *The Ibibio: An Introduction to the Land, the People and Their Culture*, ed. Monday B. Abasiattai (Calabar, Nigeria: A. Akpan, 1991), 97–103; Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century,” 437–438.

²⁰⁸ Messenger, “Anang Acculturation,” 124–126; Ukpong, “Sacrificial Worship in Ibibio Traditional Religion”; Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 7, 20–22; Abasiattai, “Ibibio Traditional Religion and Cosmology,” 89–93.

the structures that the Ibibio would have used to access that power and authority were most often at the local, village level. Higher segments such as the village-group, clan or above might have had deities and ceremonies associated with them, but they did not provide the immediate and regular access to religious resources as did the local deities and ancestors of the lineage.

The experience of a number of missionaries and researchers who worked among the Ibibio pointed to these Ibibio socio-religious assumptions as a factor in the abundant proliferation of Christian churches in Ibibioland. E. M. T. Epelle highlighted a “republican instinct” among the Ibibio that resulted in a fissiparous tendency whereby every village had its own head and families in the village developed to the point of forming a separate village with its own head.²⁰⁹ Epelle suggested, “This instinct permeates and pervades the Christian Church in Ibibioland resulting in over fifty Denominations in Uyo within a five mile [sp.] radius.”²¹⁰ Others noted that the Ibibio found larger churches “incomprehensible” and were more comfortable with a congregational polity or simply were not accustomed to developing political, social, and religious loyalties beyond the local village or clan.²¹¹ The experience of Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ missionaries from Nashville, Tennessee seems to confirm such a tendency. Their strong congregational polity and mistrust of “denominational tenets”

²⁰⁹ E. M. T. Epelle to T. S. Garrett, December 19, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ David Roberts, “Some Independent Churches” (presented at the Inter-Church Study Group, Uyo, Nigeria, 1963); Stanley Friesen and Wilbert R. Shenk, “Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria,” October 9, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

found a sympathetic hearing.²¹² Their strategy was to plant congregations that were self-governing from the beginning and that “had the right to baptize believers and served the Lord’s Supper without outside ecclesiastical control.”²¹³ This placed significant religious authority at the local level, continuous with traditional religious assumptions. Within twenty years of their arrival they reported over four hundred churches and nearly seventy thousand communicants among the Ibibio.²¹⁴

The Nationalist Critique of Indirect Rule

British colonial authorities also had to come to grips with the indigenous preference for local authority structures in southeastern Nigeria when their attempt at indirect rule failed. Since Ibibio political and religious authority was integrated, often invested in the same structures and people, the Ibibio reaction to British rule provides another argument for their preference for local religious structures over the larger denomination-like structures of the foreign missions.

In his study of the British Warrant Chief system, A. E. Afigbo argued that because political decentralization was the norm in the region, the British attempt at indirect rule was doomed from the start.²¹⁵ Colonial authorities had assumed that the system of indirect rule that had served them well in northern Nigeria where they had been

²¹² Reda C Goff, *The Great Nigerian Mission* (Nashville, TN: Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ : Nigerian Christian Schools Foundation, 1964), 10, 13–14.

²¹³ Wendell Wright Broom, “Growth of Churches of Christ Among Ibibios of Nigeria” (MA thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1970), 125.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134–135.

²¹⁵ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 256-260.

able to enforce their rule through centralized, indigenous political authorities could be reproduced in the South. The most important level of political authority among the people of the Southeast was normally the village segment. Any agglomeration above that unit, such as the village-group or the clan, might provide a context for collaborating on this or that project, but did not receive significant loyalty, and its leaders did not assume political authority at the village level.²¹⁶ Thus when colonial authorities appointed Warrant Chiefs and Native Courts over large areas that included many villages, sometimes erroneously believing that they had co-opted hereditary chiefs to their service, the Chiefs and court appointees were exterior to the indigenous political structures and held no natural authority. “The arrangement entailed the grouping together of either former enemies or areas with small, but nonetheless important difference in custom or both.”²¹⁷ The British recognized their error when a rumor about a new tax on women resulted in a women’s riot that spread from Owerri to Calabar province and attacked Warrant Chiefs, Native Courts, and European factories; colonial forces had to intervene to restore order.²¹⁸ The ineffectiveness of the Warrant Chiefs in the face of the women’s riot convinced the British that their chiefs were thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the people.

While political authority was local across southeastern Nigeria, there was diversity in how that authority manifested itself. Afigbo and J. C. Anene argued that in Ibo society a kind of democracy reigned where even elders could not make decisions with

²¹⁶ Ibid., 7, 34.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 259.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 243-247.

which the people did not agree, and they assumed that Ibibio political life mirrored that of the Ibo.²¹⁹ Later Afigbo seemed to change his mind arguing that, at least in the nineteenth century, in Ibibioland some lineage heads and assemblies could legislate for their communities.²²⁰ Other researchers have argued that the Ibibio had strong chiefs who in some cases ruled as an oligarchy, as a council of elders, or even individually.²²¹ Secret societies such as the ancestor cult enforced decisions, and often its leaders were also the segment elders or chiefs. In the Nsit clan segments below the village level, chiefs of families, sub-families, or household groups had decision-making power.²²² At the village level a council of chiefs made decisions, but the village chief spoke last, effectively articulating the final decision. Government was oligarchic at the village-group level with leadership in the hands of a few village chiefs. Political functions happened at most levels of the social structure up to the village level, and each level of the social structure from the village down had considerable autonomy.²²³ Above the village level, at the village-group level for example, the primary political concern was the relationship with other village-groups, a kind of “external relations” role.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ibid., 14-15; Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906*, 14.

²²⁰ Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century,” 441.

²²¹ Daniel A Offiong, “The Status of Ibibio Chiefs,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1984); Sennen Asuquo Efiog, “The Changing Bureaucratic and Administrative Roles of the Mbong Ibibio in Nigeria, under the Colonial and Post-Independence Civilian Structures of the Former Eastern Nigeria” (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 1975).

²²² Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 7–19; Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, 71–72.

²²³ Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 19.

²²⁴ Ibid., 15.

Whether a single chief or a council of chiefs ruled, political power normally rested at the village segment or lower. Collaboration might happen at higher levels from time to time, but ultimate authority did not rest there. The colonial attempt at indirect rule through co-option of political leaders who controlled large groups of villages or village-groups was bound to fail.

Colonial authorities turned to the discipline of anthropology for assistance in understanding the political assumptions of the people they ruled in southeastern Nigeria. Bronislaw Malinowski had suggested that anthropologists and colonial authorities should collaborate and that colonial officers should have anthropological training.²²⁵ He sought to bridge the gap between theoretical anthropology and practical applications by turning the attention of anthropologists to practical matters such as indirect rule. The International Institute of African Language and Cultures had been created in London in 1926 for just such a purpose. Colonial authorities sent a cadre of their political officers to England for anthropological instruction and eventually officers produced anthropological studies that sought to find practical, anthropological solutions for the challenges of colonial rule. Such research provided the colonial government with a better understanding of indigenous governments in southeastern Nigeria. When they

²²⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, "Practical Anthropology," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 2, no. 1 (1929): 22–38; Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Rationalization of Anthropology and Administration," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 3, no. 4 (1930): 405–30; A.E Afigbo, "Anthropology and Colonial Administration in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1891-1939," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 8, no. 1 (1975): 19–35.

reorganized the systems of colonial rule, colonial authorities adapted their policies to conform more closely to the indigenous political systems.²²⁶

Graham's study of the QIM critiques its policies, arguing that while colonial authorities were using the discipline of anthropology to adapt their approach, missionaries failed to see a similar need in their work. Tied as they were to western understandings of the Christian faith, they failed to appropriate anthropological tools to improve their cultural understanding.²²⁷ Graham noted, "Whereas the British Administration learned its lesson quickly from the Aba riots [the women's riot] and effected reforms in the interests of the people, the Qua Iboe Mission learnt nothing in understanding their people or adjusting their approaches to mission work. This was to lead to severe cultural alienation with serious repercussions for mission statistics."²²⁸

After the women's riots, colonial authorities passed new ordinances to adopt their governance to the Nigerian context. They passed the Native Authority Ordinance and Native Courts Ordinance to provide well-reasoned, functional, and flexible framework for local government and justice.²²⁹ Native Authorities were instituted along more traditional lines; in some cases traditional clan councils actually became government Native Authorities or Native Courts.²³⁰ In practice, however, people still preferred

²²⁶ Harry. A. Gailey, *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 143–155.

²²⁷ Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 14-15, 525, 529, 532-533.

²²⁸ Ibid., 415.

²²⁹ Gailey, *The Road to Aba*, 153.

²³⁰ Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 26, 28.

traditional courts and customary standards to the new structures, even if they did represent a move to take native custom seriously. The practical effect of the changes was to return large areas of custom and law back to the indigenous social systems.²³¹ Virtually all political functions and legitimation were performed in the traditional manner so that the colonial structures became formalities without significant meaning for most people. In 1950 the Eastern Regional Local Government Ordinance established three tiers of local government councils whose members at the lowest level were elected and at the highest level chosen from the lower level councils. In the elections, however, people voted as a unit in accordance with the instructions of village leaders.²³² The local councils ensured that the government councils did nothing to displease the traditional authorities. While party politics played an increasingly important role from mid-century on, people continued to vest political authority in indigenous structures at the village level.²³³ Hence there were two parallel systems, the official one instituted by the government and the indigenous one that functioned for most people. Despite the contradictions involved, colonial authorities were willing to allow the indigenous system to function informally as long as it maintained a relative peace and did not challenge their priorities.

One problem with which the British had to contend with their new approach was the difficulty in balancing the desire to appropriate indigenous structures with their desire for efficiency. Truly appropriating indigenous structures would have “demanded almost

²³¹ Ibid., 28-29.

²³² Ibid., 31-37.

²³³ Ibid., 25-37.

unlimited proliferation of Native Courts as well as the appointment of a large army of Warrant Chiefs to represent every segment.”²³⁴ That would have been burdensome since “the colonial government was concerned to ensure that each court made enough money from fees and fines to be self-supporting and so that no District Officer had too many courts to supervise.”²³⁵ Frugality and administrative effectiveness won the day and the parallel systems of political authority were the result. The QIM faced a similar dilemma and experienced similar results. Lacking sufficient financial resources they were not able to fully occupy the area that the comity agreements allotted to them with outstations and schools. They virtually ignored the Ibiono area north of Uyo. AICs proliferated in that area; the group that invited Mennonite missionaries to the region in the 1950s had congregations in Ibiono.

Another problem that dogged the colonial government’s attempt at indirect rule, both before and after the changes brought about by the women’s riot, was that it ignored significant differences between its western, secular understanding of law and justice and that of the indigenous system in which religious and social authority remained integrated.²³⁶ Under the indigenous system some crimes required both punishment of the offender and ritual propitiation of the deity who had been offended. The system of justice that the British imposed through the courts provided only punishment of the offender,

²³⁴ Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 153.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 272, 283-284.

leaving the gods and/or ancestors unsatisfied and perhaps angry enough to disrupt the social equilibrium. Justice became immoral.

The British justice system's preoccupation with objective proof meant that those criminals whom the people believed to be guilty but whose crime could not be proven walked free. There was an ambiance of anarchy since it seemed that wrong could be done with impunity. When a person from one clan or village was appointed Warrant Chief over another group, religious sanctions lost their ability to maintain order and justice. "If Opobo Warrant Chiefs took bribes to pervert justice in cases involving Andoni or the Ibibio or both, they did not see this as a moral problem that would incur severe consequences from the spirit world."²³⁷ No wonder Afigbo reported that a chief told him, "Immediately white man came justice vanished."²³⁸ The colonial government did not integrate these indigenous concerns into the system of administration and justice that it sought to impose. Faced with the persistence of those indigenous beliefs and practices, it simply allowed a duality of systems to emerge, each one conforming to the core assumptions about law and justice on which it was based and reinforcing the contradiction inherent in a situation of parallel systems.

The problem the colonial government was facing was similar to that of the foreign missions that tended to ignore the differences between their own western religious cosmology and that of their Ibibio converts. Missions refused to address issues of witchcraft, local spirits, the ongoing presence of ancestors, and the need to find spiritual

²³⁷ Ibid., 284.

²³⁸ Ibid., 282.

solutions to problems.²³⁹ AICs, on the other hand, developed familiar religious understandings and expressions under the Christian umbrella that met the felt needs of the people. During the Spirit Movement people experienced spiritual possession that had the characteristics of the traditional religion but that they manifested within the structure of Christian worship. Since the missionaries did not respond to the felt religious needs of traditional Ibibio religion, the people simply chose to create AICs, religious structures which existed parallel to the mission churches.

Implications of the Critique for the Missions

This evaluation of the colonial government's failure to establish effective indirect rule in southeastern Nigeria and the recognition that in Ibibio indigenous society political and religious authority rested in the same structures and leaders, provides a clue, in addition to those already mentioned, to why AICs proliferated in Ibibioland. British authorities were not able to exercise top-down political control of the region through Native Courts and Warrant Chiefs because indigenous society invested political authority at low segments, the village and below. Similarly, missions attempted to impose denominational authority structures, doctrines, and practices on people who vested religious authority, not in priests of Abassi or some regional denomination-like entity, but in the same local religious structures that resiliently resisted the colonial government's attempt at indirect rule. Just as that attempt failed, so did the missions' attempts to impose regional denominational control on Ibibio converts. Local leaders assumed

²³⁹ Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission," 500.

religious autonomy and established their own congregations and/or denominations. In a context where religious resources and sanctions were expected to be mediated through village structures, elders, chiefs, lineage ancestors, and local deities, despite the recognition of Abassi as Supreme God, the growing number of AICs that provided religious resources and sanctions via structures and leaders at lower segments of society were more attractive to many Ibibio Christians than were attempts to shift to a larger, unfamiliar and more distant denominational model of church. Just as Ibibio society resisted the transfer of political authority to higher segments, so those who had converted to Christianity resisted the imposition of religious authority from larger, regional, denominational structures.

Similarly, just as colonial attempts to impose British concepts of law and justice left Ibibios feeling like chaos had come to their land, mission attempts to impose western doctrine that did not take indigenous religious assumptions seriously left Ibibio Christians feeling unprotected from malevolent forces. AICs provided an expression of Christian faith that fit the indigenous religious cosmological assumptions, and therefore they were successful at drawing people away from the mission churches.

One might ask why Ibibioland was such a hotbed of AIC activity when Iboland, its neighbor to the north and west, was less so, although it shared the tendency to invest socio-religious authority with local leaders and structures. In Iboland a number of causes for the emergence of AICs that were evident in Ibibioland did not hold. In northern Ibibioland the geographical areas of influence of four different Protestant missions came

together creating a region of intense inter-Protestant competition.²⁴⁰ This was not the case in Iboland. In addition, the Catholic mission, the SHGF, entered Iboland in 1853 but did not arrive in Calabar on the edge of Ibibioland until 1903 and to the interior some nine year later. The SHGF presence in Iboland was stronger than it was in Ibibioland, and Roman Catholic missions were less likely to produce AIC movements than were Protestant missions. Finally, intense competition between the Holy Ghost Fathers and the CMS in Iboland resulted in a push from both missions to open outstations and establish schools in an attempt to gain the loyalty of the people.²⁴¹ While none of the missions in southeastern Nigeria had the resources they would have liked to command, Iboland was relatively well served with schools and outstations in comparison to Ibibioland. This created a greater incentive for AICs in Ibibioland than in Iboland. This analysis points to the complexity of the interacting causes for the emergence of these movements. In Ibibioland a number of factors came together to create the context that produced the vigorous AIC movements that Mennonite missions found when they arrived in the late 1950s and that Barrett reported.

One should be careful not to overstate the influence of indigenous cultural assumptions on Christian structures in Ibibioland. Given that traditional Ibibio religious authority was local and conformity strictly enforced, one might assume that when a village opted for an AIC or mission church its loyalty would be exclusive and there would be no other churches in the village. When Mennonite missionaries arrived in

²⁴⁰ Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52."

²⁴¹ Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*.

Ibibioland in the late 1950s, that was not the case; they found that multiple churches in any particular village was the norm.²⁴²

Ibibio society was not static but evolved over time. Enforcement of indigenous practices changed over the twentieth century as colonial laws prohibited some of the more drastic sanctions that elders could apply to enforce compliance with the traditional religion. Two additional factors, suppression of religious control and competition between many different churches, helped stoke religious vitality in Ibibioland.

Religious Vitality in Ibibioland

This final subsection suggests that the suppression of religious control and the competition between many churches encouraged the religious competition and vitality that Mennonite missionaries found in Ibibioland when they arrived in 1958. In the traditional Ibibio society village elders could enforce taboos and customs that protected the religious underpinnings of social structures. During the twentieth century, however, they progressively lost the ability to apply disciplinary sanction. The increasing number of Christians sometimes led to significant conflict between those who continued to practice indigenous religion and Christian converts. Qua Iboe missionaries reported attacks on school children and on Christian young men because they refused to join the Ekpo secret society and pay its dues.²⁴³ Protracted conflict was bad for everyone so written contracts between the two sides became common. For example, Qua Iboe

²⁴² Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁴³ Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 425; Graham, "The Qua Iboe Mission: 1887-1945," 291.

missionary Westgarth drew up an agreement between the chiefs and schoolboys of Ediano in April 1915. The mission boys agreed not to damage the Ekpo shrines, and the chiefs agreed not to attack the schools.²⁴⁴ Scarritt reported similar dynamics in the Nsit area where after years of violence the two sides reached a compromise in some of the villages.²⁴⁵ In addition, the colonial government defended religious freedom in the region, allowing neither traditional elders nor churches to attack the other.²⁴⁶ Within the context of mutual tolerance and reduced sanctions there would have been increasingly more freedom to initiate new churches and/or choose from among several options as religious leaders lost the means to enforce compliance. Local leaders had the freedom to innovatively embody indigenous religious expression within their own church structures.

With increased religious freedom, it is logical that Ibibio Christians would create more AICs that would, along with the multiple foreign missions in the region, result in more competition between churches. By 1935 almost all villages in Ibibioland had at least one church and most had between two and six churches.²⁴⁷ The fact that there were multiple churches in individual villages likely put pressure on church leaders to innovate and find their niche as they competed for church goers who had increasingly more freedom to follow their religious preferences. Three weeks after missionary Edwin Weaver arrived in Ibibioland in November 1959, he found a bewildering number of

²⁴⁴ Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," 425.

²⁴⁵ Scarritt, *Political Change in a Traditional African Clan*, 22.

²⁴⁶ Ogbu U Kalu, "Missionaries, Colonial Government and Secret Societies in South-Eastern Igboland, 1920-1950," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 1 (1977): 89-90.

²⁴⁷ Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission."

churches and church institutions. He wrote back to his MBMC supervisors listing fourteen different denominations in the area and noted that there were “many others too numerous to mention.”²⁴⁸ He added, “Church and school buildings are everywhere. Never have I been in a religious situation so pathetically confused. I wonder if I have come to the right place.”²⁴⁹ The greater the number of churches the more options churchgoers have and the harder leaders would have to work to convince them to attend a particular church. Logically a competitive milieu was the result.

To go with the large number of churches and church institutions in Ibibioland, the Nigerian census data from 1953 counted a large percentage of the population as Christian. Uyo, at the center of Ibibioland and its most densely populated division, was 91.3% Christian.²⁵⁰ In Ibibioland, therefore, a large number of churches and a high density of AICs corresponded with a high percentage of Christians. Given the decrease in religious regulation, the opportunity to create new churches and compete for members, and the large number of churches and missions, it may be that a Nigerian version of Roger Finke’s supply-side description for high religious participation helps explain the large number of Christians in the region.²⁵¹ Finke argued that in the United States a decrease in religious regulation and suppression, as opposed to the situation in Europe,

²⁴⁸ Weaver to Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria – Edwin Weaver 1959.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Nigeria, Department of Statistics, *Population Census of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1953*, 42.

²⁵¹ Roger Finke, “The Illusion of Shifting Demand: Supply Side Interpretations of American Religious History,” in *Retelling the U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

resulted in an increase in freedom of religious innovation and the delegation of responsibility for success to local leaders.²⁵² This, he suggested, resulted in more religious competition and the addition of new sects that created more religious options for people.²⁵³ Such pluralism and competition resulted in high levels of participation.²⁵⁴ It would be too much to suggest a simple cause and effect link between more religious choice and competition and high participation in churches in southeastern Nigeria. There are examples of high levels of churchgoing in countries where one religious tradition predominates.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in Ibibioland the combination of massive identification with Christian churches within the relatively short span of half a century, significant religious competition, a large number of distinct church options, and the religious innovation that local AICs demonstrated does provide a context to help explain Weaver's description of the religious situation he found, one that was highly Christianized but that appeared confusing and disorienting with its dynamic religious innovation and inter-church competition.

This chapter has provided an overview of the religious history of the AICs that invited MBMC to Nigeria in the late 1950s in an attempt to explain the context that the missionaries found when they arrived in 1958. It has shown that over the first six decades

²⁵² Ibid., 111-113.

²⁵³ Ibid. 113-115.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 121.

²⁵⁵ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 98-101.

of the twentieth century the Ibibio moved in mass to identify with the Christian movement. It has argued that the arrival of Christian missions, the establishment of British colonial rule, and the traditional religious assumptions of the Ibibio people prompted this change.

In addition, this chapter has constructed an explanation for the strength of the AIC movement in Ibibioland. AICs sometimes were a medium of resistance to colonial oppression. Even within the foreign missions colonial attitudes created tension between missionaries and Ibibio Christians, increasing the likelihood that people would leave to join AICs. In addition, the Protestant culture of separatism, particularly in the context of competition and overlapping spheres of influence, reduced loyalty to missionary denominations and encouraged schism. The need for culturally appropriate expressions of Christianity that embodied indigenous religious assumptions and Ibibio ministers' deft incorporation of those assumptions in church practices encouraged the emergence of AICs. Ibibio indigenous society that vested religious authority in structures, people, and spirits in the lower social segments made multiple, local AIC structures more attractive to Christians than the missions' denominational structures. As well, the missions' lack of financial resources and personnel meant they could not respond to everyone, leaving AICs to fill the gap. Eventually the decrease in religious regulation allowed for the emergence of a religious milieu where diverse Christian options could compete for followers who were increasingly free to pick and choose where they would lodge their loyalty. The result was the religious vitality and innovation in Ibibioland that Mennonite missionaries found when they arrived in 1958.

CHAPTER THREE

TWENTIETH CENTURY MENNONITE MISSIONS: THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTS ON MISSION THEORY AND PRACTICE

Early in the twentieth century the impact of the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate and the desire of North American leaders to protect Mennonites from harmful worldly influences threatened to constrain missionaries' engagement with local contexts and limited the mission strategies that they could develop. In 1916 Mennonite missionary and headmaster of the Dhamtari (India) Christian School, Martin Clifford (M. C.) Lehman, reported the victory of the Christian School boys in a local football game with a non-Christian team in the *Christian Monitor*, a North American Mennonite periodical.¹ Both teams had sought divine intervention for victory, and the Christian side had won thanks to a last-minute save by the goalkeeper. Lehman included the biblical reference of 1 Kings 18:19-39 in the article, the story of Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal, highlighting the way people in Dhamtari might understand the event as an example of Divine victory over false gods.

Instead of taking the story as a sign of encouragement, the bishops in eastern Pennsylvania were appalled. The bishops were the guardians of faith communities that attempted to keep themselves largely apart from society and shunned what was

¹ M. C. Lehman, "A Foot Ball Game in India," *Christian Monitor*, December 1916, 745. Football, soccer in North America.

“worldly” as a way to be faithful to God. They were chagrined to see their missionary apparently approving participation in public sporting events and mixing sports and religion.² The bishops of the Franconia Conference stopped financial support to the India mission for more than a year.³ The outcry was so strong that the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) went on record calling football cruel and inhuman and voicing its disapproval “of any such games in any of our institutions and especially when it involves the question of religion.”⁴ Lehman published a follow-up statement in the *Monitor* clarifying that he was not in favor of mixing religion and sport, that he opposed “indulgence in worldly amusement or sport by Christian people,” and that he was committed to helping “prevent the world-wide amusement craze from making inroads into the church.”⁵ In the wider Protestant community of the period proponents of “muscular Christianity” sought to energize churches and counter sloth through sport and physical education.⁶ This became a focus of Protestant missions. YMCA missionaries promulgated the movement overseas, promoting sport and arguing that health and religion were inextricable.

² John A. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 60–61.

³ Theron F. Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 133.

⁴ John A. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 60–61.

⁵ M. C. Lehman, “A Statement,” *Christian Monitor*, August 1918, 621.

⁶ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

The conservative constituency also criticized Lehman for overemphasizing education to the detriment of evangelism, and he became a lightning rod for Fundamentalist-leaning critiques of the mission. Such was the pressure that he offered his resignation in early 1917, but MBMC refused to accept it.⁷ In 1923 when Lehman wanted to do Asian studies at Columbia University, critiques feared that the university would turn him into a Modernist, so he did industrial education at Hampton Institute in Virginia instead.⁸

As the century progressed interaction with the world on a global scale opened the way for serious attention to the importance of local contexts. In 1923 Lehman suggested that the education that MBMC mission schools provided was not relevant enough to the students' environment. He promoted new teaching patterns and a village oriented curriculum.⁹ In the early 1930s Lehman was able to meet one of his educational goals, doing a doctoral dissertation at Yale that examined the religious significance of the nineteenth century Indian writer Harishchandra. This time when the eastern bishops protested at his choice of such a "liberalistic school," the mission defended him.¹⁰ When Lehman authored MBMC's 1939 Mission Study Course, *Our Mission Work in India*, the first chapter provided a survey of the Indian context including its main religions, and the

⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 61.

⁸ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 135.

⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

last chapter addressed the issue of adapting Mennonite doctrines to the Indian situation.¹¹

From 1959 to 1967 Lehman's daughter Irene and her husband, Edwin Weaver, served as MBMC missionaries in southeastern Nigeria. By then Mennonite missionaries were reading *Practical Anthropology* and seeking to appropriate the tools of linguistics and anthropology to understand local contexts and cultures.¹² The focus was such that the Weavers oriented their work towards helping African Independent Churches reinforce their own African Christian identity instead of building up Mennonite ecclesial structures with organic ties to North America. Their approach became the model for subsequent MBMC work in West Africa.¹³ This model was characterized by flexibility, an inductive approach, a dialogical method, a multilateral stance, a grassroots orientation, and respect for local contexts and cultures—quite a contrast to the eastern Pennsylvania bishops' earlier approach that appears more controlling and fearful of worldly influence.

¹¹ M. C. Lehman, *Our Mission Work in India* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1939).

¹² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964; Harold S. Bender to John H. Mosemann, March 29, 1951, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, Linguistics and Anthropology 1951-53; Stanley and Delores Friesen, "Anthropology, Anabaptists and Mission," *Mission Focus Annual Review* 8 (2000): 55-62.

¹³ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission Agency and African Independent Churches," *International Review of Mission* 63, no. 252 (1974): 475-91; Ministry Among African Independent Churches, January 1980, IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

Introduction

If the African Independent Churches (AICs) that invited the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities to southeastern Nigeria had a unique religious history, the missionaries too brought their own religious traditions and mission assumptions to their engagement in the region. Mennonite identity and missionary engagement evolved from Anabaptist beginnings during the Protestant Reformation into their late nineteenth century embodiments in North American Mennonite communities. During the first six decades of the twentieth century, the ensemble of Fundamentalist/Modernist controversies in North America, two World Wars, and relief and mission work in an increasing number of contexts around the world sorely tested Mennonite faith traditions and beliefs.

This chapter will present a history of the Mennonite Church's (MC) early missionary engagement and its primary mission agency's changing approach during the first six decades of the twentieth century. The Mennonite missionaries among whom this change occurred understood themselves to be spiritual descendants of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. As such the story will begin with a description of how the Anabaptists had been a movement of dynamic, missionary communities that grew and spread throughout Europe in a relatively short time. By the time Mennonite groups migrated to North America, however, they had lost their missionary zeal. They had become inwardly focused communities that regulated their members' interaction with the world. This history will show that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries changes occurred as Mennonites began to adapt some of the forms and priorities they

saw among other North American Protestant churches. These changes included the establishment of denominational structures and institutions and a rekindled zeal for missionary activity. In the early years of the twentieth century, North American Mennonites established a missionary presence in India and by the end of the second decade in South America. When the first missionaries arrived in India, they assumed the utility of traditional missionary methods such as the establishment of orphanages and hospitals. This chapter will show how missionary engagement with local contexts in India and Argentina and with the mission theory of the wider missionary movement led MBMC missionaries to question their assumptions and to engage missiological issues such as indigenization, mass movements, ecumenism, comity agreements, the utility of the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics, and the relative appropriateness of mission institutions such as hospitals and schools.

When work in Africa commenced in the late 1950s, an important factor was that those who worked with the AICs in southeastern Nigeria were veteran missionaries with decades of experience in India. They brought with them assumptions about theory and strategy that the mission had honed over a half century of missionary work in that field. In addition, MBMC administrators brought to the Nigeria work their experience of mission engagement with an indigenous Christian movement among the Toba people of Argentina. The openness created by the reevaluation of their India work on the part of MBMC and its missionaries and the ministry among the Toba people meant that when they engaged AICs in Nigeria, missionaries were able to shed what they considered to

be outdated methods and forge a new mission approach tailored to the context in which they found themselves.¹⁴

The Loss of Missionary Vision

This section will show how North American Mennonites came to be a community of faith that valued humility and separation from the world and that was mostly uninvolved in the nineteenth century missionary movement until late in the century. The missionary zeal of early European Anabaptists decreased significantly in the face of persecution and the resulting tendency towards seclusion. There was also government pressure to abstain from promulgating their faith. The seclusive tendency continued in the new context of North America but without the threat of persecution. Humility replaced suffering as an important marker of self-identity. A posture of humility and separation from the world shielded North American Mennonites from the activist impulses of the wider Protestant missionary movement. That, however, had not always been the case.

The Anabaptist movement that Mennonites consider to be the genesis of their church was a dynamic, missionary movement that grew and spread throughout Europe in a relatively short time from its diverse beginnings in the 1520s. With a zeal for reinstituting the church after the New Testament apostolic model, both lay people and

¹⁴ This chapter limits itself to the issues, persons, and institutions that became important in Nigeria and does not treat other themes and people who would be important for a more general history of modern Mennonite missionary activity.

leaders actively and successfully shared their ideas and established congregations.¹⁵ Lay believers evangelized family, coworkers, and neighbors.¹⁶ Leaders traveled widely, preaching, baptizing, and establishing congregations.¹⁷ Anabaptists commissioned and supported small missionary teams to visit existing congregations and to plant new ones.¹⁸ Although the Protestant reformers did not consider the Anabaptists to be legitimate, the movement offered both a compelling alternative to official ecclesiastical structures as well as hope within the turbulent social milieu of sixteenth century Europe.¹⁹

The intense missionary focus of early European Anabaptists did not last. By the seventeenth century, European Mennonites and other descendants of the Anabaptists had retreated from an aggressive missionary posture to a defensive stance of self-maintenance.²⁰ Various factors contributed to make it so. Later generations of a religious movement often do not share the intense zeal of their spiritual parents. In Switzerland, Germany, and France intense persecution, expulsion from their home communities, and

¹⁵ Hans Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 51–69; Wolfgang Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, 70–87; Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999*, Occasional Papers, Institute of Mennonite Studies 20 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 27.

¹⁶ Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity."

¹⁷ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18; Kasdorf, "The Anabaptist Approach to Mission."

¹⁹ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 18, 25.

²⁰ N. van der Zijpp, "From Anabaptist Missionary Congregation to Mennonite Seclusion," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, 119–36.

the execution of their leaders sapped the energy of many groups.²¹ In time they adapted a defensive stance that resulted in the development of churches that were cultural enclaves where Mennonites sought to maintain key spiritual principles in largely withdrawn communities instead of focusing outward. When European authorities openly tolerated their congregations, it was often on the condition that they suppress their missionary zeal. Dutch Mennonites, for example, benefited from increased religious tolerance on the condition that they abstain from mission and the promulgation of their propaganda.²² In that environment, they eventually joined the mainstream culture and became prosperous members of their communities. Perhaps because their witness was suppressed or because they exchanged this mission impulse for religious toleration, European Mennonites lost their earlier missionary zeal.²³

European Mennonite immigrants to the Americas continued the process of adaptation in the new context in which they found themselves. In eighteenth century North America, the majority of these immigrants were Swiss and South German people who had experienced persecution that led to suffering and marginalization in European society.²⁴ As they became prosperous and accustomed to life without persecution in their new homeland, their self-identification as a suffering community no longer made sense.

²¹ Ibid.; Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Mission," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, 13–23; Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 29.

²² van der Zijpp, "From Anabaptist Missionary Congregation to Mennonite Seclusion."

²³ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 29.

²⁴ Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790*, vol. 1, *Mennonite Experience in America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 50–58.

Instead, Mennonites started to use the language of pietism to express their spirituality; they came to understand the injunction to follow Christ, or discipleship, in terms of adhering to their religious community's discipline and practice. Transmitting the faith became mostly a matter of nurturing the young people raised in Mennonite congregations rather than making disciples of others.²⁵

Humility eventually became a spiritual value that replaced suffering as the major Mennonite identity marker. Jesus, the master of humility, had stooped to wash his disciples' feet and humbly accepted death.²⁶ Humility became foundational to the Christian life of obedience and righteousness. It was the opposite of worldliness and so encouraged separation from the world. Humility had visible manifestations such as the plain, unpretentious clothing that would come to be a marker of a faithful religious community set apart from the world.²⁷ This was not the revivalists' humility that was a spiritual state that led to repentance, but a humility that Mennonites applied directly to everyday life in stark contrast to the proud, ambitious mood of the post-revolutionary United States.²⁸ During the Revolutionary War many Mennonites had refused to take up arms, resulting in the loss of the right to vote or hold public office and intensifying their sense of being separate from their neighbors and from the American nation-building

²⁵ Ibid., 165–169.

²⁶ Ibid., 177–182; Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America*, vol. 2, Mennonite Experience in America (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 29–32, 99–105.

²⁷ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 99–100.

²⁸ MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood*, 182.

project in general.²⁹ The turn towards humility reinforced Mennonites' sense of separateness and conflict with the world; they became the "quiet in the land."³⁰ The Mennonite self-identity of an exceedingly humble people who were the quiet in the land was antithetical to a confident, outward, missionary vision that North American Protestant missionary proponents articulated during the nineteenth century.

North American Mennonites' move towards humility and the resulting tendency towards separatism appear to have slowed the influences that might have kindled missionary impulses earlier. The confident nature of the Protestant mission impulse must have grated against the core standard of Mennonite humility.³¹ Those drawn in the direction of revival impulses joined other churches or formed their own movements, such as the Brethren in Christ Church and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.³² In addition, since Mennonites eschewed the idea of formal theological training for leaders, they did not benefit from seminary-trained pastors who might have brought mission or other influences into the church from the wider Christian community. Bolstered by their identity as a separate, humble people, the bulk of the early to mid nineteenth century

²⁹ Ibid., 249–251, 279–280; Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 30–31.

³⁰ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 105; James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930*, vol. 3, *Mennonite Experience in America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 36.

³¹ Cf. William R. Hutchison, "A Moral Equivalent for Imperialism," in *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), Chapter 4, 91-124.

³² James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 44–45; C. Nelson Hostettler and E. Morris Sider, "Brethren in Christ Church," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 2014, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Brethren_in_Christ_Church (accessed June 20, 2016); Harold S. Bender and Richard D. Thiessen, "Mennonite Brethren in Christ," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 2013, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_in_Christ (accessed June 20, 2016).

North American Mennonites resisted the activist impulses that produced much of the missionary activity of the period.

Regaining a North American Mennonite Missionary Vision

By the mid nineteenth century some North American Mennonites had come to focus less on humility and separation from the world. They proposed adapting some of the modernizing tendencies that they saw in the churches of their Protestant neighbors, an idea that was opposed by traditionalists.³³ Mennonites also felt the influence of Pietist and evangelical streams and their focus on mission engagement.³⁴ This section shows how such influences resulted in some Mennonites loosening their hold on the values of humility and separation, leading to Mennonite participation in the wider Protestant missionary movement.

Even as they maintained a value of separation from the world, Mennonites were not immune to influence from the wider society. For example, in eastern Pennsylvania controversy over modernizing tendencies such as setting aside the custom of ordained men wearing the “round coat” and the suggestion that the Franconia conference should adopt a constitution and keep written minutes of meetings led to the departure of a number of congregations from the conference.³⁵ The reformers formed a new conference. They placed less emphasis on humility in theology, ethics, and personal style than did the traditional group, and they applied ideas of due process to a church

³³ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 118–123.

³⁴ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 32-42.

³⁵ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 118–122.

polity that had been more informal up to that point. They sought to place more authority in formal church offices rather than in particular individuals. The first successful Mennonite periodical in America and one of the first Mennonite Sunday schools came from this modernizing group.³⁶ This openness to adopting practices from the wider North American Protestant milieu included the kindling of a North American Mennonite missionary vision.³⁷

Around mid century, members of the new Pennsylvania conference became involved in foreign mission initiatives through their European siblings who had already caught the missionary spirit. They wrote to European Mennonites asking for information about their missionary teaching and practice and started sending financial assistance to support Dutch Mennonite mission activities.³⁸ The Dutch Mennonites had formed the Dutch Mennonite Missionary Association in 1847 and sent their first missionary, Pieter Jansz, to the Dutch East Indies in 1851.³⁹ Support for such initiatives was part of a new North American Mennonite involvement in the “Great Century” of modern missions.⁴⁰

In 1860 the new Pennsylvania conference and congregations from Iowa, Ohio, and Ontario combined to form the General Conference that became a progressive branch

³⁶ Fretz J. Herbert, “Oberholtzer, John H. (1809-1895),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Oberholtzer,_John_H._\(1809-1895\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Oberholtzer,_John_H._(1809-1895)) (accessed January 20, 2015); Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 118–119.

³⁷ Herbert, “Oberholtzer, John H. (1809-1895)”;

³⁸ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 127–129.

³⁹ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 38–39.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century, A. D. 1800 - A.D. 1914 in Europe and the United States of America*, History of the Expansion of Christianity, vol. 4 (New York: Harper, 1941).

of North American Mennonites. It moved toward more centralized, denominational-type structures for publishing, missions, and education.⁴¹ North American Mennonite congregations had previously collaborated in area conferences but had no overarching structure. Nearly forty years later, in 1898, most of the Mennonite and Amish Mennonite conferences that did not join the General Conference formed a different general conference.⁴² Similar to its progressive older sibling, this movement coalesced around modern initiatives such as missions, publishing, and educational institutions. Historians of North American Mennonites call this group, along with three conferences in Pennsylvania that did not join it, the Mennonite Church (MC) or the Old Mennonite Church. The 1860 group became known as the New Mennonites and finally the General Conference.

Both groups eventually established cross-cultural and foreign missions. The first organized, cross-cultural, North American Mennonite mission initiative came when the General Conference sent Samuel S. and Susannah Haury to work among the Arapaho people in Oklahoma in 1880.⁴³ Study with C. J. van der Smissen at the General Conference's Wadsworth Seminary in Ohio and four years at the Rhenish Missionary Training School in Germany had embedded the Pietist and evangelical mission impulse in Samuel.⁴⁴ Those on the MC side retained an emphasis on separation and humility longer than did their more progressive counterparts, but they also eventually moved

⁴¹ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 127–134.

⁴² Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 28–29, 41–43, 46, 119–125.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 141, 151.

⁴⁴ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 37–38.

towards organized mission activity. Some MC mission advocates established the Mennonite Evangelizing Committee in 1882, an initiative that focused on assisting isolated North American Mennonite congregations.⁴⁵ Other advocates formed the Benevolent Organization of Mennonites in 1894, intending to establish both home and foreign mission work.⁴⁶ In 1896 these two initiatives merged to form the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board (MEBB) to raise funds and conduct mission work.⁴⁷

The ensemble of mission energy around the turn of the century gave birth to the formal structures that carried much of the MC mission activity during the twentieth century. George Lambert, a member of the Mennonite Church from 1896 to 1911, had made a round-the-world trip from August 1894 to July 1895 that included travel in India.⁴⁸ Upon his return he advocated for establishing missionary work there, particularly among children, and later returned to India to distribute aid donated by Mennonites during the 1897 famine.⁴⁹ After the second trip he graphically described the suffering of the Indian people and continued to encourage mission engagement, particularly among orphans.⁵⁰ The tragedy of the India famine and Mennonite

⁴⁵ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 17–18; Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 299–300; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 38–40.

⁴⁶ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 17–18.

⁴⁸ George Lambert, *Around the Globe and through Bible Lands: Notes and Observations on the Various Countries through Which the Writer Traveled* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1896).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6, 80–82; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 27–30; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 79–80; Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 144–145.

⁵⁰ George Lambert and Abram B. Kolb, *India, the Horror-Stricken Empire: Containing a Full Account of the Famine, Plague, and Earthquake of 1896-7 ; Including a Complete Narrative of the Relief*

involvement in response to it increased the visibility and interest in mission among MC Mennonites.

When the MC was born in 1898, MEBB served as a mission board, making its first missionary appointments and formalizing the decision to open a mission in India.⁵¹ The first missionaries embarked for India in February 1899.⁵² In May 1906 the MEBB merged with yet another Mennonite mission board, the Mennonite Board of Charitable Homes and Missions, to form the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC).⁵³ It was MBMC that came to serve as the primary mission agency for the MC during the twentieth century and that sent missionaries to work with Nigerian African Independent Churches (AICs) in the late 1950s.

The move towards missionary engagement with the world entailed a significant change in posture for those North American Mennonites who participated in it. Mennonite humility and separation from worldliness had been ways to embody Mennonite faithfulness vis-à-vis a fallen world that was in need of redemption and that might well be a threat to the Mennonite faith community. The new push for missionary engagement assumed a similar understanding of the world as fallen and in need of

Work through the Home and Foreign Commission (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Pub. Co., 1898), 3, 44–48, 62–65, 74–75, 106–107, 116–120, 194, 275, 293–296, 330; Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 306; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 78–81; Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 144–145; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 30–34.

⁵¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 36.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵³ J. S. Hartzler, *Report of Committee on Consolidation of Mission Boards*, Meeting Minutes (Rittman, OH: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 19, 1906), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 2, Minute Book 1 May 1906 - May 1913; Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 152; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 88–93.

redemption. Mission minded Mennonites, however, proposed a different relationship with the world, one that assumed they had something valuable to offer to it and that implied a faith-motivated imperative to do so. One might characterize these two different Mennonite embodiments of faithfulness as protective versus engagement oriented. Engagement Mennonites moved into the world with the expectation that they could be missional agents who might nudge those who were fallen towards faithfulness. Protective Mennonites, on the other hand, saw the world as something from which one should protect the faith community. In contrast to engagement Mennonites, protective Mennonites had a greater fear of the dangers of worldliness and relied more on a posture of humility. One of the reoccurring themes in the next section about MBMC's attempt to create an indigenous Mennonite faith community in India is the tension between these two Mennonite understandings of faithfulness.

Mission Engagement in India and the Move Towards Indigenization

As the first foreign mission field of the Mennonite Church (MC), the mission experience in India provided an opportunity to participate in a foreign mission context and to seriously engage the mission theories and strategies of the wider Protestant missionary movement. From the perspective of the later work in Nigeria, it was a training ground for Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) and its missionaries.⁵⁴ With the exception of one, the key players during the formative first two

⁵⁴ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria -

years of the Nigeria work were veterans of the India field. The initial missionary couples who worked in Nigeria, Sylvan Jay (S. J.) and Ida Hostetler and Edwin and Irene Weaver, and their supervisor, MBMC Secretary Joseph Daniel (J. D.) Graber, were all veteran India missionaries.⁵⁵ Graber's assistant, John H. Yoder, who also played an important role in developing strategy in those first years, had not worked on the India field but had served in post-World War II Europe. There he was a Mennonite Central Committee relief worker, provided theological and organizational assistance to the French Mennonite Church, and supervised the mission's work in Algeria.⁵⁶ This section will provide a brief biographical sketch of the India missionaries who later engaged the Nigeria field. It will outline the development of the mission theories and strategies that they learned through their work in India and took with them to Nigeria. This section will also examine the increasing importance of local contexts, indigenization theory, mission strategy with respect to mission institutions and mass movements, ecumenism, and the changing role of missionaries in the post-colonial setting.⁵⁷

Edwin Weaver 1959; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961.

⁵⁵ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 254–257.

⁵⁶ Mark Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 16–19; Jean Séguéy, *Les Assemblées Anabaptistes-Mennonites de France* (Paris: Mouton, 1977), 637.

⁵⁷ These themes were subsequently important for the new mission approach that missionaries developed in Nigeria.

Key Missionaries in the Story

Joseph Daniel Graber

Joseph Daniel (J. D.) Graber and his wife Minnie Swartzendruber were MBMC missionaries in India from 1925 to 1942.⁵⁸ In India Graber served in a number of roles including general missionary, pastor, bishop, mission secretary, and high school principal. He became the first full-time general secretary of MBMC in 1944 and served in that position until retirement in 1967. His tenure saw a remarkable increase in the mission's footprint around the world. At the beginning of his term as general secretary, MBMC worked in just two foreign countries, India and Argentina.⁵⁹ By the end of his career the number of countries had increased to sixteen.⁶⁰

Graber kept abreast of contemporary mission theory and strategy throughout his career. As a missionary in India he studied Hindu religious documents and reflected on the significance of missiological issues for Mennonite missions: ecumenism, indigenization, church union initiatives, and mass movements.⁶¹ As MBMC general

⁵⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Graber, Joseph Daniel (1900-1978)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Graber,_Joseph_Daniel_%281900-1978%29&oldid=122507 (accessed April 10, 2015).

⁵⁹ *Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 1944), IV-06-3, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1939-46, Annual Reports 1944.

⁶⁰ *Adventure in Mission 1968, General Mission Handbook Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1968).

⁶¹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 159; J. D. Graber, "Field Reports of Missions, India," in *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1939), 16-18; J. D. Graber to Jonathan Yoder, April 20, 1948, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; J. D. Graber, "Reports from Foreign Missions and the Mexican Boarder Work, India" in *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of

secretary he encouraged the move away from colonial patterns of western-staffed mission stations and a heavy investment in institutions in response to the end of colonialism and the move towards indigenization.⁶² Graber communicated a clear sense of regret for missionary approaches that had been “imperialistic” or domineering during the colonial period.⁶³ He repeatedly described the post-colonial situation as a “new day” for missions, a day in which colonialism ceded to nationalism.⁶⁴ As the reigns of leadership were passed from missionaries to indigenous leaders, they needed to work together to accomplish the goals of the church. A focus on institutional machinery needed to give way to spiritual renewal and evangelism. Graber also developed an appreciation for the way anthropological insights could help missionaries understand and identify with local contexts and cultures. He maintained, nevertheless, a strong conviction that the Mennonite faith tradition had a positive contribution to offer those same contexts and cultures.⁶⁵

Missions and Charities, 1938), 8–10; J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), 32–39.

⁶² Graber, *The Church Apostolic*, 41–44.

⁶³ J. D. Graber to E. J. Bingle, April 28, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, London, England 1951-1955.

⁶⁴ J. D. Graber to India Missionaries, April 6, 1951, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Unification Commission 1950-1953; J. D. Graber to Samida, May 4, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Samida, J W Confidential 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to Malagar, May 4, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 3, Malagar, P J 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to D. A. Sonwani, July 15, 1952, IV-18-10, Box 5, Solomon, Stephen N 1951 Confidential and Sonwani, D A 1952-54; J. D. Graber, “Report of the Secretary,” in *Report of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1956), 19–21 among others.

⁶⁵ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 12, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, April 5, 1956 and J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, March 16, 1957, IV-18-03-02, Box 2, Argentine Chaco 1956-60; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, November 12, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to John H. Yoder, March 3, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to E. J. Bingle,

In India Graber was a co-worker of Edwin and Irene Weaver, who became the key leaders of the mission's early work with African Independent Churches (AICs), and he maintained a close working relationship with them throughout the Weavers' time in India and Nigeria. He was the chief executive officer for foreign missions during the first six years that the Weavers worked in southeastern Nigeria.

Sylvan Jay Hostetler

Sylvan Jay (S. J.) and Ida Hostetler were missionaries in India from 1928 to 1949 and in Ghana from 1957 to 1964.⁶⁶ They often played the role of pioneers, being the first missionaries that MBMC assigned to the Bihar field in India, the senior members of the first team of four missionaries to work in Ghana, and the first to work in southeastern Nigeria. From November 1958 to November 1959 they traveled to Nigeria regularly and established Mennonite Church Nigeria among AICs that had declared themselves Mennonite. S. J. was conversant with mission theory and practice of the time; he was well versed in the theories of mass movements that grew out of the mission context of India and held to the principle of indigenization.⁶⁷ The Hostetlers contributed numerous educational reports and articles in the Mennonite press about mission work, and S. J.

April 28, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, London, England 1951-1955; J. D. Graber, "Mennonite Distinctive, Speech given to Bapt/Menn Seminar, Japan" (Japan, 1964), HM 1-48, Box 181, The Church as Indigenous.

⁶⁶ Dorothy Yoder Nyce, "Hostetler, Ida Miller (1900-1972) and Hostetler, Sylvan Jay (1901-1978)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hostetler,_Ida_Miller_\(1900-1972\)_and_Hostetler,_Sylvan_Jay_\(1901-1978\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hostetler,_Ida_Miller_(1900-1972)_and_Hostetler,_Sylvan_Jay_(1901-1978)) (accessed April 10, 2015).

⁶⁷ S. J. Hostetler, "Soul Winning Methods that Have Proved Successful in India," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 94-101.

gave an address at the mission's 1936 annual meeting about missionary methods in India in which he addressed the mass movement phenomenon.⁶⁸

The Hostetlers' appointment as the first MBMC missionaries to Bihar was at least partly the result of missionary frustration with the lack of mass movement activity in the mission's Dhamtari centered field, but the new field proved to be no more prone to such movements. In Bihar missionaries worked in a region that another mission had ceded to them so in some cases inherited established congregations.⁶⁹ An additional dynamic at play was that at times the relationships among the different missions in Bihar were troubled by comity disagreements, leading the mission to conclude that it could no longer simply assume the validity of such agreements.⁷⁰ When S. J. set about accepting AIC congregations into a new Mennonite church in Nigeria in 1959, he assumed as much—that in southeastern Nigeria comity agreements were a thing of the past and that competition for members between churches was the norm.

⁶⁸ S. J. Hostetler, "The Great Commission," in *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1933), 117–19; S. J. and Ida Hostetler, "A New Beginning," in *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1941), 73–75; S. Jay Hostetler, *We Enter Bihar, India: A Statement of Historical Development, Present Progress, Plans, Ideals, and Description of our Mennonite Mission in Bihar, India, 1940-1950* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951); S. J. Hostetler, *Supplement to We Enter Bihar, India* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954) among others; Hostetler, "Soul Winning Methods that Have Proved Successful in India."

⁶⁹ S. J. Hostetler and Ida Hostetler, "Annual Report of the Bihar, India, Mennonite Mission, 1948," in *Report of the Forty-Third Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1949), 121–25; Hostetler, *Supplement to We Enter Bihar, India*.

⁷⁰ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, March 18, 1948, IV-06-06 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee.

Edwin and Irene Weaver

Edwin and Irene Weaver were MBMC missionaries in Chicago from 1933 to 1935, in India from 1935 to 1956, in Nigeria from 1958 to 1967, in Ghana from 1969 to 1971, and later made several extended mission visits to southern Africa.⁷¹ Irene was born in India in 1910 to MBMC missionaries M. C. and Lydia Lehman. The Weavers both attended Biblical Seminary in New York City before the mission assigned them to their first mission post, and Edwin returned later to finish his bachelor of theology degree, writing his thesis on the Hindu Ramakrishna mission in America.⁷² At Biblical Seminary he learned the inductive Bible study method, which he found useful for the post-colonial contexts of India and West Africa.⁷³

The Weavers served three terms in India. Their first assignment was in the town of Drug, a district that the Methodist Episcopal Church had recently transferred to the Mennonites.⁷⁴ There were many Satnami people there among whom the mission hoped a

⁷¹ “Historical Directory of Overseas Missionaries,” in *Go Where I Send You, Working Reports Feb. 1, 1980 - Jan. 31, 1981* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1980), OHD – 1–80 – OHD – 12–80; *Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 1, 1933), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1933-1939.

⁷² Edwin Weaver, “The Influence of Hinduism in America with Special Reference to the Ramakrishna Mission” (bachelor of sacred theology thesis, Biblical Seminary in New York, 1943).

⁷³ Edwin Weaver, “Inductive Bible Study,” *Ecumenica*, May 1952, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Edwin Weaver to Harry Y. Henry, March 21, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Edwin Weaver to Harry F. Petersen, June 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous.

⁷⁴ A. C. Brunk, “Reports from Foreign Missions, India,” in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 13–14.

mass movement into the church would develop, although this did not happen.⁷⁵ The Weavers worked in pastoral and evangelistic roles, and Edwin served as bishop of the Mennonite Church in India (MCI) from 1946 until their departure in 1956. Aware that the socio-political dynamics of the dawning post-colonial context would mean changes for both mission and church, Edwin sought to encourage the indigenization of the church, equitable collaboration between the mission and MCI, spiritual renewal, and reflection by church leaders about how the Mennonite faith tradition might enrich Indian Mennonite faith.⁷⁶

The Weavers were co-workers of Graber in India and maintained a good relationship with him after he became MBMC general secretary. As general secretary, Graber followed Edwin's advice on mission strategy at a number of critical points of the mission's post World War II work in India.⁷⁷ The Weavers' effort in Nigeria during the

⁷⁵ "India, Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Mission, Dhamtari, C. P., India, 1935, Editorial" in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 113; Irene Lehman Weaver, "Drug Station," in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1940), 121–22.

⁷⁶ Edwin Weaver to S. C. Yoder, April 25, 1943, IV-7-1, Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908-1943, Box 30, Weaver, Edwin I. 1928-1943; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 15, 1947 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 21, 1948, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; Weaver, "This Year in the Church," in *Report of the Forty-Third Annual Meeting of the MBMC* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1949), 104–8; Edwin Weaver, "Some Principles to Be Considered in Charting the Future Course of the Church," April 25, 1951, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Unification Commission 1950-1953; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 5, 1952, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Edwin I. Weaver, "The Indigenous Church in India," in *Report of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1953); Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 20, 1954, in IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), 29-20, Mennonite Mission Network.

⁷⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 4, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 24, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene

1960s developed into a groundbreaking engagement with AICs that would be paradigmatic for the mission's theory and strategy in West Africa for the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

The Increasing Importance of Local Contexts

Over the first six decades of the twentieth century, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities missionaries gave progressively more importance to the realities of the local contexts in which they worked. They became increasingly convinced that an understanding of local cultures was important for their mission theory and strategy. MBMC and its missionaries eventually expressed such concerns in their letters and reports. They sought to plant an indigenous church that was truly Indian and that could relate to North American Mennonites in a fraternal manner. This subsection highlights missionary recognition of the importance of local contexts for mission theory and practice and shows how protective Mennonites' concern to retain Mennonite distinctives and avoid liberalism sometimes slowed missionary adaptation to those local contexts. It shows how missionaries engaged ideas about the indigenous church and the three-self theory of the wider Protestant missionary movement and outlines the Mennonite Church of India's progress towards the goals of becoming self-propagating, self-financing, and self-governing.

1956-59 Confidential; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, April 5, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 24, 1956 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 25, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential.

At the beginning of their India experience, the missionaries seem to have assumed that the strategy and theory they brought from the North American context would be appropriate for India. They knew very little about India, and there was little consideration of how the gospel might be relevant in the Indian context.⁷⁸ George Lambert had suggested ministry among orphans, and to early twentieth century Mennonites that meant orphanages.⁷⁹ Also, one of the three missionaries sent in 1899 was a doctor. Plans were made to open an orphanage and a hospital as a way to develop ties with the community and establish a church.⁸⁰ Lambert's travel accounts had shown that such strategy was consistent with other mission initiatives in India.⁸¹

From the beginning the situation on the ground resulted in a change of plans. With yet another famine in the region the missionaries were occupied instead with famine relief and organizing public works projects that sought to provide remunerative work for those without a means of livelihood.⁸² Such work provided its own entree into the community, and the famine only increased the number of orphans. The mission did eventually develop both an orphanage and a hospital. The orphanage children became

⁷⁸ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 77, 39; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 148–149.

⁷⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 28, 34–35; Carolyn Weaver Esch, *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir Booklet, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1906-1956*, ed. Levi C. Hartzler (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1956), 48–50.

⁸⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 41, 44.

⁸¹ Lambert, *Around the Globe and through Bible Lands*, 81–82; Lambert and Kolb, *India, the Horror-Stricken Empire*, 62–65, 148–149, 194, 211, 292–296.

⁸² Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 44–48; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 93–94.

mission dependents and their care one of the mission's priorities.⁸³ As the children matured, the missionaries organized schools and industries to train the orphans for a vocation.⁸⁴ Taking responsibility for the famine orphans influenced missionary work for years to come.

Mennonite Distinctives and the Indian Context

Factors growing out of the situation in the North American Mennonite Church (MC) at the beginning of the twentieth century complicated the extent to which MBMC missionaries could allow the Indian context to influence their mission approach. A spirit of engagement had moved some Mennonites to modify their strong orientation towards humility and separateness. There was, however, also a counter move by protective Mennonites to reinforce Mennonite identity by strictly regulating certain markers of the faith, Mennonite distinctives, in the face of seductive worldly influences.⁸⁵ Even as Mennonites became more like their Protestant neighbors in some ways, they maintained a nonconformist stance toward the wider society and did not participate in the military, sue in courts of law, or purchase life insurance.⁸⁶ Nonconformity found expression in very tangible ways in areas such as dress and hairstyle. Simple and plain dress had

⁸³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 47–48, 165; Esch, *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir Booklet*, 19.

⁸⁴ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 117, 136.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 59–60; Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, vol. 4, *Mennonite Experience in America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 62–63, 75–76.

⁸⁶ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 148–149.

become a mark of a humble and separate church the century before.⁸⁷ In the face of creeping progressivism, protective leaders moved to require distinctive and standard “plain” patterns of dress as a way to reinforce a faithful religious tradition.⁸⁸ Some conferences required a plain-collar coat for men, especially church leaders, and the bonnet for women. MBMC policy required missionaries to respect such regulation dress.⁸⁹

In his address at the annual MBMC meeting in 1933, Mennonite leader Daniel Kauffman argued for the application of North American Mennonite distinctives in foreign mission fields. He asked a rhetorical question, “To what extent should the home Church project its standards into the Church on the field?”⁹⁰ His answer was “one hundred percent.”⁹¹ Although he allowed that one must reckon with personal characteristics of individual workers and diverse environments in the different fields, he argued that certain standards had to be maintained. Among the things he wanted to discourage was the practice of having, “one standard for America, another for Europe, another for India, another for China, another for Africa, [and] another for South

⁸⁷ Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 99–100.

⁸⁸ Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 313; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*, 72–74.

⁸⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 60; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 151.

⁹⁰ Daniel Kauffman, “How Far Should the Home Church Project Its Policies into the Church on the Field?” in *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the MBMC* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1933), 97–102.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

America.”⁹² Kaufman did not spell out what standards he had in mind, but in the context of protective Mennonites’ efforts to reinforce Mennonite distinctives, his audience likely understood implicitly issues of dress and other markers of nonconformity to the world. Those who advocated for strict adherence to North American Mennonite regulations about dress and other Mennonite nonconformist distinctives must not have considered the possibility that such markers might not have had the same significance in the Indian context. Nevertheless, it is perhaps not surprising that a faith tradition that invested significant religious meaning in its cultural distinctives would be slow to give them up.

Missionaries on the ground did understand the limits of transferring distinctive markers of faithfulness. They struggled to balance an appreciation for the Indian context with the expectations of the religious tradition from which they came.⁹³ MBMC missionaries enforced some prohibitions such as those against polygamy, jewelry, rings, moustaches, and life insurance and stressed the importance of a prayer veil for women and nonconformity to the world.⁹⁴ Missionaries did not, however, adhere to all North American Mennonite dress regulations, although they were careful to do so for photos and during furlough in North America.⁹⁵ When they failed to remember the importance of dress standards in the home church, they risked reprimand. For example, M. C. Lehman’s daughter, Irene, told how as a recently returned missionary child and student

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 167; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 13–14, 153–154, 162.

⁹⁴ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 167, 169.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 60.

at Goshen College, she spoke before a group of mission supporters during the 1928-1929 school year.⁹⁶ She felt chagrined when an MBMC member criticized her for her dress, which she described as plain, very simple, and with long sleeves and no trimmings. The problem was that it had no cape. Irene was somewhat comforted when India missionary Ernest Miller, then on furlough, confided to her that he had received criticism for how he combed his hair.⁹⁷ While the distance between India and their sending church was great enough to allow missionaries a certain amount of freedom, the movement to reinforce a faithful religious identity through cultural markers in the home church meant that missionaries had to be cautious about re-evaluating such religious assumptions in the light of local realities in India, or at least cautious about how they presented such re-evaluation to the home church.

Another way that North American Mennonites sought to reinforce their religious identity during the first decades of the twentieth century was by codifying a set of Mennonite theological doctrines. The MC tradition had always been biblicist and practical in its faith and had not prioritized the development of its own formal theological systems.⁹⁸ Its leaders were not trained theologians. Their authority came from the churches they served, not from degrees earned at theological schools. In the late nineteenth century Mennonites were still using a 1632 Dutch Mennonite confession

⁹⁶ Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 110–111; Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 108.

of faith as a formal theological expression.⁹⁹ The encroaching influence of the different streams of revivalism, North American Protestantism, and the larger society prompted some Mennonite leaders to desire a more explicit doctrinal definition of Mennonite belief.¹⁰⁰ In 1898 Daniel Kauffman published a *Manual of Biblical Doctrines*. In 1914 he edited *Bible Doctrine*, a larger work, and in 1928 edited yet another version, *Doctrines of the Bible*.¹⁰¹ This became the standard MC expression of correct belief. Kauffman was editor of the *Gospel Herald*, the closest thing to an official MC paper, from 1908 to 1943, and he exerted considerable influence on the church's articulation of its theological identity.¹⁰²

By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, doctrinal correctness threatened to overshadow practical expressions of missionary activity. For example, in the early 1920s a local Mennonite mission at Peoria, Illinois had letterhead that identified its aims as “To preach and teach the Gospel/ To distribute Gospel literature/ To put homeless children into Christian Homes/ To provide clothing for the worthy poor/ To provide free medical aid for the afflicted poor/ [and] To welcome all classes,

⁹⁹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 110–111.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 60; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Kauffman, *Manual of Bible Doctrines: Setting Forth the General Principles of the Plan of Salvation, Explaining the Symbolical Meaning and Practical Use of the Ordinances Instituted by Christ and His Apostles, and Pointing out Specifically Some of the Restrictions Which the New Testament Scriptures Enjoin upon Believers*. (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Pub. Co., 1898); Daniel Kauffman, ed., *Bible Doctrine: A Treatise on the Great Doctrines of the Bible, Pertaining to God, Angels, Satan, the Church, and the Salvation, Duties and Destiny of Man* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1914); Daniel Kauffman, ed., *Doctrines of the Bible, a Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1928).

¹⁰² Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 111.

especially the poor and needy.”¹⁰³ By 1929 its letterhead focused instead largely on beliefs, “Divine Inspiration of the Bible/ Deity of Christ/ Salvation thru the blood of Christ/ Complete separation from the world/ [and] Preach the Gospel to all people.”¹⁰⁴ In 1929 the Virginia Conference criticized the India mission and made a number of recommendations for change, including “more emphasis on preserving the orthodox position of the church.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in 1930 the Lancaster, Pennsylvania bishops called on MBMC to “send only missionaries trained in institutions ‘beyond question as to orthodoxy and soundness.’”¹⁰⁶ In fact, the year before MBMC had already sought to satisfy the bishops’ concerns by formulating a doctrinal statement for its missionaries to sign in which they affirmed “‘full sympathy’ in general with Mennonite Church doctrine and practice.”¹⁰⁷

Mennonites were not immune to the highly mobile and diverse North American milieu where ethnic and regional identities were becoming looser, and protective Mennonites looked for ways to reinforce religious identity. Ideological solidarity was one of the integrative mechanisms that could bolster group unity.¹⁰⁸ Codification of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 119–120.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930, Meeting Minutes* (Beech Church, Louisville, OH: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 3, 1930), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 2, Minutes 1927-1933, point no. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 144.

¹⁰⁸ John Higham, “Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History,” *The Journal of American History* 61 (June 1974): 5–28.

Mennonite doctrines was a move in that direction. Hence, during the first decades of the twentieth century when Mennonites were beginning foreign mission work and starting to engage Indian peoples' thought patterns and religious assumptions, the home church was solidifying its doctrinal expressions and building unity of belief. Correct belief was being standardized according to North American assumptions at the same time that MBMC missionaries were, for the first time, engaging in a long-term encounter with religious expressions that were vastly different from the understandings of the home church.

Mennonite leaders who sought to solidify standards of Mennonite doctrine and of visible markers of the faith community often embodied such moves in the language and concerns of the early twentieth century Fundamentalist movement. Fundamentalism aimed its attacks at what it identified as modernism or liberalism in North American Christianity. As there were not significant modernist or liberalist movements in the MC, it would be a mistake to attribute the motivation for that language and those concerns exclusively to Fundamentalist influences.¹⁰⁹ The move to control, or at least channel, social change and reinforce separation and nonconformity in the MC dovetailed with Fundamentalists' attempts to secure orthodox Christian identity in the face of proposals that moved in the modernist direction.¹¹⁰ By adding doctrines such as nonresistance and nonconformity to the list of indispensable beliefs, protective Mennonites could fashion

¹⁰⁹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 114; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 66.

¹¹⁰ Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 66, 71.

their own Mennonite fundamentalism and solidify their markers of faithfulness.¹¹¹ The Fundamentalist movement itself grew out of anxiety about cultural as well as doctrinal changes.¹¹² It was a timely resource for those who sought to protect the Mennonite faith community from worldly influences and dangerous social changes.¹¹³ If engagement Mennonites borrowed from revivalists and Protestants in their establishment of missions and mission boards, protective Mennonites too borrowed from Fundamentalists to give voice to their concerns. These different influences sometimes clashed with each other within the MC.

When MC leaders sought to enforce standard identity markers and doctrines among the missionaries in India or criticize missionary laxity about such matters, it was often expressed in the rhetoric of Fundamentalism. For example, the Kansas-Nebraska conference urged MBMC to select only those missionary candidates who could affirm verbal and plenary biblical inspiration and who were against modern religious thought and higher criticism.¹¹⁴ Fearing the influence of the Social Gospel, Fundamentalist-leaning critics of the India mission questioned the need for schools and health institutions at the expense of direct evangelism.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid., 66; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 114–115.

¹¹² Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 64–66.

¹¹³ Ibid., 70–76; C. Norman Kraus, “American Mennonites and the Bible, 1750-1950,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41, no. 4 (October 1967): 309–29.

¹¹⁴ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 117.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 133–137; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 61.

Similarly the Lancaster bishops outlined ten points of criticism about the India mission to MBMC in 1930. Their concerns included: that missionaries who had trained the ordained Indian leadership had themselves been trained in liberal institutions, that too many resources were being dedicated to institutions instead of to evangelism, that the mission should only send missionaries trained in orthodox and sound institutions, that missionaries should not work with missions of different faith and practice than Mennonites, that Indian Christian women should wear a head covering different from what non Christians wore, and that Indian brethren should not wear mustaches, which Mennonites in North America associated with the military.¹¹⁶ The Virginia Conference had a similar list of concerns that it presented to MBMC, but it was a more general attempt to conform the dress of India missionaries to North American Mennonite standards, especially the avoidance of neckties.¹¹⁷ In these lists typical Fundamentalist concerns were aligned with more specific Mennonite distinctives. The mission was not indifferent to such criticism. The Declaration of Faith to which it had recently asked missionaries to subscribe called on them both to affirm Mennonite Church doctrine and practice and to “deny and oppose the doctrines of Modernism.”¹¹⁸ MBMC reported that the India missionaries did so “without reserve.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930*, point no. 3; Harold S. Bender et al., “Nonconformity,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Nonconformity&oldid=113555> (accessed June 20, 2016).

¹¹⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 62.

¹¹⁸ *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930*, point no. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, point no. 3.

MBMC sometimes played a moderating role between its India missionaries and their North American critics, at times defending and other times buffering the missionaries from their detractors.¹²⁰ The mission defended its missionaries in the face of the criticism by the Lancaster bishops and arranged meetings of missionaries on furlough and their critics to attempt to clear the air about issues such as education, prayer veiling for women, Mennonite dress, modernism, and moustaches.¹²¹ Responding to critics who feared the influence of ecumenical relations with other missions on the mission field, MBMC adopted a policy to “avoid any ‘union’ efforts, to witness in interdenominational circles against ‘secularized social uplift programs’ that were substitutes for Christianity, to speak in favor of ‘our distinctive Church principles,’ and to ‘refrain from taking prominent position in the National Council.’”¹²² In reality the mission allowed the missionaries on the ground to decide how they would interact with other missions. The American Mennonite Mission (AMM), as MBMC’s India mission was known, sent representatives to the National Council and some missionaries served on regional and National Council committees.¹²³ The same laissez-faire practice extended to missionary attire.¹²⁴ With respect to theological education, Sanford C. Yoder, MBMC secretary from 1921 to 1944, steered missionaries-in-training to schools

¹²⁰ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 118, 143, 151.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 137–139; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 61–63; *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930*, point no. 3.

¹²² Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 141.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

for which fundamentalist-leaning Mennonites would not criticize them, such as Moody Bible Institute in Chicago or Biblical Seminary in New York.¹²⁵

While protective Mennonites' attempts to resist the modification of Mennonite identity markers in the India mission field likely retarded such movement, MBMC missionaries did come to take seriously the realities of their local context and adapted their mission theory and strategy accordingly. Lambert had noted the importance of learning the local languages, and from the beginning the missionaries took that challenge seriously.¹²⁶ Language proficiency allowed them to acquire directly significant knowledge about Indian culture. Lacking training and formal study, missionary experience provided a base on which to build cross-cultural understanding.¹²⁷ In addition, J. A. Ressler, one of the three missionaries who made up the first group to arrive in 1899, established a reading program that included material on Indian culture, Christian theology, and missions and wrote numerous articles that explained the Indian context for the Mennonite press.¹²⁸ While he and his colleagues had no formal preparation for working in a culture other than their own before arriving in India, they strove to gain the skills and knowledge that would allow them to engage their new context constructively.

¹²⁵ Edwin Weaver to S. C. Yoder, June 5, 1931 and S. C. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, June 9, 1931, IV-7-1, Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908-1943, Box 30, Weaver, Edwin I. 1928-1943; Theron F. Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 142.

¹²⁶ Lambert, *Around the Globe and through Bible Lands*, 80; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 69, 77-78.

¹²⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 83.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69, 77-78; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 158.

Knowledge and appreciation of the Indian setting grew over the first decades of MBMC's work. M. C. Lehman developed significant knowledge of the social structures of Indian life from a village survey that he did and which provided data about economics, infant mortality, and literacy.¹²⁹ He eventually wrote a PhD dissertation on the nineteenth century Indian writer Harishchandra.¹³⁰ In the AMM's educational program Lehman and Earnest Miller sought new teaching methods and a curriculum appropriate for village schools in India.¹³¹ In 1938 the *Prospectus of the Dhamtari Christian Academy* outlined a vision for an educational experience appropriate for its students' context, "Our school must fit pupils for life in the environment in which they find themselves and not unfit them to return to their homes and villages."¹³² Other missionaries were keen to understand Indian religions, especially Hinduism. George J. Lapp wrote numerous articles on Hinduism and a more extensive manuscript that was not published.¹³³ J. D. and Minnie Graber studied Hindu scriptures during language study, and J. D. wrote about the Hindi understanding of salvation in the church press.¹³⁴

With experience, missionaries became convinced that a deep understanding of local contexts was essential for their work. In 1917 George J. Lapp argued, "The

¹²⁹ M. C. Lehman, "Some Facts Gathered from the Survey of an Indian Village," *Christian Monitor*, January 1928 cited in Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 79-80.

¹³⁰ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 159.

¹³¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 119.

¹³² *Prospectus of the Dhamtari Christian Academy* (Dhamtari, India: Dhamtari Christian Academy, 1938), 1, cited in Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 130.

¹³³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 80-82.

¹³⁴ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 159.

knowledge of the language, the religions of the people, their folk-lore, their domestic and social customs, their natural tendencies, in fact a thorough acquaintance with them in every way is essential before one can know or even enter any of the many avenues of evangelism.”¹³⁵ Ten years later he responded to critics who wanted to see a more direct transfer of North American Mennonite methods and traditions to the India work by recalling that the Apostle Paul successfully answered his critics at Jerusalem and then reprimanded the Jerusalem Christians “for trying to force Jerusalem methods in Galatia and spoiling his work.”¹³⁶ For Lapp, trying to force the appropriation of North American Mennonite methods and traditions in India was tantamount to repeating the Jerusalem Christians’ mistake of attempting to oblige Gentiles to take on a Jewish identity to become Christian. This argument from scripture for a plurality of Christian expression across different peoples was typical of the wider Protestant theological reflection about mission.¹³⁷

Lapp’s recourse to the biblical story of Paul’s success in resisting the attempt to Judaize Gentile Christians did not guarantee that his argument would convince everyone. Using the same biblical story, Daniel Kaufman noted that when the controversy of whether or not to circumcise Gentiles arose, Paul allowed the problem to

¹³⁵ George J. Lapp, “India and the Missionary: VIII. Avenues of Evangelism,” *Gospel Herald* 9, no. 47 (March 1, 1917): 882.

¹³⁶ George J. Lapp, “George J. Lapp to V. E. Reiff,” May 24, 1927, quoted in Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 62.

¹³⁷ International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tamaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938* (London: International Missionary Council, 1939), 24–25.

be adjudicated by the leaders of the home church in Jerusalem. The result, according to Kauffman, was that after the decision recorded in Acts of the Apostles chapter 15, the missionaries returned to the churches they had planted and delivered the decision of the Apostles.¹³⁸ The implication was that the missionaries should not decide on the appropriateness of North American Mennonite faith practice and distinctives for foreign settings on their own. They should instead consult the home church and then implement the decisions made by the home church. Recourse to the Bible or biblical standards did not provide an easy answer to the question of how to appropriate the North American Mennonite faith tradition in other cultures.

Even when missionaries agreed to insist on Mennonite distinctives for the Indian church, their insistence did not guarantee a successful transplant of religious tradition. Missionaries included the prohibition against life insurance in the Indian church discipline, but as Indians found their voice there were long discussions about it in the yearly Conference meetings. Finally in 1948 the Conference dropped the prohibition altogether.¹³⁹ Eventually it would be Indians who made decisions about Mennonite faith and practice in India, not missionaries or North American Mennonites. Mennonite faith expressions in India might well differ from those of the home church in North America.

Nevertheless, missionaries did adapt some of the North American Mennonite distinctives so that they would fit into the Indian context with minimal disruption for

¹³⁸ Kauffman, "How Far Should the Home Church Project Its Policies into the Church on the Field?"

¹³⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 17, 1949, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

Indian Mennonites. They adapted the North American Mennonite practice of the woman's prayer veil by allowing the Indian women to cover their head with a part of their normal garment, as was already their custom in the presence of men, when praying or prophesying.¹⁴⁰ Since most early twentieth century North American Mennonites understood scripture to prohibit adornment with gold and expensive dress, they prohibited wedding bands. In India glass armbands, bangles, played the same function of showing marital status as wedding bands. Missionaries accommodated, allowing women just two bangles, enough to show they were married without being showy.¹⁴¹ Historian Theron Schlabach's study of Mennonite missions from 1863-1944, both home and foreign, found that the interaction of three variables, "clarity of scriptural command, ease of translating into an acceptable cultural form, and amount of disruption caused in new believers' lives," determined missionary accommodation of Mennonite distinctives to local contexts.¹⁴² Despite influences from the home church that complicated the missionary attempt to navigate between the religious culture of their origin and the culture and context they found on the field, they did manage to navigate their way well enough to plant a church that considered itself both Indian and Mennonite.

By the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the AMM, Mennonite missionaries were expressing another stage in their engagement with the Indian context by highlighting Indian agency in theological discernment. In his 1949 report to MBMC on

¹⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930*, point no. 3.

¹⁴¹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 164.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 165.

the Mennonite Church in India, Edwin Weaver focused both on the importance of the Christian faith being embodied in Indian ways and also on his conviction that it was up to Indian Christians to discern the best way for Mennonite faith to be expressed in India.¹⁴³ He argued that although the principles of the Word of God were unchanging, the Indian Church had to “find for itself the meaning and application of these principles for her own life and her own setting.”¹⁴⁴ Christian faith was not something that was simply shared by the missionaries but was something that needed to be worked out on the ground. For the first decades of AMM’s work, there had been debate among missionaries and with the home church about the relative importance of North American Mennonite distinctives and religious assumptions for Indian Mennonites. Weaver heightened yet further the importance of the local context by arguing not only for contextual Mennonite faith expressions but also in favor of Indian agency in the debate about those expressions.¹⁴⁵ He was even bold enough to suggest to MBMC and its constituency, “We Western Christians may not be the best interpreters of these principles [of the Word of God] for India.”¹⁴⁶ The importance of Indian agency in the development of Indian faith expressions and doctrines, both for practical ministry and

¹⁴³ Edwin I. Weaver, “This Year in the Church.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 20, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

¹⁴⁶ Weaver, “This Year in the Church.”

for the development of theological literature, was a priority for which Weaver continued to advocate in the years that followed.¹⁴⁷

Prioritizing Indian agency in this way did not mean that Weaver considered Mennonite faith tradition irrelevant for the Indian church. On a study furlough in 1953, he sought to better understand basic Anabaptist principles, how early Mennonites interpreted and applied those principles, and what they might mean for the church in India.¹⁴⁸ In addition, he thought it important for Indian Mennonites to have access to literature about Mennonite history and its peace witness and helped establish a new peace statement for the Mennonite Church in India as it developed its new constitution in 1951.¹⁴⁹ He sought assistance in the form of books and financing from prominent North American Mennonite specialists in Mennonite history and peace such as Harold S. Bender and Orie O. Miller. He argued, however, that those sources were to be adapted and interpreted by qualified Indian authors who would produce literature for the Indian church.¹⁵⁰ North American personnel did not embody the Indian cultural context to a great enough extent to be able to do the job. North American books or simple translations of them were not adequate. For Weaver, the Mennonite faith tradition was

¹⁴⁷ Weaver, "Some Principles to Be Considered in Charting the Future Course of the Church"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 20, 1954, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 15, 1954, and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 19, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

¹⁴⁸ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 5, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

¹⁴⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 20, 1951.

¹⁵⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 20, 1954; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 15, 1954; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 19, 1954; Edwin Weaver to Orie O. Miller, November 4, 1954 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 5, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

important for the Mennonite church in India, but that tradition had to be interpreted for the Indian context by Indians.

By the middle of the century MBMC general secretary J. D. Graber too was clearly advocating the idea that Christian faith had to be embodied in local ways. He agreed with Weaver that Indians themselves should be making the decisions about how Mennonite faith and doctrine should be communicated in their context.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, Graber still envisioned a significant role for missionary personnel and their faith tradition in such discussions. He expected missionaries to balance the influence of their North American Mennonite faith heritage with the need to allow local cultures and contexts to provide new embodiments of the faith. In a letter about such concerns to all MBMC missionaries, he assumed that they were familiar with contemporary missiological reflection, such as that of Stanley Soltau and Donald McGavran, about the importance of knowledge of local contexts for missionary work and that they would make cultural adaptations in their different local situations.¹⁵² They were to plant the church of Jesus Christ and not the church of their homeland.

Further explaining his letter to the Latin America Field Secretary, however, he cautioned that MBMC missionaries represented a North American Mennonite church.

¹⁵¹ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, October 22, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

¹⁵² J. D. Graber to Overseas Representatives of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 5, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Executive Committee 1956-64; T. Stanley Soltau, *Missions at the Crossroads; the Indigenous Church--a Solution for the Unfinished Task* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Donald Anderson McGavran, *The Bridges of God*. (New York: Friendship Press, 1955). McGavran had been a missionary in India. See Donald McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10, no. 2 (April, 1986): 53-58.

That church had “certain cultural patterns and certain distinct points of view” that should not be forgotten.¹⁵³ Missionaries should not, he wrote, “become worldly and unconcerned about the Doctrine of Separation from the world and the peculiarly high standards of a Christian in an evil world.”¹⁵⁴ In addition, he held up the doctrine of nonconformity as one for which missionaries might find new, culturally appropriate forms but which was an indispensable doctrine nonetheless.¹⁵⁵ Half a century of missionary engagement in foreign cultures had convinced the mission of the need for the faith to be embodied in ways that might be different from that of the home church in very real ways. However, the values of separateness, nonconformity, and a rejection of worldliness were still strong in the mid 1950s. Missionaries might embody such core values in distinct ways across different cultures, but they were not to sacrifice them completely to the relativity of faith expression in different contexts.

Both Weaver and Graber assumed that the Indian church would embody the Christian faith in ways different from that of the home church. Both also believed that, in addition to a general understanding of Christian faith, the North American Mennonite faith tradition had something valuable and unique to share with its Indian counterpart. Weaver highlighted Mennonite history and peace teaching, although interpreted through

¹⁵³ J. D. Graber to Nelson Litwiller, September 22, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Argentina Field Secretary 1956.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ J. D. Graber to Overseas Representatives of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 5, 1956.

Indian eyes, and Graber identified the doctrines of separation from the world and nonconformity.

The Indigenous Church and the Three-Self Challenge

Perhaps the predominant way that MBMC missionaries expressed the importance of the Indian context for their mission was in their articulation of the principle of the indigenous church. They sought to plant an indigenous church in India. This was consistent with mission strategy that developed out of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's three-self theory of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁶ The development of self-financing, self-administering, and self-propagating churches was meant to create churches that would participate in the missionary advance and be free of dependence on Western resources. Additionally, Venn came to envision missionary activity as the planting of churches that embodied the exigencies and circumstances of their contexts and not the simple "transplanting" of the home church into new places.¹⁵⁷ During the first six decades of the twentieth century missiologists described the goal of mission activity as the establishment of indigenous churches, although there was ongoing discussion about what that meant and how best to cultivate indigenization.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Henry Venn's Legacy," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 2 (1977): 16–19; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 4 (1981): 168–72; Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983).

¹⁵⁷ Peter Williams, "Not Transplanting' Henry Venn's Strategic Vision," in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147–72.

¹⁵⁸ P. O. Philip, "The Indigenous Church: An Indian View," in *The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches*, vol. 3, 8 vols., Reports of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24 - April 8, 1928 (New York: International Missionary Council, 1928), 154–64;

MBMC missionaries participated in the wider conversation about how best to ensure that the church in India would be indigenous. From the beginning they articulated some form of the three-self theory.¹⁵⁹ In 1908 J. A. Ressler addressed the Mid-India Missionary Association on “How to Best Further the Establishment of a Self-Propagating Indian Church.”¹⁶⁰ George Lapp envisioned a church that was free of foreign domination and support and argued that missionaries should support “wholeheartedly the policies of an indigenous corporate body of Christ.”¹⁶¹ The church was to be “wholly Indian in tradition, policy and expression.”¹⁶² Later in the century Graber regularly sent literature that advocated indigenous approaches, such as that of Stanley Soltau and Donald McGavran, to his missionaries and to Indian church leaders.¹⁶³

Missionary Edwin Weaver found this helpful, shared the material with his Indian co-

International Missionary Council, “The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches,” in *The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches*, 165–74; International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tamaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938*, 24–26, 44–46; International Missionary Council, “The Indigenous Church - the Universal Church in Its Local Setting,” in *The Missionary Obligation of the Church* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1952); William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions; a Laymen’s Inquiry after One Hundred Years*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1932), 82, 87–88, 106–108, 115; Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1947), 313–328, 407–427; R. Pierce Beaver, “The History of Mission Strategy,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Steven C. Hawthorne and Ralph D. Winter, Revised (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1992), 58–72.

¹⁵⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 165, 173; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 197.

¹⁶⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 97.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 12, 1955 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 25, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and Edwin I. Weaver, March 26, 1955, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary 1951-1955; S. N. Solomon to J. D. Graber, March 19, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, India Secretary 1956-58.

workers, and engaged them in discussion about it.¹⁶⁴ Weaver wrote to Graber that in McGavran's *Bridges of God* he found helpful analyses and approaches that were new to him.¹⁶⁵ Such an affirmation of McGavran's missiological reflections about India is important given Weaver's argument that they were not applicable to the situation that he found in Nigeria five years later.¹⁶⁶ Mission strategy that was helpful in one context would not necessarily be applicable in another context.

Indigenous church thinking assumed that Indian agency would be increasingly important as a mission-planted church matured, particularly in the propagation of the church. Indeed MBMC missionaries recognized the importance of Indian workers from the beginning. They believed that Indian Christians were better than they at communicating the gospel to other Indians. AMM employed colporteurs, evangelists, and Bible women who did much of the evangelistic outreach.¹⁶⁷ The first Indian deacons were ordained in 1913, and in 1917 the church organized a home mission, financed and staffed by the Indians.¹⁶⁸ It opened at least two home mission stations, although they were not very successful.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 12, 1955; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and Edwin I. Weaver; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 16, 1955 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 19, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1955 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 24, 1956.

¹⁶⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 24, 1956.

¹⁶⁶ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

¹⁶⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 160–161.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 170, 163.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

Missionaries were slow, however, to cede positions of authority that might have empowered Indian leaders to be more successful at self-propagation. In their annual business meeting of 1921, they resolved to shift responsibilities to Indian personnel whenever possible, but the process was gradual.¹⁷⁰ It was not until 1931 that a Mennonite congregation chose the first Indian pastor, although eight years later five of the ten congregations had Indian pastors.¹⁷¹ In 1930 AMM established the Evangelization Board made up of eight Indians and eight missionaries in order to give more responsibility to Indians in evangelistic efforts.¹⁷² It was not until the Mennonite Church in India was formally organized and succeeded the AMM with the unification of church and mission in 1952, however, that Indians would come to direct the entire church program.¹⁷³ Subsequently MBMC gradually reduced the number of missionaries as a way to assist the church to take over primary responsibility for its program.¹⁷⁴ By 1955, missionary Edwin Weaver noted a “strong indigenous movement” in the church as it moved to develop its capacity for self-propagation.¹⁷⁵ He was convinced that the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 174–175.

¹⁷¹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 207; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 170; J. N. Kauffman, "Report of the Indian Mission," in *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the MBMC*, Annual Report (Metamora, IL: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 22, 1932), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 2, Minutes 1927-1933.

¹⁷² J. N. Kauffman, "Reports of Foreign Missions, India," in *Report of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of MBMC*, Annual Report (Wellman, IA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 3, 1931).

¹⁷³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 190–191.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁷⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 11, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 12, 1955.

church had been successfully planted and would continue regardless of the presence or absence of foreign missionaries.¹⁷⁶ One of the examples to which he pointed was the establishment of a church in the town of Kanker. Numerous missionaries had failed in their attempts to plant a church there, but in 1956 the Mennonite Church in India (MCI) dedicated a Kanker congregation that one of its own leaders had started.¹⁷⁷

Early Indian involvement in evangelization efforts and in the home mission initiative indicates progress towards the ideal of a self-propagating church, but financial self-support was an illusive goal. Nevertheless, there were small steps in that direction. Apart from buildings and pastoral support, congregational life was self-funding by 1920 and during the 1930s the church instituted a pastoral support fund that church member dues financed.¹⁷⁸ Mission programs and their institutions, however, were costly and hardly sustainable by local resources alone.¹⁷⁹ When AMM opened a new mission field in Bihar, India to add to its work centered at Dhamtari, it reiterated its commitment to planting a church that was as self-supporting as possible within the local communities' economic structures from the very beginning.¹⁸⁰ There MBMC missionaries followed an "indigenous" mission strategy that called for applying the principle of self-support from

¹⁷⁶ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 18, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1955 Confidential.

¹⁷⁷ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 12, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential.

¹⁷⁸ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 168.

¹⁷⁹ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 203–205.

¹⁸⁰ *Minutes of the Joint Session of the Executive and Mission Committees of the MBMC*, (Yoder, KS: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 16, 1941), IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1939-46.

the very beginning instead of building mission-financed structures that would be handed over in due time.¹⁸¹

Experience during the first four decades of the India work had heightened the awareness of the challenges of dependency on western funds and a recommitment to the three-self formula, at least with respect to finances. In 1955 Weaver noted, referring to the older Dhamtari centered field, that self-propagation and self-government in the church were “practically a reality;” it was self-finance that was illusive.¹⁸² In an attempt to model the move towards self-finance he started raising chickens as a “stewardship program” to raise money for the church.¹⁸³ The challenge of self-support was ongoing during the decade after MBMC dissolved AMM and handed over its work to the MCI in 1952. The mission sought to incrementally decrease its financial support of the Indian church and the former mission institutions it inherited.¹⁸⁴ The goal of an indigenous church meant the eventual withdrawal of foreign support and personnel from India.

¹⁸¹ Ernest. E. Miller, “What Shall Be the Place of the Native Church in Our Mennonite Foreign Mission Program” 1945 or 1946, 8–9, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51.

¹⁸² The Weaver Family to Supporters, March 15, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

¹⁸³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 14, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential.

¹⁸⁴ “Development Toward an Indigenous Church in Mennonite Mission and Church in C. P., India,” March 1950, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; J. D. Graber to P. J. Malagar, September 8, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Malagar, P J 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and Edwin I. Weaver; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 6, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and Edwin Weaver, January 20, 1956 and J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon, April 5, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, India Secretary 1956-58; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 24, 1956 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 25, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential; J. D. Graber to E. P. Bachan, July 5, 1956 and J. D. Graber to E. P. Bachan, October 1, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, India Secretary 1956-58.

While Indian Mennonites sometimes agreed with the goal of self-support, they protested against reductions in MBMC financial assistance. They worked to prevent such reductions with a number of different arguments. They contended that Indians needed assistance to build their economic capacity, that a successful transfer of authority from mission to church depended on ongoing support for at least a limited period, that the missionaries' goal of the establishment of the church was not completed as long as it could not meet its own financial needs, and that the mission had a moral obligation to assist it.¹⁸⁵ Such challenges reinforced the missionaries' commitment to avoid contributing to financial dependency and to support the principle of the self-financing church from the very beginning in new fields of work. These kinds of concerns were not theirs alone but reflected wider twentieth century missiological thinking.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 28, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1955 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 18, 1955; "Address Presented by the India Mennonite Conference to the Fraternal Delegates from America" (Address, November 27, 1949), IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Unification Commission 1950-1953; D. A. Sonwani to MBMC India Missionaries, January 16, 1950, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; P. J. Malagar to J. D. Graber, August 14, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Malagar, P J 1951-1955; A. K. Biswas to J. D. Graber, August 22, 1953, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary Confidential 1953-1955; J. D. Graber to Members of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 26, 1955, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, Executive Committee 1953-55; S. N. Solomon to The Executive Committee, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 19, 1956 and S. N. Solomon to J. D. Graber, April 30, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, India Secretary 1956-58; Stephen N. Solomon, "Current Issues Facing the Mennonite Church in India," in *Report of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1956), 59-61; E. P. Bachan, "Changing Attitudes and Developments Within the Mennonite Church in India," in *Reports of the Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1957), 57-59; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 210.

¹⁸⁶ Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 425; Committee for Southern Asia, "Some Living Issues Before the Church in India" (Division of Foreign Missions, NCCC, January 1957), IV-18-13-02, Box 6, India - General 1956-60.

The movement towards self-government was also uncertain. Indian Mennonites desired it, but missionaries were hesitant to confer it without similar increased self-financing.¹⁸⁷ Giving more authority and independence to Indian churches was a common strategy among Christian missions in India during the first half of the twentieth Century.¹⁸⁸ For its part AMM organized the India Mennonite Conference in 1912, the precursor to the MCI that came into being in 1952.¹⁸⁹ Membership included the missionaries, ordained officers of the church, and delegates from each congregation. The Conference had decision-making power over church affairs but not over those of the AMM. Indian members outnumbered missionaries, but the conference did not elect the first Indian moderator, chief official of the Conference, until 1951. At first the Conference kept its minutes in both English and Hindi, but after 1933 only in Hindi.¹⁹⁰ Indian agitation for more say in the matters of the AMM increased in the late 1920s with the result that Indian representatives were appointed to the major mission committees and a committee was appointed to study mission and church policy.¹⁹¹ The committee published its *Report of the Committee on Transfer of Work to Indian Hands* in which it summarized the steps already taken and outlined options for continuing the process.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 174.

¹⁸⁸ Beaver, "The History of Mission Strategy."

¹⁸⁹ "India Mennonite Conference," March 1950, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

¹⁹⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 168-169; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 213.

¹⁹¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 175.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 176.

Conference accepted the proposition of the *Report* to appoint yet another committee to continue studying the problem of mission/church relationships and the transfer of mission work to the church. The practical results of the committee appear to have been negligible.¹⁹³

As India moved towards independence from British colonial rule, churches were not exempt from the push for self-rule. Indian Mennonites' desire for a similar shift of control of ecclesial structures to indigenous actors intensified.¹⁹⁴ Sensing the direction of such movement, the missionaries asked MBMC to move toward turning over church buildings to the Conference.¹⁹⁵ Hesitance to do so risked giving the impression that the mission was “unsympathetic toward the natural development of the church.”¹⁹⁶ In addition, a shortage of missionary personnel during World War II demonstrated the need for more national leadership.¹⁹⁷ In December of 1945 the mission and church instituted a new experimental India Mennonite Mission (IMM) that included fourteen Indian Mennonites in the mission structure.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Ibid., 177; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 216–218.

¹⁹⁴ Miller, “What Shall Be the Place of the Native Church in Our Mennonite Foreign Mission Program”; Graber, “Field Reports of Missions, India.”

¹⁹⁵ J. D. Graber, “Transfer of India Church Properties,” in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1940), 22–23.

¹⁹⁶ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 178.

¹⁹⁷ Weaver, “The Indigenous Church in India,” 148–54.

¹⁹⁸ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 180; “Constitution of the India Mennonite Mission,” 1946, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, India - Church - Mission Relation 1959.

In the long run neither the missionaries nor the Indians were satisfied with the new setup. Gaining national independence in 1947 through the nonviolent movement led by Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indians expected more participation in decision-making and control of church structures. Instead they felt that they were still in “spiritual bondage,” that those included in the mission structures were mere figureheads without real influence or power.¹⁹⁹ Despite such misgivings, the India Mennonite Conference requested that the experimental structure be finalized.²⁰⁰ For their part missionaries were disappointed with what seemed like material motives of their Indian colleagues and an institutional mission structure that threatened to undermine the church by encouraging a focus on its own program and priorities.²⁰¹ The missionaries asked MBMC to revoke the IMM experiment in 1949, and the Board reluctantly complied.²⁰² The former AMM structure came into force once again.

Indian church leaders were not in agreement with the decision to revoke the IMM experiment and reacted with conviction. They argued that they had not been

¹⁹⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 181–182; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 21, 1948.

²⁰⁰ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, Meeting Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 8, 1949), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950; “Address Presented by the India Mennonite Conference to the Fraternal Delegates from America.”

²⁰¹ Jonathan Yoder to J. D. Graber, March 26, 1948, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 21, 1948, and R. R. Smucker to Ernest E. Miller and J. D. Graber, May 9, 1949, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

²⁰² Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 182; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 9, 1949), 181–182, IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950.

consulted and resorted to a strategy of noncooperation with the missionaries to express their discontent and recuperate their losses.²⁰³ Indian Mennonites boycotted mission and church activities throughout 1949 and 1950 and appealed directly to MBMC to enact an amalgamation, by which they meant “complete integration or merging of the Mission in the Church to form one body.”²⁰⁴ The MBMC missions and executive committees weighed their options, and the mission responded positively to the Indian church’s request, mandating the unification of church and mission at its annual meeting in 1950.²⁰⁵ A decade earlier the missionaries had refused to move in that direction, arguing from the example of the Apostle Paul that church and mission were separate and should remain so, but times were changing.²⁰⁶

The middle decades of the twentieth century had brought significant changes that affected the church/mission relationship. Given the movement away from colonialism in Indian society, Graber had been arguing for some time that some sort of power sharing

²⁰³ “Address Presented by the India Mennonite Conference to the Fraternal Delegates from America”; D. A. Sonwani to J. D. Graber, April 14, 1950, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 182–188.

²⁰⁴ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 182–188; “Remarks on Indianization,” March 1950, S. N. Solomon to J. D. Graber, February 7, 1950, and S. N. Solomon to MBMC, February 7, 1950, all in IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951; P. J. Malagar, “A Memorandum on Building an Indigenous Church in India” (Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1950), 37–40, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, Malagar, P. J., 1956-59.

²⁰⁵ “Development Toward an Indigenous Church in Mennonite Mission and Church in C. P., India,” March 1950 and “Remarks on Indianization,” March 1950; “Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship,” in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 82–83; J. D. Graber to S. N. Solomon and G. H. Beare, June 21, 1950, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51.

²⁰⁶ *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the American Mennonite Mission*, (Balodgahan, India: American Mennonite Mission, November 14, 1939), IV-17-1 AMM India Bus Mtg Minutes 1933-1939.

or power transfer was necessary.²⁰⁷ Failing to act would only prove embarrassing in the long run and risked driving the educated Indian leadership away from the church. The situation in China, where under pressure from the government the church had declared its independence from foreign missionaries, foreign funds, and even western churches, raised the possibility that a similar situation might arise in India.²⁰⁸ The Cold War was heating up, raising apocalyptic possibilities of political instability and another World War.²⁰⁹ The possibility that Indian Mennonites might be cut off from MBMC assistance because of war or an unfriendly political situation heightened the urgency of the move toward self-government and self-financing.

Since the experimental IMM had not succeeded in providing a structure for mission/church collaboration, the more radical transfer of power, amalgamation of church and mission, was the obvious option that remained. It had the added advantages of Indian support and of calming the fears of MBMC and of some of the missionaries that the separate mission structure, with its significant budget, programs, institutions, and career opportunities tended to draw attention, time, energy and qualified personnel away from the church and its ministry.²¹⁰ Weaver had already warned about this danger

²⁰⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, February 4, 1948, J. D. Graber, "Procedures in the India Mennonite Mission, A Line of Reasoning," February 4, 1948, and J. D. Graber to Jonathan Yoder, April 20, 1948, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

²⁰⁸ J. D. Graber to P. J. Malagar, October 18, 1950, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51.

²⁰⁹ J. D. Graber to India Missionaries, April 6, 1951.

²¹⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 21, 1948; "India Mennonite Mission-Church Relationship," n.d., IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission

and advocated for handing over to, and integrating into, the church certain fields or departments of the mission in order to relativize the significance of the mission and reinforce the church, cultivating in it the opportunity for revival and new life.²¹¹ The mission's strategy should be church-centered instead of mission-centered he thought. Graber noted that the memorandum in which MBMC mandated the church/mission unification drew "rather heavily" on Weaver's thinking.²¹² This conscious move from a mission-focused to a church-focused strategy demonstrates the increasing importance of the church and the growing awareness that church and mission could not be neatly separated. This was consistent with missiological thinking in the wider mission movement during the twentieth century.²¹³

MBMC mandated the unification of church and mission at its annual meeting in 1950, but it would take more than a board decision to move the process forward. In the fray of disagreements over the rescinded IMM and the subsequent plan for amalgamation, relationships between Indian Mennonites and the missionaries continued

Relations 1947-1951; "Remarks on Indianization," March 1950; R. R. Smucker to Ernest E. Miller and J. D. Graber.

²¹¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 15, 1947.

²¹² J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 4, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

²¹³ International Missionary Council, "The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches," 166-168; International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tamaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938*, 22-24; John Alexander Mackay, "The Church's Task in the Realm of Thought, Reflections on the Oxford Conference," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 31, no. 3 (1937): 3-9; Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 2, 34, 43.

to be strained.²¹⁴ In addition, the missionaries were unsure of what kind of structure MBMC desired. Seeing no way forward in this context of discord and uncertainty, the missionaries requested general secretary Graber's presence to guide the elaboration of the new structure.²¹⁵ Mission board members had already considered the significance of such a visit in their earlier deliberations about amalgamation.²¹⁶ If they sent a representative to negotiate directly with the church, the missionaries would lose their status as its primary representatives on the field. On the other hand, if they threw the ball back into the laps of the missionaries and the church, expecting them to re-engage each other and negotiate a way forward, they could affirm both the autonomy of the church and their confidence in the missionaries. The recent failure of mission/church collaboration through the now rescinded IMM, the push for amalgamation by Indian Mennonites, and an awareness of the post-colonial and Cold War political and social context that could result in World War III, were likely factors as they weighed the options.

In the end MBMC sent Graber to India. He visited from December 1950 to March 1951 and worked with a unification commission to outline the structure of a new

²¹⁴ Paul Erb and S. C. Yoder, "Report of Fraternal Delegates to India," in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 76–78, 85; J. W. Samida to J. D. Graber, October 11, 1950, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-51.

²¹⁵ *American Mennonite Mission Meeting Minutes*, (Shantipur, India: American Mennonite Mission, October 26, 1950), IV-17-1 AMM India Bus Mtg Minutes 1940-41, 1944-52 and IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - American Mennonite Association 1952-55; George Beare to J. D. Graber, October 30, 1950 and George Beare to J. D. Graber, October 31, 1950, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

²¹⁶ "Remarks on Indianization," March 1950.

amalgamated mission and church.²¹⁷ This transfer integrated the mission program and institutions into the church and instituted greater Indian control of the work. MBMC agreed to assign its missionaries to the service of the MCI. The AMM ceased to exist as a controlling missionary entity on July 1, 1952. From that point forward the mission would officially relate directly to the MCI without missionary intermediaries. MBMC considered this move to be consistent with its principle that the mission must decrease and the church increase.²¹⁸ Among the missionaries some, such as Weaver, were convinced that unification of mission and church was the correct move.²¹⁹ Others found the change too much to bear, and it led to their early retirement.²²⁰ Indeed the issue of when and how a western mission should hand control of ecclesial and/or mission structures over to indigenous Christians was a common missiological theme of the epoch. Already in 1928 the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council

²¹⁷ J. D. Graber, "Report on Central Provinces, India, Mission," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 87–89.

²¹⁸ J. D. Graber, "Report on Central Provinces, India, Mission;" "Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 97; "Resolutions, IV. Merging of Church and Mission in the Central Province, India," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 95; "Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship," in *Report of the Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1952), 95–96; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 182–188; Wilbur Hostetler to J. D. Graber, July 24, 1952, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary 1951-1955.

²¹⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 20, 1951.

²²⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 189.

had identified nineteen official statements by different missions around the world on devolution of control from mission to local church structures.²²¹

In the years following the unification of church and mission there were encouraging signs that in fact the Indian church was making progress towards the indigenization ideal. After his visit to India in early 1954, Graber reported that he had found good relationships between North American missionaries and Indian leaders.²²² The latter had progressively taken on more of the administrative load of the church and the varied projects it had inherited from the mission. This was so even if the institutions were too costly to be funded solely from Indian sources and despite the appearance of competing parties within the church that impeded ideal fellowship. Weaver too reported that, in addition to more Indian governance, Indian leaders accepted more responsibility for church ministries such as evangelization and that they recognized the disadvantages of reliance on foreign personnel and foreign funds.²²³

The move towards a more indigenous church had been motivated by the larger political context, by the desire of the Indian church, and by the recognition that an indigenous church had been the goal of MBMC's work in India from the beginning. Despite the progress embodied in the unification process, the Indian church still faced a

²²¹ International Missionary Council, *The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches*, 109, 114–115, 127–128 and Appendix A.

²²² J. D. Graber, *Report of Visit to Madhya Pradesh, India*, Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 1954), IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - General 1951-1955.

²²³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 15, 1954; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 1, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

number of challenges: how to adapt a western-style, institutional mission setup to the realities of the Indian context and how to reinforce the spiritual life and faith of the church.²²⁴ Missionary concerns about mission institutions such as schools, hospitals, and other charitable institutions creating difficulties for the newly autonomous church turned out to be well founded. In the years following amalgamation different parties in the church vied for power, at least in part to gain control of the institutions that had been integrated into the church structure.²²⁵ Graber eventually spent five months, November 1959 to March 1960, in India helping the church decentralize its structure and set up independent management boards for the various ministries of medical work, Christian education, and literacy and audio-visual work.²²⁶ In order to counter “local interests and party spirit” Graber and church leaders set up boards that represented a wider base than the Mennonite Church in India, that were autonomous of the church, and that could receive personnel and financial assistance directly from the mission.²²⁷

²²⁴ Weaver, “The Indigenous Church in India.”

²²⁵ S. N. Solomon to J. D. Graber, October 14, 1955, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary Confidential 1953-1955; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 18, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59 Confidential; John H. Yoder to Executive Committee of MBMC, February 1960, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - General 1951-1955.

²²⁶ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 194.

²²⁷ John H. Yoder to Executive Committee of MBMC, February 1960, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - General 1951-1955; *Executive Committee Minutes*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 10, 1960), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4.

After its India experience MBMC was more careful about choosing between the theoretical absolute alternatives of “indigenous control” or “mission control” in its mission initiatives. When administrative or technical supervision of institutions threatened to cause power struggles in the church or rob it of energy to complete its spiritual responsibilities, the mission sought to create separate structures.²²⁸ Edwin and Irene Weaver’s first months among AICs in Nigeria, when they were discerning how to respond to churches’ requests for schools and medical dispensaries, corresponded with Graber’s 1959/1960 visit to India. MBMC’s India experience, particularly the challenge of protecting the church from the temptation of focusing an inordinate amount of its time and energy on mission institutions such as schools and hospitals, would greatly influence their missionary approach among AICs in West Africa where they resisted creating such institutions for the church.

Beyond Three-Self Theory

While the attempt to cultivate indigenous churches focused primarily on the three-self formula, over the twentieth century MBMC missionaries filled the term with broader meaning. The formula sometimes had the feel of being a mission strategy that simply sought efficient church planting.²²⁹ Additionally, the principle of self-finance

²²⁸ John H. Yoder to David Shank, Pierre Widmer, Robert Witmer, Bob Stetter, and Paul Lehman, March 22, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 116, European Missions 1959-1960; *Executive Committee and Conjoint Meeting with Personnel Committee*, Meeting Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 11, 1960), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4; J. D. Graber to P. J. Malagar, July 7, 1960, IV-18-03-02, Box 9, Mennonite World Conference 1962.

²²⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 97; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 210.

held the promise of reducing the financial burden on the mission.²³⁰ In 1938, however, George Lapp envisioned a church that was “wholly Indian in tradition, policy and expression” and argued that missionaries should be willing to support the policies and identify with the interests and problems of the indigenous church.²³¹ In 1946 E. E. Miller wrote that “indigenous” also suggested a rejection of the “foreignness” that characterized many mission-planted churches.²³² Often western missionaries had introduced foreign ways of dress, manners, and worship that were unintelligible to nationals. That is, they had transplanted their own cultural assumptions along with the Christian faith. Nationals objected and used the term “indigenous” to describe the alternative, a church that embodied the faith in a particular local culture different from that of the home church.

By the early to mid 1950s, with the new reality of the unification of mission and church in India, indigenization had become a guiding principle for MBMC. Graber obtained permission from HIS, an Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship student magazine, to reproduce an article by T. Stanley Soltau that advocated a radical indigenization that prohibited mission financing for building and for salaries from the very beginning of a mission initiative.²³³ This he sent to MBMC home and foreign missionaries.²³⁴

²³⁰ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 222.

²³¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 145.

²³² Miller, “What Shall Be the Place of the Native Church in Our Mennonite Foreign Mission Program,” 8.

²³³ Gertrud DeGroot to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 4, Planting the Church 1953; T. Stanley Soltau, “Planting the Church Abroad,” *HIS*, May 1952, IV-18-10, Box 4, Planting the Church 1953.

Despite clear indigenous church rhetoric, MBMC missionaries did not apply rigidly indigenous theory as developed by the likes of Soltau. In the new Bihar field they were quite explicit in their articulation of their indigenous theory and strategy and their hesitancy to establish institutions.²³⁵ Nevertheless, their reports and action plans show mission financing for local personnel and projects.²³⁶ Admittedly they steered clear of the heavy institutional commitments that MBMC had developed around Dhamtari, but during the 1950s the Bihar initiative depended on the mission's assistance and eventually added a high school and hospital to its ministries.²³⁷ Graber's understanding allowed for such elasticity with respect to indigenous church theory. His annual report to MBMC in 1957 supported indigenization but cautioned that indigenous mission methods had to be adapted to the contexts in which they were applied.²³⁸ What worked in one place would not necessarily work in another place, and sometimes it was advantageous to assist newly planted mission churches with financial assistance despite radical indigenous theory that prohibited it. In addition, prioritizing indigenous actors did not

²³⁴ J. D. Graber to Missionaries of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 19, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 4, Planting the Church 1953.

²³⁵ S. Allen Shirk to J. D. Graber, December 15, 1954 and S. Allen Shirk, *Future Program of the Bihar Mennonite Mission* (Bihar, India, December 15, 1954), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Bihar - 1951-54; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 217.

²³⁶ *Detailed Self-Support Plan for Pastors of the Bihar Mennonite Church* (Bihar, India, December 15, 1954), S. Allen Shirk, *Steps Towards Indigenizing* (Bihar, India, December 15, 1954), John E. Beachy, *Self-Support in the Program of the Indigenous Bihar Mennonite Church* (Bihar, India, December 15, 1954), and John E. Beachy, *Plan for Bible Training School* (Bihar, India, December 15, 1954), all in IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Bihar - 1951-54.

²³⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 217–218.

²³⁸ J. D. Graber, "Making Indigenous Principles Work," in *Reports of the Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1957), 8–13.

preclude the need for more western missionaries. In fact, more missionaries and more missionary initiatives were needed.²³⁹ Graber sought to balance the need for increased indigenization with the imperative he saw for Mennonites to engage the world with missionary initiatives.

Weaver too understood the indigenous church principle to be broader than an adherence to three-self theory. The 1953 MBMC annual report contained his article “The Indigenous Church in India,” in which he made the following points.²⁴⁰ The church in India was the work of divine initiative and not that of the mission. The three-self formula did not sufficiently take into account the unity of the church. That unity should continue to be demonstrated by fellowship between the North American and Indian Mennonite churches. Three-self theory should not result in an “independent” Indian church but in maturity in Christ and in “interdependence and inter-fellowship” between the North American and Indian churches, goals that were ongoing.²⁴¹ In order to move towards accomplishing those goals Weaver suggested “relatively less emphasis on institutions and more emphasis upon the church... less emphasis on its [the church’s] organization and more emphasis on its spiritual life,” and finally “less emphasis upon lands and buildings and more emphasis upon people.”²⁴² In Weaver’s article he attempted to hold together his concern for a church-centered focus with the recognition

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Weaver, “The Indigenous Church in India.”

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

that mission activity flows from divine initiative. The tension in broader missiological thinking during the 1960s between church-focused mission and *missio Dei* was a similar manifestation of this dynamic.²⁴³

For MBMC and its missionaries indigenization became a goal instead of a method that could be applied to achieve defined outcomes. It contained not only the concern for a church that was self-financed, self-governed, and self-propagating, but also for a church that was wholly Indian in its Mennonite faith expressions. It also allowed for ongoing elasticity in methods and strategies as different local contexts presented new missionary challenges. In addition, indigenization made room for ongoing relationships between the sending church and the newly autonomous church that now had the capacity to make decisions about how Mennonite faith would be expressed in its context. The vision for that relationship was one of fellowship and interdependence, indicating that both sides would need, and benefit from, each other. Such an understanding of indigenization anticipated in some measure the missiological concept of “contextualization” that Shoki Coe would introduce two decades later.²⁴⁴

Mission Strategy

At the beginning of the twentieth century Mennonites had not yet developed their own mission philosophy, goals, or strategies as they later would. When the need arose

²⁴³ Johannes Aagaard, “Trends in Missiological Thinking During the Sixties,” *International Review of Mission* 62 (1973): 8–25.

²⁴⁴ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 62; Shoki Coe, “In Search of Renewal in Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 233–43.

they appropriated what they found in the larger Protestant missionary movement.²⁴⁵ The missionaries who had first arrived in India in 1899 were no exception. While they had no specialized training in mission strategy, once there they interacted with other North American and European missionaries and learned about and appropriated contemporary mission strategy of the time.²⁴⁶ By mid century MBMC Secretary Graber was expressing the opinion that mission strategy had to be tailored to particular contexts since “each people have their own problems and their own characteristics.”²⁴⁷ He also lamented the way mission strategy and practice had too often been influenced by colonial assumptions that resulted in spiritual imperialism in tandem with political imperialism.²⁴⁸ To discourage the establishment of mission empires that risked overshadowing local church initiatives, the mission established a “principle of sending smaller groups of missionaries to more places.”²⁴⁹ By the sixth decade of the twentieth century, Mennonite missionaries had gained experience on which to reflect and from which they might suggest strategy. They were still part of the larger western missionary movement, but they no longer relied solely on missiological reflection of others.

This subsection will outline MBMC’s deliberations about and experience of missionary strategy in India, particularly with respect to the mission institutions that it

²⁴⁵ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 40–41.

²⁴⁶ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 43.

²⁴⁷ J. D. Graber to D. A. Sonwani, July 15, 1952.

²⁴⁸ Graber, “Making Indigenous Principles Work.”

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

established and the phenomenon of mass movements to Christianity that some missions experienced. Like others, early Mennonite missionaries assumed that the establishment of orphanages, schools, vocational training centers, and health facilities were essential to their work. As the concern for indigenization increased, missionary commitment to building institutions waned as it became apparent that the Indian church would find it difficult to maintain institutions that had relied heavily on subsidies from North America. Mennonite missionaries were hopeful that they might experience a mass movement of people into their church after other missions in India experienced such movements. Much to their chagrin this never materialized. Nevertheless, experience with mission institutions and mass movement theory provided Mennonite missionaries the background upon which they could reflect and from which they could develop their own strategy and theory in the post-colonial context of the mid to late twentieth century.

Mission Institutions

From the beginning of their time in India, MBMC missionaries expected the creation of mission institutions to be integral to their strategy. This is perhaps not surprising since the creation of modern institutions was a characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century North America. The North American Mennonite Church (MC) was no exception, and by the mid 1950s its mission board, MBMC, owned and/or administered five hospitals, four institutions for the care of the elderly, and three child

welfare institutions in the United States alone.²⁵⁰ For the church the early decades of the century were a time of organizing and institution building, including the establishment of a mission board.

Mennonite missionaries arrived to India anticipating the creation of institutions such as an orphanage and a hospital as a way to gain entry into the Dhamtari community. It had been the famine of 1897 that had motivated the establishment of the India mission, and with yet another famine in 1900 orphanages were a way to provide for children who had lost their families.²⁵¹ Other institutions such as homes for aged men and women as well as for the deaf and blind, asylums for lepers, schools, health dispensaries, and hospitals became part of the mission enterprise.²⁵² Some of these institutions lasted for only brief periods, but their establishment indicates their importance in MBMC mission strategy. The missionaries considered orphanages in particular to be the best way to build a church.²⁵³ They had a point; by 1923 they reported that ninety-five percent of their workers had been orphans that AMM had supported during the famine of 1900. In 1930 M. C. Lehman reported that more than eighty-five percent of the Mennonite Church members had passed through the mission's

²⁵⁰ Theron Schlabach, "The Urge to Make Institutions," in *Gospel Versus Gospel*, 83–108; J. D. Graber, "Report of the Secretary," in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 16–18.

²⁵¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 44, 101–102.

²⁵² John A. Lapp, "Mission Charity," in *The Mennonite Church in India*, 101–11; John A. Lapp, "Mission Medicine," in *The Mennonite Church in India*, 112–16; John A. Lapp, "Mission Education," in *The Mennonite Church in India*, 117–35; Esch, *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir Booklet*, 19–22.

²⁵³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 102.

orphanages and schools.²⁵⁴ As the orphans matured, the need to educate them naturally arose, and schools were a logical institutional solution.²⁵⁵ By 1932 both the boys' and girls' orphanages in Dhamtari had been converted into boarding hostels for high school and middle school students.²⁵⁶ Institutions seemed to beget other institutions.

While mission schools were an outgrowth of the needs of an orphan population that was reaching school age, they also were part of missionary strategy. Schools not only provided opportunities to draw students into the church, but the students themselves could then take the Gospel message into their communities and homes.²⁵⁷ In addition, missionaries reasoned that if the church was to become indigenous, it would need literate and educated persons to fill leadership roles and perform specific tasks in the church program.²⁵⁸ They also hoped that graduates of mission schools would fill community and government positions and show good will toward the church. Through the mission schools missionaries sought practical benefits rather than a more ambiguous love of learning for its own sake.

Upon the unification of church and mission in 1952, the mission hospitals, dispensaries, schools, and the leper home were integrated into the Mennonite Church in India (MCI). They were to be an expression of the Christian vitality of the Indian

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 119.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 117.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 103.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 118–119.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 119–120.

church, not of a foreign mission.²⁵⁹ Some of the missionaries, such as Edwin and Irene Weaver, regretted that there had been no attempt at transforming these institutions into more indigenous entities before the transfer.²⁶⁰ They doubted whether institutions conceived and created by the mission would be adequate and sustainable in the context of the new amalgamated church and mission. Edwin Weaver opined that the church taking over these foreign institutions was akin to the biblical figure of David trying to fight with Saul's armor.²⁶¹ In his report to MBMC in 1953, Graber wrote that at their best, mission institutions were expressions of the life of the church, but if they maintained their foreignness and overshadowed the life of the local church they risked becoming "a missionary liability."²⁶²

The mission encouraged the same move towards self-support for mission institutions as it did for the MCI. It understood, however, the need for ongoing support for institutions that the mission had founded with funding that came from the wealth of the North American economy.²⁶³ It was the hospitals and dispensaries that were best

²⁵⁹ "Development Toward an Indigenous Church in Mennonite Mission and Church in C. P., India."

²⁶⁰ Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 25, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

²⁶¹ Weaver, "Some Principles to Be Considered in Charting the Future Course of the Church."

²⁶² J. D. Graber, "Report of the Secretary," in *Report of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1953), 15-17; Graber, *Report of Visit to Madhya Pradesh, India*.

²⁶³ J. D. Graber to A. K. Biswas, July 30, 1953, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary 1951-1955; Graber, *Report of Visit to Madhya Pradesh, India*.

able to make the transition from mission institutions to local ownership and control.²⁶⁴ They became largely self-supporting, receiving from the outside only the services of a few mission doctors and nurses.²⁶⁵ Indian physicians played significant leadership roles, and the Dhamtari community's assistance to the hospital increased.

Achieving self-support of the educational work of the mission was more difficult. Education had grown to be the largest part of the mission budget and required more administrative time than any other single activity.²⁶⁶ Government subsidies became available starting in 1912 and would eventually provide one third of the budget. Costs included teachers' salaries, construction and maintenance of infrastructure, and scholarships. Schools were dependent on mission and government subsidies and faced competition from municipal and village schools. Between 1952 and 1962 four of the mission's primary schools closed because of reductions in funding from MBMC.²⁶⁷ In 1958 the normal school closed due to more stringent government regulations and reduced government funding. More dependent on outside assistance, mission schools were not as prepared to weather the move towards self-support as were the hospitals and dispensaries.

By the middle of the twentieth century MBMC was reassessing the place of institutions in its mission strategy. It refocused its strategy away from long-term support

²⁶⁴ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 115, 200.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 200–202.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 120–122.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

for institutions and toward a more mobile missionary force meant to reinforce indigenous churches.²⁶⁸ Graber came to see mission institutions as part of a strategy that had been at home in the context of colonialism.²⁶⁹ As the colonial empires were losing their force, so mission strategies also had to move into a new age of minimal organizational machinery and intensified identification with the local church. In India institutions had seemed to rob the church of time and energy that would be better invested in spiritual ministries. Reinforcing those ministries was a more appropriate role for the missionary than was the building of institutions in the new post-colonial context Graber thought.

Amalgamation of church and mission did not resolve the sticky question of the future of the institutions that the mission had established in India. The Indian church had at its disposal fewer financial resources than the mission had invested in earlier decades. It simply could not expect to carry on the same institutional program without the support that the North American economy had given to missionaries during the colonial era.²⁷⁰ In addition, following the creation of MCI in 1952, the institutions seemed to aggravate the detrimental effects of “local interests and party spirit” within the church.²⁷¹ Such considerations motivated MBMC to organize the movement of administrative authority

²⁶⁸ John H. Mosemann, “Report of Officers, Report of the President,” in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 15–16; “Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship,” 1950.

²⁶⁹ J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1960), 42.

²⁷⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 208; J. D. Graber to Ernest Bennett and John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 1, Administrative Travel - JD Graber 1959-60.

²⁷¹ J. D. Graber to Ernest Bennett and John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960.

of former mission institutions away from the MCI to autonomous boards just eight years after amalgamation.²⁷² Graber became cautious about the establishment of mission institutions in new fields. The mission now considered a third option with respect to the institutions with which it related on mission fields, neither mission administered nor church administered, but administration by relatively autonomous local boards.²⁷³

The amalgamation of mission and church and the desire of MBMC to reorient its strategy in order to encourage indigenization and to protect the MCI from the dangers of a burdensome mission structure, especially its institutions, was consistent with twentieth century missiological thought. The Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928 addressed issues of the sustainability of mission institutions and of devolution.²⁷⁴ The issues that the mission faced in its relationship with the church that it had planted in India reflect those outlined in both the Jerusalem meeting reports and those from the Tambaram, Madras meetings in 1938.²⁷⁵ Coming late to the missionary task and in particular the India field, MBMC encountered the issues later than did those missions that had preceded it by many decades.

²⁷² J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960; J. D. Graber to Ernest Bennett and John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960.

²⁷³ John H. Yoder to David Shank, Pierre Widmer, Robert Witmer, Bob Stetter, and Paul Lehman, March 22, 1960.

²⁷⁴ International Missionary Council, "The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches," in *The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches*, 165–74; International Missionary Council, "Appendixes, A. Some Official Statements on Devolution," in *The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches*, 189–253.

²⁷⁵ International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tambaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938*.

Mass Movements

The conversion of groups of people, of castes or villages for example, was part of the missionary experience and strategy in India from early in the twentieth century.²⁷⁶ Mennonite missionaries were aware of such movements and for a time were optimistic, reporting signs that a similar dynamic would happen in their district.²⁷⁷ Edwin and Irene Weaver's first assignment in India was a new American Mennonite Mission (AMM) area, Drug, where there were many Satnami people, a group that missionaries hoped would be the source of a mass movement into the faith.²⁷⁸ MBMC missionary A. C. Brunk accompanied J. Waskom Pickett, mass movement expert, in a study of such movements in southern India in October 1934.

The missionaries' hopes for a mass movement in their area, however, were in vain. At the meeting of the Mid-India Christian Council in 1934 where Pickett was speaking, Mennonite missionary G. J. Lapp rose and asked in an impassioned way, "Dr.

²⁷⁶ J. H. Oldham, "A Missionary Survey of the Year 1912, British India and Ceylon," *International Review of Mission* 2, no. 1 (1913): 28–41; International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tamaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938*, 49–50; Jarrell Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India, a Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933).

²⁷⁷ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 52, 214; S. Jay Hostetler, "Special Meetings," in *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1935), 128–30; Hostetler, "Soul Winning Methods That Have Proved Successful in India;" Brunk, "Reports from Foreign Missions, India," 1936; J. D. Graber, "The Evangelistic Samaj," in *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1937), 121; J. D. Graber, "Reports from Foreign Missions and the Mexican Boarder Work, India."

²⁷⁸ "India, Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Mission, Dhantari, C. P., India, 1935, Editorial," 1936.

Pickett, why does not that sort of thing happen here?”²⁷⁹ In 1935 AMM undertook a survey of the different castes in its mission field, hoping the results would assist them in effecting a movement into the church along caste lines.²⁸⁰ Back in North America on furlough the following year, missionary S. J. Hostetler addressed the annual MBMC meeting on the theme “Soul Winning Methods that Have Proved Successful in India.”²⁸¹ He outlined traditional mission methods that Mennonite missionaries used before explaining the mass movement phenomenon and a number of reasons that such movements would likely soon take place in the AMM field. Hostetler described the advantages of group conversion: that new Christians did not have to experience social dislocation and did not become dependent on the missionary compound for their livelihood. Despite such enthusiasm the mass movement phenomenon eluded the missionaries.²⁸²

Hoping to assist missions such as AMM that were not benefiting from the mass movement dynamic, the Mid-India Christian Council organized a study of Christian Mission in Mid-India in early 1936.²⁸³ Its report attempted to identify how and why mass movements started, what made them successful church growth events, and what mission strategies might have encouraged them. It also purported to address for the first

²⁷⁹ J. W. Pickett, D. A. McGavran, and G. H. Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India* (Jubbulpore, India: The Mission Press, 1938), 2.

²⁸⁰ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 23; Brunk, “Reports from Foreign Missions, India,” 1936.

²⁸¹ Hostetler, “Soul Winning Methods That Have Proved Successful in India.”

²⁸² Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 52.

²⁸³ Pickett, McGavran, and Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India*, 1–4.

time how a group movement could arise out of a traditional mission station arrangement.²⁸⁴ The report noted the devotion and thoroughness with which the AMM had staffed and served the Christian community and the public in its field, one of the few missions in India to have so successfully done so.²⁸⁵ It referred to the mission strategy of building up an Indian Christian community so that it could in turn establish Christianity in the land. It noted, “If there is any Mission or any mission station in Mid India where this theory has been given a thorough, devoted, intelligent trial, that Mission is the American Mennonite, and that station is Dhamtari.”²⁸⁶

Despite recognizing AMM’s thoroughness and devotion, the report was devastating in its critique and opined that the mission’s methods impeded church growth and created dependency in the Indian Mennonite community. Like many westerners who thought in individualistic terms, missionaries had often assumed that group conversions produced inferior, perhaps even nominal, Christians.²⁸⁷ AMM support of the Christian community caused Christians to see themselves as a people apart from the general population; those who joined often chose to reside close to mission centers instead of in their village homes. There they benefited from the mission but became separated economically and socially from their own people. Their “economic improvement, intellectual development, social advantage, and religious growth” made them a people

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 111.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 24–33.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 30.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 24–33.

apart and created “a dependent, exclusive group of individualistic Christians, frankly not interested in the addition of others.”²⁸⁸ In addition to creating dependency, AMM’s planning, organization, theory, and heavy institutionalism had produced isolated conversions whereas other types of thinking and organization would have been more conducive to conversions of groups in their natural social units. The survey report argued that AMM’s methods encouraged the conversion of limited numbers of individuals from many castes who were then torn from their societies, instead of encouraging groups to enter the church without social dislocation and in greater numbers. Since Dhamtari-style mission stations were common among the established missions in India, AMM served in this case as a paradigm of general discontent with established mission practices.²⁸⁹

The report recommended that the mission change its strategy. It encouraged AMM to refocus its energies and resources away from resourcing the Christian community in order to concentrate on the evangelization of specific non-Christian castes.²⁹⁰ It also recommended training all Christians to participate in evangelism, believing that voluntary witness by large numbers was a better evangelistic strategy than relying solely on evangelists paid by mission funds.

The mass movement critique of AMM’s work might be understood through the lens of indigenization theory and the rising importance of context. The critique was that

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

²⁸⁹ Beaver, “The History of Mission Strategy.”

²⁹⁰ Pickett, McGavran, and Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India*, 24–33.

Mennonite missionaries had not taken into account the social context of the people they hoped to convert to Christianity. The move to encourage group conversion that did not oblige Indians to leave their natural social units was a remedy that affirmed the integrity of Indian society and set aside assumptions of individual agency that was more characteristic of the missionaries' home society.

Taking the report's critique to heart, the Mennonite missionaries decided to try again by opening up a new field. After investigation with the National Christian Council and with other missions working in Hindi-speaking areas, an opportunity appeared in Bihar Province.²⁹¹ An investigative tour by missionaries Graber, Hostetler, and George Beare in the fall of 1939 resulted in the appointment of Hostetler and his wife to the new field. They arrived there in January 1940, and others would join them the following year. Unfortunately the rate of conversion and the establishment of new congregations in Bihar were not remarkably better than in the field around Dhamtari.²⁹²

Hostetler would be the first MBMC missionary to work in southeastern Nigeria starting in 1958. There AIC leaders presented him with a list of congregations that boasted nearly three thousand members who wanted to become Mennonite, indeed had

²⁹¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 214–218; J. D. Graber, "Special Reports, Report of the India Mission," in *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1941), 12–14; S. J and Ida Hostetler, "A New Beginning"; S. Jay Hostetler, *We Enter Bihar, India: A Statement of Historical Development, Present Progress, Plans, Ideals, and Description of Our Mennonite Mission in Bihar, India, 1940-1950* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 5–8.

²⁹² S. J. Hostetler, *Supplement to We Enter Bihar, India* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954).

already declared themselves as such.²⁹³ After the frustration of the India experience where the mission had been deprived of the kind of mass movement influx into its churches that other missions had experienced, Hostetler must have been greatly encouraged. Hostetler's colleagues Edwin and Irene Weaver followed him in the Nigeria work, were less convinced of the advisability of understanding the Nigeria situation through the lens of mass movement strategy, and would move MBMC work there in a different direction.

The Mid India mass movement survey's critique of AMM's work in India highlights two ironies. First, it noted that AMM's work was thorough and that it had established comprehensive service programs in its territory.²⁹⁴ With respect to traditional mission theory and strategy Mennonite missionaries had actually done as well or better than other missions in Mid India.²⁹⁵ Given that Mennonites had entered into the foreign missions project later than most and that Mennonite missionaries had arrived in 1899 as novices without formal missionary training, this would have been a compliment in an earlier time. They must have been good learners since they were able to assimilate Protestant mission theory and strategy and implement an exemplary missionary enterprise by the 1930s. Of course from the point of view of the report, traditional mission methods were now passé and success at implementing them was actually failure. Nevertheless, it does suggest that Mennonite missionaries found their feet rather

²⁹³ Mennonite Church to Brother and Sister Hostetler, November 23, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

²⁹⁴ Pickett, McGavran, and Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India*, 24.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

successfully after having embarked on their missionary initiative with virtually no missionary preparation whatsoever.

Secondly, the report criticized AMM for producing a separatist Christian community that was out of step with the society around it.²⁹⁶ At the same time that AMM had produced a separatist church out of step with the greater society, protective Mennonites in North America criticized it for not applying strictly enough North American Mennonite cultural markers meant to reinforce nonconformity and separation from the world. The missionaries were, by and large, engagement Mennonites who looked to the larger Protestant missionary movement for their mission theory and strategy. They were quite troubled by the report's critique and were not inclined to find constructive possibilities in it. Over the next half-century, however, MBMC missionaries would come to articulate mission theory and strategy that was less dependent on that of others and that critically engaged mass movement theory.²⁹⁷

Ecumenism and Comity Agreements

While the Mennonite Church (MC) was not particularly ecumenically minded during the first half of the twentieth century, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities missionaries in India did collaborate with missionaries of other denominations and found it useful to participate in ecumenical initiatives. Earlier, towards the end of the nineteenth century, engagement Mennonites had collaborated inter-denominationally, a

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 24, 30.

²⁹⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *The Challenge of Church Growth: A Symposium* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973).

tendency that carried over into the India field.²⁹⁸ From the beginning of the India work when J. A. Ressler sought counsel and assistance from missionaries of other denominations, he and his colleagues maintained close connections with other missions.²⁹⁹ In fact, by the time the MC had initiated the India mission, missionaries across denominations assumed that a spirit of collaboration was beneficial.³⁰⁰ Such relationships were natural; the vast cultural and religious differences between their home society and Indian society would have made differences between western denominations pale in comparison.

Missionaries from other missions could offer orientation to missiological thought and experience that the MC was ill prepared to provide, and collaboration allowed the American Mennonite Mission to benefit from projects that it could not afford to implement on its own. The International Missionary Council sponsored reflection on missiological issues that were germane to the missionaries' work such as the importance of: local forms and terms that were key to indigenization, Indian agency, institutional structures and educational strategy appropriate for the Indian context, the concern to balance faithful transmission of the home church's faith tradition with the need to embody the Gospel in local contexts, an understanding of local religions, financial self-support, among others.³⁰¹ AMM participated in the Chhattisgarh Missionary Association

²⁹⁸ Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 45–46.

²⁹⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 94–95; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 150.

³⁰⁰ Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 40.

³⁰¹ International Missionary Council, "The Relation Between the Younger and the Older Churches"; International Missionary Council, *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and*

from its inception in 1907 and the subsequent Mid-India Representative Christian Council, an affiliate of the National Christian Council (NCC) of India.³⁰² Mennonite missionaries played leading roles on some of the Mid-India Council's committees and, through ecumenical relationships, assisted a number of interdenominational institutions and agencies formed to support theological education, literature development, and health services.³⁰³ Missionaries realized too that issues arising out of the Indian church context that the ecumenical movement sought to address would eventually arise among Indian Mennonites.³⁰⁴ The ecumenical movement provided both insight and resources for AMM.

Likely not understanding the importance of ecumenical relationships and collaboration between missionaries of different denominations on the India field, voices from within the North American MC raised alarm at such tendencies among its missionaries.³⁰⁵ At the end of the third decade of the twentieth century a committee from the Virginia conference went so far as to suggest that MBMC missionaries should neither fellowship with other missions nor cooperate with them more than was the

Recommendations of the International Missionary Council, Tamaram, Madras, India, December 12 to 29, 1938, 24–26, 44–46; International Missionary Council, “The Indigenous Church - the Universal Church in Its Local Setting.”

³⁰² Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 96–97.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 96–97, 144–145; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, September 13 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, April 4, 1952, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

³⁰⁴ Graber, “Field Reports of Missions, India.”

³⁰⁵ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 98; Schlabbach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 136–137.

practice in the home church.³⁰⁶ The next year the bishops from the Lancaster conference expressed similar sentiments.³⁰⁷ In the MC this was a period of solidifying Mennonite identity and, for some, of protecting the church from modernist influences of the mainline denominations. Ecumenical leanings in India must have seemed dangerous to both concerns.

MBMC moved to respond to such fears, and the missionaries maneuvered to adjust. In 1934 the mission instructed its missionaries to “discontinue organic relations with the National Christian Council and affiliated organizations.”³⁰⁸ Three years later AMM clarified the position of the India missionaries, allowing for ecumenical interaction that did not contribute to the church union movement, that did not result in secularized social uplift initiatives that threatened to become a substitute for Christianity, that did not inhibit articulation of distinctive Mennonite principles, and that did not involve missionaries in prominent positions in the NCC.³⁰⁹ In 1938 MBMC ratified AMM’s articulation of its relationship to the NCC.³¹⁰ The missionaries remained

³⁰⁶ *Meeting of the Full Board*, Meeting Minutes (Garden City, MO: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 18, 1929), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 2, Minutes 1927-1933.

³⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930*.

³⁰⁸ “Committee on Affiliation,” in *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1934), 25–26; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 98; Schlabach, *Gospel versus Gospel*, 140–141.

³⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting of the American Mennonite Mission*, (Balodgahan, India: American Mennonite Mission, November 9, 1937), IV-17-1 AMM India Bus Mtg Minutes 1933-1939.

³¹⁰ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Executive and Missions Committees of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Wayland, IA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 17, 1938), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 1, Minutes, Report, Corr, 1923-1962.

adamant that they disagreed with the ecumenical movement's church union initiatives and its suggestion that church and mission should also move towards unity, although the amalgamation that would take place in 1952 reversed the latter position.³¹¹ The reality was that ecumenical relationships continued among the missionaries, albeit more discretely and with less involvement in NCC leadership roles.³¹²

As a North American mission, MBMC cooperated with the Foreign Missions Conference of North America and its subsequent counterpart the Division of Foreign Missions under the National Council of Churches. The British government's requirement that all missionaries from the United States be registered under one cover agency made such collaboration a necessity for working in India.³¹³

With time the home church became more comfortable with ecumenical initiatives, and MBMC had more freedom. It could participate in cooperative ventures and use resources from the wider ecumenical movement, order and distribute bulk amounts of the *Christian World Facts* publication, and subscribe to the *International Review of Missions* for its executive committee members.³¹⁴ It also provided members

³¹¹ J. D. Graber, "Reports from Various Fields, India," in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1940), 16–18.

³¹² Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 98.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ J. D. Graber to S. M. King, April 7, 1953, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, India - Secretary 1951-1955; Foreign Missions Conference of North America, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and Division of Foreign Missions, *Christian World Facts*; Edwin Weaver to S. C. Yoder, December 27, 1943, IV-7-1, Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908-1943, Box 30, Folder Weaver, Edwin I. 1928-1943; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee*, (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 27, 1947) and *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Conjoint*

subscriptions to *World Dominion Magazine*, an alternative voice to the mainstream *International Review*.³¹⁵ The mission made financial contributions to International Missionary Council projects, and Graber sat on its Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews.³¹⁶ As a North American mission it participated in the Foreign Mission Conference, paying its dues regularly and sending representatives to Conference meetings.³¹⁷ Graber sat on the Conference's India committee.³¹⁸ The mission

Meeting of the Executive and Missions Committees, (Mackinaw Dells, Eureka, IL: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 12, 1948), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 27, 1949), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950; *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 21, 1942) and *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive and Mission Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 11, 1944), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1939-1944.

³¹⁵ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 22, 1948), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, June 27, 1949.

³¹⁶ *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive and Mission Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 11, 1944), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1939-1944; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee*; Harold Floreen to J. D. Graber, July 24, 1956; Harold Floreen to Members of the American Section of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, September 28, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, International Missionary Council 1956-1960.

³¹⁷ *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee on the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 31, 1940), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1939-1944; *Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 12, 1944) and *Conjoint Meeting of Executive and Missions Committees of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 22, 1945), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, March 8, 1949; *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 8, 1949), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950.

³¹⁸ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, June 27, 1949.

continued its collaboration with the new Foreign Mission Division, although it was a consultative agency of the Division, not a charter member, and it designated its financial contributions to be used in projects with which it sympathized.³¹⁹

MBMC attempted to walk a fine line between collaboration and full-fledged membership in ecumenical movements. In 1948 the mission declined to become a member of the Missionary Education Movement but decided to continue its practice of using the Movement's materials when they proved helpful.³²⁰ Presented with the option of joining the Evangelical Foreign Missions Conference in 1946, MBMC shelved the decision but sent representatives to its annual meeting.³²¹ Three years later it authorized one of its officers to attend the annual meeting if it was "convenient."³²² The mission participated in and used the resources from the wider missionary movement but was careful not to give up its ability to set its own course or to move too far ahead of a constituency steeped in a tradition that valued nonconformity and a certain

³¹⁹ J. D. Graber to Foreign Mission Division of the National Council of Churches of Christ in USA, December 18, 1951, J. D. Graber to Fred Field Goodsell, October 1, 1952, and *Approved Appropriations for the Division of Foreign Missions for 1955*, Annual Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 16, 1954), IV-18-10, Box 4, NCC - Division of Foreign Missions Budget 1951-54; J. D. Graber to International Missionary Council, September 17, 1954, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, International Missionary Council 1951-1955.

³²⁰ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 18, 1948), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee.

³²¹ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Conjoint Meeting of Executive and Missions Committee*, (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 7, 1946), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee.

³²² *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 4, 1949), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes Exec Committee 1948-1950.

differentiation from wider North American Protestantism. Ecumenical perspectives did become important for the mission's work in the 1960s with AICs in Nigeria where its missionaries received support for their ministry of inter-church reconciliation from ecumenically minded Protestant churches and missions.

One concrete outcome of AMM's ecumenical relations was its participation in comity agreements that were meant to keep the fields of different missions from overlapping. The first missionaries chose the area around Dhamtari for their mission field at least partly because it was well clear of other mission stations.³²³ In some cases they took over an area from another mission, as AMM did in the Drug region and in Bihar. This entailed negotiating boundaries and payment to the original mission for infrastructure such as missionary dwellings or other buildings.³²⁴

In the post World War II context of newly independent nations, comity agreements were not easy to maintain. This became clear in the Bihar region when Hostetler's report on the comity agreement with the Lutheran church indicated that it sought the privilege of serving its members when they migrated into MBMC's field.³²⁵ Enforcing strict compliance with territorial boundaries was difficult. The mission executive committee noted that in independent India foreign organizations would no

³²³ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 20, 41.

³²⁴ A. C. Brunk to Yoder (no given name), December 28, 1935, IV-17-4, AMM Secretary's File, cont., Corr 1935 A. C. Brunk; Brunk, "Reports from Foreign Missions, India," 1936; S. J and Ida Hostetler, "1946 in Bihar," in *Report of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1947), 122–26; S. J. Hostetler, "Report of the Bihar, India, Mennonite Mission," in *Report of the Forty-Second Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1948), 20–22.

³²⁵ *Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Executive Committee*, March 18, 1948.

longer be able to enforce rigid field boundaries as they had earlier. It therefore recommended to Hostetler aggressive evangelism in order to establish a right to the field “by spiritual rather than legal prerogatives.”³²⁶ MBMC’s experience in Bihar was that comity was giving way to competition between denominations.³²⁷ Back in the Dhamtari region, once missionaries no longer controlled church structures, Indians ignored comity agreements in which they had not had a say and/or with which they did not agree.³²⁸

Even beyond India the question of what regions of the world were legitimate mission fields was becoming an issue for MBMC by the mid twentieth century. When Mennonite Central Committee Executive Secretary Orié Miller suggested that MBMC might open work in Korea, Graber responded that the country was well covered with mission and church work and that introducing “a closely segregated denominational program” would be detrimental to the existing unity of the church there.³²⁹ His report of an exploratory visit to the Philippines noted that its islands were similarly well served by missions and churches.³³⁰ Graber observed, however, that there might be a way for a Mennonite presence to contribute its particular testimony and witness to the larger Christian Philippine community.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Hostetler, *Supplement to We Enter Bihar, India*, 4.

³²⁸ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 191.

³²⁹ Orié O. Miller to J. D. Graber, March 25, 1953 and J. D. Graber to Orié O. Miller, March 30, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 4, Mennonite Central Committee 1951-1955.

³³⁰ J. D. Graber, *Report of the Mission Investigation in the Philippine Islands*, Annual Report (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 1950), IV-06-3, Box 4, Change to workbooks, Annual Reports 1950.

In Europe the mission was establishing a presence in a traditionally Christian region. Mennonite relief work during and after World War II had dovetailed into more permanent MBMC ministries there.³³¹ In London, for example, MBMC established a Mennonite Center in the decade following the war. When E. J. Bingle of *World Dominion* magazine questioned this way of working and compared it to western missions' encroachment on the territory of churches in the Near East, Graber took the critique quite seriously.³³² He wrote a long letter that expressed sympathy for Bingle's views and outlined MBMC's goals for the London initiative.³³³ He stressed that the unique Mennonite spiritual witness that the mission sought to express grew out of its service and relief work and that the goal was to develop a center to foster Christian fellowship, not simply to open "another preaching hall."³³⁴

Identifying a mission field was no longer as simple as finding a geographical area that MBMC could occupy with missionaries and their institutions. It might entail providing a missionary witness that would benefit a particular context, even if that context happened to be in the traditionally Christian West. The breakdown of well-defined comity agreements and MBMC's search for new understandings of mission

³³¹ "Mennonite Relief Committee," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 71-74; "God Opens Doors in Paris," 47-48, "Living and Preaching in Belgium," 42-43, and "Witnessing Opportunities Grow in London," 45-46, *Report of the Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954).

³³² E. J. Bingle, "On Being Evangelized," *World Dominion*, March/April, 123-125.

³³³ J. D. Graber to E. J. Bingle, April 28, 1953 and J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, April 28, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, London, England 1951-1955.

³³⁴ J. D. Graber to E. J. Bingle, April 28, 1953.

would continue in the Nigeria context. Their comity had broken down and AICs desired missionary assistance but on their own terms, often outside of traditional mission churches and the comity agreements they had established with each other.

Mission engagement in India provided MBMC and its missionaries with experience and an orientation to contemporary mission theory and strategy. Missionaries became well versed in the debates about indigenization, mission institutions, mass movements, and ecumenical collaboration, including the practice of comity. These were all issues that would carry over into the Nigeria engagement with AICs.

Missionary Role and *Identification*

It was missionaries on the ground, with input from mission administrators to be sure, who developed and implemented MBMC's mission approach in its work in India and later with Nigerian AICs. This subsection outlines the changing roles, from masters of the mission to servants of the church, of the missionaries in the wake of the amalgamation of the church and mission in India in order to provide background for the innovative roles they would play in Nigeria. It introduces the concept of *identification* that missionaries were beginning to use to describe their relationship to local Christians.

The role of Mennonite missionaries in India changed over the twentieth century because of the changing contexts in which they worked, the adjustment of mission strategies, and the devolution of missionary and church structures to indigenous hands. The early missionaries built charitable institutions, played the roles of evangelist and church leader, and occupied positions of authority in the church and mission institutions. By the late 1950s they worked under the authority and at the invitation of the MCI and

the mission institutions it had inherited. Graber advocated for smaller groups of missionaries in more places, a greater focus on supporting the indigenous church's programs, and less focus on mission institutions.³³⁵ He also recognized that less mission infrastructure and spreading missionaries out geographically would increase the strain on missionaries since it would mean less spiritual and emotional support would be available on the field. It would take time for such changes to solidify in the vocational self-understandings of the missionaries. When the former India missionaries initiated work with AICs in southeastern Nigeria, they did so during a period of uncertainty and discussion about the proper place of missionaries in a foreign field.

The unification of the church and mission that MBMC mandated in 1950 motivated reflection about appropriate missionary roles. Indian Mennonites were ready to deal directly with the mission and move away from a situation in which assistance given by North American Mennonites for their church's ministries came through missionary intermediaries, sometimes in the form of payment for services rendered.³³⁶ They no longer accepted the missionaries as MBMC representatives in the role of superiors. When the mission mandated amalgamation, it recognized that it was implementing significant and stressful change for its missionaries and encouraged them to strive to have reciprocal and collegial relationships with their Indian brothers and

³³⁵ Graber, *The Church Apostolic*, 41–44.

³³⁶ Malagar, "A Memorandum on Building an Indigenous Church in India," 41; "Address Presented by the India Mennonite Conference to the Fraternal Delegates from America."

sisters.³³⁷ For those who might find working under the new autonomous Indian structure difficult, it offered a change of assignment, an early furlough, or the negotiation of some other kind of honorable solution.³³⁸

Missionaries adjusted to the changes wrought by the new administrative structure. In his history of the MCI, Lapp described the changes in stark terms, as the transformation of their role from master to servant.³³⁹ As a group they committed themselves to close cooperation, ecumenical fellowship, and partnership within the new ecclesial structure, although there were some who took early retirement from the field in the years that followed.³⁴⁰ In this new missionary age that was dawning, missionaries would work under the supervision of the Indian church, but there was not yet clarity about what roles they would play.³⁴¹

Missionary Irene Weaver, who had grown up in India as a missionary child and later returned as a missionary with her husband Edwin, expressed the uncertainty well in her report to the annual MBMC meeting in 1951. She wrote the report sitting in her

³³⁷ “Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship,” 1950; J. D. Graber, “Report of Officers, Report of the Secretary,” in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 17–21.

³³⁸ J. D. Graber to G. H. Beare, Arnold Dietzel, E. I. Weaver, and J. G. Yoder, July 25, 1950, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, India - Church-Mission Relations 1947-1951.

³³⁹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 211.

³⁴⁰ Graber, “Report on Central Provinces, India, Mission”; Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 189.

³⁴¹ “Special Actions, India Mission-Church Relationship,” 1952.

childhood home, in the room that had been her parents' bedroom.³⁴² By then the house served as both a girls' hostel and guesthouse. Irene wrote of her childhood memories there, how the boys from the orphanage next door came to her parents daily for their needs, sometimes working in their garden and returning home in the evening with armloads of cabbages and greens for their curry. They also came when they needed medical attention or help sewing their clothing or bedding, and sometimes even for punishment. Every day the Bible Women, women evangelists, would come in the morning for prayer and return in the afternoon to report on the day's activities. Church members routinely came with their problems and needs, often finding solace. Her parents had played a parental role, literally and spiritually, and her father had been headmaster at the mission high school.

By 1951, however, times had changed. Irene described the change as a "new day of foreign missions."³⁴³ Administrative and spiritual leadership was now to be held primarily in Indian hands. Missionaries were no longer to play a parental role. Irene found the change difficult since Indian Mennonite friends who longed for former days continually reminded her that, "your mother did this and your father did that."³⁴⁴ For Indians who longed for the familiar, parental missionary figure and for those missionaries whose role had included providing badly needed assistance, the change

³⁴² Irene Weaver, "Then and Now," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 123–24.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

must have been unsettling indeed. Irene struggled to conceive what her role in this new day would be. She reflected, “When I see our Indian brothers and sisters caring for the orphanages, pastoring the churches, teaching and administering in primary, middle, and high school, working in the hospitals, and caring for much that our parents did, I have found myself groping for my new place.”³⁴⁵ She resigned herself to be open to playing the roles that would come her way and found solace in her faith, quoting from the Bible at the end of her report, “Be anxious for nothing but in all things through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”³⁴⁶

Despite the uncertainty voiced by missionaries like Irene Weaver, Graber argued that they still had a role to play on the India field. While he noted that public preaching in the villages was likely no longer an appropriate role for foreign missionaries, he urged them to not relax their efforts to contribute in other meaningful ways.³⁴⁷ One option was for a change of focus from a denominational program to one that supported the larger Christian cause.³⁴⁸ Some missionaries worked at the union seminary at Yeotmal or with other interdenominational initiatives.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Philippians chapter 4 verses 6-7, quoted in *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, October 22, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

³⁴⁸ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 212.

Edwin Weaver is an example of a missionary who was able to navigate the new situation and maintain his primary focus with the MCI. He had been ordained bishop before the implementation of the new structure and continued in that role until he retired from India in 1956 when the church ordained an Indian bishop, the first Indian in that position. He viewed the ministry of strengthening the spiritual life of the church as a missionary role that was appropriate in the new day of missions.³⁴⁹ The implication seems to have been that administrative leadership in the church was now the responsibility of Indians but that missionaries could still work in ministries of spiritual renewal. Back in North America on furlough in 1953, Weaver sought to update his knowledge in the areas of Anabaptist and Mennonite principles so that he could share such thought with the Indian church.³⁵⁰ He also facilitated the study of current literature in the areas of Mennonite history, peace concerns, and missiology among Indian Mennonite leaders.³⁵¹ Being a conduit through which Indian leaders might engage current North American Mennonite thought seems to have been another role that Weaver found appropriate for missionaries in the new age. He also led a MCI committee assigned to produce Christian literature for the church.³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, "Dhamtari and the Church Community," in *Report of the Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1952), 156–57.

³⁵⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 5, 1953.

³⁵¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 12, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 16, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1955 Confidential.

³⁵² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 7, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59.

Finally, as a member of the MCI, Weaver was eligible to hold office in the church. It chose him as treasurer in 1954.³⁵³ This presented him with somewhat of a dilemma. He had a good relationship with MBMC general secretary Graber and regularly wrote him letters giving his own opinion on mission and church affairs. Graber relied heavily on Weaver's views in the writing of the memorandum in which the mission mandated amalgamation in 1950.³⁵⁴ Even after amalgamation Graber followed Weaver's advice as he sought to encourage self-support through incremented reductions in the amount of yearly subsidy that the mission provided to the church.³⁵⁵ As treasurer of the MCI Weaver argued that he would now be writing official letters and would need to express the view of the church instead of his own opinions.³⁵⁶ Graber acknowledged the dilemma but encouraged him to write both official and personal letters, apparently believing that Weaver could take on both roles of church treasurer and advisor to MBMC without a conflict of interest.³⁵⁷ If amalgamation had relegated missionaries from positions of administrative authority to those of support of the Indian church, it had not necessarily simplified their position. As Weaver's situation shows, missionaries still

³⁵³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 11, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

³⁵⁴ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 4, 1951.

³⁵⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 24, 1956; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, April 5, 1956; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 24, 1956 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 25, 1956.

³⁵⁶ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 12, 1955.

³⁵⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 25, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

had to responsibly manage the power their positions gave them, even when they were no longer in charge.

By the mid 1950s, MBMC missionaries were articulating a principle of *identification* as one way to think about their role. Graber argued that identification with the living standards of native peoples needed to be added to the principle of indigenization for fruitful missionary work.³⁵⁸ In 1955 linguist Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society, with whom the mission maintained a working relationship, highlighted identification as a major challenge for missionaries, defining the concept as primarily being able to think like the people among whom the missionary works.³⁵⁹ He argued that a human being “does not want someone to sympathize with him, but to understand him, to be able to see problems as he views them, to enter into his situation and work with him, not just do things for him.”³⁶⁰ Nida recommended four practices for missionaries concerned with identification: learning to judge and evaluate cultural traits from within the context where they are relevant; acquiring a mastery of the indigenous language; adapting when possible indigenous forms of dress, shelter, and food; and finding indigenous patterns of life that they might affirm and that might be sanctified by the Gospel.

William Rayburn, a close collaborator of MBMC missionaries, also wrote about identification. He argued that identifying with people was not about giving up friends

³⁵⁸ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, January 14, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955.

³⁵⁹ Eugene A. Nida, “Identification, A Major Problem of Modern Missions,” *Practical Anthropology* 2, no. 4 (July 1955): 90–95.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and a comfortable life in the West.³⁶¹ It involved, rather, reexamining one's own cultural assumptions and the willingness to live in a new context that was often unintelligible. Identification meant a willingness to be "converted" to local ways even as one was trying to convert others. Reyburn noted that the goal of this risky vulnerability was real communication and communion between missionary and indigene, possible only when both had a freedom in Christ. Reyburn warned, however, that identification risked being a conscious or subconscious way that western missionaries sought to alleviate the guilt they felt in their interactions with native people.³⁶²

MBMC missionaries' understanding of indigenization was similar to that of Nida and Reyburn. Graber described successful missionaries as those who could "lose themselves among and identify themselves with the people to whom they go."³⁶³ Irene Weaver, as she reflected after retirement on the importance of identifying with the nationals with whom she had worked, noted how challenging such an approach really was. "Under-identifying," she thought, amounted to arrogance and pride on the part of the missionary.³⁶⁴ But over identifying by living at the level of people in poverty might well be courting unwarranted risk for the missionary and his/her mission. Identification

³⁶¹ William Reyburn, "Identification in the Missionary Task," *Practical Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (Jan-Feb, 1960): 1-15.

³⁶² William Reyburn, "Identification – Symptom or Sublimation?" *Practical Anthropology*, 9, no. 1 (Jan-Feb, 1962): 1-8.

³⁶³ Graber, "Making Indigenous Principles Work."

³⁶⁴ Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, 75–76.

was perhaps a helpful solution to the problem of colonial methods, but it also brought its own challenges.

This section about MBMC's engagement in India has shown that Mennonite missionaries' experience there provided them an opportunity to participate in a foreign mission context and to engage the mission theories and strategies of the wider Protestant missionary movement. It has introduced the India missionaries who later worked in Nigeria and outlined the development of theory and strategy that they would take with them to their new Nigerian context. This includes issues such as the increasing importance of local contexts, indigenization theory, the significance of mission institutions and mass movements for mission strategy, ecumenism, comity agreements, and the changing role of missionaries in the post-colonial setting.

Anthropology and the Conversion of the Missionaries in the Argentine Chaco

The discipline of anthropology became important for the missionary movement over the course of the twentieth century and for Mennonite missionaries in particular from mid century onward. Edwin Smith, Primitive Methodist missionary and anthropologist who served as the president of the Royal Anthropological Institute, was an early voice for the use of the discipline for better missiological understanding of indigenous religious and cultural systems.³⁶⁵ Hendrik Kraemer, in his landmark work written for the International Missionary Council conference in Madras, India in 1938,

³⁶⁵ "Smith, Edwin Williams (1876-1957)," *History of Missiology | Boston University*, <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/r-s/smith-edwin-williams-1876-1957/> (accessed April 4, 2015).

The Christian Mission in a Non-Christian World, urged missionaries to make use of anthropological research for Christian mission.³⁶⁶

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities and its missionaries came to see anthropology and the related discipline of linguistics as important tools for understanding local contexts and engaging in mission initiatives in those contexts. In southeastern Nigeria and during the years leading up to their engagement there, Mennonite missionaries sought out and appropriated anthropological insights in their missiological discernment about strategy and method. This section will outline the growing awareness of the utility of the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics among MBMC missionaries from mid-century on. It will show their importance for the change of missionary method that missionaries in the Chaco region of Argentina implemented in 1954. Finally, it will suggest that the change in the Chaco, from a traditional missionary approach to one that focused on resourcing an indigenous Christian movement among the Toba people, provided a precedent that facilitated a similar move by MBMC missionaries when they encountered African Independent Churches (AICs) in southeastern Nigeria.

By mid-century, MBMC and Goshen Biblical Seminary were collaborating in the provision of formal anthropological and linguistic training for Mennonite missionaries. In April 1951 they organized a conference on missionary linguistics and anthropology with Eugene Nida as the primary resource person.³⁶⁷ At the time dean

³⁶⁶ Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 341–343.

³⁶⁷ Harold S. Bender to John H. Mosemann, March 29, 1951.

Harold S. Bender was seeking ways that the seminary might improve its services to Mennonite mission programs and hoped to offer courses for MBMC and Lancaster Conference's Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' (EMBMC) missionaries in training. Conference participants included MBMC and EMBMC executives and the Goshen Seminary faculty who affirmed the importance of the conference theme for Mennonite missions.³⁶⁸ They identified both the need for anthropological and linguistic consultants who would be available to missionaries in different fields and the need to offer courses in those disciplines for missionary candidates and missionaries on furlough. Recognizing that there were not enough missionary candidates to justify a full-time program, Bender proposed that the mission choose someone who would be available part-time to teach courses and the rest of the time to serve as a consultant. The mission boards and the seminary would collaborate on and jointly finance the initiative. At the time the idea did not come to fruition as Bender envisioned, but Graber did pursue further training at the Kennedy School of Missions and taught missions part-time at Goshen Biblical Seminary from 1955 to 1963.³⁶⁹

Throughout the 1950s MBMC provided anthropological literature for its missionaries and assisted them in acquiring training in the field. For example, Graber sent copies of Nida's *Customs and Cultures* to the different MBMC fields,

³⁶⁸ Harold S. Bender, *Report to the Seminary on the Conference on Missionary Linguistics* (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), Levi C. Hartzler, *Conference on Missionary Linguistics and Anthropology, Meeting Report* (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), and Harold S. Bender to J. D. Graber, May 3, 1951, all in IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, Linguistics and Anthropology 1951-53.

³⁶⁹ J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, January 21, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Graber, Joseph Daniel (1900-1978)."

recommending it as “must reading” that would help missionaries understand cultural dimensions of their interaction with local contexts.³⁷⁰ Missionaries and mission administrators read the mission journal *Practical Anthropology* and engaged the issues its articles raised.³⁷¹ A number of missionaries, including Graber, studied at the Kennedy School of Missions where they developed skills in the use of anthropology and linguistics for missiological purposes.³⁷² The mission came to value training in linguistics and anthropology and made it a prerequisite for candidates in missionary fields such as the Chaco region of Argentina.³⁷³

MBMC’s work in the Argentine Chaco is an example of its appropriation of anthropological insights for missiological strategies and methods. In 1954, after ten years of missionary work, missionaries decided to forego the establishment of a Mennonite church in order to avoid dependency and reinforce an autonomous Christian movement among the Toba people.³⁷⁴ The reassessment of mission strategy and the new

³⁷⁰ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 12, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, January 20, 1955, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁷¹ John H. Yoder to S. J. Hostetler, November 16, 1959, HM 1-48, Box 182, Principles; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

³⁷² Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, May 19, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to the Dean, Kennedy School of Missions, July 16, 1955, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Buckwalter, Albert and Lois Confidential 1951-55; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, January 21, 1956; J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, April 5, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 2, Argentine Chaco 1956-60.

³⁷³ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, May 19, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; Albert Buckwalter, “Missionaries, Tobas, and Anthropology” (Chaco, Argentina, June 4, 1957), HM 1-097, Box 9, Folder 4: Unpublished Manuscripts, 1951-1965.

³⁷⁴ Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairos, 2009), 41, 65, 84, 193–197.

approach there paved the way for the mission's efforts to collaborate with AICs in West Africa during the second half of the twentieth century.

In November 1942 MBMC missionaries in Argentina responded to a report of the need for missionaries in the northern part of the country by sending a commission to visit the region.³⁷⁵ In the town of Resistencia the commission found missionaries who were desperate for help to reach an indigenous population that was scattered over a wide region. MBMC opened a new mission to the indigenous Toba people of the Chaco region the following year, buying a farm where it settled two Toba families and erected a church building.³⁷⁶

The missionaries' strategy with the Toba followed the traditional mission station approach. It entailed the establishment of a colony of indigenous people on mission property and the development of industrial and religious work.³⁷⁷ Such a strategy was meant to allow converted Tobas to move away from the pernicious influence of their home communities into a new Christian community where they would find it easier to live Christian lives.³⁷⁸ The central station of Nam Cum was to be a hub to train leaders

³⁷⁵ "Investigation Trip to Northern Argentina and Bolivia," in *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1943).

³⁷⁶ *Report of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 16, 1943), 133-34; J. W. Shank and Selena Shank, "Mission to the South American Indians," in *Report of the Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1944), 118-19.

³⁷⁷ Shank and Shank, "Mission to the South American Indians."

³⁷⁸ Calvin Holderman and Frances Holderman, "The Chaco Indian Mission Nam Cum," in *Report of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1945), 136-39.

and from which they could serve the indigenous population in the outlying areas.³⁷⁹ It also was to provide indigenous families with land to farm, a school for their children, shelter from unjust treatment from non-indigenous people, medical attention, and training in cleanliness, hygiene, and healthy living. As Nam Cum developed over the following years, missionaries established outstations for evangelization, church planting, establishment of schools, and provision of general assistance to the indigenous population.

Over the next decade a number of factors combined to motivate a reassessment of MBMC mission strategy in the Chaco. First, the mission goal of indigenization was as strong in Argentina as it was in India. Latin America Field Secretary Nelson Litwiller sought ways to increase indigenous agency and decrease reliance on mission personnel, institutions, and financing.³⁸⁰ Graber affirmed this focus, envisioning an Argentine church that would invite missionaries to work under its supervision and articulating a policy of scattering missionaries among indigenous peoples instead of grouping them in mission stations.³⁸¹ Second, missionaries came to realize that additional cultural and

³⁷⁹ J. W. Shank, "The Chaco Zone-Indian Mission," in *Report of the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1946), 127–31.

³⁸⁰ Nelson Litwiller, "The Missionary - National-Worker Relationship" (Mission Council, Argentina, January 1951); Nelson Litwiller to Albert Buckwalter and Wife and John Litwiller and Wife, October 22, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁸¹ *Minutes of the Mission Council*, (Monte Retiro, Argentina: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 28, 1952), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Mennonite Mission Council 1951-55; Albert and Lois Buckwalter to Friends, December 25, 1952, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Buckwalter, Albert and Lois Confidential 1951-55; J. D. Graber to Nelson Litwiller, November 12, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Litwiller, Nelson and Ada 1951-55 Confidential.

linguistic understanding was necessary to meaningfully engage the Toba people.³⁸² They acknowledged the missiological significance of the differences between Hispanic creole culture and that of the Toba as well as the need for anthropological assistance.³⁸³

Although they understood that the Argentine government followed a strategy of forced accommodation to Spanish among indigenous peoples, missionaries increasingly articulated the importance of mastering the Toba language for their work.³⁸⁴ The acquisition of Toba language skills was difficult, however, because scholars had yet to study the language and reduce it to written form. The Chaco missionaries requested the assistance of MBMC and of Eugene Nida to find a linguist to help them start the process of studying and learning the language.

A third factor that motivated a reassessment of strategy was that the Toba people were responding positively to what missionaries understood as Pentecostal expressions of the Christian faith.³⁸⁵ MBMC missionaries bemoaned the Tobas' focus on ecstatic

³⁸² J. D. Graber, *Report on Trip to Latin America*, (Kalona, IA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 12, 1952), IV-06-3, Box 4, Change to workbooks, Annual Reports 1952.

³⁸³ *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, (Chaco Mission Council, December 12, 1953), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁸⁴ Albert, Lois and Rachel Buckwalter to Dear Christian Friends, December 4, 1951, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Buckwalter, Albert and Lois Confidential 1951-55; Albert Buckwalter, "Are We Adequately Meeting the Needs of the Indian Through the Spanish and Interpreters? Or Should the Mission Officially Take Steps to Put the Toba in Writing?" (Chaco, Argentina, December 31, 1951), HM 1-097, Box 9, Folder 4: Unpublished Manuscripts, 1951-1965; *Minutes of the Chaco Worker's Meeting*, (Quitilipi, Argentina, August 18, 1952) and J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, April 29, 1953, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁸⁵ J. W. Shank, "Among the Chaco Indians," in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 145-47; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; William David Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, an Interpretive Report*, 2nd ed. (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1959), 44-50.

worship, on what seemed like esoteric spiritual revelation, and on the charismatic leaders whom missionaries considered to be false teachers.³⁸⁶ Nevertheless, such expressions were a significant force in the religious milieu of the Chaco. Fourth, the Argentine government's policy of limiting non-Catholic missionary endeavors meant that the expansion of a traditional, geographically-defined mission field was no longer possible.³⁸⁷ Meeting the requests for assistance from the larger Toba community would mean reorienting missionary efforts towards a more itinerant type of circuit work instead of church planting. It would also focus on training and empowering indigenous workers who could work independently or semi-independently of the mission, a focus that would be less likely to draw government attention and fit nicely with the move towards indigenization.³⁸⁸ Finally, while the Toba were eager to receive assistance in biblical study, the number who were willing to be baptized, became church members and whose Christian life met the standards of the missionaries was few, one hundred members in three congregations in December 1952 after a decade of work.³⁸⁹

In 1953 Chaco missionaries started a reorientation of their strategy. Missionary Albert Buckwalter had already hired an informant to help him learn the Toba language

³⁸⁶ Shank, "Among the Chaco Indians"; Albert Buckwalter to Amos Swartzentruber, June 29, 1953, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁸⁷ Peron and Ministers, "Translation - On the Appointing of a Commission by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Said Commission Is to Study the Location of Religious Missions, Decree No. 15498," August 20, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁸⁸ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, January 1955, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁸⁹ Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, an Interpretive Report*, 77; "Chaco Mission Directory," in *Report of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1953), 133.

the year before.³⁹⁰ He intensified his advocacy for professional linguistic assistance, reminding MBMC of the need and obtaining advice from Nida about who might be available. Given the move to limit non-Catholic mission activity, Field Secretary Nelson Litwiller assigned the Chaco missionaries the task of studying a number of different options with respect to future mission strategy.³⁹¹ He met with the Chaco team in December and together they modified their strategy.³⁹² They prioritized language learning and the acquisition of professional anthropological and linguistic assistance as well as the training of local leaders according to the indigenous principle. The colony at Nam Cum was to continue under missionary supervision, as well as the work of missionary nurses, but the missionary role outside of Nam Cum was to be as an itinerant evangelist and worker who maintained contact with former students and sought new students for a leadership training program.

A consultative visit by William and Marie Reyburn of the American Bible Society in 1954 was the impetus for completing the reorientation of mission strategy. Nida had recommended the Reyburns in response to the missionaries' request for linguistic and anthropological assistance, and Field Secretary Litwiller hoped that they

³⁹⁰ Albert Buckwalter to J. D. Graber, November 17, 1952, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁹¹ Nelson Litwiller to Albert Buckwalter and Wife and John Litwiller and Wife, October 22, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁹² *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, (Chaco Mission Council, December 12, 1953), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953; Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, December 31, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 3, Litwiller, Nelson and Ada 1951-55 Confidential.

would be able to help the missionaries better understand Toba ways of thinking.³⁹³ The Reyburns spent six months with the Chaco missionaries, preparing the missionaries for ongoing study of Toba culture, preparing a grammar of the language, and setting the base for a method of missionary language study.³⁹⁴ They used a kind of “participant observer” strategy with William living among the Toba in order to gather his data.³⁹⁵ Subsequently MBMC missionaries would adopt a similar strategy in their itinerant teaching and visitation ministry.³⁹⁶ Chaco missionary Buckwalter wrote to Graber about the Reyburns’ work, “Dr. Reyburn sees our main task as being that of putting content into the form of Christianity which the Tobas have taken on.”³⁹⁷ Buckwalter came to see the Toba believers as an indigenous church that had already established itself independently of him and his colleagues.³⁹⁸ In the story of Mennonite missions, this is an early acknowledgment that legitimate mission strategy might focus not only on non-Christian peoples, but also entail engagement with nascent forms of non-western

³⁹³ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, April 7, 1954 and J. D. Graber to Nelson Litwiller, April 21, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁹⁴ Albert Buckwalter to J. D. Graber, May 1, 1954, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁹⁵ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, May 17, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

³⁹⁶ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955; Elmer S. Miller, *Nurturing Doubt: From Mennonite Missionary to Anthropologist in the Argentine Chaco* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

³⁹⁷ Albert Buckwalter to J. D. Graber, May 1, 1954, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

³⁹⁸ Albert Buckwalter to Esther Graber, July 28, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

Christianity that were very different from North American Mennonite faith expressions but were authentically Christian nonetheless.

The Reyburns' work led to the finalization of a new mission strategy that replaced the colony model embodied at the Nam Cum central station. In August the Reyburns met with the Chaco team and gave their report.³⁹⁹ Nelson Litwiller wrote to Graber that the report indicated that while most of the indigenous peoples of Latin America had resisted the Gospel, a majority of the Toba had, surprisingly, accepted it.⁴⁰⁰ Of the three missions that had focused their work on the Toba, the Pentecostals, the Anglicans, and the Mennonites, it was with the Pentecostals that this indigenous people had found "emotional release, spiritual satisfaction, a spiritual community, and the ethical content of the Gospel."⁴⁰¹ The report led to two and one-half days of meetings during which the missionaries discussed its implications for their work.⁴⁰²

During the meetings missionary John Litwiller proposed a statement outlining a new mission approach that the team accepted as its new strategy. The statement acknowledged that while most of the Toba people had already accepted what it described as a Pentecostal piety instead of a Mennonite expression of the

³⁹⁹ Albert Buckwalter, *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, (Nam Cum, Argentina: Chaco Mission Council, August 18, 1954), IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

⁴⁰⁰ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

faith, the missionaries still wanted to assist the Toba church and accept the Toba believers as true members of the Christian Church.⁴⁰³ It committed the missionaries to a sympathetic view of Toba culture and to a posture of assisting the Toba church to realize its own goals. The missionary role was to identify with the Toba, to become as much as possible a member of the Toba church, to assist the church in interpreting the Christian faith in light of Toba life, and to work within the framework of the Toba's existing piety. This statement went much further than the decisions the team had made the December before. It committed the missionaries to work from within the framework of Toba culture and within the particular Pentecostal-type expression of Christian faith that the Toba had chosen. Contained in the new approach was an implicit recognition of the validity of this non-western expression of the Christian faith.

With the articulation of the new approach, the presence of the Nam Cum colony with the eight indigenous families that had settled there became a dilemma. The Chaco team commissioned Field Secretary Litwiller to interview the Nam Cum families to ascertain their expectations of MBMC.⁴⁰⁴ After investigation the mission reimbursed the families for their time and expenses and ceased all its farming activities and assistance.⁴⁰⁵ For all practical purposes the mission and the colony simply ceased to

⁴⁰³ Buckwalter, *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, August 18, 1954.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Albert Buckwalter, *Minutes of the Chaco Mission Council*, (Nam Cum, Argentina: Chaco Mission Council, September 11, 1954), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Argentina Chaco 1951-55.

exist. All that remained were missionaries who continued their linguistic work and who acted as circuit riders, living, preaching, and teaching in the Toba villages, sometimes for weeks at a time.

The Chaco missionaries had made a radical change, so much so that they referred to it as a conversion.⁴⁰⁶ They still believed that they had something to offer the Toba people, but they had come to value Toba spirituality and culture and allowed Toba understandings to orient their mission strategy. A paragraph in Nelson Litwiller's report to Graber demonstrates the effect that interaction with the Toba people was having on the missionaries,

But the grace of God has worked effectively among them. They are ignorant in many things, but they have turned away from "idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son." Thank God! And who knows if their worship and faith, simple [and] unliturgic [sic] but intense is not just as acceptable to our Heavenly Father as some of the polished formal one-hour-a-week bored worship of the comfort-cult-Christians of a materialistically minded North America.⁴⁰⁷

The Chaco story had implications beyond its immediate setting. Thanks to the increased appreciation for local contexts and cultures that anthropological insights had facilitated, MBMC's Chaco strategy had moved from a traditional mission-station approach to one that sought to serve an indigenous Christian movement from within that movement's religious and social understandings. Five years later when Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived in Nigeria, they found vibrant churches that were autonomous of

⁴⁰⁶ Albert Buckwalter, "Conversion in the Chaco, 1954," in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 43–45.

⁴⁰⁷ Nelson Litwiller to J. D. Graber, August 26, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 1, Argentina Field Secretary 1951-1955.

western denominations, some of which Mennonite missionaries had formed into a Mennonite church during the previous year and whose leaders expected to be ordained. The Weaver's assessment of their new mission context led them to question the advisability of automatically credentialing those leaders and of moving ahead with the new Mennonite denomination. When they broached the subject with MBMC Administrative Assistant for Foreign Missions John Yoder, he responded that a reversal of strategy in Nigeria might be a real possibility, and Graber later confirmed as much.⁴⁰⁸ Yoder indicated that one of the things he found encouraging about working at MBMC was that it was more able than other Mennonite organizations with which he had worked to repent, review, and reverse decisions it had made without concern for saving face. The comment was more than an idle observation. The fact that MBMC, both its missionaries and as an institution, had reviewed, repented, and reversed its mission policy in order to orient its work towards the needs of an indigenous Christian movement in the Chaco increased the possibility of a similar move in Nigeria when the Weavers started engaging AICs there in 1959.

This chapter has presented a history of the increasing importance of local contexts in MBMC's mission approach during the first six decades of the twentieth century. It has shown that in the years around the turn of the century engagement Mennonites rekindled the early Anabaptist missionary impulse and launched an India

⁴⁰⁸ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960.

mission. Through that initiative Mennonite missionaries gained firsthand experience and appropriated practice and theory from the larger Protestant missionary movement. They cooperated with other missions and the National Christian Council of India, but protective Mennonite impulses from some parts of their North American constituency caused them to be discreet about their collaboration. Such pressure from the home church also limited their ability to set aside North American Mennonite distinctives as they engaged the Indian context. Missionaries became conversant in theories about mass movements and were disappointed when such phenomenon did not materialize in their mission territory. Their goal to plant an indigenous church was elusive but gained fresh impetus around mid century when MBMC amalgamated its India mission and the church to form the Mennonite Church in India. This raised the question of the appropriateness of mission institutions and the role of missionaries as they ceded leadership positions and took supportive roles in the church and its institutions. Finally, this chapter outlines the growing importance of the disciplines of anthropology and linguistics for Mennonite missionaries. It shows how missionaries in the Chaco region of Argentina appropriated the tools of those disciplines to change strategy, from a traditional mission station approach to one that sought to reinforce an indigenous Christian movement among the Toba people. This change and the growing attention to local contexts in the India work were important precedents for MBMC's later engagement with AICs in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FOUR

RADIO, INDIGENIZATION, AND AFRICAN INDEPENDENTS: THE BEGINNINGS OF A MENNONITE MISSION IN AFRICA

In 1957 Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) missionaries arrived in West Africa to support an indigenous Mennonite Church in the region. Within three years, however, they reoriented their focus in Nigeria in response to the situation they found on the ground, working primarily to improve relationships between African Independent Churches (AICs) and mission churches. This chapter will show how this change came about between the missionaries' arrival in August 1957 and December 1960. It will outline how MBMC's desire for a mission field in Africa, the international connections of its European missionaries, and its growing use of radio resulted in the establishment of a mission in Ghana. Their presence in the region allowed missionaries to respond to Nigerian AICs that were soliciting the mission's assistance in November 1958. Missionary visits from Ghana resulted in the organization of some of these AICs into Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) by the time veteran India missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived as the first resident MBMC missionaries in Nigeria.

This chapter will show how the value of indigenization that they brought from their India experience, the highly competitive religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria, and the difficulty they had obtaining resident visas led the Weavers to reorient their missionary strategy. The value of indigenization made them hesitant to transplant

uncritically North American Mennonite faith practice and belief in Nigeria and to establish mission institutions that were not sustainable with local resources. The divisive ecclesial context caused the Weavers to propose inter-church reconciliation as a missionary priority and to resist planting yet another mission church that would add to the competition. The government's refusal to give the Mennonite mission authorization to work in Nigeria meant that missionaries worked under the umbrella of the Church of Scotland Mission and that much of MBMC's assistance would support its mission institutions instead of the fledgling Mennonite Church Nigeria. This reorientation was away from the establishment of African Mennonite ecclesial structures with organic ties to the North American Mennonite Church and towards the work of reconciliation between mission churches and the AICs that had separated from them. Such a move was consistent with the focus on indigenization characteristic of MBMC and the wider Protestant missionary movement but was innovative for its epoch in the way it embodied western engagement with nonwestern Christianity in the form of AICs.

The Desire for a Mission Field in Africa

The Mennonite Church (MC) had sent missionaries to India in 1899 and to Argentina in 1917, and by the end of the 1920s there was a growing desire within MBMC and its constituency to establish a mission field in Africa. This section will outline the mission's initiatives to open a mission field on the continent during the twentieth century. It will show that the Lancaster conference of the MC established work in Tanganyika on its own in 1934, without MBMC involvement, and that MBMC worked provisionally in Ethiopia between 1945 and 1951. A permanent missionary engagement on the continent,

however, would have to wait until the late 1950s and would start in the Gold Coast during the year leading up to its independence from British rule.

At MBMC's annual meeting in 1929 the establishment of an African field was on the agenda. Two addresses under the title "The Call to Africa" argued for missionary engagement on the continent.¹ Drawing heavily on *The New Africa*, a study of Africa published by the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, I. E. Burkhardt urged the mission to move forward.² He reasoned that western civilization as introduced by the colonial powers had undermined African social traditions leaving African peoples with nothing comparable to replace them. This, combined with African belief systems that already acknowledged the reality of a divine being and a spiritual world, meant that the time was ripe for successful Mennonite missionary activity on the continent.

MBMC president D. D. Miller followed Burkhardt with an address that encouraged mission members to investigate possibilities in Africa with a view to opening a new field there. Miller's son, Orié O. Miller, served as vice-president of the Lancaster conference's board of missions, had suggested Burkhardt's topic, and helped him find resource material to prepare his address.³ In his address the senior Miller attempted to calm concerns that

¹ *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Garden City, MO: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1929), 14, 16, IV-06-3, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1927-1932, Annual Reports 1929.

² I. E. Burkhardt, "The Call of Africa, (A) The Unoccupied Territory," in *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1929), 65-70; Donald Fraser, *The New Africa*, (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1928).

³ John M. Bender, "Miller, Orié O.," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Orié_O._\(1892-1977\)&oldid=104410](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Orié_O._(1892-1977)&oldid=104410) (accessed March 27,

such a move would be a financial overreach for the mission, reminding his audience that less than forty years previously donations had been less than forty dollars in one year while the 1929 reports showed nearly half a million dollars flowing from the MC for missions.⁴ The MC constituency typically responded positively to such needs, Miller claimed, and had the capacity to contribute more than it was currently giving. To do so would deepen their spiritual lives as well as benefit the unsaved in Africa. The annual meeting responded positively, passing a resolution that authorized the MBMC executive committee to investigate the possibility of opening work in Africa.⁵ The mission printed Burkhart and Miller's addresses together in booklet form, providing a promotional tool for the new push.⁶

The following year the mission once again took up the theme at its annual meeting. Its foreign missions committee reported that it had found a number of possible African fields and that interest in the church was high.⁷ MBMC secretary S. C. Yoder

2015); John C. Wenger, "Miller, Daniel D. (1864-1955).," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1957, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Daniel_D._\(1864-1955\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Daniel_D._(1864-1955)) (accessed March 13, 2015); Paul Erb, *Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968), 188.

⁴ D. D. Miller, "The Call of Africa, (B) Our Obligations and Limitations," in *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1929), 71–73.

⁵ *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities*, 16.

⁶ I. E. Burkhart and D. D. Miller, *The Call of Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1929).

⁷ "Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930," Meeting Minutes (Louisville, OH: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 3, 1930), 10, IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 2, Minutes 1927-1933.

addressed the meeting about the possibilities.⁸ He reported that although western missions had divided up the different fields, there were still many people whom missionaries were not able to reach. Yoder identified Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as the most opportune field at the time and, like Miller the year before, encouraged movement in that direction. Again MBMC passed a resolution, this time authorizing its executive and mission committees to “take all the steps necessary leading to the establishment of a Mennonite mission in Africa.”⁹

The plans for work in Abyssinia did not materialize. The Great Depression created uncertainty in the early 1930s, and mission secretary S. C. Yoder noted that the Africa work would have to be put on hold for the time being.¹⁰ Interest was, however, still high. In June 1931 Edwin Weaver wrote to Yoder inquiring about the possibility of serving in Africa.¹¹ Yoder advised Weaver that the precarious financial situation meant that the mission would send few missionaries in the coming year or so, but that he should fill out the preliminary forms nonetheless in order to be prepared should an opportunity arise.¹² Weaver and his wife Irene would eventually serve in India and would be the first resident MBMC missionaries to work with AICs in southeastern Nigeria.

⁸ S. C. Yoder, “Prospective Fields in Africa,” n.d., IV-18-3, Overseas Committee Official Records, Reports - Africa.

⁹ “Proceedings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1930,” 20.

¹⁰ S. C. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, June 9, 1931, IV-7-1, Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908-1943, Box 30, Folder Weaver, Edwin I. 1928-1943.

¹¹ Edwin Weaver to S. C. Yoder, June 5, 1931, IV-7-1, Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908-1943, Box 30, Folder Weaver, Edwin I. 1928-1943.

¹² S. C. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, June 9, 1931.

The Lancaster conference of the MC did move to send missionaries to Africa under its own mission board, the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (EMBMC). The conference had been active in home mission initiatives for some time and in 1914 had formed its own mission board.¹³ Unlike MBMC it had the necessary financial resources and moved to expand its work to Africa.¹⁴ Orie Miller and one of the missionaries EMBMC assigned to the work, Elam Stauffer, traveled to the continent to investigate possible open fields, consulting with World Dominion Movement offices in London, Berlin, and Munich and the African Inland Mission office in London on route.¹⁵ Alexander McLeish of World Dominion identified Abyssinia, Sudan, or Tanganyika as possible mission sites. After consultation with missionaries and government officials in Dar es Salaam, Miller and Stauffer chose an open field near the eastern shore of Lake Victoria in Tanganyika in early 1934. In its 1933 annual meeting MBMC had passed a resolution affirming the EMBMC's intention to open a mission field in Africa and wishing its missionaries Godspeed.¹⁶ Although the Lancaster conference mission board opened this field, MBMC considered it part of the MC mission movement and manifested at least symbolic ownership in it. In the early years of the initiative the annual mission

¹³ Henry F. Graber, "Eastern Mennonite Missions (Lancaster Mennonite Conference)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1955, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Eastern_Mennonite_Missions_\(Lancaster_Mennonite_Conference\)&oldid=113905](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Eastern_Mennonite_Missions_(Lancaster_Mennonite_Conference)&oldid=113905) (accessed on May 12, 2015).

¹⁴ John E Sharp, *My Calling to Fulfill: The Orie O. Miller Story*, Kindle edition (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015), 181.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182-200.

¹⁶ *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Springs, PA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 21, 1933), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1933-1939, Resolution no. 3.

meetings included reports from the Tanganyika work and sent greetings to the missionaries there.¹⁷

After World War II MBMC finally did open work in Africa when its Mennonite Relief Committee commenced relief work in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1945.¹⁸ EMBMC eventually joined the work, which the two missions shared until 1951 when MBMC handed over its part entirely to EMBMC.¹⁹ Such short-term involvement was not enough to satisfy MBMC's desire for an African field, however, and by the mid 1950s the

¹⁷ *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 26, 1934), 15, IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1933-1938; *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Hopedale, IL: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 16, 1935), 29, IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1933-1938; Henry F. Garber, "My Observations Concerning Africa," in *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1937), 91-94; *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Fairview, MI: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 18, 1939), 19, IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1939-46; *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Johnstown, PA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 5, 1940), 21, IV-06-03, Box 4, Annual Meetings Annual Reports 1939-46; John H. Mosemann, "What Christ Sees in Africa," in *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1940), 82-85.

¹⁸ "Conjoint Meeting of Executive and Missions Committees of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities," (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 1, 1945), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee; "Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Conjoint Meeting of Executive, Missions and Relief Committees," (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 2, 1945), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee; Nathan Hege and Richard D. Thiessen, "Ethiopia," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 2012, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ethiopia&oldid=115197> (accessed on May 14, 2015).

¹⁹ "Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of Conjoint Executive, Missions, and Relief Committees," (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, April 18, 1947), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1944-1948 Exec Committee; "Report of the Mennonite Relief Committee," in *Report of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1950), 62-66; "Mennonite Relief Committee," in *Report of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951), 71-74.

mission was once again looking to establish work on the continent, this time fixing its attention on West Africa.²⁰

Radio, Indigenous Initiative, and Global Connections

A number of factors led to the arrival of the first Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' missionaries in West Africa in August 1957. The mission had recently become active in radio ministries, and its broadcasts attracted attention from Liberia. During the same period a Ghanaian pastor traveling in Europe visited the mission's work in Belgium and London after meeting a Flemish collaborator of Mennonite missionaries at a YMCA event in Paris. He spent several months with the London missionaries. The London Mennonite Center eventually commissioned him to return to Ghana and establish a Mennonite church in the country. He did so in 1956, giving MBMC an indigenous church in West Africa to go with its fledgling radio ministry. This section will show how these contacts via radio technology and missionaries in Europe resulted in the arrival of Mennonite missionaries to Ghana in 1957, the mission's first resident missionaries in West Africa. It will outline the mission's theory and strategy for its work in Ghana and show how it played out amidst the realities of this newly independent country. Finally, this story of the early Ghanaian mission will provide background that helps explain the arrival of MBMC missionaries to southeastern Nigeria and their engagement with African Independent Churches there.

²⁰ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, October 13, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955.

Radio and European Connections

Over the middle decades of the twentieth century, North American Mennonites became increasingly familiar with the medium of radio and its use as a tool for missionary witness. Between 1936 and 1951 they started thirty-two programs that aired over sixty-one different stations in fifty-four cities; by the end of that period, however, only about half were still functioning.²¹ As early as March 1937 the MBMC executive committee had considered the medium of radio as a preaching witness but deferred the matter to a later date, perhaps because at the time at least some Mennonite Church (MC) bishops and conferences prohibited the use of radios in Mennonite homes.²²

In 1951 a group of those interested in radio ministries met at Harrisonburg, Virginia to form the *Crusaders for Christ* to produce religious programming, an initiative that would become an MBMC ministry. The *Crusaders for Christ* provided an organizational framework for the Crusaders Quartet, a group that had already initiated a program of “sacred music and inspirational messages from the Word of God” but that relied on unpaid, public service time to broadcast its programs.²³ The new organizational setup allowed for raising funds to purchase airtime, hire staff, and expand the initiative. In 1952 the program became *The Mennonite Hour* and *Crusaders for Christ* became

²¹ Hubert R. Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years* (Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc., 1978), 15.

²² “Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities,” (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 10, 1937), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 3, Minutes 1933-1939; Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years*, 13–15.

²³ Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years*, 9–17.

Mennonite Crusaders, solidifying its denominational identity. In 1953 an agreement between the mission and the *Mennonite Crusaders* sought to create an effective program of evangelism via radio broadcasting and made *The Mennonite Hour* the radio arm of the MC.²⁴

By 1955 radio evangelism had become an integral part of the mission's work. *The Mennonite Hour* developed a Bible correspondence course that it distributed through its radio broadcasts and that missionaries corrected in various mission fields.²⁵ In 1956 *Mennonite Crusaders* became *Mennonite Broadcasts, Incorporated* (MBI) and took over the functions of the mission's Radio Evangelism Committee.²⁶

The power of radio to reach audiences over large geographical regions made it an attractive missionary tool for North American missions, and MBMC was no exception. In the politically polarized post World War II world, radio programming could reach areas of

²⁴ Ibid., 18–21; “Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee,” (Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 10, 1953), IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Annual Meeting - 1953; “Special Actions and Resolutions,” in *Report of the Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1953), 109–10; J. D. Graber to Missionaries of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 19, 1953, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 1, Annual Meeting - 1953.

²⁵ J. D. Graber, “Report of the Secretary,” in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 16–18; H. Ernest Bennett, “Report of the Radio Evangelism Committee,” in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 103–5; Henry Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958; Henry Weaver to Paul Kraybill, April 9, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958; Grant M. Stoltzfus, “New Tools for the Missionary,” *Gospel Herald*, February 12, 1957.

²⁶ Carolyn Weaver Esch, *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir Booklet, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1906-1956*, ed. Levi C. Hartzler (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1956), 16–17; “Business Sessions of the Board,” in *Report of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1956), 15-19.

the world where missionaries could not go and could prepare audiences for subsequent missionary contact.²⁷ By the mid 1950s religious broadcasters were broadcasting from the Americas, Asia, West and North Africa, and Europe. Mennonites were aware of such possibilities and arranged for missionary radio stations in Ecuador, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Philippines, Formosa (Taiwan), and Tangier to broadcast *The Mennonite Hour* around the world.²⁸

In 1956 MBI added the station ELWA in Liberia to the list so that audiences across West Africa could tune their radios to the program. ELWA personnel coordinated their efforts with mission organizations working in West Africa to translate their radio content into meaningful messages for particular contexts.²⁹ MBI shared this concern. Recognizing the cultural differences around the world, starting in 1956 MBI produced *The Way to Life*, an international version of *The Mennonite Hour*.³⁰ The international version was shorter and edited to remove illustrations and references not appropriate for foreign release. Broadcasts such as *The Mennonite Hour* and later *The Way to Life* became one of the factors that resulted in MBMC sending missionaries to Ghana and Nigeria in the late 1950s.

²⁷ Timothy H. B. Stoneman, "Preparing the Soil for Global Revival: Station HCJB's Radio Circle, 1949-59," *Church History* 76, no. 1 (March 2007): 114-55; Henry Weaver to H. Ernest Bennett, May 16, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958.

²⁸ Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years*, 63-64.

²⁹ Timothy Stoneman, "Radio: Missions: Station ELWA in West Africa," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, no. 4 (October 2012): 200-204.

³⁰ Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years*, 64.

The Mennonite Hour broadcasts generated interest among African listeners. A senator from Liberia who was impressed with the music on the program wrote asking for records and suggested that Mennonites should initiate mission work in Liberia.³¹ He even offered to arrange a meeting with the Liberian president and indicated that free land would be available for the mission. Since MBMC wanted to open a mission field in West Africa, this contact provided an enticing opportunity.³² In cooperation with the mission, two *Mennonite Hour* representatives visited Liberia and the Gold Coast (Ghana) in the spring of 1956 to assess the possibilities.³³ They found that other missions had already occupied Liberia for the most part, but in the Gold Coast the ministry of George Thompson, a Gold Coast native who was establishing a Mennonite church there, impressed them.

Thompson had met Mennonites in Europe the year before and was establishing a Mennonite church in the Gold Coast. He had attended the YMCA centennial celebrations in Paris where he met a Flemish coworker of Mennonite missionaries in Brussels.³⁴ Thompson visited the MBMC's work in Brussels and London and proposed to return to

³¹ Henry Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 4, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Henry D. Jr. Confidential.

³² J. D. Graber to Henry Weaver, November 29, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Henry D. Jr. Confidential.

³³ Henry Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958; Henry Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 7, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958; Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956.

³⁴ John H. Yoder to Quintus Leatherman, September 23, 1955, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, Ghana 1955; David A. Shank, "On the Margin: My Pilgrimage in Mission," in *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 41.

his homeland and do evangelistic work in the name of the Mennonites and with Mennonite support.

Given the mission's desire for a West African field, this was too good an opportunity to pass up. Graber recommended that London missionary Quintus Leatherman license Thompson and authorize him to start a Mennonite Church in the Gold Coast if he accepted Mennonite doctrine and practice.³⁵ In London Leatherman oriented Thompson to Mennonite understandings and evaluated his capacities for mission work in the Gold Coast, eventually baptizing him and commissioning him to establish a Mennonite church in his homeland.³⁶ MBMC delegated Leatherman to be Thompson's supervisor, enrolled Thompson in correspondence courses in theology and Mennonite history at Goshen College, and provided a small stipend to support his work.³⁷

For the mission this was an opportunity to establish a church in the Gold Coast that would be indigenous from the very beginning. Leadership and the propagation of the faith would be entirely in native hands and foreign financial assistance would be kept to a minimum in order to avoid dependency.³⁸ Thompson returned to the Gold Coast in early

³⁵ J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, November 5, 1955, IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, Ghana 1955.

³⁶ J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, December 14, 1955, George Thompson to J. D. Graber, December 24, 1955, and Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, December 28, 1955, all in IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, Ghana 1955; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, January 17, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Quintus Leatherman, "London Missionaries Work for Growth," in *Report of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1956), 67-68.

³⁷ J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, December 14, 1955; J. D. Graber to S. C. Yoder, January 4, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956.

³⁸ J. D. Graber to Norman Derstine, April 4, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956.

1956. Having visited Mennonite centers in Brussels and London, the latter with a ministry of housing students, he planned to create a hostel and other institutions in the Gold Coast.³⁹ MBMC now had mission work in West Africa, work that Graber and his colleagues even referred to as “indigenous” at that.⁴⁰

An African Mission Field

From January 1956 to August 1957 Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities’ engagement in Ghana, the Gold Coast prior to March 6, 1957, was the work of George Thompson. The mission sent visitors three times during this period to see the work and advise him. *The Mennonite Hour* representatives Norman Derstine and Lewis Martin visited in May 1956, mission president John Mosemann and London missionary Quintus Leatherman in September-October, and Leatherman again in March-April 1957.⁴¹ Thompson established Bible studies out of which a modest group became the first Mennonite church in the country.⁴² His primary focus, however, was the promotion of

³⁹ Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, December 7, 1955, and J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, December 14, 1955, in IV-18-10 MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 2, Ghana 1955; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, January 17, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956.

⁴⁰ J. D. Graber to Norman Derstine, April 4, 1956; Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956.

⁴¹ J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, April 16, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956; Norman Derstine, “Visiting the Gold Coast,” Trip Report, (May 1956), IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; John H. Mosemann, “Report on the Cold Coast,” Trip Report, (October 1956), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; G. K. Ayerh, “Address at the Reception of Two Visitors of the Mennonite Hour,” October 5, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, February 12, 1957 and Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, March 23, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957, The same folder includes numerous other reports from Leatherman to Graber during March 1957.

⁴² Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956; Mosemann, “Report on the Cold Coast”; Derstine, “Visiting the Gold Coast.”

The Mennonite Hour literature, including Bible correspondence courses, and the establishment of a number of institutions: a Mennonite center, student hostels, a high school, and several primary schools.

Derstine encouraged Thompson to use *The Mennonite Hour* materials. Thomson distributed the correspondence courses, and *The Mennonite Hour* authorized him to correct students' responses and give a certificate upon completion of each course.⁴³ Another activity was the sale of collections of sermons aired on the broadcast and subsequently published.⁴⁴ There was great demand for the correspondence courses after Thompson placed an advertisement in an Accra newspaper announcing availability, and he eventually ordered hundreds of copies.⁴⁵ Ironically there is no evidence that the Ghanaians involved listened to *The Mennonite Hour* or its international version *The Way to Life* during this initial period, but the correspondence courses and printed sermons drew the interest of many.

Apparently taking his cue from the Mennonite center in London and the student hostel connected to it, Thompson worked to establish a student hostel as well as a number of other institutions, especially schools. These were at first in Accra but later in towns and villages where he brought groups into the Mennonite fold. The first centers outside of

⁴³ Norman Derstine to George Thompson, May 28, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Henry Weaver to John Mosemann, July 23, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956.

⁴⁴ J. D. Graber to G. K. Ayerh, February 26, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁴⁵ George Thompson to Norman Derstine, August 2, 1956 and George Thompson to Brother Mosemann, November 29, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; Henry Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 6, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958.

Accra were at Dodowa and Somanya, two towns north of the city.⁴⁶ During 1956 and the first seven months of 1957, Thompson and his collaborators planned and/or established at least eleven different institutions.⁴⁷ These included primary schools, student hostels, secondary schools, Mennonite centers, and a hospital. Since MBMC sought to make its mission initiative in Ghana indigenous, executive secretary Graber was hesitant to provide financial assistance that might encourage dependency on foreign funds.⁴⁸ Hence funding for these institutions was hard to come by. The mission promised some limited start-up funds for the hostel in Accra, but Thompson patched together his own money with promises to pay later to get his numerous projects started.⁴⁹

Thompson's ministry in Ghana both fascinated and took MBMC aback. Visitors to Ghana reported his energy, wide contacts with Ghanaian authorities, and skill at leading Bible studies.⁵⁰ His reports of new Mennonite groups in villages and the large numbers of people that requested the correspondence courses seemed to indicate

⁴⁶ George Thompson to Norman Derstine, June 14, 1956 and G. K. Ayerh to J. N. Benianah, July 13, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; George Thompson to Norman Derstine, August 2, 1956; Mosemann, "Report on the Cold Coast"; Ayerh, "Address at the Reception of Two Visitors of the Mennonite Hour."

⁴⁷ Reference to these different institutions found in multiple communications in folders Ghana 1956 and Ghana 1957 in IV-18-13-02, Box 4.

⁴⁸ Quintus Leatherman to George Thompson, February 12, 1957, J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, February 26, 1957, and J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 22, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, HM. 1-563, Box 3, Folder 28.

⁴⁹ Mosemann, "Report on the Cold Coast"; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, February 12, 1957; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, March 26, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 22, 1957; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, April 10, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 28, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, Hostetler, S. Jay 1955-59.

⁵⁰ Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956; Mosemann, "Report on the Cold Coast."

incredibly fast growth.⁵¹ The mission had been disappointed in India when its work did not attract mass movements to Christianity, as had been the case with some missions. Thompson's energy and apparent success in Ghana must have made it seem like the mission would finally have a field in which there was significant church growth, an ongoing concern for Graber.

Yet there was cause for unease. Visitors noted that Reverend Dagadu, secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana, was not supportive of the work and there was tension between him and Thompson.⁵² Comity was becoming a thing of the past, but MBMC was still concerned to maintain positive ecumenical relationships, especially in a new field where other missions and churches were already working. Finally there was the concern about Thompson's focus on building institutions, perhaps at the expense of laying a solid base for the new church.⁵³ Mission institutions had become problematic in India and, if financed with foreign funds, risked countering the indigenous principle that the mission sought to embody. Such concerns motivated the mission to send North American

⁵¹ George Thompson to John H. Mosemann, July 27, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; George Thompson to Norman Derstine, August 2, 1956; George Thompson to John H. Moseman, September 5, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, January 2, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, McGavran, Donald 1956-64; J. D. Graber to Norman Derstine, February 5, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁵² Mosemann, "Report on the Cold Coast"; Quintus Leatherman to J. D. Graber, March 26, 1957.

⁵³ Quintus Leatherman to George Thompson, February 12, 1957 and J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, February 26, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 28.

missionaries to Ghana in order to guide Thompson and the growing Mennonite movement that he was spearheading.⁵⁴

As MBMC prepared to send its first missionaries to Ghana, it developed a twofold strategy of supporting Thompson's work and establishing a mission field among an unreached people in the northern part of the country. The mission's priority was indigenization, so the missionaries would provide council and encouragement to Thompson in his different ministries in Accra.⁵⁵ They would not take on strong leadership roles. The situation in northern Ghana, however, was different. Graber consulted with Donald McGavran about mission strategy in this new African field.⁵⁶ Graber knew McGavran as a friend from serving at the same time in India and followed his work in the area of church growth closely, believing that such a focus was a needed encouragement for missionaries who too often encountered problems and unresponsive populations.⁵⁷ Mennonite missionaries had been familiar with McGavran's work with J. W. Pickett about mass movements in India, and the mission's Dhamtari field had served

⁵⁴ Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, May 23, 1956; Mosemann, "Report on the Cold Coast"; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, December 22, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Ghana 1956; J. D. Graber to Members of Executive Committee, April 15, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁵⁵ J. D. Graber to John H. Yoder, February 26, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 13, Yoder, John H 1956-61; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 28; J. D. Graber to Members of Executive Committee, April 15, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁵⁶ Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 3, 1956, J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, November 13, 1956, and Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, McGavran, Donald 1956-64; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, January 2, 1957.

⁵⁷ Walter Sawatsky, "Living and Writing the Vision: The Missiological Pilgrimage of Wilbert R. Shenk," in *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 8; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, January 2, 1957.

as a case study in their survey of such movements in mid India.⁵⁸ McGavran had published his views about mission strategy in *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* in 1955, and late the following year Graber consulted with him about the mission's strategy in its new Gold Coast field.⁵⁹

McGavran's response to Graber was consistent with the church growth theories he was formulating at the time. McGavran advised that MBMC should be able to find a people group that had not yet been evangelized and that it should focus its energies there, taking advantage of recent missiological methodology that appropriated sociology to understand church growth.⁶⁰ If for some reason such an approach was not possible, he wrote, there were enough non-Christian and marginally Christian people in Ghana to plant a Mennonite church in the midst of the Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist churches. Following McGavran's advice, Graber formulated a mission strategy that would use evangelistic outreach and the provision of educational and medical services to convert a people group in northern Ghana while providing advice and encouragement to Thompson's indigenous Mennonite movement in the south.⁶¹

The first missionaries from North America that MBMC assigned to Ghana arrived in August 1957. These were S. J. and Ida Hostetler, veteran India missionaries, Erma

⁵⁸ J. W. Pickett, D. A. McGavran, and G. H. Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India* (Jubbulpore, India: The Mission Press, 1938).

⁵⁹ Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955).

⁶⁰ Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 3, 1956; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, November 13, 1956; Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 1956; J. D. Graber to Donald McGavran, January 2, 1957.

⁶¹ J. D. Graber to John H. Yoder, February 26, 1957; J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957; J. D. Graber to Members of Executive Committee, April 15, 1957.

Grove, and Ruby Hostetler.⁶² Rudy was also a veteran India missionary but not related to S. J. and Ida. Graber met them in Accra, and he and Hostetler toured northern Ghana in search of an area that other missions had not already occupied.⁶³ Their investigations found no areas in northern Ghana without a mission presence.

Since no open fields were found in the North, the missionaries settled in Accra, associating themselves with a number of the projects that Thompson had initiated. In fact, Thompson was eager for them to stay in southern Ghana and assist him in this way.⁶⁴ Grove and Ruby Hostetler took responsibility for a girls' hostel and a school that were not yet functioning but for which Thompson had already rented facilities. S. J. and Ida Hostetler took over the work of the Bible correspondence courses which soon included responding to listener correspondence from *The Way to Life* programs broadcast from ELWA.⁶⁵ Since the original plan to work in an unevangelized field in the North had not materialized, the mission followed McGavran's second option, planting a church among

⁶² J. D. Graber, "Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa," Trip Report (Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 11, 1957), IV-7-2 General Corres. 1938-68, Box 33, Graber, J. D. 1956-62; S. Jay Hostetler, "First Missionaries Arrive in Ghana," in *The Living Church in Action: The 52nd Annual Meeting of the MBMC* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1958), 29-31; "Historical Directory of Overseas Missionaries," in *Go Where I Send You, Working Reports Feb. 1, 1980 - Jan. 31, 1981* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1980), OHD - 1-80 - OHD - 12-80.

⁶³ Graber, "Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa."

⁶⁴ J. D. Graber, "First Report on Ghana," (Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 20, 1957), IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁶⁵ Lewis E. Strite to J. D. Graber, November 11, 1958, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1956-1958; Norman Derstine to J. D. Graber, February 16, 1959, IV-18-03-02, Box 8, Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc. 1959-60.

the already established churches in southern Ghana.⁶⁶ The strategy was to send missionaries who would provide educational and medical services in schools, clinics, and hospitals as a way to strengthen Thompson's nascent Mennonite movement and help it to grow.⁶⁷ A strong Mennonite church would be a spiritual stimulus in a context where there appeared to be much nominal Christianity.

Two major challenges faced the missionaries in the year following their arrival to Ghana: the strong focus on institutions and the goal of reinforcing what they considered to be an indigenous church movement. Thompson had initiated a number of institutions, but the only one that was functioning when the missionaries arrived was the school in the village of Mayera.⁶⁸ In the other cases Thompson had rented unfinished buildings or allowed rental agreements to lapse. Graber encouraged Thompson to get a few of his projects up and running before initiating others. The mission was willing to provide missionaries for educational and medical institutions, but after the experience of India, it was hesitant to invest heavily in their establishment. Graber's Ghana trip report noted that the program in Ghana was "manifestly a development of institutions."⁶⁹ This was acceptable because they were indigenous, Thompson had established them and was not

⁶⁶ Donald McGavran to J. D. Graber, November 3, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 8, McGavran, Donald 1956-64.

⁶⁷ Graber, "Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa"; J. D. Graber to Lowell Herr and Paul Schrock, November 9, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 21, 1958 and J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, February 3, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; Jonathan G. Yoder, "Report Regarding the Possibility of Medical Mission Work in Ghana," September 1958, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

⁶⁸ Graber, "Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa."

⁶⁹ Ibid.

seeking mission financing for their operations. Thompson appeared confident that the schools and hostels would pay for themselves after an initial start-up investment for which the mission did provide some limited assistance. Yet the heavy institutional nature of the Ghana mission was troubling. Graber's report noted, "How these institutions can best serve the cause of evangelism and the building up of a strong Church is a matter of concern and should continue to be studied. It is clear that a mere operation of institutions is not the end in itself."⁷⁰

In fact the strong institutional focus of MBMC's Ghana mission diminished by mid 1958. The secondary school in Somanya closed in October 1957.⁷¹ The primary school in Accra did not attract the influx of pupils that Thompson had imagined, and the domestic science school disappeared from missionary letters and reports.⁷² The girls' hostel that Grove was to run met a similar fate.⁷³ It opened in May 1958 but drew only one temporary resident.⁷⁴ Thompson had rented an unfinished building to house the boys' hostel, but the landlord was not able to keep his promise to finish the building.⁷⁵ That project disappeared from reports by late 1958, apparently having lapsed like the others.

⁷⁰ Ibid; Unfortunately the sources are limited, providing the view of mission administrator Graber and the missionaries of the situation. Thompson's voice is lacking and would add depth to this history.

⁷¹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, October 7, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957.

⁷² S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 28, 1957.

⁷³ Erma Grove, "It Did Not Work," in *Spirit-Directed Witnessing 1959, A Handbook of Mission Activity Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1959), 26.

⁷⁴ S. J. Hostetler to Quintus Leatherman, June 5, 1958 and S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, June 6, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 15, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

⁷⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, August 14, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

The village primary schools were the exception. In the villages it was still possible to find areas that were not served by other churches. Hostetler and his Ghanaian coworkers agreed to establish primary schools in villages where a Mennonite church would also be planted.⁷⁶ By June 1958 the mission supported schools in five villages.⁷⁷ During the same year MBMC evaluated the need for health services in the country and started recruiting doctors and nurses who would work in already established medical institutions or collaborate with the Ghanaian government to establish new clinics or hospitals.⁷⁸ The mission had a predisposition against institutions as a missionary strategy but was willing to participate in them if there was a clear connection with church development or if they provided a channel to contribute educational or health services without heavy capital investment.

MBMC's goal of reinforcing Thompson's indigenous Mennonite movement proved to be a challenge for the missionaries. When it became clear that they would be working in much closer proximity to Thompson than anticipated, Graber advised a strict division of labor.⁷⁹ The missionaries would each have their work and Thompson would continue to develop the work he had started. Interaction would be for council and

⁷⁶ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1957, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1957; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 10, 1958, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 21, 1958, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, March 19, 1958, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, April 2, 1958, and S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, April 10, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁷⁷ S. J. Hostetler to Quintus Leatherman, June 5, 1958.

⁷⁸ Jonathan G. Yoder, "Report Regarding the Possibility of Medical Mission Work in Ghana," September 1958, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, October 18, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁷⁹ Graber, "Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa."

fellowship. Thompson would not work under missionary supervision and the missionaries would not work under Thompson's supervision.

In practice such a strict division was difficult to maintain. The missionaries soon came to believe that Thompson was using their presence as a way to boost the credibility of his projects and was working in ways that alienated people from the church.⁸⁰ They reported that he had a habit of berating harshly those who worked under him, humiliating them publicly.⁸¹ Some of those who worked with Thompson claimed that he had promised them jobs or scholarships if they would join the Mennonite church.⁸² Thompson announced to the headmaster of a school in Accra that the mission had arranged to send four teachers to Ghana the following summer.⁸³ This was to appease the headmaster when MBMC did not take over his school as Thompson had suggested it would. The Hostetlers were aghast. They knew there were no such plans to take over the school and that no missionary teachers were on the way at that time. S. J. Hostetler came to believe that Thompson's Mennonite movement was not indigenous after all but heavily dependent on the credibility gained by its association with MBMC and the presence of its missionaries.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, October 7, 1957; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 21, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, April 2, 1958.

⁸¹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 10, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 21, 1958.

⁸² S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, March 19, 1958.

⁸³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, June 6, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁸⁴ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 21, 1958.

A breaking point came when the landlord of a building that Thompson had rented to use as a Mennonite center took him to court for nonpayment of rent. The Mennonite Church of Ghana was named as co-defendant with Thompson.⁸⁵ Hostetler sought the advice of a lawyer who informed him that the mission was liable because Thompson had made the rental agreement on its behalf. Fearing for the good name of the Mennonite mission and church in Ghana, Hostetler settled the matter out of court by paying the arrears.⁸⁶ He also took over leadership of the small Accra congregation and recommended to Graber that MBMC prohibit Thompson from acting on its behalf.⁸⁷ Graber did so via an official letter from the mission and reiterated his belief that Thompson and the missionaries should each have their separate domains of work.⁸⁸ Thompson's institutions did not become self-supporting and therefore foundered, and he eventually stopped participating in Mennonite mission and church activities.⁸⁹

The missionaries found themselves in charge of a largely traditional mission initiative, a situation they had hoped to avoid by working alongside an indigenous Mennonite movement that a Ghanaian had started. Thanks to connections through its appropriation of radio technology, its missionaries in Europe, and the indigenous agency

⁸⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, May 29, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁸⁶ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, June 6, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, June 10, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁸⁷ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, May 29, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁸⁸ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, June 3, 1958 and J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, July 16, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁸⁹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, August 14, 1958; S. Jay Hostetler, "Ghana and Nigeria, West Africa for 1958," in *Spirit-Directed Witnessing 1959, A Handbook of Mission Activity Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1959), 23–26.

of George Thomson however, MBMC did have the African field that it had sought for nearly three decades.

Nigerian Independent Churches Engage the Mennonite Mission

Having established a field with resident missionaries in Ghana, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) was positioned to respond favorably when African Independent Churches (AIC's) from southeastern Nigeria solicited its assistance. This section will recount how a group of AICs contacted Mennonite missionaries, thus initiating a relationship that would significantly alter the mission's vision for its West African field. It will show how these churches and the Hostetlers engaged each other. The AICs sought to take on a Mennonite identity and acquire the benefits of traditional missionary structures, and the Hostetlers were excited about welcoming a large number of indigenous Christians into the Mennonite fold. Together they formed Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) during the period from their first contact in November 1958 until missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived in November 1959, the first MBMC resident missionaries in Nigeria. Finally, this section will show that mission personnel recognized that the situation in West Africa differed from the traditional mission settings to which they were accustomed and that they were conscious of critiques that their innovative mission engagement in the region might provoke. Despite the uncertainties of the new context and possible critiques, MBMC moved to open its second West African field in southeastern Nigeria.

The mission's engagement in Nigeria came at the invitation of AICs. This was consistent with long established practice in the region. As chapter two noted, as early as the second decade of the sixteenth century the king of Benin had asked the king of Portugal for missionaries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Church of Scotland, Qua Iboe Mission, Primitive Methodists, Lutherans, Salvation Army, and Church of Christ had all established mission work in the area at the invitation of local people. This was part and parcel of increasing global connections, especially as they were embodied in the modern missionary movement.

In the 1950s it was MBMC's turn to receive invitations to enter this field. The post World War II context of nationalism and the move towards independence had made it even more likely that Nigerian churches that were not satisfied with the relationships they had with the missions that birthed them would reach out to establish new connections. The strong AIC movement in the region was an indication that just as the new nation was coming out from under British colonial rule, so many churches rejected the ecclesial authority structures of the foreign mission churches. The AICs were part of a society that was throwing off old colonial patterns and finding its voice. In December 1955 Paul Erb, editor of the *Gospel Herald*, passed on to the mission a letter he had received from Bishop E. Edem Ephraim of the Pentecostal Assemblies in Nigeria at Uyo.⁹⁰ Ephraim asked for assistance for his church, financial assistance or the assignment of a missionary. The church claimed to have no affiliation with other western missions

⁹⁰ J. D. Graber to Paul Erb, December 20, 1955, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1955; E. Edem Ephraim to Paul Erb, n.d. and E. Edem Ephraim to J. D. Graber, February 2, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

but was in contact with a group called the Associated Pentecostal Churches in America from Saint Louis, Missouri. Ephraim offered to affiliate the church with MBMC. Graber took the request seriously and responded by asking Ephraim for more information. By this time the mission was already in touch with Thompson, and *The Mennonite Hour* had made contacts in Liberia. In the end Graber did not pursue the matter further.

Two years later, however, another invitation arrived. Matthew Ekereke, secretary of the Saint John's Baptist Church wrote to Paul Peachey, a MBMC missionary in Japan, asking if his church's sixty congregations with 1,160 members could affiliate with MBMC.⁹¹ Ekereke wrote from Ikot Ada Idem, just eight kilometers northwest of Uyo from where Ephraim had written. It was the follow-up to Ekereke's letter that would result in the mission's engagement in southeastern Nigeria.

Between September and November 1958 there was an exchange of letters between Ekereke and MBMC personnel as they discerned how best to engage each other. For their part, the Nigerians acted out of the mid twentieth century religious context of southeastern Nigeria and assumed that the mission would provide for them the kind of religious and social services that other missions of the region provided. They had obtained Paul Peachey's address from M. D. Akpan of the Universal Pentecostal Church, information that had apparently been on a tract, and they had learned of the Mennonites from *The Way to Life* broadcasts from ELWA.⁹² They did not use Peachey's name in the

⁹¹ Matthew Ekereke to MBMC, July 25, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

⁹² Matthew Ekereke to Paul Peachey, September 2, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in Calabar Province," November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-1959; I. U. Nsajak, *Africa in Three*

first letter but did subsequently, indicating that they may have acquired just an MBMC address without his name from Akpan. Ekereke's first letter expressed the desire to affiliate with the mission and to adopt its name and teachings. It also asked for the mission's by-laws and issued an invitation to visit. Peachey put Ekereke in touch with Hostetler in Ghana, and Ekereke invited Hostetler to the church's annual meeting that would take place in December.⁹³

For the mission's part, Hostetler and Graber were fascinated with the possibility of taking these Nigerian AIC congregations into the Mennonite fold, although they articulated a sense of caution about verifying the authenticity of the church before accepting it. Hostetler expressed excitement about Ekereke's proposal, wrote to him asking for more information about Saint John's Baptist Church, and sent him literature about the Mennonites.⁹⁴ Hostetler was anxious to see the church for himself and made plans to visit in November, before the December meetings to which Ekereke had invited him.⁹⁵ Part of his urgency came from a conversation he had with a missionary in Ghana who was familiar with southeastern Nigeria.⁹⁶ This missionary said that it was easier to

Dimensions, DVD (converted from 16mm film), written and directed by Ken Anderson (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1967).

⁹³ S. J. Hostetler to Paul Peachey, November 2, 1958 and Matthew Ekereke to S. J. Hostetler, October 27, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

⁹⁴ S. J. Hostetler to Matthew Ekereke, October 8, 1958 and S. J. Hostetler to Matthew Ekereke, October 21, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

⁹⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 1, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; S. J. Hostetler to Matthew Ekereke, November 5, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 5, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

⁹⁶ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 10, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

get many converts quickly there than in any other field. He said that individuals were creating many new churches in the region but that other missions would “swallow them up” if MBMC did not act quickly.⁹⁷ This is consistent with the competitive religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria at mid-century that chapter two outlined. Hostetler reported to Graber, “We are not interested in losing more time.”⁹⁸

Graber too was excited about the prospects in Nigeria. He noted, however, that he found them staggering and responded to Hostetler that they seemed “a bit fantastic.”⁹⁹ Nevertheless, he opined that the mission should not ignore what seemed like a real need, a genuine opening, and an opportunity to contribute to the effective evangelization of Africa.¹⁰⁰ He encouraged Hostetler to visit as soon as possible and not let the opportunity escape. Both Hostetler and Graber expressed the need for caution, the need to visit the church and confirm that its claims and requests were genuine.¹⁰¹ The tone of their discussion, however, was upbeat, and they were eager to engage this opportunity for a second African field.

Besides the desire for missionary engagement in Africa, there were two other factors that made this new Nigerian opportunity attractive, MBMC’s commitment to

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, October 18, 1958.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, November 14, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

¹⁰¹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 1, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to Paul Peachey, November 2, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 5, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 10, 1958; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, November 14, 1958.

indigenization and its hope for a mass movement into the Mennonite Church. Hostetler and Graber did not refer to Saint John's Baptist Church as an AIC; they were not yet using that nomenclature. Hostetler did refer to it as "indigenous."¹⁰² He wrote to Graber and Peachey that he hoped a visit would confirm that it really was "indigenous."¹⁰³

The goal of the mission was to establish an indigenous church, one that was self-propagating, self-governing, and self-financing, and here was an opportunity to have a ready-made indigenous Mennonite church without having to start from scratch. Hostetler and Graber were veteran missionaries from the India field where it had taken half a century for the emergence of an indigenous Mennonite church, and even then it was still heavily dependent on the mission for financial assistance. The initiative to commission Thompson to start a Mennonite church in Ghana had been attractive, in part, because MBMC saw it as an indigenous effort. That initiative had foundered in the months before Ekereke made contact with Peachey. Now there was another opportunity to have an indigenous African Mennonite church, and this time it was an already functioning church with nearly 1,200 members. Hostetler wrote to Graber, "It would be wonderful to get such a church, and just let it go on, just helping here and there as desired."¹⁰⁴ Both Hostetler and Graber appear to have assumed that to do so meant bringing the church into the Mennonite fold. The idea that even with their assistance it might remain unaffiliated with a western church or mission did not seem to occur to them.

¹⁰² S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 5, 1958.

¹⁰³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 1, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to Paul Peachey, November 2, 1958.

¹⁰⁴ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 1, 1958.

Behind Hostetler and Graber's excitement lay also the expectation of a large influx into the Mennonite church. As chapter three noted, the missionary experience in India had created an expectation that mass movements into the church were possible. Hostetler and Graber had been missionaries in India when the Mid-India survey critiqued the American Mennonite Mission there, arguing that its way of working impeded such movements. They were among those who sought to exchange old strategies that did not work for others that would encourage a large influx of Indians into the church. They had not succeeded in this goal, but Donald McGavran continued to develop church growth theory based on the mass movement phenomenon. Graber followed McGavran's advice in his plans to establish an MBMC field in northern Ghana. That had not materialized, but the Nigeria opportunity now seemed to raise again the possibility of whole groups of people coming into the Mennonite Church.

Hostetler was well versed in mass movement theory. He had given a presentation that explained mass movement ideas to MBMC's annual mission meeting in 1936 when he was on furlough.¹⁰⁵ When the mission opened a new field in Bihar, India, hoping to be more successful at attracting such movements, it appointed the Hostetlers as its first missionaries there. In Bihar, however, they were no more successful at attracting a mass movement than had been the case in the Dhamtari field. Now the Hostetlers were faced with the possibility of a large influx into the Mennonite church in this Africa field, an exciting prospect indeed. S. J. wrote, "The more we consider this whole proposition, the

¹⁰⁵ S. Jay Hostetler, "Soul Winning Methods That Have Proved Successful in India," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 94–101.

more it staggers us. If we could be joined by a whole 1,200 member church, we would have almost the numerical equivalent of our India Church.”¹⁰⁶

Between November 19 and December 19, 1958, S. J. Hostetler visited the Nigerian church three times, giving positive reports of what he found. His second trip was with two visiting North American Mennonite leaders, Orie O. Miller and John R. Mumaw.¹⁰⁷ Miller and Mumaw had scheduled a visit to Ghana in early December, and Graber suggested they might visit the Nigeria church with Hostetler.¹⁰⁸

Miller was an influential twentieth century Mennonite leader who did much to increase North American Mennonite engagement around the globe in the post World War II period, and Mumaw was an prominent Mennonite educator. Miller was executive secretary of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) from 1935 to 1958, vice-president of Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities from 1925 to 1935 and secretary from 1935 to 1958, formulator and promoter of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), and was involved in numerous other Mennonite initiatives including the establishment of Menno Travel Service and Mennonite Mutual Aid.¹⁰⁹ Miller was also an instrumental voice encouraging Mennonite mission engagement in Africa. It was

¹⁰⁶ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 10, 1958.

¹⁰⁷ John R. Mumaw and S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Calabar Province Visit,” (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, December 1958), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹⁰⁸ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, November 11, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Orie O 1956-1965.

¹⁰⁹ John M. Bender, “Miller, Orie O.,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Orie_O._\(1892-1977\)&oldid=104410](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Miller,_Orie_O._(1892-1977)&oldid=104410) (accessed March 27, 2015); Erb, *Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era*, 184, 193; John E Sharp, *My Calling to Fulfill: The Orie O. Miller Story*, Chapters 5, 9 and 10; J. Winfield Fretz, *The Meda Experiment 1953-1978: Twenty-Five Years of Experience in Helping the “Little People” to Get Established in Their Own Businesses in Over Twenty Countries Around the World* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1978), 16–17.

he who had suggested that I. E. Burkhart speak on “The Call to Africa” at the 1929 MBMC annual meetings and who had helped Burkhart find the necessary materials to prepare his presentation.¹¹⁰ Graber and Miller maintained a working relationship, consulting with each other on Mennonite overseas work and visiting each other’s workers and projects.¹¹¹ Mumaw was an important leader in Mennonite education and president of Eastern Mennonite College and Seminary, now University, from 1948 to 1965.¹¹² Miller and Mumaw lent their credibility to the cause, giving positive reports of the Nigeria churches and, along with Hostetler, encouraging the mission to welcome them into the Mennonite fold.¹¹³

Hostetler’s individual reports were similarly encouraging. He reported that the Nigerian congregations appeared to be a true church of Jesus Christ that was alive and growing.¹¹⁴ They had a desire to follow God and to conform to the MC in doctrine and belief. He wrote that they would not need to radically change their practices in order to

¹¹⁰ Erb, *Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era*, 188; Burkhart, “The Call of Africa, (A) The Unoccupied Territory.”

¹¹¹ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, April 5, 1951 and Orie O. Miller to J. D. Graber, April 9, 1951, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955; J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, March 30, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 4, Mennonite Central Committee 1951-1955; Orie O. Miller to J. D. Graber, December 8, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, January 14, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955; J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, January 10, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955 Confidential; J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, October 13, 1955; Orie O. Miller to J. D. Graber, October 20, 1955, IV-18-10, Box 4, Orie O 1954-1955.

¹¹² Hubert R. Pellman, “Mumaw, John Rudy (1904-1993),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M8445> (accessed June 2, 2015).

¹¹³ S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province,” (Accra, Ghana, November 28, 1958) and John R. Mumaw and S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Calabar Province Visit”; John R. Mumaw to J. D. Graber, December 10, 1958 and Orie O. Miller to J. D. Graber, December 12, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Orie O 1956-1965.

¹¹⁴ Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province.”

conform to Mennonite standards, noting that they required women to cover their heads in Church, practiced foot washing, concurred with nonresistance, and only baptized believers. Hostetler was also impressed with the organizational capacities of the church leadership.¹¹⁵ When he attended their yearly meeting in December, they had organized it well and later formally documented it in typed meeting minutes.¹¹⁶ This was in contrast to the Ghana situation where he found himself starting from scratch. In Nigeria there was already a church that appeared to be well organized and to have a vibrant spiritual life.

The churches that invited MBMC to Nigeria focused more on the services that foreign missions normally provided in the region than on distinctive Mennonite teaching. In the report of their visit, Hostetler and Mumaw noted that African churches in the region regularly sought assistance from western missions, asking for schools, medical centers, and maternity houses.¹¹⁷ Those that invited MBMC were no different. From the first visit they requested schools, scholarships, a Bible school, and a hospital.¹¹⁸ They had, however, declared themselves ready to adopt Mennonite doctrines.¹¹⁹ Hostetler had sent them the booklet *Who Are the Mennonites?* after first exchanging letters.¹²⁰ By the

¹¹⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹¹⁶ “Annual General Conference of Mennonite Church,” Meeting Minutes (Ikot Eyo, Eket, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, December 11, 1958), HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

¹¹⁷ John R. Mumaw and S. J. Hostetler, “Report of Calabar Province Visit.”

¹¹⁸ Mennonite Church to Brother and Sister Hostetler, November 23, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

¹¹⁹ Matthew Ekereke to MBMC, July 25, 1958.

¹²⁰ S. J. Hostetler to Matthew Ekereke, October 21, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; John C. Wenger, *Who Are the Mennonites?* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, n.d.).

time of his first visit they had changed their name to The Mennonite Church and openly affirmed a number of Mennonite teachings.¹²¹ They were flexible with respect to doctrine.

On his first visit to the church, Hostetler found that the church was even bigger than he had thought. The number of people associated with these churches had grown from the 1,160 members that Ekereke had reported to 2,832 members.¹²² Church leaders said that the numbers jumped so significantly because the former number had been from the year before while the larger number was a current count. It may well be, however, that since this group of congregations had found a foreign mission that appeared ready to respond to their request for affiliation, others were motivated to join because of the possibility of services normally associated with missions. This would have been consistent with the religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria where schools and health services were factors in convincing people to choose one church over another. At the December church gathering that Hostetler attended on his third visit, five new congregations applied to join the group, pushing the total membership of all the congregations in the group to 3,082.¹²³

Having verified the viability of the Nigerian church, indigenization continued to be an important value as MBMC decided how to relate to its potential partner. The

¹²¹ Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province"; Mennonite Church to Brother and Sister Hostetler, November 23, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

¹²² Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province."

¹²³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958.

church was functioning autonomously so seemed to meet the three-self criteria. It was, however, asking for assistance for some of the traditional mission services that it could not provide on its own. Hostetler and Graber were ready to help in this way.¹²⁴ They were ready to provide schools, scholarships, and medical facilities within the limits of the mission's financial possibilities. After the India experience the mission hesitated to create new mission institutions since they appeared to siphon energy and personnel away from the nascent indigenous church. Those concerns appear to have been less prevalent in this case, perhaps because a vibrant, indigenous church already existed. Hostetler also suggested that instead of constructing buildings that met North American standards, with amenities such as toilets, MBMC might simply contribute to the cost of a structure that the Nigerians would build themselves.¹²⁵ Graber agreed.¹²⁶ The idea seemed to be that the church could continue to function in its normal way and the mission would add traditional mission assistance, perhaps via mission run institutions, without threatening the church's indigenous nature.

How the mission and church would collaborate was not clear. The Nigerians questioned whether such an arrangement would work. "How can there be two captains?"

¹²⁴ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province"; John R. Mumaw and S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Calabar Province Visit,"; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958; S. J. Hostetler to A. A. Dick, December 22, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; J. D. Graber to John Lehman, December 29, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹²⁵ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958.

¹²⁶ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 31, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

they asked.¹²⁷ Hostetler admitted that this was indeed a problem. He wrote to Graber that given the African idea of the chief, leader or superintendent, it would not be wise for him to work completely under the Nigerian leadership.¹²⁸ Neither did he want to take over leadership of the Nigerian church. Hostetler was also not sure of the feasibility of working “parallel” with the Nigerian leadership. That had proven impossible in the Ghana situation. Working with an indigenous church was turning out to be complicated. It required the reassessment of missionary strategy and missionary roles. Hostetler wrote to Graber, “The exact way of cooperating I believe would have to be found by counsel and trial and error.”¹²⁹

Hostetler’s visits to Nigeria reinforced the expectation of a mass movement into the Mennonite church that the first exchange of letters had created. Ekereke had reported 1,160 church members, but on Hostetler’s first visit the church provided a list of congregations that represented 2,832 members.¹³⁰ By the time of his third visit a month later, the number had risen to 3082.¹³¹ Hostetler wrote to Graber, “To think that here we are faced with a challenge to take in immediately a bigger church than any we have on the mission field is thrilling.”¹³² The Churches of Christ missionaries that Hostetler met

¹²⁷ Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province”; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 30, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

¹²⁸ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 30, 1958.

¹²⁹ Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province.”

¹³⁰ Matthew Ekereke to MBMC, July 25, 1958; Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province.”

¹³¹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958.

¹³² S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958.

in Nigeria had advised him, “Be prepared for a great influx of churches.”¹³³ Indeed, back in Accra after his second visit to Nigeria, Hostetler received a letter from an altogether different group of sixteen Nigerian congregations that also wanted to affiliate with MBMC.¹³⁴

In his response to Hostetler’s reports, Graber admitted to being “somewhat bewildered at the pace of events.”¹³⁵ He noted, however, that this was perhaps simply part of a more general West African movement towards the Church. If so, then maybe the mission was arriving on the scene by the providence of God “for such a time as this.”¹³⁶ Graber suggested that MBMC needed to “evaluate as intelligently as possible this situation and move into it with a great deal of courage and faith.”¹³⁷ He wrote to Hostetler, “Why not think in terms of a Church of 5 and 10 thousand members within the next few years in Nigeria?”¹³⁸ Perhaps here in Nigeria, finally, the mission would experience the large influx of members into its churches that had eluded it in India.

MBMC’s engagement in Ghana and now in Nigeria convinced those involved that they were entering a context different from that to which they were accustomed and that a new mission approach would be necessary. Perhaps the most obvious way the new

¹³³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 9, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹³⁴ M. A. Udo to S. J. Hostetler, December 3, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

¹³⁵ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*; J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, December 19, 1958, IV-18-03-02, Box 2, Argentine Chaco 1956-60.

¹³⁷ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 31, 1958.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

context differed from traditional mission fields was in the breakdown of the practice of comity in southeastern Nigeria.¹³⁹ The mission normally sought to respect such agreements in its work.¹⁴⁰ Increasingly, however, comity agreements between Christian missions around the world were breaking down.¹⁴¹ Migration, increased mobility, the rapid growth of cities, and the desire of many to take their ecclesial identities with them instead of affiliating with a new church when they entered the geographical territory of others created overlap.¹⁴² The marked increase of new mission societies during the middle of the twentieth century and the tendency of many to see comity as an impediment to the spontaneous expansion of the church meant they often refused to respect comity agreements.

MBMC's experience reflected the general trend, and it found that comity agreements no longer had the force that they once had. In the Bihar, India field such agreements no longer commanded respect, and the mission had instructed Hostetler to keep working despite the breakdown of comity. In Ghana Hostetler and his fellow missionaries were not able to find a people group that another mission had not already evangelized, so they started work among churches already present in southern Ghana.

¹³⁹ Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province"; Edet Akpan Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-52," in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (London: Longman, 1980), 159-81.

¹⁴⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999*, (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 40; R. Pierce Beaver, *Ecumenical Beginnings in the Protestant World Mission: A History of Comity* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 155.

¹⁴¹ "After Comity, What?," *The Christian Century* 68, no. 23 (June 6, 1951): 677-78.

¹⁴² Beaver, *Ecumenical Beginnings in the Protestant World Mission*, chapter 10, "Stress, Strain, and Problems," 272-327.

Now in Nigeria it was apparent that comity agreements from earlier in the century were unenforceable. Hostetler reported as much, “The area is full of churches and missions. It is quite evidently a free for all. These churches are all interspersed, and so there is no hesitation about doing work here.”¹⁴³ Given his experience of the decreasing importance of comity agreements, Hostetler accepted this situation as the norm and set about creating a new Mennonite church among the others that were already there.

In addition to the breakdown of comity, it became apparent to MBMC that a more significant change of the missionary context was embodied in its West African field. Of all those involved it was Orié Miller who articulated most astutely this shift. His report to Graber about the visit to the Nigeria church with Hostetler and Mumaw noted that Christian missions and churches had fully occupied southern Ghana and Nigeria and that Christianity was growing numerically.¹⁴⁴ Among the Christian groups some had wide connections through denominational identities, membership in national councils, and participation with the International Missionary Council. Other indigenous groups, however, lacked such connections and consequently felt weak and helpless within a political context that was increasingly nationalistic. These latter groups were now “seeking wider brotherhood connections.”¹⁴⁵ Such a situation, he wrote, called for a new response from Mennonite missions. Miller thought that Mennonites’ Anabaptist faith, relationships, facility, and structure equipped them well for helping to build the Church in

¹⁴³ Hostetler, “Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province.”

¹⁴⁴ Orié O. Miller to J. D. Graber, December 12, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Orié O 1956-1965.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

this new situation. He recommended to Graber that the mission's Ghana and Nigeria work focus on addressing this new context. Miller saw this West Africa opportunity as different, unique, unprecedented, and still a bit unclear, but he recommended that the mission take on the challenge. Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived to Nigeria a year later, and their work would develop into a creative approach with the groups that were seeking wider connections.

While Hostetler and Graber implemented a strategy in Nigeria that largely followed traditional missionary practice, they too understood that the missionary context had changed radically. They compared it to the situation in Argentine where missionaries were working to support an indigenous church movement among the Toba people instead of planting a Mennonite church.¹⁴⁶ Graber saw similarities between the two fields where indigenous Christian movements were reaching out to western missions for assistance, structure, and encouragement. Hostetler, on the other hand, thought that the context among the Toba was different from that in West Africa, but he did suggest that the missionary approach of the missionaries in the Chaco might be instructive for work with the Nigerian churches. There was general agreement that changing contexts called for new missionary strategies. It was unclear, however, how to best modify traditional strategies or what new strategies to adopt.

¹⁴⁶ J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, December 19, 1958; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 19, 1958, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 30, 1958, and S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 30, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958. There are two different letters from Hostetler to Graber dated December 30. Both refer to the comparison of the indigenous Christian movements in the Argentine Chaco and southeastern Nigeria.

MBMC moved to accept the Nigerian indigenous churches into the Mennonite fold. Hostetler, Miller, and Mumaw had recommended that it do so. During his first visit Hostetler had informed the Nigerians that he expected the mission to accept their request for affiliation if they were willing to follow the mission and be patient about financial assistance.¹⁴⁷ He wrote to Graber recommending affiliation and asking how to proceed.¹⁴⁸ Graber responded that Hostetler should indeed accept the church if he felt so led.¹⁴⁹ He noted that MBMC's executive committee would not meet for another three months, but continued, "Our missions are set up to evangelize the world and build churches and so we hardly need an executive committee action to permit you to receive people into the Mennonite fellowship. You have the authority to do this, whether on the small or large scale."¹⁵⁰ The mission's executive committee subsequently affirmed the decision, as did its annual plenary gathering.¹⁵¹ Upon receiving word from Graber, Hostetler wrote to the Nigerian church leadership informing them that he could move forward with the process.¹⁵² The plan was for Hostetler to visit each congregation to explain Mennonite

¹⁴⁷ Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province."

¹⁴⁸ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 28, 1958.

¹⁴⁹ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, December 17, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ "Minutes of the Executive Committee," (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 20, 1959), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4; "Resolutions," in *Spirit-Directed Witnessing 1959, A Handbook of Mission Activity Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1959), 232-34.

¹⁵² S. J. Hostetler to A. A. Dick and Matthew Ekereke, December 30, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

beliefs and practices. If the congregation agreed to these, he would accept it into the new church.

During 1959 Hostetler traveled to Nigeria five times, forming Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) by accepting individual congregations into the new Nigerian denomination. He followed the procedure of visiting each congregation, explaining a list of twenty Mennonite beliefs, and accepting the congregation into the church when members affirmed that they were in agreement.¹⁵³ By November, when resident missionaries Edwin and Irene Weaver arrived to Nigeria, Hostetler had accepted forty congregations with 2,100 members into MCN.¹⁵⁴ The numbers were less than he had at first envisioned because the church ousted its first president, A. A. Dick, who proceeded to take a number of the original congregations with him when he left the group.

Already in January another missionary in the region had warned Hostetler that Dick had a questionable reputation for manipulating Nigerian churches and foreign missions for his own purposes. He claimed that Dick gathered groups of churches together by falsely promising access to foreign assistance then presenting those groups to foreign missions for affiliation.¹⁵⁵ This bolstered his reputation, and sometimes he was able to convince a mission to send him assistance. The situation raised the possibility of corrupt leadership and a church that lacked authenticity. As a result Hostetler

¹⁵³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1959 and S. J. Hostetler, "Statement of Beliefs," March 7, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; S. J. Hostetler, "Nigeria Churches Join Mennonites," *Gospel Herald* 52, no. 18 (May 5, 1959): 422-423.

¹⁵⁴ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, October 3, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹⁵⁵ Wendell Broom to S. J. Hostetler, January 8, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

contemplated taking a much more direct leadership role than he had at first envisioned.¹⁵⁶ It was as if the Ghanaian situation of taking over control of the church was repeating itself in Nigeria.

In February, however, the other church leaders acted independently of Hostetler. They relieved Dick of his leadership responsibilities.¹⁵⁷ The reasons they gave for their actions mirrored the allegations of Hostetler's missionary contacts, adding the accusation that he was an ordained leader of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints and planned to merge the new Mennonite church with that group. Dick's dismissal spared Hostetler of the decision of whether or not to intervene in the governance of the church, and its indigenous character remained intact.

Hostetler was impressed that Mennonite Church Nigeria had the capacity to solve such problems by itself without missionary intervention. Six months after the church ousted Dick three congregations moved to leave the new church because another mission offered them the services of a paid preacher.¹⁵⁸ Church leaders investigated, intervened, and disciplined the guilty deacon who had arranged the secession. They also helped Hostetler investigate churches that sent letters to North American Mennonite congregations soliciting assistance.¹⁵⁹ Hostetler wrote to Graber, "Well, all this Nigeria

¹⁵⁶ S. J. Hostetler to Wendell Broom, January 15, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60.

¹⁵⁷ Pastors and Deacons of the Mennonite Church of Jesus Christ to S. J. Hostetler, February 14, 1959 and Matthew Ekereke to A. A. Dick, February 17, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, March 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

¹⁵⁸ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, August 22, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 11, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60.

¹⁵⁹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 11, 1959.

set up makes the tingles of joy run up and down your back. To have a good sized church that is really indigenous enough that they go at settling trouble in an orderly and logical manner, and run the organization without help is really a marvelous, new thing for us.”¹⁶⁰ He and Graber were pleased. They continued making plans to provide the educational and medical assistance that MCN so eagerly anticipated, and Hostetler continued visiting and bringing the Nigerian congregations into the Mennonite fold.¹⁶¹

While MBMC personnel were enthusiastic about the new Nigeria church, they were troubled by some of the dynamics involved in the process. There was the apparent mixed motives of the Nigerian churches; besides the desire to meet spiritual needs, the requests for assistance to meet material needs via schools, scholarships, and hospitals became all the more prominent as congregations joined MCN.¹⁶² Other missionaries with experience in the region had warned them about this dynamic and Hostetler and Graber

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ S. J. Hostetler to A. A. Dick and Matthew Ekereke, January 12, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; J. D. Graber to John Lehman and Laban Peachey, February 9, 1959 and J. D. Graber, “Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities,” (April 8, 1959), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, July 3, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 27.

¹⁶² “Convention of Mennonite Church of Jesus Christ, Nigeria,” Meeting Report (Ikot Ada Idem, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, February 12, 1959), Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler, February 15, 1959, and Matthew Ekereke to S. J. Hostetler, February 23, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960; “A Welcome Address from the Mennonite Church Ikot Eyo Headquarters, Eket County, Nigeria,” March 5, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, March 9, 1959; Welcome Address Presented by the People of Ibiono to Bishop J. D. Graber, March 29, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959.

experienced it in their interaction with the church.¹⁶³ They considered a focus on material needs to be less authentic than requests for assistance to strengthen the spiritual life of the churches.

Missionary tendencies to separate material from spiritual motives among Christians in the region likely reflected insufficient understanding of the Christian movement there. The group of Ibibio congregations that MBMC was engaging was part of the vibrant Christian movement that developed in southeastern Nigeria during the first six decades of the twentieth century. The inability of traditional social and religious institutions to impede the establishment of colonial rule or provide for the people's well-being had encouraged a growing number of Ibibios to switch allegiance from their traditional religion to Christianity. Missionary schools provided an education that enabled them to earn a livelihood in the new colonial context. If the Ibibio had once turned to their traditional religion to assure their well-being via prosperity and fertility, now mission schools, maternity houses, and hospitals were a logical and integrated part of the way the new religion that Christian missionaries had introduced met the same needs. Requests for help to establish schools and medical institutions were common in the region, and the congregations that invited MBMC were no different. They assumed that well-being was a characteristic of Christianity and that such institutions were part and parcel of what their new mission partnership would provide. Requests for schools and

¹⁶³ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, January 15, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, March 4, 1959 and J. D. Graber, "Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities"; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver; Hostetler, "Nigeria Churches Join Mennonites"; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, August 22, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, September 2, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; S. J. Hostetler to Wilbur Hostetler, September 3, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 27.

hospitals were not so much indications of the ascent of material needs to the detriment of spiritual concerns but a characteristic of an Ibibio understanding of the Christian faith in which the two were inextricably linked.

There was also the question of whether or not working with people who were already Christian was really part of the missionary task. In the post World War II context the role of some missionaries was that of a fraternal worker with indigenous churches, striving for mutuality and sometimes working under indigenous leadership, instead of a pioneer preacher or church planter among non-Christians.¹⁶⁴ Some considered such a role change a betrayal of the true missionary calling. In 1958 when an editorial in *Christianity Today* advocated for this latter understanding, Graber took its argument seriously enough to send copies to his overseas missionaries asking for their opinion.¹⁶⁵ In the Argentine Chaco the MBMC missionary role resembled more that of a fraternal worker than of a pioneer church planter. The work in Nigeria seemed to be moving in a similar direction, but was this an appropriate deployment of missionary resources?

Graber and Hostetler anticipated questions about mixed motives and proper missionary roles, arguing for continued engagement despite such objections. In an article for the *Gospel Herald*, Hostetler asked a series of rhetorical questions, “Do these people have the right motives in coming to us? Can we be of spiritual help to them? Or should

¹⁶⁴ Blaise Levai, ed., “The Foreign Missionary,” in *Revolution in Missions: A Study Guide to the Role of Missions in Present Day India*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, India: YMCA Publishing House, 1958), 54–110; Georg F. Vicedom, “The Role of the Missionary: A Consultation at Nagpur,” *International Review of Mission* 51, no. 202 (April 1962): 163–70; J. S. Kingsnorth, “The Changing Role of Missionary Societies in Africa,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 111, no. 5079 (February 1963): 224–38.

¹⁶⁵ “Whither ‘Ecumenical Mission’?” *Christianity Today*, August 18, 1958, 20–22; J. D. Graber to Albert Buckwalter, December 10, 1958.

we decline to help them if their motives are questionable?”¹⁶⁶ He admitted that the new members of MCN had mixed motives. He pointed out, however, that it was because of material needs that they had asked for assistance, providing the opportunity for the mission to minister to them both materially and spiritually. For example, the church wanted a Bible school. The mission had the means to assist in the creation of a Bible school that would meet both spiritual and educational needs.

Also writing for the *Gospel Herald*, Graber sought to counter anticipated objections. He asked the question, “Why Nigeria? If an area is 95 percent Christian, does it still need the attention of a mission board?”¹⁶⁷ Graber argued that since the late 1920s there had been a revival movement that swept ninety-five percent of the people in the region into the church. Since no one had followed through on this movement, there were many unaffiliated churches led by Nigerians with little training and preparation for their leadership roles. Graber used McGavran’s terms, explaining that these new Christians had been “discipled” but not “perfected.”¹⁶⁸ This was the need that MBMC was now stepping in to fulfill. Such need created a vacuum that someone else would fill if it did not do so. Already various sects and marginal Christian groups had come to the region, so the implication was that the mission was justified in providing its more legitimate instruction and guidance for the Nigerian churches. In their articles in the church press and in their conversations with other MBMC personnel, Graber and Hostetler argued that

¹⁶⁶ Hostetler, “Nigeria Churches Join Mennonites.”

¹⁶⁷ J. D. Graber, “Why Nigeria?,” *Gospel Herald* 52, no. 21 (May 26, 1959): 497.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; Donald Anderson McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 13–16.

taking this Nigerian church into the Mennonite fold was the correct thing to do.¹⁶⁹ Even if the missionary role would resemble that of a fraternal worker instead of a pioneer church planter, the guidance of the mission appeared to be just what these congregations needed.

The Nigerian Context, African Independent Churches, and Edwin and Irene Weaver

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities chose Edwin and Irene Weaver, veteran missionaries to India, to be its first resident missionaries in Nigeria. They had returned from India in December 1956 and settled into the roles of pastor and pastoral counselor in Edwin's hometown of Hesston, Kansas. Graber was convinced that in its initial stages the Nigeria work would require experienced missionaries, so MBMC invited the Weavers to go to Nigeria to continue the work that Hostetler had started.¹⁷⁰ They arrived in November 1959.¹⁷¹

This section will show how the Weavers' understandings about indigenization and inter-church relationships caused them to raise questions about missionary strategy. It will explain the high value that MBMC administrator John Yoder gave to inter-church relationships and indigenization in his advice during their first months in Nigeria. The

¹⁶⁹ J. D. Graber, "A New Mennonite Church," *Gospel Herald*, January 13, 1959; J. D. Graber, "Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities"; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, July 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to Wilbur Hostetler, September 3, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 27.

¹⁷⁰ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 3, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59; Graber, "Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities"; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959.

¹⁷¹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to MBMC, November 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, November 23, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

Weavers' concerns resulted in the decision to stop accepting more AIC congregations into the newly formed Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN). This section will describe the Weaver's frustration with the highly competitive religious milieu that traditional mission strategy had apparently helped create, describe their conception of a new mission strategy to encourage reconciliation amidst the discord, and outline their interaction with their MBMC colleagues about an appropriate missionary response to the situation in the region. This section will also describe the Weavers' difficulty in obtaining government approval to work in Nigeria and the solution that the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) eventually provided by including them in the CSM visa quota. Finally, it will describe their engagement with the newly formed Mennonite Church Nigeria and the challenges it presented with respect to leadership development, the application of indigenization strategy, and inter-church relationships.

Mission Administrators, Ecumenism, and Indigenization

As they engaged the context of southeastern Nigeria during the early months of their assignment, the Weavers' primary interlocutors with respect to mission theory and strategy were J. D. Graber and John Howard Yoder.¹⁷² Yoder, Administrative Assistant for Foreign Missions, had not been a missionary in India but brought to the task his mission experience of assisting with MBMC's work in France and Belgium during his

¹⁷² John H. Yoder to S. J. Hostetler, November 16, 1959, HM 1-48, Box 182, Principles; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 23, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

Mennonite Central Committee service in Europe.¹⁷³ During his Europe service he also directed the mission's work in Algeria. As the missionaries on the ground, the Weavers were the primary players in the development of the new missionary approach that the mission developed to work with the Nigerian church. Since Graber had shifted some of the supervisory responsibilities for West Africa to Yoder, however, Yoder's contribution as a consultant was important.

Yoder shared the Weavers' concern for better inter-church relationships and encouraged their move to make that a priority in their work. He had already been involved in ecumenical conversations in Europe, had sat on the ecumenical committee of the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, and encouraged the Mennonite Church to increase its ecumenical engagement, having written a series of articles for the church's *Gospel Herald* that were later printed in pamphlet form, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church*.¹⁷⁴ His recently completed doctoral dissertation provided a sympathetic view of sixteenth century Anabaptist resistance to the official Protestant church of Zurich.¹⁷⁵ In it he made a case for meaningful dialogue between Christians who were in

¹⁷³ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, November 26, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, John Howard Yoder 1951-1955; J. D. Graber to John H. Yoder, May 25, 1957 and John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, December 5, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 13, Yoder, John H 1956-61; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, August 3, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 2, Graber 2nd.

¹⁷⁴ Mark Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions*, 17–18; John H. Yoder to W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, May 22, 1958, HM 1-48, Box 111, Folder 5; John H. Yoder, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church," *Gospel Herald*, January 15, 1957; John H. Yoder, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church," *Gospel Herald*, February 5, 1957; John Howard Yoder, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church*. (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1958); John H. Yoder to Paul Erb and Erwin Goering, July 8, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 111, Folder 4.

¹⁷⁵ John Howard Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues between Anabaptists and Reformers*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder, trans. David Carl Stassen (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004).

conflict because of their different understanding and expressions of the faith, especially where one side derided the other as lacking theological or ecclesial sophistication or even validity. Among International Missionary Council (IMC) officials and North American mission agency leaders, he advocated, unsuccessfully, for slowing down the coming merger between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the IMC. He feared it would result in a split between missions and churches related to the WCC and conservative and evangelical groups, leading to the creation of rival inter-church structures, especially in the non-western world.¹⁷⁶

Because of his close relationship with the mission committee of the French Mennonite Church, Yoder became aware of a split in the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society's church in New Caledonia and the Independent Church that resulted from it.¹⁷⁷ He considered the situation to be the result of colonial missionary practices, sought to convince the Society to dialogue with its critics and with the independent group, and lobbied IMC and mission leaders to intervene to reconcile the two sides.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ John H. Yoder to Clyde W. Taylor, August 10, 1959, HM 1-48, Box 10, WCC and IMC Merger 1958-61; John H. Yoder to George W. Carpenter, November 13, 1959 and John H. Yoder to Paul Rees, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, International Missionary Council 1956-1960; John H. Yoder to C. N. Hostetter, January 14, 1960, John H. Yoder to Eugene Smith, April 26, John H. Yoder to Certain Mission Agencies Related to the Division of Foreign Missions, May 25, 1960, and John H. Yoder to Richard Shaull, July 30, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 10, WCC and IMC Merger 1958-61.

¹⁷⁷ John H. Yoder to Pierre Widmer, October 27, 1958, HM 1-48, Box 116, European Missions 1959-1960; John H. Yoder to Lesslie Newbigin, October 12, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, International Missionary Council 1956-1960.

¹⁷⁸ John H. Yoder to Raymond Leenhardt, December 11, 1958, HM 1-48 Yoder, John Howard, Box 13, New Caledonia Church Division Corr. Charlemagne, Leenhardt; John H. Yoder to Pierre Benignus, January 25, 1960, SMEP Dossiers Permanents, Nouvelle-Caledonie, Affaire Charlemagne (4), R. Leenhardt, Guiart, Mennonite Board, Paris Evangelical Missionary Society Archives; John H. Yoder to Lesslie Newbigin, March 23, 1961, HM 1-48 Yoder, John Howard, Box 13, New Caledonia Church Division Mediation Efforts; John H. Yoder, "A Case Study: Missions and the Colonial Mentality" May 1961, HM 1-48, Box 13, A Case Study, Missions and the Colonial Mentality; John H. Yoder to Donald

Yoder was current with indigenization theory and had helped MBMC missionaries reflect on the relevance of North American Mennonite faith and practice for the European context.¹⁷⁹ For example, should missionaries introduce and require North American Mennonite distinctives in the fledgling congregation in Belgium in the early 1950s?¹⁸⁰ The issues ranged from the use of jewelry and wedding rings to what form of nonresistance to expect from the new church members. Yoder argued that while missionaries might have to make these decisions at the beginning, in the long run it was the indigenous church that should decide such matters.¹⁸¹

A crucial issue for Mennonite missionaries was to what extent they should enforce the doctrine of nonresistance in countries where civilian alternative service to military service did not exist. In North America during World War II, Mennonite Church

McGavran, May 10, 1961, John H. Yoder to Donald McGavran, May 22, 1961, and John H. Yoder to Alan A. Brash, May 24, 1961, HM 1-48 Yoder, John Howard, Box 13, New Caledonia Church Division Mediation Efforts; Pierre Benignus, "Entretien Joder - MPPF" (Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, September 22, 1961), SMEP Dossiers Permanents, Nouvelle-Caledonie, Affaire Charlemagne (5), Texte de John Yoder et Réponses, Paris Evangelical Missionary Society Archives; John H. Yoder to John Coventry Smith and Eugene Smith, November 20, 1961, HM 1-48 Yoder, John Howard, Box 13, New Caledonia Church Division Mediation Efforts.

¹⁷⁹ Yoder advised missionaries to set up and/or respect indigenous accountability structures instead of automatically assuming they should apply North American norms in foreign contexts. The advice he gave in the sources cited in this dissertation are consistent with indigenization theory. Yet he strongly resisted efforts by his own church community to hold him accountable to its norms for the sexual violence that he perpetrated on dozens of women over a period of two decades starting in the mid 1970s. See Rachel Waltner Goossen, "'Defanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (2015): 7-80. Given the discordance between his advice and his behavior, Yoder's thought and work as well as its use in mission theory and practice needs further evaluation to identify errors or misjudgments that may well need to be corrected or simply rejected.

¹⁸⁰ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, January 19, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, March 10, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

conference rules often mandated discipline for those who did military service.¹⁸² The extent to which it was correct for missionaries to insist on such discipline in the European context had become an issue for MBMC missionaries and MCC service workers.¹⁸³ Yoder argued that missionaries and service workers should refrain from a facile assumption that the North American experience would be normative in foreign situations.¹⁸⁴ He had noticed that MCC workers tended to advocate a more categorical position on conscientious objection and war than their MBMC missionary counterparts who hoped to leave functioning young churches in place at the end of their service.¹⁸⁵ Graber affirmed Yoder's hesitancy to simply transplant North American viewpoints into the European context.¹⁸⁶ He also noted that missionaries in Japan were dealing with the same issue. Should they require full acceptance of the North American interpretation of non-resistance as a basis for church membership, or should they let the Holy Spirit lead the new church to its own scriptural position?

Harold S. Bender, who was assistant secretary of MCC and who had helped define Yoder's assignment in Europe, was less inclined to reflect in terms of

¹⁸² Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, vol. 4, Mennonite Experience in America (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 173-180.

¹⁸³ John H. Yoder, *Report on Conscientious Objection and Medical Service*, March 3, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, March 10, 1953.

¹⁸⁵ John H. Yoder to J. Harold Sherk, J. D. Graber, H. S. Bender, and Orie O. Miller, December 8, 1953, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

¹⁸⁶ J. C. Graber to John H. Yoder, January 14, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

indigenization.¹⁸⁷ He resisted Yoder and Graber's implication that different contexts might require different Mennonite faith expressions and thought they did not leave enough room for the home church to participate in decisions about non-resistance and conscientious objection to participation in war.¹⁸⁸ Their proposal, it seemed to him, might lead to the question of whether or not missionaries should teach anything specific to the new mission churches and could well end up encouraging a focus on national identities within the worldwide Mennonite community. Apart from acknowledging that there might be minor details of difference, Bender argued for maintaining a common standard around the world.

Bender's argument echoed the concerns of Daniel Kauffman who twenty years earlier had asked the rhetorical question, "To what extent should the home Church [the North American MC] project its standards into the Church on the field?"¹⁸⁹ Kauffman's answer had been one hundred percent. The issue for Bender was no longer Mennonite distinctives such as dress or coiffure or the battle against modernism. Instead it was about the faithfulness of North American embodiments of nonresistance, such as church discipline of those who accepted military service, for the European context.

¹⁸⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Introduction: John Howard Yoder's Mission Theology, Context and Contribution," in *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz (Dowers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press 2014), Kindle edition.

¹⁸⁸ Harold S. Bender, "Comments on John Yoder's Paper Regarding Non-Resistance in Mennonite Churches in Europe" (Goshen, IN, March 5, 1954), IV-18-10, Box 5, Yoder, John Howard 1951-1955.

¹⁸⁹ Daniel Kauffman, "How Far Should the Home Church Project Its Policies into the Church on the Field?" in *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the MBMC* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1933): 97-102.

The responses to Yoder's proposals are illuminative of the significance of missiological experience for mission theory and for MBMC's engagement in Nigeria specifically. Both Graber and Bender were conscious that missionary linguistics and anthropology encouraged careful attention to local contexts for missionary practice and Christian faith.¹⁹⁰ They were both products of the twentieth century North American Mennonite Church and its increasing engagement with the world, and they most likely shared more common ground than they had differences. The two of them, however, responded differently to Yoder's proposal. Bender, in his role as a guiding force in working out Mennonite doctrine and practice that included a strong focus on the peace witness, argued for a fairly strict application of North American Mennonite standards of enforcement of nonresistance and conscientious objection to war in the mission planted churches. Graber, who had missionary experience in India and who supervised mission work around the world, engaged indigenization theory as a matter of course and was familiar with the challenges of crossing national and cultural borders with assumptions about Mennonite faith expressions. He doubted the advisability of assuming that the faithful embodiment of nonresistance would look the same everywhere.

Five years after the discussion about enforcing nonresistance in Europe, Graber and Yoder were helping the Weavers discern how to engage AICs. Their advice reflected a strong concern for indigenization, and they encouraged the Weavers to take seriously

¹⁹⁰ Harold S. Bender to John H. Mosemann, March 29, 1951, Harold S. Bender, *Report to the Seminary on the Conference on Missionary Linguistics* (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), Levi C. Hartzler, *Conference on Missionary Linguistics and Anthropology*, Meeting Report (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), and Harold S. Bender to J. D. Graber, May 3, 1951, all in IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, Linguistics and Anthropology 1951-53.

the AICs and the form of Christianity they embodied. Yoder's strong ecumenical sensibilities and sympathy with indigenization led him to encourage the Weavers to reorient their focus towards reconciliation between the Independents and the established mission churches and eventually to treat the Independent Churches as authentic Christian movements.

Caution, Disenchantment, and Initial Conclusions

The Weavers' first weeks in Nigeria were a mix of excitement and caution as they engaged the Nigerian situation and took over the work that the Hostetlers had initiated. Edwin's first letters back to Mennonite Board of Missions' home office were in some respects upbeat; he wrote that they were settling in and anticipated a happy, busy term of service.¹⁹¹ The first worship services they attended with their new Nigerian brothers and sisters brought back pleasant memories of India, and the hospitality and generosity of the Africans touched them deeply.¹⁹² They were cautious, however, and determined to avoid some of the missionary pitfalls they had observed in their India experience. They were suspicious that the idea that there were large numbers of churches desiring to be Mennonite was overly simplistic and concerned about respecting comity agreements that other missions might have already established.¹⁹³ Given these concerns and the

¹⁹¹ Edwin Weaver to H. Ernest Bennett, November 23, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 23, 1959.

¹⁹² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 23, 1959; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

¹⁹³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), 36, Mennonite Mission Network; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, January 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10,

importance of understanding the local context for mission strategy, which had become apparent in India, the Weavers hoped to study the Nigerian situation for a year before making major decisions or changes.¹⁹⁴ In the end they decided that they could not afford the luxury of waiting that long.

Within three weeks of arriving in Uyo, the Weavers identified what they considered to be significant problems with MBMC's strategy in Nigeria, and within five weeks they stopped the process of accepting congregations into MCN. They outlined three problems that motivated them to reassess the mission approach they had inherited.¹⁹⁵ The first concerned the church, especially its leadership. The Weavers began to question if it really was an "indigenous" church.¹⁹⁶ They discovered that many of the congregations that made up the church had left the mission churches to avoid being disciplined. In addition, the MCN leaders expected Edwin to ordain them, but many were illiterate, polygamist, and, like their congregations, had left the mission churches to escape discipline. The second problem had to do with indigenization. The churches in the area appeared to be making progress towards the ideal of being self-propagating, self-financing, and self-governing, and the wrong kind of assistance from the mission risked retarding that progress.

Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

¹⁹⁴ Edwin Weaver to H. Ernest Bennett, November 23, 1959 and Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

¹⁹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

¹⁹⁶ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

The third problem was the relationship with other missions and churches. It was becoming apparent that, contrary to what Hostetler and Graber had understood, comity was still practiced by the established missions and churches that had worked in the region since the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷ These older missions considered those missions that arrived during the post World War II period to be proselytizers. The Weavers were clear that they did not want to be known as proselytizers and had no desire to compete with respectable churches that had a long history of successful work in the region.

Over the first three months of the Weavers' time in Nigeria, Edwin and Yoder exchanged a series of letters in which they dialogued about an appropriate missionary strategy to engage the Nigerian situation and the challenges it presented. The following subsections will describe the three challenges that the Weavers identified, Yoder's responses to those challenges, and the beginnings of a consensus about an appropriate way forward. The challenges that the Weavers identified were the questionable practices of some MCN leaders, the appropriate application of indigenous principles, and the mission's relationship with other missions and churches. This exchange was the beginning of a reorientation of MBMC's mission approach in West Africa towards work with AICs.

Mennonite Church Nigeria and its Leaders

The Weavers identified a number of challenges with regard to the leadership of the Mennonite church that Hostetler had formed during the previous year. The first was

¹⁹⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959.

that the pastors of the congregations that had joined the MCN were asking for certificates of ordination.¹⁹⁸ Edwin admitted that MBMC had promised to provide these but found the commitment problematic since there was evidence that some of the leaders practiced polygamy.¹⁹⁹ Likely following their leaders, whole congregations had left the Qua Iboe Church (QIC) instead of accepting disciplinary action because of this issue. At one congregation members told the Weavers as much, that they had left the QIC because “they would not let us have more than one wife.”²⁰⁰ There was also the story of one pastor whose church had disciplined him for embezzlement. Instead of accepting this correction he formed his own church and joined MCN. One leader who wanted to bring his thirty congregations into the church was reported to have a checkered history, including a jail sentence. Another had visited village churches, collecting money in exchange for the promise to bring a white missionary who would build a school or hospital in the village.²⁰¹

The Weavers began to doubt the quality of some of the church’s leadership. Edwin observed in the weeks after his arrival, “We still have little real solid information about the kind of an indigenous church we have.”²⁰² Christian Council of Nigeria officials and other missionaries shared stories about how unscrupulous leaders of

¹⁹⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

¹⁹⁹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, 36–37.

²⁰² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

Independent Churches around Uyo sent hundreds of letters all over the world giving false information about themselves and their work, asking for assistance, and sometimes receiving aid.²⁰³ The region seemed to be known for such practice; missionaries referred to it as a religious racket. Weaver started to doubt that the congregations actually met the criteria of the missiological concept of an indigenous church, one that had achieved maturity with respect to its propagation, financing, and governance. They seemed more like congregations that simply refused the standards of the mission churches and were seeking assistance elsewhere. Given this uncertainty about the marriage practices and integrity of MCN leaders, Weaver was hesitant to ordain the pastors until he could further evaluate the situation.

The second challenge with regard to the leaders was their need for training. At the end of his first month in Nigeria, Weaver reported that some were illiterate and that he had not yet met anyone who had the qualifications to lead MCN effectively.²⁰⁴ Starting a Bible school program, creating opportunities for leadership training, and providing Christian literature were ways he envisioned that the mission might address this challenge. In January the Weavers had their first three-day Bible study conference with church leaders and made plans for continuing such initiatives.²⁰⁵ Edwin also asked

²⁰³ W. J. Wood to E. I. Weaver, January 2, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 37, Wood, W. J.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960, Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960, and Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁰⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959.

²⁰⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 22, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

Yoder to send Mennonite literature for Sunday school work and for MCN leaders.²⁰⁶ For the moment, however, he questioned whether its current leaders were capable of building MCN into a strong church.

Yoder's response to the question of ordination for church leaders and the integrity of the churches and their leaders, especially with respect to their readiness to accept discipline, was to suggest the development of local authority structures. In accordance with the contemporary structure of the MC in North America, he suggested some sort of conference structure that would have a constitution and be a sister conference to the MC.²⁰⁷ This entity would then be the agency through which MBMC would work in Nigeria, and it would have structures and methods to credential its ministers. The same authority structure would be responsible for establishing and enforcing faith practices and discipline, such as that concerning polygamy, and would provide a structure for fraternal relationships within the group and eventually with the established mission churches.²⁰⁸ The ministerial status of the MCN leaders would depend on the support of their congregations and on the leaders' recognition of each other's authority rather than on the mission.²⁰⁹ His proposal placed authority on the shoulders of the Nigerian church, thus relativizing the authority of the missionary. Yoder's proposals moved towards classifying

²⁰⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 14, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁰⁷ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²⁰⁸ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, February 1, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²⁰⁹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1959.

these AICs as legitimate expressions of Christian faith instead of as separatist or schismatic groups.

Yoder also affirmed Weaver's concerns about polygamy. Some leaders apparently continued the practice even after acknowledging its inappropriateness for leaders in their position.²¹⁰ Discipline of practicing polygamists, Yoder argued, should be to encourage reconciliation and spiritual growth, not a way to make people follow norms.

Yoder contributed clear analysis about MBMC's options with respect to its work with MCN. He articulated two approaches that the Weavers might follow.²¹¹ The first was to build an additional denominational organization in southeastern Nigeria. This was what Hostetler had already started with the creation of a Mennonite church. The second option was to serve as fraternal worker or ecumenical delegate for them without their taking on a Mennonite identity.

This second option would mean reversing the work that Hostetler had done and renegeing on the promises he and Graber had made to the MCN. Yoder considered this a real option, thus providing the Weavers with the freedom to adjust their approach away from the traditional missionary strategy of creating a denomination with organic ties to the North American MC. The mission had already made a similar change in its work with the Toba people in Argentina, so there was a precedent for such an adjustment. Although the existence of MCN was now an accomplished fact, the Weavers' approach would move in the direction of the second option in the years to come.

²¹⁰ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²¹¹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960.

Indigenous Principles

The Weavers were committed to the development of indigenous churches and so evaluated the Nigeria work according to indigenous principles. They noted that, in contrast to their experience in India, churches in southeastern Nigeria seemed to be largely self-financing.²¹² They built their own church buildings, although admittedly some were humble structures, and supported the work of their evangelists, teachers, and pastors. In general the area seemed to be rich in resources; crops flourished with minimal care, and food seemed abundant. While the Qua Iboe Mission (QIM) supported a teacher training school, a pastor training school, and one high school, the Qua Iboe Church (QIC) built and ran many primary schools and other high schools on its own initiative. The Weavers visited the Qua Iboe missionaries and expressed appreciation for the way they worked at developing an indigenous church. In contrast, earlier in the year MBMC had initiated a small travel allowance for MCN pastors and was financially supporting some evangelistic work. Such assistance appeared to be a motivating factor for congregations that were ready to drop their connections with other denominations in order to join MCN. Edwin calculated that if MBMC offered incentives it could have a church of several hundred congregations in a few years.²¹³ The Weavers argued that this assistance encouraged the church to move in the wrong direction, further from the goal of being self-financing.

²¹² Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

²¹³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

Earlier Hostetler and Graber had indicated willingness to help MCN establish traditional mission institutions such as schools, hospitals, and maternity houses, but the Weavers feared that such institutions would be an impediment to movement towards indigenization. In India they had found that institutions diverted attention and resources away from the church and that their costly maintenance made the church dependent on mission assistance.²¹⁴ In fact, during the first months of the Weavers' time in Nigeria, Graber wrote to them from India describing how he was renegotiating the mission's relationship to the mission institutions that it had handed over to the Mennonite Church in India in 1952 while the Weavers were still there.²¹⁵ The management of those institutions had become so enmeshed in church politics and personal interests that both the church and the institutions suffered. Eight years later Graber was now negotiating the establishment of separate management boards for these institutions that would relate directly to MBMC. Such news could only confirm for the Weavers the danger of mission institutions. In addition, there were already many schools and hospitals serving southeast Nigeria. Edwin wrote, "Never in my life have I seen a place so full of Churches and their institutions. Church and school buildings are everywhere."²¹⁶ Adding more seemed unnecessary.

²¹⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

²¹⁵ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959 and J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to S. J. and Ida Hostetler, March 23, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²¹⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

The Weavers argued that indigenization meant that the church should have the liberty to, and be capable of, developing appropriate faith expressions for its context. MBMC would not have a truly indigenous Nigerian church if it tried to impose its own faith understandings, tried to tell it what to believe and practice.²¹⁷ Indigenous churches had to understand and interpret the Gospel message for their own times and cultures with the help of the Holy Spirit.²¹⁸ In the case of MCN, the Weavers were convinced that the congregations that belonged to it had declared themselves Mennonite and invited the mission to the region without comprehending the beliefs and practices that missionaries assumed accompanied such acts.²¹⁹ Protecting the indigenous nature of the church meant avoiding a superficial designation of these congregations as Mennonite without a deeper understanding of what such an identity implied as well as encouraging and equipping them to develop authentic faith expressions for their own context.

Yoder's response to the Weavers' concerns about indigenization was to reaffirm this important missiological principle. His advice about setting up local church structures to address the issues of ordination of MCN leaders and church discipline was in that direction. He affirmed the Weavers' attempt to protect the indigenization of MCN by avoiding significant financial assistance and the hasty establishment of mission

²¹⁷ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²¹⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

institutions.²²⁰ He also reasoned that if MCN's leaders had been disciplined recently and individually, this might indicate that the established missions were right to consider them schismatic rebels.²²¹ If, on the other hand, these missions' overly legalistic discipline and inability to provide sufficient follow-up to large influxes of Christian converts had resulted in the establishment of Independent Churches that were alive and evangelistic over an extended period of time, this might well validate their separate existence. They had certainly existed and identified themselves as Mennonite before MBMC had authorized or recognized their Mennonite identity.²²² The Weavers' interaction with them and with other missions, wrote Yoder, could not follow the same pattern that it would follow if MBMC was entering territory where churches were not yet present. Yoder was willing to consider the right of these independent, indigenous churches to exist despite the existence of long-standing comity agreements between established missions in the region.

Relationships with Other Missions and Churches

While Hostetler and Graber had described the southeastern Nigeria ecclesial milieu as a free-for-all where missions and churches freely competed for members, the Weavers found that there were indeed comity agreements that the established missions

²²⁰ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 21, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²²¹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 15, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²²² John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, February 23, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

sought, unsuccessfully, to enforce. Edwin described two groups of missions and their respective churches.²²³ There were the so-called established churches that had been in the region since the nineteenth century and that practiced comity: the Church of Scotland's Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Qua Iboe Church, and the Methodist Church. The other churches did not practice comity: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Salvation Army, the Lutheran Church, the Churches of Christ, The African Church, the Church of God, numerous Pentecostal churches and now the Mennonites.

Weaver wrote to Yoder that he had never seen a place so full of churches or of religious competition and confusion. He added, "Never have I been in a religious situation so pathetically confused. I wonder if I have come to the right place. In a situation where there is so much religious confusion, proselyting and keen competition between the Churches can hardly be avoided. There is little in religion that I dislike more. Must we now add to the confusion?"²²⁴ When the Weavers consulted with the QIM, the mission on whose comity area MBMC was encroaching, its lead missionary was categorical. The entrance of MBMC into the region would simply add to the religious confusion that already existed.²²⁵

The Weavers considered the problem of competition to be even more difficult than that of the MCN and its leadership or that of indigenous principles. The milieu, they

²²³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960.

²²⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959.

²²⁵ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

wrote, was one of “Deep friction, jealousy, competition, resentment between groups; a situation in which Africans profit most by playing one [mission] against the other.”²²⁶ The Weavers found the prospect of competing with long-established, respectable missions that were doing good work disturbing and embarrassing.²²⁷ They had no desire either to compete with those missions or to duplicate their work or institutions. The time had come, rather, for united witness and fellowship. Missionaries needed to communicate the message that there was one Gospel, one Christ and Savior, one Bible, and one God.²²⁸ Competing versions of the faith would only confuse people who did not understand the difference between the different western denominations.²²⁹ In their engagement with the established missions the Weavers were apologetic about having entered southeastern Nigeria without properly investigating the situation.²³⁰ They wrote to Graber that the whole inter-church situation in the region left them feeling “sick at heart.”²³¹

Given the competitive and confused religious milieu in which they found themselves, they sought an appropriate mission response. Edwin had brought books to

²²⁶ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²²⁷ Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, December 16, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.

²²⁸ Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²²⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960.

²³⁰ Edwin Weaver to W. J. Wood, December 29, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 37, Wood, W. J.

²³¹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959.

Nigeria, including Yoder's *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church*.²³² In it Yoder argued for Mennonite attention to ecumenical concerns and that Christian unity was a biblical imperative. Weaver wrote to Yoder, "The other day I opened one of our barrels containing books. The first I got out to read again was your The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church. I was very much impressed. I didn't lay it aside until I had completed it. Your booklet has applications and implications for us here. I would hope to apply some of the principles you suggest in our work in Uyo."²³³ For Weaver the ecumenical principle of positive inter-church relations became a missionary imperative.

For Yoder too, MBMC's relationship to the other missions and churches took priority over the other two issues that the Weavers had raised. He responded in length to the dilemma, writing, "The only justification for our moving into a place like Nigeria, with such a large percentage of Christians of varying shapes and kinds, is that we help to decrease confusion. In a sense this is more an ecumenical than a missionary task, if those two concepts can be separated."²³⁴

Yoder went on to suggest that the highly competitive situation was a microcosm of the larger Christian scene that was dominated by conflict between two tendencies in the Christian Church. On the one hand there were the established churches that baptized infants, justified participation in warfare, were often content with a low spirituality,

²³² John Howard Yoder, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1958).

²³³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959.

²³⁴ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

exercised discipline either legalistically or not at all, and were so aligned with their nations in the West that they gave Christianity a bad name in Africa and Asia.²³⁵ On the other hand there were the churches that represented the Free Church tradition. They usually practiced believer's baptism, taught the necessity of personal conversion, and were often small, disorderly, and competitive. In the Nigerian situation Yoder suggested that the established churches were largely responsible for the existence of the Free Churches since they were unable to contain the spiritual fermentation within their structures, thereby encouraging the establishment of the Independent Churches that requested help from MBMC.

Yoder saw the Nigerian AICs through the lenses with which he was familiar: the mid twentieth century North American Mennonite appropriation of Anabaptist history, his dissertation study of the Zwinglian/Anabaptist disputations, and the construct of a mainline/Free Church opposition that was playing itself out as a result of the WCC/IMC merger. He associated the AICs with the Free Church tradition and the mission churches with mainline Protestant denominations. The opposition between these two groups, he reasoned, was now playing itself out in southeastern Nigeria.

Yoder not only analyzed the situation in Nigeria, he started formulating a proposal about how MBMC might engage it. He suggested that Mennonites had a special call to contribute a message of reconciliation.²³⁶ Mennonites were unique in the way they bridged the two groups. They agreed with the established churches about the necessity of

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

an orderly church life, of some kind of ecclesial structure with discipline, and of ordained ministry. They also agreed, however, with the Free Churches about the priority of personal experience and commitment, believer's baptism, active evangelism, and real congregational fellowship. Mennonites, therefore, might be able to speak to both camps and show that a third option was possible, one that was "just as orderly and responsible as the established churches, yet just as evangelistic and experiential as that of the 'sects', which is more biblical than either."²³⁷

Yoder encouraged the Weavers to establish contact with the leaders of the established missions and explain to them the validity of MBMC's presence. He reasoned that a Mennonite mission had a reason to be there as long as the other churches continued militaristic tendencies and baptized infants and as long as there were movements of revival in the region that needed assistance.²³⁸ For Yoder ecumenical concerns did not necessarily preclude MBMC's presence in the comity area of another mission, especially when that mission and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) refused to establish normal ecumenical relationships with the churches that had invited MBMC.²³⁹ Helping them realize that they had shirked this responsibility was part of the reconciliation towards which Mennonite missionaries might work. By working with the Independents, Yoder argued, MBMC could help them become more responsive to inter-church

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960.

²³⁹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 15, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

concerns. This he thought was more ecumenical than the position of those who refused to recognize the AICs' validity.

Edwin had noted the possibility that working ecumenically to bridge competing expressions of Christianity might be a mission priority in Nigeria. Yoder responded positively to the idea and started formulating a rationale for how such engagement might be a unique Mennonite missionary contribution in the region.

Weaver responded to Yoder's suggestions cautiously. He noted that Mennonites were indeed in a strong position to provide a positive witness in southeastern Nigeria.²⁴⁰ He doubted, however, Yoder's identification of the ecclesial confusion in southeastern Nigeria as a microcosm of the more general tension between established churches and Free Churches. The problem between the mission churches and Independents did not correspond directly to the theological issues that Yoder had raised, he thought. Those that had invited MBMC to the region had little knowledge of the doctrines and histories of different church traditions. They were simply looking for assistance. The problem of the relationship between the two groups had to be worked out on a different, more practical level. He suggested that one way to gain credibility with the established missions for a future mission strategy of reconciliation would be to provide teachers and other specialists for schools and universities. Despite his caution about Yoder's analysis, Weaver too saw the possibilities in a Mennonite mission initiative to help reconcile the competing streams of Christianity in the region.

²⁴⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960.

The Weavers' found encouragement that such a ministry might be possible in a visit they made to Robert Macdonald, a missionary with the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) and secretary of the Eastern Council of the CCN. Missions in southeastern Nigeria had initiated inter-church discussions meant to move towards organic union in the decades before MBMC arrived in the region and the CSM was among the most eager participants.²⁴¹ Macdonald was the CSM's representative in union negotiations and would later be bitterly disappointed when they fell apart.²⁴² He expressed gratitude for the Weavers' visit. Other missions that came to the region to work with the Independent Churches typically did not seek relationships with the established missions.

Macdonald and the Weavers found common ground. They were concerned for inter-church relationships in southeastern Nigeria.²⁴³ When Edwin asked Macdonald if there was not a way for MBMC to work at bringing more harmony and unity to the confusion and mistrust between churches in the region, Macdonald responded, "That is the very thing we have been looking for and hoping could happen."²⁴⁴ He noted that it would be a challenging task and entail working with many different groups, including some of the Independents that appeared to be more pagan than Christian. Additionally, Macdonald asked if MBMC would be willing to send missionaries to work in established

²⁴¹ Ogbu Kalu, *Divided People of God : Church Union Movement in Nigeria, 1875-1966* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978), 15–17, 24.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 18, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²⁴⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960.

mission institutions such as hospitals. This the Weavers had already contemplated. Edwin described the visit to Macdonald as the “beginning of a new day” and the possibilities that it presented as “light shining in the darkness.”²⁴⁵ Macdonald promised to work within the eastern region of the CCN to explore the possibilities.²⁴⁶

Macdonald’s first attempts to find ways for MBMC to work at bringing more harmony and unity to the religious confusion in the region were not successful. He organized a meeting of missionaries from the CCN churches with the Weavers, but it failed.²⁴⁷ Leaders of the established missions argued that they had been working for decades to establish indigenous churches and the arrival of the Mennonite mission and others like it destroyed the progress that they had made.²⁴⁸ They stated clearly that there was no place in the region for MBMC to contribute and encouraged the Weavers to find another place to work, perhaps in the middle belt of Nigeria where they said there was great need.

After having been encouraged by Macdonald’s support, the Weavers were devastated by the rejection of any possibility that the established missions might welcome their contribution in the region. They did not consider it wise to continue the process of developing the MCN in the traditional way, adding congregations and mission

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ R. Macdonald to Mr. and Mrs. Weaver, January 24, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960.

²⁴⁷ R. Macdonald to Mr. and Mrs. Weaver, January 24, 1960; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁴⁸ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 6, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960.

institutions, although they felt that was what MBMC really wanted.²⁴⁹ Now it appeared that their idea of a missionary role of bringing more unity and harmony to inter-church relations in southeastern Nigeria was no longer an option. The Weavers considered resigning their position with the mission and going home.²⁵⁰ In the end they stayed.

By mid to late February, three months after the Weavers arrived to Nigeria, they had come to some initial conclusions about how they might work in Nigeria despite the challenges they had encountered. First, they would continue to work with the congregations that made up MCN.²⁵¹ They had already started Bible training with its leaders and moved ahead with a church conference in February at which Edwin taught about the New Testament church.²⁵² At the same time the Weavers decided not to accept additional congregations into the church. They wanted to investigate further to find out which leaders were polygamous or who were already receiving assistance from foreign donors. Nor would they establish a heavily institutionalized church program with hospitals, schools, and other traditional mission infrastructure as MCN repeatedly requested.²⁵³ Second, they would work with the CCN leaders to find an acceptable way to

²⁴⁹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, 36-37.

²⁵⁰ Edwin Weaver to R. M. Macdonald, February 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.

²⁵¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, February 1, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

²⁵² "Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church, Nigeria, February 26, 1960), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁵³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 19, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

strengthen the Independent Churches and bring a peace witness to the confused and competitive ecclesial situation in the region. Finally, they would investigate the availability of other fields in Nigeria, hoping to find a place where other missions were not yet working. There MBMC might work according to its own pattern without encroaching on the territory of other missions.

The goals of strengthening the Independent Churches and working to reconcile them with the mission churches would guide MBMC's ministry in West Africa in the decades to come. The goal of finding an open field untouched by other missions in the mid to late twentieth century would prove illusive and soon drop by the wayside.

Bumps in the Road to a New Strategy

Although the Weavers were outlining the beginnings of a mission strategy for the southeastern Nigeria context by late February 1960, there were a number of challenges that faced them as the year progressed. There was some resistance from Hostetler and Graber, who at first were less enamored with Weaver and Yoder's ecumenical focus and wanted to put more emphasis on developing a strong Mennonite Church Nigeria. In addition, the Nigerian government refused both to give Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities permission to work in Nigeria and to give the Weavers resident visas. This subsection will outline these two challenges and the way the Weavers responded as they sought ways to ensure MBMC's long-term presence in the region and to continue to develop a new mission strategy.

Colleagues from the India Field

Weaver, Graber, and Hostetler agreed in principle about the importance of the indigenous nature of the church, maintaining good relationships with other missions and churches, and the integrity of MCN, but they differed about how those concerns might play out in the Nigerian context. Both Graber and Hostetler had been excited about the prospect of the sudden emergence of a relatively large Mennonite church during 1959 and had expected the Weavers to continue the process of accepting congregations into it. It is therefore not surprising that they were disappointed, and sometimes even dismayed, at the changes in focus and strategy that the Weavers implemented.

Hostetler had been the point person for the mission in the establishment of MCN and naturally took issue with the changes that appeared to impede its development. Even after the Weavers' report of leadership inadequacies, the dangers of dependency, and the comity agreements that were still in force, he was convinced that the establishment of the church had been correct and doubted that the mission should reverse its decision.²⁵⁴ The creation of a Mennonite church in Nigeria was more important than the established missions and churches' acceptance of it.²⁵⁵

Hostetler upheld the principle of the indigenous church but was more comfortable with the provision of financial assistance to MCN than were the Weavers. He argued that limited assistance was merely symbolic and that other missions in the region provided

²⁵⁴ S. J. Hostetler to Edwin Weaver, January 4, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

²⁵⁵ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential.

more assistance to the churches they planted than the Weavers admitted.²⁵⁶ Refusing to provide any help might encourage churches to defect to those missions that were more generous in their assistance.²⁵⁷ Hostetler was also dismayed that Weaver had refused to work with the pastors who were polygamous.²⁵⁸ He agreed that the practice was not proper for church leaders, but given the fact that these leaders had established functioning and organized churches independent of mission assistance, he argued they should be given some kind of position that recognized their contribution even if they no longer could play pastoral roles.

Hostetler differed most from the Weavers in the way he understood MBMC's relationship with other missions and churches. He opposed trying to convince members of other churches to join MCN and duplicating what other missions were already doing, but he argued that the MCN congregations had been independent for too long for the QIM to claim some responsibility for them.²⁵⁹ Hostetler seemed more comfortable setting aside comity agreements, working in contexts where there was apparent competition between denominations for the same population. He noted that the established churches were similarly unhappy with the mission's presence in Ghana, yet Hostetler worked without the ecumenical preoccupations that engaged the Weavers' attention in Nigeria. He expressed dismay that for the Weavers inter-church relationships seemed to take

²⁵⁶ S. J. Hostetler to Edwin Weaver, January 4, 1960.

²⁵⁷ S. J. Hostetler to Wilbur Hostetler, September 3, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 27, Hostetler letters.

²⁵⁸ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960.

²⁵⁹ S. J. Hostetler to Edwin Weaver, January 4, 1960.

priority over building up MCN.²⁶⁰ It would have been better, argued Hostetler, for the mission to work quietly in Nigeria, without consulting widely and drawing unwelcome attention from the established churches, until it had established its work and gained a good reputation.²⁶¹

Hostetler argued consistently that the days of comity were past and that competition between churches was simply characteristic of the time. After a visit with IMC chairman Christian Baëta in Ghana, Hostetler reported to Yoder, “He [Baëta] said that the old time ideas of strict geographical comity can hardly continue to hold any longer, because people are moving and churches are perforce becoming interspersed, and anyway there is more evangelism to do than the present forces can get done, so there is no reason that others should be kept out.”²⁶²

In his advice to the Weavers, Graber too gave more priority to the establishment of a Mennonite church in Nigeria and less to concerns about respect for comity agreements. He noted that MBMC should have consulted more of the other missions in the region before beginning work and that it was correct to work in cooperation with other missions and churches and with national Christian councils.²⁶³ Mennonites had a

²⁶⁰ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 17, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 17, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²⁶¹ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960.

²⁶² S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, February 6, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60.

²⁶³ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 10, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961.

good reputation around the world for such cooperation. He defended, however, the establishment of a Mennonite church in the region, arguing that other churches entered the area in much the same way that MBMC did and that the established missions did not have the resources or vitality to meet all the mission needs. Too much consultation with other missions had simply drawn attention to MBMC's work in an unhelpful way.²⁶⁴ Graber observed that except for its first field in India and the work in Central Argentina, MBMC routinely faced resistance from other missions that were already present when it entered a new area.²⁶⁵

In southeastern Nigeria, Graber argued, there was a vacuum since there were needs that other missions were not meeting. Some mission would certainly come in to fill those needs.²⁶⁶ Better it be MBMC whose missionaries would build a church on the New Testament pattern than other less qualified groups through which aberrations might arise. During the previous year missionaries familiar with southeastern Nigeria had warned Graber of church leaders who manipulated foreign missions for financial aid.²⁶⁷ For Graber, however, the presence of a strong Mennonite church would be a way to bring some stability to the area. He wrote to Weaver, "I honestly believe the Mennonite Church has a mission in a situation like yours there. Our historical and doctrinal stability are what

²⁶⁴ J. D. Graber to S. J. and Ida Hostetler, March 23, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

²⁶⁵ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 10, 1960.

²⁶⁶ Graber, "Why Nigeria?"

²⁶⁷ J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, March 4, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

the situation requires. ‘We have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.’”²⁶⁸ Later he added, “You will establish a large and growing Mennonite Church which will maintain close working relationships with the established churches and which will be a stabilizing influence and will be an encouragement and a help to them. I feel that a real Mennonite Church with all its discipline, biblicism, stability, etc. is just what the situation needs and what will in the end be most satisfactory to NCCC and to the other established churches. So it looks to me. Is this right?”²⁶⁹ Graber also advised Edwin to be more aggressively evangelistic and less concerned about criticism. Mennonites, he said, were too accustomed to being “the quiet in the land” and needed to develop a more aggressive spirit.²⁷⁰

For Graber time was of the essence. In India missionaries were not finding the welcome that they had found a generation earlier.²⁷¹ In Nigeria, however, people still wanted missionaries and what they could bring. Nationalism, however, was growing there too and might soon enough create problems. One should take advantage of the opportunity to build a strong and growing church while it was still possible to do so.

While Graber encouraged Weaver to maintain good relationships with other missions and churches, he also pointed out the weaknesses of some ecumenical initiatives of the day. He considered the notion that all Christians should come together in a united

²⁶⁸ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961.

²⁶⁹ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960.

²⁷⁰ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

church to be idealistic, something that simply would not happen.²⁷² National councils sometimes assumed authority for every church in a way that was not realistic and not always desirable.²⁷³ While the ecumenical movement created structures to promote church unity, unity was not always the result of its initiatives. Graber wrote, “They tie the thing together at the top and actually split things at the bottom.”²⁷⁴ He was likely referring to Yoder’s critique that the coming WCC/IMC merger risked splitting church and missionary structures along ecumenical/evangelical fault lines.²⁷⁵

With respect to Weavers’ concerns about protecting the indigenous character of MCN, Graber agreed. If the modest assistance that the mission was giving to the church was putting its self-sufficiency in danger, it should be discontinued.²⁷⁶ Any investment in schools or hospitals in the region should be worked out in cooperation with other missions, respond to real needs, and not duplicate unnecessarily what others were already doing. Graber was clearly in favor of providing personnel for other mission institutions and government schools, seeing this as a way to further establish MBMC’s presence in West Africa.²⁷⁷

²⁷² J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 10, 1960.

²⁷³ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960.

²⁷⁴ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, January 10, 1960.

²⁷⁵ John H. Yoder to George W. Carpenter, November 13, 1959; Luther A. Gotwald to J. D. Graber, June 22, 1960 and J. D. Graber to Luther A. Gotwald, July 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 6, International Missionary Council 1956-1960.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960.

²⁷⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, May 3, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, August 3, 1960.

Graber assumed that the congregations that had invited MBMC to the region were authentic and viable Christian churches and encouraged Weaver to work with them as such. Given the large number of people who participated in them and in the numerous other independent groups, they were not simply a “split off remnant,” and it was unrealistic to expect them to return to the mission churches.²⁷⁸ While some of their leaders practiced polygamy and so did not meet New Testament standards, he noted that even the Apostle Paul appeared to have been flexible about Christian standards with lay members. Graber encouraged the Weavers to accept the imperfections of the church and work with it to improve its Christian witness. He used categories from MacGavran’s *Bridges of God* to explain his understanding of the situation, suggesting that many in southeastern Nigeria had been “discipled” into the Christian faith.²⁷⁹ The challenge for the Weavers was to work at teaching and assisting them to move to the next stage of “perfection.” Graber even suggested that MacGavran had written *Bridges of God* with the African situation in mind rather than that of India.

Authorization to Work in Nigeria

While the Independent Churches had been insistent in their invitation to MBMC to enter the Nigerian field, and there seemed no end to the congregations that wanted to affiliate with the new MCN, the government of Nigeria was less hospitable and refused to give permission for the mission to work in the country or to issue long-term visas to its missionaries. Hostetler had submitted an application for permission for the mission to

²⁷⁸ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, May 3, 1960.

²⁷⁹ McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, 13–16.

engage in missionary work with the Nigerian authorities in September 1959.²⁸⁰

Interaction with personnel at the government office where he deposited the application led him to believe that authorities would readily grant such permission, so he was surprised to receive word in February 1960 that they had denied it.²⁸¹

Hoping to rectify the situation, Edwin visited an official in Enugu, the seat of the Eastern Region. Officials assured him that the Government's decisions could be reversed.²⁸² Edwin immediately submitted a request that the government reconsider the application and repeated the same request in April.²⁸³ In addition, although they had requested permanent visas upon arrival to Nigeria, the government refused to issue them, forcing the Weavers to seek monthly extensions of their visitors' visas, a process that they could not continue indefinitely.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 21, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; S. J. Hostetler to Immigration and Passport Control, September 21, 1959 and "Form of Application for Permission to Engage in Missionary Work in Nigeria," September 21, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

²⁸¹ Permanent Secretary of Internal Affairs to S. J. Hostetler, February 10, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, J. D. Graber, and Edwin Weaver, February 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁸² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, March 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁸³ Edwin Weaver to The Ministry of Internal Affairs, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Akpabio, March 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 2, Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Internal Affairs, April 14, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

²⁸⁴ Edwin Weaver to the Principle Immigration and Passport Control Officer, The Nigerian Police Force, February 13, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to Principle Immigration Officer, Immigration and Passport Control, March 22, 1960 and Senior Immigration Officer to Edwin Weaver, March 28, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

Upon further investigation Weaver found that the government was hesitant to grant permission for any new missions or missionaries to enter the region. This was because of the reputation the area had for religious confusion and for Independent Church leaders whose requests to foreign sources for assistance it considered invalid and unscrupulous.²⁸⁵ This was not the first time that the government had sought to control foreign mission initiatives to protect social order in the region. Three decades earlier during the Spirit Movement the government had identified religious tracts and influences from the American based Faith Tabernacle and the Watchtower Bible Society as subversive.²⁸⁶ It maintained vigilance of new religious movements, sometime keeping charismatic faith healers under surveillance. Again, thirty years later, the government was moving to maintain order in the vibrant but confused religious context that was southeastern Nigeria.

As the Weavers were facing the increasing likelihood that they would have to leave the region since they could not obtain permission to work or even stay in Nigeria, Macdonald and the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) continued to search for ways to find the Weavers a place in the work of the established missions. Eventually those efforts bore fruit. The CSM was in need of someone to do evangelistic work in Ikot Inyang, ten miles from Uyo, where Roman Catholic and Independent Churches had started to enter

²⁸⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 14, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁸⁶ David Pratten, "Mystics and Missionaries: Narratives of the Spirit Movement in Eastern Nigeria," *Social Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 47–70.

what had been a Presbyterian area.²⁸⁷ The mission offered Edwin the job. At the same time the community of Abiriba, in Iboland north of Uyo, was looking for a volunteer agency to manage and help staff its new hospital and asked MBMC to take on that responsibility.²⁸⁸ The CSM had administered a hospital there earlier but had closed it in 1944. Now the community had built new buildings and the government promised to fund the initiative. CSM missionaries were anxious to find an agency to take on this project since they did not have the staff to respond to the need and the Roman Catholic mission was making moves to fill the void. These two possibilities would allow the Weavers and MBMC to remain in Nigeria, assist an established mission, build trust, and perhaps develop a ministry of ecclesial reconciliation in the confused and competitive milieu of southeastern Nigeria. The Weavers wrote to Graber and Yoder explaining these new possibilities and asked for guidance.

The Weavers also investigated the possibility of working with other missions in the region. The QIM considered accepting MBMC personnel to work in its mission institutions but decided against it.²⁸⁹ S. G. Elton, a former British Apostolic missionary who had become independent and formed his own mission, the World Christian Crusade, worked with Independent Churches across southern Nigeria, providing theological

²⁸⁷ R. M. Macdonald to Edwin Weaver, March 31, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁸⁸ K. Kalu to Edwin Weaver, March 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; A. G. Somerville to J. Jackson, April 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 31, 1960; Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁸⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

training for leaders but not establishing a denomination.²⁹⁰ He invited the Weavers to work with him, offering his mission as a cover for work they themselves might develop.²⁹¹ At one point they almost accepted his offer before deciding for the CSM option.²⁹²

Elton would come to have a significant influence on the development of Nigerian Pentecostalism and its relationship with western Pentecostals in the following decades. He teamed up with evangelists T. L. Osborn and Gordon Lindsay to introduce church-planting concepts in eastern Nigeria.²⁹³ Elton introduced Benson Idahosa to Lindsay, and Idahosa studied at Lindsay's Christ for the Nations Institute in the United States before returning to found what would become All Nations for Christ Bible College in Nigeria. Idahosa was instrumental in exposing Nigerian church leaders to contemporary streams of the North American Pentecostal movement.²⁹⁴ The Weavers, on the other hand, would impact western missionary involvement with, and scholarly analysis of, a stream of African Christianity that came to be known as the AIC movement.

²⁹⁰ Richard Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2008), 70; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960.

²⁹¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁹² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁹³ Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution*, 191–192; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism : An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91–92; Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army : Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, Religion in Contemporary Africa Series (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 38, 44–45, 61, 222.

²⁹⁴ Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution*, 197–198.

The difference between these two movements was in many cases more one of classification than of substance. After leaving Nigeria in 1967 Edwin Weaver noted that nearly all the AICs that he had worked with there had a Pentecostal understanding of the Christian faith.²⁹⁵ Some of his AIC collaborators had tried unceasingly to convince him of the importance of the gift of tongues. With the “AIC” label Weaver and other missionaries and scholars highlighted the fact that some African churches were not affiliated with a western mission or church structure. With the “Pentecostal” label they highlighted their observation that of all the western versions of Christianity, the faith expressions of some African churches corresponded most closely with those of the Pentecostal churches. Weaver’s experience seems to indicate that in southeastern Nigeria these two nomenclatures often referred to the same churches.

The Weavers scrambled to find a way to resolve their precarious visa situation in early May as the expiration date on their visitor visas approached.²⁹⁶ They traveled to Lagos hoping to convince Immigration officials to issue them permanent visas despite the fact that MBMC did not yet have permission to work in Nigeria.²⁹⁷ Without such permission they could perhaps work under the authority of MCN or another mission even if they could not establish a legal mission entity, own property, or operate schools or hospitals. Upon arrival they found that Immigration officials had already started the

²⁹⁵ Edwin Weaver, “Files on Independent Churches, Transcript,” 1968, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 19, Weaver Background - Transcribed.

²⁹⁶ Senior Immigration Officer to Edwin Weaver, March 28, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

²⁹⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960.

process of ordering them to leave the country.²⁹⁸ Officials were firm in their resolve to disallow new American missions that might increase the confusion to initiate work in the region.

The Weavers had to act quickly, and their decision would affect the direction their work would take. Either they would commit themselves to working under another mission and not start separate work, or Immigration would issue them a notice to leave the country. They had only forty-eight hours to make a decision.²⁹⁹ The CSM had invited them to work under its cover, but a four-way negotiation among the CSM, the Abiriba community, the Weavers, and MBMC was still in process.³⁰⁰ Agreeing to work in Nigeria under the CSM would likely relegate work with MCN to a position of less importance.³⁰¹ The Weavers were not sure that MBMC would agree to this.

Since they had to make a decision immediately, they decided to call Graber for counsel. The call had to be rerouted from mission headquarters in Elkhart, Indiana to the

²⁹⁸ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁹⁹ Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1970), 35.

³⁰⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to K. Kalu, April 5, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 1, K - Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to R. M. Macdonald, April 5, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.; A. G. Somerville to J. Jackson, April 6, 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1960, John H. Yoder to A. G. Somerville, April 18, 1960, John H. Yoder to A. Kalu, April 18, 1960, John H. Yoder to Members of the Executive Committee, April 18, 1960, and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 22, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Abiriba Union to MBMC, May 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³⁰¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

Atlantic Hotel in Chicago where Graber was in meetings.³⁰² Graber listened to the Weavers' explanation of the visa crisis. In the end he said, "Go ahead, accept the proposal of the Presbyterian Church. By all means plan to stay."³⁰³ The die was cast. The Weavers would work under the CSM. This would facilitate their inter-church work that sought to reconcile mission churches and Independent Churches in southeastern Nigeria, but it would draw attention and energy away from their work with MCN.

In the months that followed MBMC and the CSM arrived at a formal agreement for the Weavers to work in the Presbyterian community at Ikot Inyang and for MBMC to manage and provide staff for the Abiriba hospital. Immigration officials gave the Weavers a visa extension to permit them time to establish a formal agreement with the CSM that would allow their inclusion in that mission's visa quota.³⁰⁴ In a move consistent with the immigration department's treatment of the Weavers' visa applications, at the end of May the Ministry of Internal Affairs again denied MBMC's request for permission to establish its own mission in Nigeria, affirming its earlier decision of February.³⁰⁵ This ended hope that the necessity for CSM's legal umbrella would only be temporary.

³⁰² Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 35–36; Edwin Weaver, "Notes for Telephone Conversation" (Lagos, Nigeria, May 6, 1960), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³⁰³ Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 36.

³⁰⁴ Edwin Weaver to The Chief Immigration Officer, Lagos, May 7, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 14, 1960.

³⁰⁵ J. C. Cousins to Edwin I Weaver, May 30, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

MBMC and its missionaries would clearly have to work within the structures of the CSM. Until a Mennonite doctor could be sent Edwin supervised the Abiriba work, coordinating the preparation of the hospital and setting up the needed administrative structures.³⁰⁶ The CSM provided a house at Ikot Inyang for the Weavers, and Edwin and MBMC agreed that he would split his time and energy among pastoral work at Ikot Inyang, the Abiriba project, and responsibilities with the Uyo congregations that made up the MCN.³⁰⁷

The CSM was clear, however, that the Weavers were not to establish a separate denomination in their work with the Uyo congregations.³⁰⁸ Instead they were to orient them towards the doctrine and discipline of CCN churches. This meant that Graber and Hostetler's desire to establish a strong Mennonite church in southeastern Nigeria appeared to be impossible.

The Nigerian Presbyterian Church Synod formally approved the agreement with MBMC in June, officially cementing the Weavers' place in their structure and meeting the requirements for their permanent visas, which the government issued in August.³⁰⁹ At

³⁰⁶ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; R. M. Macdonald to John H. Yoder, May 30, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 5, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁰⁷ "Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC," June 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65.

³⁰⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; "Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC."

³⁰⁹ A. G. Somerville to The Principle Immigration Officer, The Nigerian Police, June 17, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 20, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.; A. G. Somerville to The Senior Immigration Officer, Lagos,

the same meetings the CSM handed over all of its work in Nigeria to the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, culminating a process that had started decades earlier.³¹⁰ From this point on MBMC's work would be with the newly constituted church, even though it continued collaborating with CSM missionaries who were part of the new Presbyterian Church structure. This new working arrangement of collaboration with the CSM and Presbyterian Church institutions and the restrictions it entailed limited the Weavers' options as they continued to formalize their new mission approach.

A Way Forward: Mennonite Church Nigeria, Indigenization, and a Mennonite Witness of Reconciliation

Between February, when they first received word that the government had denied Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities permission to work in Nigeria, and the end of the year, the Weavers' missionary strategy grew out of the problems they identified during their first three months in country, their consultation with Yoder, Graber, and Hostetler, and especially their new position as workers within the Church of Scotland Mission structure. This subsection will show how the Weavers developed their mission approach in the face of the challenges that arose. Despite misgivings they continued to work with Mennonite Church Nigeria, although less than previously because of the limitations of their agreement with the Church of Scotland Mission. They moved MBMC's emphasis away from developing a traditional denominational presence in the

July 20, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 10, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³¹⁰ A. G. Somerville and E.A. Onuk, "Announcement of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria," (Abakaliki, Nigeria: Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, July 29, 1960), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.

region and towards an inter-church missionary role that sought reconciliation and order in the divisive and confused religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria.

Mennonite Church Nigeria and its Leaders

The first of the three concerns that the Weavers had identified early in their term in Nigeria focused on MCN and its leaders. While they believed it had been unwise to establish a Mennonite church in the region and that MBMC had accepted congregations into the Mennonite fold too quickly, the Weavers committed themselves to continue working with the church out of respect for the mission's commitments and because they believed that was what the mission wanted.³¹¹ Their strategy was to initiate regular opportunities for leadership training and to help the church organize itself so that it could address issues of discipline and the credentialing of church leaders within local structures. In January 1960 they held their first three-day Bible classes for thirty church leaders and a few lay people.³¹² Interest was good, and such training sessions became a monthly event.³¹³ In addition to providing opportunities for biblical and theological training through regular teaching sessions, they provided scholarships for church leaders to attend training programs of the established missions. Edwin contacted the established

³¹¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960; Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.

³¹² Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 22, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

³¹³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, March 15, 1960.

missions' Bible Schools and by October had obtained permission to send MCN leaders to be trained in the Qua Iboe and Methodist Bible schools.³¹⁴

The Weavers urged the church to develop structures and standards that would increase its ability to function as a stable and authentic church in what appeared to be a highly confused religious milieu. In this Yoder encouraged them, suggesting that assisting the church in the establishment of a more orderly and responsible church life would not only be beneficial for the church but would also make it more acceptable to the Qua Iboe Mission.³¹⁵ At the Weavers' recommendation, the church modified its structure, making each congregation responsible to a central structure instead of to regional pastors.³¹⁶

For the Weavers one standard that took priority over the desire for a large Nigerian Mennonite church was the rejection of polygamy for church leaders. In MCN's February conference Edwin taught on the theme of the New Testament church, arguing that polygamy was contrary to the New Testament's teaching.³¹⁷ For the context of southeastern Nigeria in the early 1960s, the Weavers considered this standard necessary for a responsible, New Testament church and asked polygamous leaders to choose

³¹⁴ Edwin Weaver to N. A. Shields, October 13, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 8, Shields, N. A.; A. Griffiths to Edwin Weaver, October 27, 1960 and Principle of Methodist Church Lay Training Centre to Edwin Weaver, October 29, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.

³¹⁵ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 27, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, February 1, 1960.

³¹⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³¹⁷ "Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church, Nigeria, February 26, 1960), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

younger leaders who were not polygamous to take their place.³¹⁸ Given the prevalence of the practice among church leaders, this was disruptive enough that the conference delayed the appointment of new officers. Hostetler was dismayed, fearing that the church would break apart, and suggested an office below that of pastor to give recognition to the leaders who were polygamous.³¹⁹ The new standards did result in congregations leaving the church.³²⁰

While Hostetler sought a way to keep the congregations together under the MCN umbrella, the Weavers preferred to maintain a standard that precluded polygamous leaders despite the reduction in the number of congregations and membership that such insistence threatened. The desire for a large influx into the church that mass movements seemed to promise was not as operative for the Weavers as it appeared to be for Hostetler. In India MBMC had sent the Weavers to Drug for their first assignment, hoping to take advantage of a possible mass movement among the Satnami people there.³²¹ Such a movement did not materialize, and the Weavers seemed unresponsive to mass movement expectations there and later in Nigeria.

Graber sought to understand MCN and the situation in southeastern Nigeria through the lens of McGavran's church growth theories and engaged the Weavers in an

³¹⁸ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³¹⁹ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential.

³²⁰ Daniel Essiet to S. J. Hostetler, April 4, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60.

³²¹ "Editorial," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1936), 113.

exchange of letters about the relevance of those theories for the region. Like the Weavers, MacGavran had worked among the Satnami people in India, and he became the leading advocate of mass movement and church growth approaches.³²² While Edwin reported that he agreed with McGavran's main thesis in *Bridges of God*, he found that the situation in southeastern Nigeria did not correspond exactly to McGavran's principles, and he did not want to be tied to any one single way of working.³²³ He argued that missionary theory and strategy had to be revised constantly to take into consideration the history, culture, and background of any given situation so that principles should not be simply transferred from one situation to another unwisely.

The lack of permission to open mission work in Nigeria, and the Weavers' appointment under the Church of Scotland Mission influenced the strategy that the Weavers would implement with respect to Mennonite Church Nigeria. Because of the government's opposition and the CSM's insistence that the establishment of another denomination was not advantageous, MBMC could no longer work towards establishing a Mennonite church.³²⁴ They could, however, include MCN with any work that they did within the broader context of all the Independent Churches in the region. They could work at reconciliation between them and the established missions and churches and at

³²² Donald McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 10, no. 2 (1986): 53-58; George G. Hunter, "The Legacy of Donald A. McGavran," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 16, no. 4 (1992): 158-162.

³²³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 17, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³²⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 27, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; "Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960.

building up the integrity of their witness by providing biblical study and helping them to organize their churches. Until there was another way to acquire visas, mission work that was not in accordance with the policies and goals of the CSM would have to wait.³²⁵ Of course MCN existed, even though the government had not recognized it as a legally constituted church and had categorically refused the mission permission to establish a Mennonite church in Nigeria. This was embarrassing for both the Weavers and Mennonite Church Nigeria.³²⁶

This situation changed somewhat when, unexpectedly, the government recognized MCN as a legally constituted church. The church had applied for recognition in January, apparently without the Weavers' assistance or knowledge.³²⁷ In August it received word that the government had approved its application. Despite the Weavers' commitment to the CSM and Immigration officials that they would not plant a new Mennonite church in the region, MCN now had official recognition and approval. Given their agreement with the CSM and the responsibility to get the Abiriba project started, the church's new status did not significantly alter the Weavers' focus. Most of their time and energy was directed at Abiriba, but they also found time to visit and work with MCN congregations.³²⁸ In the months that followed some congregations left the church, but others baptized new

³²⁵ John H. Yoder to I. U. Nsagak, May 24, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

³²⁶ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960.

³²⁷ Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, August 19, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.

³²⁸ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 12, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

members.³²⁹ Slowly the church was making progress at becoming more organized and disciplined.

Graber's report from his December 1960 visit to Nigeria shows the mission's plans for engaging MCN after the Weavers first tumultuous year in country. Graber articulated a clear goal, "To build it up in standards, purity and discipline so that it can be acceptable by the churches who are members of the Nigerian Christian Council as a sister church in as full a cooperation as possible."³³⁰ Now that the government had officially recognized the church, this was a goal that was acceptable to both MBMC and the CSM, and Graber was hopeful that a large Mennonite church with good discipline and standards would emerge. The most significant challenge appeared to be the lack of competent leadership, so MBMC planned to continue providing leadership training. In addition to the monthly biblical training sessions that the Weavers had already started, the mission would provide scholarship aid to enable current leaders to attend Bible training programs. It would also give scholarships to secondary school students who would later provide a pool of educated young people who might one day become useful and respected leaders in the church. In addition, the mission would continue to provide a small subsidy for the church.

Given the expectations and commitments that grew out of MBMC's early engagement with MCN, the Weavers were willing to work with the church despite their

³²⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³³⁰ J. D. Graber, "Report on Visit to Nigeria," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, December 31, 1960), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

misgivings, even if their primary mission focus was shifting in another direction. Hostetler was no longer involved in discussions about the mission's approach in Nigeria after March 1960. Graber was MBMC Secretary for Foreign Missions, but given his belief that mission strategy had to be adapted to local contexts, he relied heavily on the experience and advice of missionaries on the ground. Despite some early differences of opinion about strategy in Nigeria, his report to the mission after his December 1960 visit to Nigeria was upbeat and supported the Weavers' approach.³³¹ Yoder encouraged the Weavers to develop inter-church initiatives of reconciliation and to push the church to be more self-sufficient in terms of organization, discipline, and leadership credentialing. In the end it was the Weavers and their fellow missionaries on the ground who shaped and implemented the mission's approach to MCN.

Indigenous Principles

The challenge of encouraging the emergence of indigenous churches continued throughout the Weavers' first year in country. They committed themselves to work according to indigenous principles, arguing, for example, that leadership training in Nigeria should fit into indigenous patterns and not create foreign understandings of professionalism or dependency on foreign missions.³³² While the indigenous goal of churches that were self-financing, self-propagating, and self-governing was also a priority for their MBMC colleagues, not everyone agreed how best to accomplish that goal.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960.

The Weavers argued that, in addition to the three-self formula, indigenous principles should be applied to theological reflection. In India Edwin had suggested that Indian leaders should evaluate North American Mennonite teaching and decide what should be appropriated for the Indian context. In Nigeria too he was hesitant to assume that North American Mennonite theological assumptions could be easily applied, preferring to equip church leaders who would find meaningful theological expressions for their context.³³³ Such an approach contrasted with Hostetler, who assumed that Nigerian congregations could simply accept a list of North American Mennonite beliefs in order to become Mennonite. This corresponded to their differing approaches with respect to establishing a church with a Mennonite identity and organically connected to North American Mennonites. Hostetler sought to build a strong Mennonite church. Edwin, on the other hand, doubted that the distinctives of Mennonite identity as expressed in North America were important considerations for the Nigerian congregations.³³⁴ He wrote, “The historical events out of which we became ‘Mennonites’ and others became ‘Lutheran,’ etc. means nothing to these people.”³³⁵

Indeed, differences between the beliefs of the various western Christian traditions seemed to be of little consequence. As congregations had sought to join MCN the year before, they told Hostetler that they were eager to receive copies of Mennonite doctrine

³³³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.

so that they could believe with him.³³⁶ They expressed a willingness to change beliefs and expected to do so as part of their affiliation with the mission.³³⁷ This appeared to be a move that required little investigation. No wonder the Weavers were hesitant to continue the process of building a large Nigerian Mennonite church. The diversity of western understandings of the Christian faith and the distinctives of the different denominational traditions seemed to hold little significance for Christians in southeastern Nigeria.

For the Weavers, an alternative to forcing a strictly Mennonite understanding of the faith among congregations in Nigeria was that they might simply remain indigenous, without a western denominational affiliation. The Weavers had worked hard in India to facilitate the emergence of an indigenous Indian Mennonite church. In the religiously competitive and confusing context of southeastern Nigeria, however, they came to believe that foregoing a strong Mennonite identity for the Nigerian congregations was the most faithful missionary strategy. The Weavers and their MBMC colleagues would practice such a strategy across West Africa in the coming decades. Nevertheless, the Weavers accepted the existence of MCN as a *fait accompli* and in the years that followed worked closely with it, developing strong relationships with its leaders. In their ministry they held in tension these two approaches, balancing the time and attention they gave to this Mennonite church with their commitment to working with AICs.

³³⁶ Frank A. Udo to S. J. Hostetler, January 12, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

³³⁷ Matthew Ekereke to MBMC, July 25, 1958 and M. A. Udo to S. J. Hostetler, December 3, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

When the Weavers worked with MCN to replace polygamous leaders, their MBMC colleagues raised concerns about proper indigenization strategy. At the February conference Edwin encouraged the church to follow principles outlined in the New Testament.³³⁸ This included the prohibition of polygamy for church leaders. Edwin's insistence that he would work only with leaders who were not polygamous meant that many of them either had to cede their place to younger leaders or leave the church. Yoder and Hostetler questioned Edwin's procedure on indigenous church grounds.³³⁹ They argued that he should not have interfered in the governance of a church that already had leaders who were responsible for its well-being and a functioning structure, as rudimentary and imperfect as it was. The Weavers maintained that monogamy for church leaders was an accepted principle in the region that had to be applied if MCN was to become a respected church and shed its reputation as rebel congregations that simply sought to avoid the discipline of their mother churches.³⁴⁰ As in MBMC India's experience, indigenization functioned better as a shared goal than as a set of practices upon which everyone agreed.

While the Weavers were hesitant to build institutions such as schools and hospitals for MCN because of concerns for indigenization that grew out of their India

³³⁸ "Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church, Nigeria, February 26, 1960), Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 6, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³³⁹ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, March 3, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

³⁴⁰ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

experience, they did work with CSM related institutions, managing the completion of the Abiriba hospital construction and later providing MBMC doctors, nurses, and teachers for schools. These Nigerian mission institutions differed from those of the MBMC's India mission in ways that mitigated the Weavers' concerns about their danger to indigenization. The government funded the construction and staff salaries of the Abiriba hospital, so it would not become a financial burden for the church and increase its dependency on foreign funds.³⁴¹ A board made up of representatives from the community, MBMC, and the government oversaw administration of the institution.³⁴² It would not draw the church's attention away from other responsibilities nor would it become embroiled in church politics. The government also subsidized teachers' salaries at CSM schools.³⁴³ Government funding and governance structures that separated these institutions from the church appeared to ensure that they would not hinder the church's progress towards indigenization.

Relationships with Other Missions and Churches

MBMC's agreement with the CSM provided not only a way for the Weavers to obtain residence visas but also a way to gain the confidence of the established missions in hope that a ministry of reconciliation between them and the Independent Churches would

³⁴¹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 10, 1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 17, 1960.

³⁴² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁴³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 22, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; U. Iso to Kermit H. Derstine, November 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61.

be possible. The Weavers had identified this ecumenically focused work of reinforcing inter-church relationships as an important mission contribution to the confused and competitive religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria. They continued to believe that both the established mission churches and the Independent Churches needed to work towards reconciliation.³⁴⁴ Collaboration with the Presbyterian congregation at Ikot Inyang and with the Abiriba hospital provided a way to establish MBMC's presence in Nigeria and to prepare a mission strategy of inter-church reconciliation.³⁴⁵

MBMC commenced sending personnel for the Abiriba hospital immediately. In July the mission appointed its first missionary doctor for Abiriba who arrived to Nigeria in October.³⁴⁶ In August it appointed a missionary business manager for the hospital who arrived in November.³⁴⁷ By the end of 1960 the Abiriba staff could report that they had already treated eight hundred and seventy outpatients and that the first inpatient ward

³⁴⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 12, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁴⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 17, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1960.

³⁴⁶ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, July 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 17, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁴⁷ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 11, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

would open on January 2, 1961.³⁴⁸ The Weavers also started negotiations between MBMC and the CSM to provide much needed teachers for CSM's schools.³⁴⁹

Building trust with the established missions and proving MBMC's usefulness in their projects would increase the likelihood that it could serve as a reconciling presence. In this way the visa solution that the Weavers found corresponded nicely to the priorities that they had set for their missionary engagement in the region.

Mennonite Church Nigeria's Voice

Mennonite Church Nigeria did not agree with the Weavers' change of focus from a traditional, denominationally oriented mission approach to one that emphasized reconciliation in the larger inter-church context and did not hesitate to express its discontent. As a church that grew out of Indigenous Church roots, it was no stranger to disagreement with missionaries. The socio-political situation of the time likely also encouraged indigenous voices. The post World War II context of the end of colonialism and the independence of former British colonies such as Nigeria could only embolden indigenous actors to express their concerns. This section will show that MCN was part of a Nigerian society that was emerging from the colonial period with a well-developed sense of its own voice. As such it expressed clearly its disagreement with the Weavers' new mission approach, identified problems inherent in it, and argued that such an

³⁴⁸ John Grasse to MBMC, December 30, 1960, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1960-61.

³⁴⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 10, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to Kermit H. Derstine, July 5, 1960, Kermit Derstine to John H. Yoder, August 9, 1960, and U. Iso to Kermit H. Derstine, November 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61.

approach would keep the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities from accomplishing its missionary duties in the region. The church acted to reaffirm its Mennonite identity, solidify its connection to the mission, and access the benefits of traditional missionary services.

The congregations that came to make up MCN were adamant in their rejection of the ecclesial authority structures of the established mission churches and sought the same move towards independence in the churches that they saw happening in the larger Nigerian political context. Formal Nigerian independence would not take effect until October 1960, but when MBMC missionaries arrived in the region the process towards independence was already under way. The Nigerian Christians articulated well their desires already in a February 1959 address to Hostetler:

Nigeria of today is not like Nigeria of yesterday. We are at present struggling to take our stand among the Nations of the world as an independent country; and of course, naturally, we must be beset with difficulties. At this transitional period of ours, which you come to meet us, we have to advise you not to look on us from the angle you look upon the people of America or England, but to look on us from the perspective of a child beginning to tread about the house. It will be difficult for you to work in our midst if you will not be able to appreciate our efforts and difficulties, and be prepared to stand firm by us, and support us in every way possible, to retain our independence on a balance as we have already marched to its threshold.³⁵⁰

MCN congregations were looking to MBMC for assistance but desired that assistance on new, post-colonial terms.

³⁵⁰ “Welcome Address from the People of Ibiono to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler,” February 15, 1959, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

As Independent congregations MCN had experienced the disapproval of the established missions and their churches and expected resistance from them. Church leaders warned Hostetler that other missionaries opposed the establishment of new churches and would discourage the mission from assisting them.³⁵¹ They described these missionaries in starkly negative terms:

Beware of the dogs that bark and bite around Christian institutions in this country. By these dogs we mean certain missionaries from other denominations who will volunteer to backbite, ensnare, ill-advice [sic] and discourage you in whatever good plans you intend for our country.... These are the hypocrites who twist the Bible teachings and formulate their creeds and doctrines in order to intimidate the people and exploit them; these are the brand of missionaries who fear any new church establishing in this country, for fear of the fact that the truth will be made known to the people.... These are the brand of imperialist [sic] and their stooges who find it impossible to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of Nigeria.... They are prepared to seize every opportunity and employ every possible means to spoil the work and good plans of any rival mission. Take heed that ye do not become preys [sic] to these dogs. Take heed also that ye deviate not from your well planned policy and join yourselves with these band of hypocrites.³⁵²

Church leaders understood that the established missions would advise MBMC not to provide the church a Mennonite identity and the assistance that it requested. The church's understanding of Christianity as a religion that would provide vitality and well-being as well as the history of Christian missions in the region had encouraged MCN congregations to anticipate help via medical and educational institutions. Hostetler and Graber had reinforced such expectations when they committed the mission to aiding in that way. When the Weavers abandoned the traditional mission strategy with its

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

denominational structures and mission institutions, the church faced the prospect of relinquishing its hope of such assistance.

The church resisted the mission's change in approach and articulated its own understanding of the church/mission relationship. In May 1960 Yoder wrote to MCN suggesting that its relationship with the mission did not follow the traditional pattern and that MBMC entered the region to work with a church that already existed, that had adopted a Mennonite identity, and that was already in agreement with the mission's doctrinal positions.³⁵³ Any financial assistance, he added, would be provided in a way that did not make the church dependent on the mission. MCN reacted strongly to Yoder's depiction of its history and provided another narrative that identified February 1959, when church leaders separated themselves from former leader A. A. Dick, as the date when the church decided to "remain directly under the control and supervision of the Mennonite Mission."³⁵⁴ MCN maintained that the mission representative, Hostetler, had approved of this decision before accepting congregations into the new church during subsequent visits. The development of a constitution and registration with the government followed on the advice of Hostetler. The church presented its relationship to the mission in a way that reinforced the traditional mission obligation to provide medical and educational services that were part of its understanding of the practice of Christian missions in the region.

³⁵³ John H. Yoder to I. U. Nsasak, May 24, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

³⁵⁴ "Presentation from Mennonite Church, Nigeria to J. D. Graber," December 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

MBMC's arrangement with the Church of Scotland Mission and its strategy of replacing a traditional mission approach with one that focused on inter-church collaboration caused chagrin among MCN leaders. During Graber's visit in December, they asked him if the mission still wanted to exist in Nigeria "as a distinct Mennonite Mission with full engagement in evangelical and allied work."³⁵⁵ They wanted to know if it was no longer "interested in opening up a Mission and implementing the plans which the Mission Board had formerly made for the country."³⁵⁶ They argued strongly against the change in approach and admitted openly that they resented the MBMC/CSM agreement that would have precluded the establishment of a Mennonite church.

In addition, MCN argued that the new approach would not allow the MBMC to fulfill its responsibilities as a Christian mission among the Ibibio people. Church leaders noted that the mission seemed to prefer working with community projects like that of the Abiriba hospital but contended that it would be difficult to advocate for Mennonite understandings in such projects.³⁵⁷ Because of government regulations and the fact that communities were multi-religious, the authorities would restrict the promotion of specific faith beliefs. The church warned MBMC that given such restrictions it should not think that its responsibilities as a mission could be satisfactorily completed working in that way. Church leaders also rejected the argument that there were already too many churches in the region. They admitted that there were many but maintained that, since

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

Christianity was now the accepted religion of people in the Uyo province, there was simply more need. They explained to Graber, “If sufficient harvesters are not called into the field, then the harvest is sure to rot [sic] and decay in the ground. As long as this is the case in Uyo province, many more Missions will still be in demand for evangelical work in Uyo.”³⁵⁸ Finally, MCN noted that mission’s new approach deprived the Ibibio people, the church’s ethnic identity, of the mission’s assistance. Abiriba, an Ibo community, received the mission’s aid while Ibibio communities, where the church was located, did not benefit.

MBMC was sympathetic to MCN’s concerns. While Hostetler and Graber had distinguished between material and spiritual motivations, they did understand mission institutions such as schools and hospitals as legitimate mission contributions that might well accompany the development of the church. For their part, the Weavers were happy for the contribution missions institutions could make as long as the dangers to indigenization were minimized and they did not add to the division and competition between churches that was so prevalent in the region. Since they were dependent on the CSM for visas, however, they felt constrained to provide assistance to CSM projects, which happened to be primarily outside of Ibibioland, before considering assistance to non-CSM opportunities.

The Weavers admitted that MBMC had engaged the situation in southeastern Nigeria with a traditional mission approach. It had created expectations by providing a Mennonite identity and planning to support and implement a program that would

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

eventually include schools and hospitals.³⁵⁹ They wrote to Graber, “We [MBMC] were much interested in developing a Mennonite Pattern church, before these people even had the least concept of what a Mennonite Church is or believes. To say that these people were Mennonites before we came is definitely stretching the point.”³⁶⁰ Because of the commitments that the mission had made, the Weavers continued to work with the church, hoping to help it develop structures and leadership that would serve it well. Given the confused and competitive ecclesial context in southeastern Nigeria, however, they gave priority to laying the groundwork for a ministry of reconciliation within the Christian movement in the region.

This chapter has shown how MBMC missionaries arrived in West Africa and, after evaluating the context in southeastern Nigeria, changed their mission strategy. They changed it from a traditional denominational approach to one that sought to encourage reconciliation between AIC’s and the mission churches from which they had separated. The chapter has highlighted the significance of the mission’s desire for an African field, European missionary connections, and radio technology for the arrival of Mennonite missionaries in the region. Missionaries’ concerns about indigenous principles, mass movements, inter-church relationships, and the integrity of the AICs that had invited them to the region influenced their analysis of the confused and competitive religious milieu in southeastern Nigeria. Their response was a missionary strategy that sought to

³⁵⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

strengthen those AICs and lay the groundwork for a ministry of inter-church reconciliation, a focus that gave less importance to the establishment of a church with organic ties to the North American Mennonite Church. The government decision to refuse MBMC permission to establish its own mission in Nigeria reinforced the new mission strategy since missionaries had to conform to the will of the Church of Scotland Mission under whose legal umbrella they would work. The AICs that formed the newly established Mennonite church embodied the nationalist impulse of the move towards independence and were not shy about condemning as colonialists those who sought to discourage the mission from assisting them. They vigorously criticized MBMC's decision not to establish traditional mission services for the church.

This chapter has shown the importance of the missiological and religious assumptions of missionaries and their African interlocutors and of the social, religious and political context for mission theory and strategy. MBMC missionaries' experience in India led them to expect that a large group of churches in Nigeria might come into the Mennonite fold but also led them to place a high value on indigenization so that they were hesitant to establish mission institutions. The concern for indigenization similarly made the missionaries hesitant to transplant North American Mennonite faith and practice into the Nigerian context. The AIC's assumptions that religion should provide for human well-being and the history of Christian missions in the region led them to expect that MBMC would provide mission institutions like schools and hospitals for the newly formed Mennonite church. The church embodied the anti-colonial sentiment and the move towards independence of Nigerian society and was not hesitant about voicing

its condemnation of missionaries or mission approaches that might impede their acquisition of mission services and the well-being they might provide. The competitive and divisive religious context of southeastern Nigeria encouraged the missionaries to make inter-church reconciliation a mission priority and to resist starting a new church that they believed would only add to the divisive context. The Nigerian government's refusal to grant missionary visas resulted in partnership with the Church of Scotland Mission and the Presbyterian Church it had created so that the mission's inter-church focus was heavily oriented towards providing personnel for CSM schools and the Abiriba hospital. This chapter has shown that the particularities of the southeastern Nigerian context at the end of the colonial era were significant factors in MBMC's missiological reflection and practical mission engagement there.

CHAPTER FIVE
MENNONITES, INDEPENDENTS, MISSION
CHURCHES AND A LAYERED
MISSION APPROACH

At the beginning of 1961 the Weavers had been in Nigeria for thirteen months, had resolved their visa difficulties, and had formulated a loosely defined missionary approach for the context they found in southeastern Nigeria. Their approach focused, in addition to Mennonite Board of Mission's (MBMC) ongoing concern for indigenization, on encouraging reconciliation between the Independent Churches and the established missions and their churches. The Weavers believed that this would require that both groups make the effort to learn about the other. They also came to believe that the MBMC would have to succeed in its relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) if it was to build trust with the various churches in the region and play a mediating role. This chapter will describe the ongoing development of the Weavers' approach and the various initiatives that they and their colleagues introduced in order to implement it. While inter-church reconciliation was the basic motivating factor in the mission's work in southeastern Nigeria, each of the different ministries that developed held innate missiological value for the missionaries who engaged in them. The motivation of reconciliation led to engagement in diverse ministries and a rich, layered missionary witness.

MBMCs specific initiatives under the general rubric of inter-church reconciliation fit into three categories: the provision of personnel for institutions of the established missions, the study of and ministry among African Independent Churches (AICs), and ministry engagement with MCN. The mission's provision of personnel for the established missions' programs aimed to build trust with them in order to allow MBMC to play a mediating role in the ecclesial milieu of southeastern Nigeria. This support included personnel for the Abiriba hospital, for seven schools of varying sorts, and for the Asaba Rural Training Center.

MBMC engagement with AICs included both the study of that vibrant movement and assistance meant to increase the integrity and capacity of these churches and their leaders. The study of AICs was necessary in order to increase mission churches' understanding of the movement. Increasing the integrity and capacity of the AICs was necessary in order to prepare them for fruitful relationships with the mission churches. The Inter-Church Study Group embodied most clearly the study focus. Its participants included leaders of the established missions and their churches, scholars who focused on AICs and African Christianity, and eventually some AIC leaders. They met quarterly to read and discuss papers and to network about common interests. The Inter-Church Team was a parallel initiative that conducted surveys of AICs in and around the towns of Abak and Uyo. The United Independent Churches Fellowship was the original vehicle through which MBMC worked with the large number of AICs in the region. It established the United Churches Bible College that provided training for AIC leaders. Eventually the

United Independent Churches Fellowship faltered and the Independent Churches Leaders Meeting took its place.

Finally, until they evacuated in 1967 the Weavers and their MBMC colleagues continued to work with MCN. They acted as teaching and preaching resources within its congregations, provided scholarships to high school and Bible school students, served as liaisons with the Mennonite movement outside of Nigeria, and provided agricultural assistance in MCN villages. At first the Weavers worked with the church because of the commitments the mission had made to this group of congregations before their arrival, but with time they came to believe that their larger goal of inter-church reconciliation depended on successful engagement with the church. As they worked with MCN and the other churches in the region, missionaries sought to encourage indigenization and drew on the insights of the discipline of anthropology in their deliberations about mission theory and strategy. Through their work they developed significant relationships with, and an affinity for, the church and its leaders.

MCN's response to the mission's novel approach was, however, mixed. The church resented mission practice that failed to provide the educational and medical facilities that church members had come to associate with Christian missions, although some MCN leaders participated in the different inter-church ministries the missionaries initiated. With the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967, most of the missionaries evacuated; only five at the Abiriba hospital finished their terms in the seceded state of Biafra. After the war the various initiatives to engage AICs and work at reconciliation in the region did not continue as the Nigerian government again refused to grant long-term

visas to mission personnel. The legacy of this innovative mission approach would instead develop across West Africa as MBMC personnel engaged AICs in a variety of ministry initiatives in the sub-Saharan countries of Ghana, the Ivory Coast and the Republic of Benin.

Supporting Established Missions' Programs

Having experienced the established missions' resistance to Mennonite Board of Mission's presence in the region, the Weavers considered assistance to their various mission institutions a way to gain their trust and to meet medical and educational needs among the population. This section will show how MBMC provided personnel for the Abiriba hospital, for a number of Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and Qua Iboe Mission schools, and for the Asaba Rural Development Center, a project of the Christian Council of Nigeria. Most of these were lay missionaries in the newly conceived category of Overseas Mission Associates or in the new Overseas Voluntary Service program. This assistance became a significant part of MBMC's work in the region; more missionaries worked in this capacity between 1960 and the outbreak of the civil war than with Mennonite Church Nigeria and the African Independent Churches.

Lay Missionaries

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities designated most of its personnel who served as medical workers and teachers in Nigeria as Overseas Missions Associates (OMA). This was a new designation that sought to allow professional lay people to participate in missions by accepting assignments that would support the work without

becoming long-term missionaries.¹ The involvement of lay missionaries and service workers in mission initiatives was a Mennonite version of this dynamic in the larger Protestant missionary movement. In the post World War II era there was recognition of the important role of lay people in the history of the spread of the Christian movement and in the development of modern missions.²

With the increasing intensity of globalization in the twentieth century, Christians were traversing the world like never before, and this seemed to present possibilities for missions. At its meeting at Willingen in 1952, the International Missionary Council challenged churches to be “alive to the strategic importance of the spread of the Gospel by such lay people.”³ Global mobility among lay people raised the possibility of “new forms of missionary witness” in which Christians in countries around the world would serve as “non-professional missionaries.”⁴ They might earn their living working in business, industry, or government institutions and provide services that were not traditionally missionary roles. Since doors were closing to traditional missionaries in some countries and financial difficulties were forcing missionary societies to curtail programs, the focus on lay people in mission intensified. Rolland Allen and Sir Kenneth Grubb of the World Dominion Movement had highlighted the need for such non-

¹ “Overseas Mission Committee,” Meeting Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 23, 1962), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4-5.

² Paul Löffler, *The Layman Abroad in the Mission of the Church: A Decade of Discussion and Experiment* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1962), 7–20.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8, 27–30.

professional missionaries earlier in the century, Grubb having networked with Christian businessmen in various countries to place Christians in key posts overseas.⁵ During the decade following the Willingen meeting, numerous organizations set up programs to provide lay opportunities in foreign mission service. At its third assembly at New Delhi, the World Council of Churches established a Secretariat for Lay Service Abroad in response to increasing interest of young people in service abroad.⁶

MBMC drew on this wider missiological reflection in its own theoretical and strategic deliberations. Weaver sought to get professional lay personnel appointed to positions in government and mission institutions in southeastern Nigeria.⁷ MBMC General Secretary J. D. Graber articulated a vision of Mennonite professionals taking overseas posts and suggested that such non-professional missionaries represented a new dimension for the mission as it faced financial shortfalls.⁸ The new OMA program embodied these ideas.⁹ Mission administrator John Yoder's pamphlet *As You Go* highlighted historical precedents of Christian expansion through the migration of Christian lay people and advocated "migration evangelism," the emigration of Christians

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ Ibid., 40–51, 34.

⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan-May 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 12, 1961 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 20, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

⁸ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, January 19, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Orie O 1956-1965; J. D. Graber to Mike Thornberry March 8, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, 1956-65; J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1959), 119–121.

⁹ "Overseas Mission Committee," January 23, 1962.

who would use their professional skills in their new homelands and would provide an evangelistic presence.¹⁰

Overseas Mission Associates typically served for one term of two or three years and received their salaries from the institutions or projects in which they worked. Assignments were normally in the fields of education, medicine, research, or agriculture.¹¹ Graber touted the OMA program as a “new dimension” in missions, arguing that it provided a way to expand mission initiatives in an epoch of decreasing mission budgets and even suggesting that the use of such lay missionaries “in very large numbers is the missionary method of the future.”¹² It was a way for Christian lay people to use their vocational skills to advance mission objectives and to embody the important connection between word and deed.¹³ Twenty-four of the fifty-four MBMC workers who served in Nigeria were OMAs.

The mission sent seven of its agricultural workers to Nigeria under its Overseas Voluntary Service (OVS) program. This was similar to the OMA program in that it allowed lay people to participate in mission initiatives without becoming long-term missionaries.¹⁴ It was different in that participants usually were younger, without

¹⁰ John Howard Yoder, *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961).

¹¹ “Overseas Mission Committee,” January 23, 1962.

¹² J. D. Graber to Mike Thornberry, March 8, 1962.

¹³ J. D. Graber to Orrie O. Miller, January 19, 1962; J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions*, 119–121.

¹⁴ Harold S. Bender and Harold A. Penner, “Voluntary Service,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Voluntary_Service&oldid=93835 (accessed June 21, 2016); Calvin W. Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976* (Telford: PA:

professional training, lived and worked as part of a unit, and received a modest living stipend instead of regular remuneration. The first of this kind of formal Mennonite voluntary service in the United States arose during World War II as an alternative to the civil defense work of the Government Civil Defense Agency. It was at first a domestic, summer service program but became a permanent, year-around program under the Mennonite Relief Committee of the Mennonite Church. An overseas component began in 1952. Numerous Mennonite denominations and conferences as well as the Mennonite Central Committee developed similar, proprietary voluntary service programs.

MBMC's integration of lay workers into its program via the OMA and OVS programs was characteristic of the twentieth century Mennonite experience. In the wake of World War I, Mennonites were involved in the international work camp movement via participation in work camps in Europe organized by the American Friends Service Committee.¹⁵ Participants typically did reconstruction in war damaged areas. Mennonites eventually organized their own work camps. Twenty-seven Mennonites served in Turkey and Lebanon during the inter-war years with the Near East Relief initiative. During World War II Mennonites participated in the Civilian Public Service (CPS), a program that the National Service Board for Religious Objectors negotiated for conscientious

Pandora Press, 2001), 33; Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, Vol. 4 in *Mennonite Experience in America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 197–199; “Proposed VS Program for Nigeria,” October 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1962.

¹⁵ Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 120–121; Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976*, 28–29.

objectors who refused all forms of military service.¹⁶ They served in areas of national importance such as soil conservation, mental hospitals, the United States Forest Service, the National Park Service, and in United States Public Health projects. Of the twelve thousand six hundred young men who participated in CPS, thirty-eight percent were Mennonites. CPS provided American Mennonites with a new paradigm of service, one that combined an emphasis on Christian service with an exemption from military service.

In the post World War II period this emphasis on Christian service continued to develop and in the early 1960s provided MBMC with willing personnel for its Nigeria program. The Selective Service law required conscientious objectors to perform civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest.¹⁷ In addition to channeling Mennonite volunteers into mission and service opportunities, many of the Mennonite voluntary service programs could provide Selective Service approved assignments to draft-age young men. PAX was one such program that placed volunteers overseas in a variety of projects such as construction of housing for refugees in Europe, agricultural improvement in Greece, and road building in Paraguay.¹⁸ PAX workers also served in United Nations projects through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the United Nations Educational and Scientific and

¹⁶ Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976*, 33–34; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 134–153; Melvin Gingerich, “Civilian Public Service,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1953, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Civilian_Public_Service (accessed June 21, 2016).

¹⁷ Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 240–245; Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976*, 53–56.

¹⁸ Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976*, 63-74.

Cultural Organization. When Weaver passed on to mission administrators requests from the established missions and the government for rural health and agricultural workers, he had this program in mind and asked specifically for “PAX workers.”¹⁹

In the end MBMC sent its workers to Nigeria as general missionaries, OMAs, or OVSers. The five missionaries who were drafted by Selective Service received alternative service credit for their service in Nigeria in the fields of agriculture and medicine. When Weaver, Graber, and Yoder promised Nigerian contacts that they would send medical personnel, teachers, and agricultural workers to Nigeria, they were able to do so because of their knowledge of, and faith in, a movement of lay Christian service in the twentieth century American Mennonite community. As Mennonite historian Paul Toews noted in his discussion of Mennonite overseas missionary and service activity in the postwar period, “By 1970 there was hardly a Mennonite congregation [in North America] without someone who had international experience.”²⁰

Abiriba

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities had agreed to manage and provide staff for the Abiriba hospital in exchange for inclusion of its missionaries in the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) visa quota, and this became the focus of its involvement in medical missions in the region. John Grasse was the first medical doctor that MBMC

¹⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 20, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

²⁰ Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, 208.

provided, and he arrived with his family in October of 1960.²¹ The mission appointed Cyril Gingerich as business manager for the hospital, and he and his wife arrived in November 1960.²² In total eighteen missionaries served at Abiriba between October 1960 and the outbreak of the civil war in June 1967.²³ Of those, thirteen worked directly with the hospital and its rural health program. Five were spouses of doctors who often contributed in significant non-medical ways to the work. From time to time other MBMC missionaries in the region assisted temporarily when there were staff shortages or so that Abiriba staff could take vacations.

The Abiriba hospital initiative provided the mission a medium with which to engage the context of southeastern Nigeria that was both familiar and consistent with its concerns for ecclesial reconciliation and indigenization. It was one avenue through which the missionaries might prove their willingness to work in a collaborative venture and gain the trust of the established missions and of the government in order to remain in Nigeria and to prepare the way for the ministry of inter-church reconciliation that the Weavers envisioned.²⁴ MBMC was familiar with the provision of medical care as an expression of Christian mission. By mid-century it managed and/or owned five hospitals in the United

²¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 17, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; John Grasse, "Grasse Newsletter," December 2, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, Grasse, Dr. John and Betty 1956-65.

²² J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1960-65.

²³ See the Table of MBMC Personnel that Served in Southeastern Nigeria, Appendix 1.

²⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 24, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 5, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

States, had operated hospitals in India and Puerto Rico, and had a repository of experience and medical personnel on which to draw.²⁵

Such medical engagement reflects the experience of the wider Protestant missionary movement. Medical care had become an important mission medium during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁶ While some mission theorists and practitioners considered such service to be auxiliary to the main mission task of proclamation and church building, others understood it to be authentic missionary witness.²⁷ MBMC was in the latter category.²⁸

The hospital project was consistent with the mission's value of indigenization. The Abiriba community had built the initial physical structure, and the government promised to pay the salaries of staff and make up any financial deficits that might arise in

²⁵ J. D. Graber, "Report of the Secretary," in *Report of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1955), 16–18; "Doctors Serving Overseas under the MBMC," May 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mennonite Medical Association 1966-69; H. J. Andres and Ron Ropp, "Hospitals, Clinics and Dispensaries," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hospitals,_Clinics_and_Dispensaries&oldid=130731 (accessed June 21, 2016).

²⁶ Christoffer H. Grundmann, *Sent to Heal!: Emergence and Development of Medical Missions* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005); Christoffer Grundmann, "The Role of Medical Missions in the Missionary Enterprise: A Historical and Missiological Survey," *Mission Studies* 2, no. 1 (1985): 39–48; Christoffer Grundmann, "Proclaiming the Gospel by Healing the Sick? Historical and Theological Annotations on Medical Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14, no. 3 (1990): 120–126; Gerard Jansen, "Christian Ministry of Healing on Its Way to the Year 2000: An Archaeology of Medical Missions," *Missiology: An International Review* 23, no. 3 (July 1995): 295–307.

²⁷ M. Scheel, "Missionary Work and Healing," *The International Review of Mission* 53, no. 211 (July 1964): 265–71.

²⁸ J. D. Graber, "Report on Visit to Nigeria," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, December 31, 1960), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; J. D. Graber, "By Word and Deed," in *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Missions*, 45–67.

the hospital's operations.²⁹ This assured that the significant costs that such an institution could incur would not burden the indigenous church in Nigeria and make it dependent on foreign subsidies. A board of governors that included representatives from the Abiriba community, the government, and the mission oversaw the hospital.³⁰ This was a governance structure similar to the one that Graber had implemented for the former mission institutions in the Dhamtari field in India in early 1960.³¹ It seemed to ensure that the institution would not be a factor in intra-church party politics as had been the case in India. By agreeing to become the volunteer agency that managed and staffed the Abiriba hospital, MBMC was engaging in a familiar medium in order to accomplish the missionary goals it had set for itself in the region.

The CSM missionaries and the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) also had strong motivations for inviting MBMC to manage and staff the Abiriba hospital. The Abiriba community was determined to reopen its hospital that had been closed years earlier because of a shortage of doctors.³² The CSM did not have the personnel to respond to the community's desire, but if it or another Protestant mission did not respond to the

²⁹ Geoffrey Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), 213; John H. Yoder to Members of the Executive Committee, April 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 27, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 22, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 27, 1960.

³¹ J. D. Graber to Ernest Bennett and John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 1, Administrative Travel – J. D. Graber 1959-60; John H. Yoder to David Shank, Pierre Widmer, Robert Witmer, Bob Stetter, and Paul Lehman, March 22, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 116, European Missions 1959-1960.

³² K. Kalu to Edwin Weaver, March 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; A. G. Somerville to J. Jackson, April 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966*, 203–209.

need there was a strong possibility that the Catholic Church would do so, likely gaining influence and members in the area. In addition, a Presbyterian layman, Dr. Francis Akanu Ibiam had initiated and directed the first Abiriba hospital from 1934 to 1945. Ibiam was an important Nigerian leader who initiated the Bible Society of Nigeria and the Christian Medical Fellowship, and served as president of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), as a president of the All African Conference of Churches, as a president of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and as chairman of the United Bible Societies.³³ He became governor of Eastern Nigeria after independence and was advisor to the Biafran government during the civil war. The reestablishment of the Abiriba hospital would affirm the legacy of his work there and support the indigenous Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.

The Abiriba initiative accomplished much of what the Weavers had envisioned. It garnered trust and good will on the part of the established missions and the government, and it became a vehicle through which missionaries engaged the Nigerian context. Edwin Weaver reported already in early 1961 that government officials were very appreciative of the Abiriba work and were opening doors for further missionary involvement, including the development of an inter-church peace witness.³⁴ Two years later missionary

³³ Andrew F. Walls, "Ibiam, (Francis) Akanu," *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, 1998, http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/ibiam2_akanu.html (accessed August 27, 2015).

³⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 20, 1961 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

Glen Miller reported that the community was proud of its new hospital and that news of its activities made the daily papers quite frequently.³⁵

The Abiriba hospital developed into an active medical ministry that included a rural health program. Doctors and nurses treated people in maternities, health centers, and dispensaries in the surrounding area and sought to apply principles of preventative medicine.³⁶ Medical missionaries had been calling attention to the need for such rural health initiatives for decades by this time and government health officials in Nigeria as well as the other Presbyterian hospitals in the country were similarly focusing on the provision of rural health services.³⁷

The number of patients that the hospital served rose significantly during the period that MBMC managed the hospital. By mid 1961 the Abiriba hospital alone was treating around one thousand eight hundred people each month and in 1962 the rate rose to two thousand two hundred and ninety-two people monthly.³⁸ For 1965 the hospital had

³⁵ Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, February 21, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963.

³⁶ John Grasse to J. D. Graber, February 24, 1961, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1960-61; John Grasse, "Statement Regarding Recommendations for the Administration Policy of the Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital for the Next Five Years," May 21, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; John Grasse to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1963, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1963; Cyril Gingerich, "Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital Board of Governors Meeting Minutes," (Abiriba, Nigeria: Abiriba Joint Hospital, May 14, 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

³⁷ Gerard Jansen, "The Tradition of Medical Missions in the Maelstrom of the International Health Arena," *Missiology* 27, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 377-92; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966*, 213-217; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 20, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; John Grasse to J. D. Graber, February 24, 1961; Geoffrey Johnston, "The Canadian Contribution," in *A Century and Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria: 1846-1996*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory Press, 1996), 97-119.

³⁸ John Grasse to Supporters, June 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, Grasse, Dr. John and Betty 1956-65; "The Fifth Meeting of the Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital Board of Governors," Meeting Minutes

average monthly statistics of two thousand two hundred and thirty-six outpatients, twenty-five major surgeries, and fifty-three obstetrical deliveries.³⁹ The rural health program reported monthly averages of four thousand nine hundred and seventy-three outpatients, sixty-five deliveries, two hundred and forty-three infant immunizations, and three hundred sixty-two immunizations against tuberculosis.

Missionaries also contributed in other, non-medical ways. Business manager Cyril Gingerich served as informal hospital chaplain.⁴⁰ Abiriba missionaries served as a hub for the *Way to Life* radio broadcasts, receiving and correcting its Bible study correspondence courses from listeners in the region.

The success of the Abiriba initiative was tempered by the significant challenge of acquiring adequate resources—both staff and funding—for the hospital, and of working towards indigenization by turning over management responsibilities to Nigerian personnel. The agreement between MBMC, the government, and the Abiriba community required the government to reimburse any deficit that arose when patient fees did not cover costs.⁴¹ The hospital reimbursed the mission for the staff it provided through its

(Abiriba, Nigeria: Abiriba Joint Hospital, June 23, 1962), IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; Lawrence S. Eby to Selection Committee for Smith, Kline, and French Fellowships, December 7, 1963, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1963.

³⁹ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, October 13, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mission News Sheet 1966.

⁴⁰ Cyril Gingerich to J. D. Graber, October 20, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; Cyril Gingerich to Wibert R. Shenk, June 9, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1964-1965; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 8, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

⁴¹ "Constitution of the Abiriba Community Hospital," August 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1960-61; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966*, 213.

budget according to government salary schedules.⁴² This setup worked, except that the salary schedules were less than what qualified workers could obtain on the open market, and the government and the mission sometimes disagreed on what constituted legitimate needs.⁴³ Government representatives on the board often argued against budget increases that missionaries submitted in order to keep the budget low, and sometimes the ministry of finance simply did not allow budget increases.⁴⁴ Financial crises were the norm in Nigerian hospitals at the time, and the mission ended up subsidizing staff expenses for its Abiriba operation.⁴⁵

Additionally, MBMC was not always able to provide the two doctors required by the hospital's administrative scheme. Sometimes it had to send short-term doctors to cover the gaps or was only able to provide one of the two for a time.⁴⁶ Missionaries worked long hours and often under the stress of fatigue. When hospital administrator

⁴² Cyril Gingerich to J. D. Graber, January 23, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; J. D. Graber to Lawrence Eby, May 7, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Eby, Lawrence and Mary Jane 1960-64.

⁴³ Cyril K. Gingerich to John H. Yoder, September 15, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Rhodes (Thelin), Nelda 1953-64; Cyril K. Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 2, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

⁴⁴ "The Twelfth Meeting of the Akahara Abiriba Joint Hospital Board of Governors," Meeting Minutes (Abiriba, Nigeria: Abiriba Joint Hospital, October 9, 1965), IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1964-1965; Wallace Shellenberger and Martha Bender, "Fourteenth Meeting of the Akahara Abiriba Joint Hospital," Meeting Minutes (Abiriba, Nigeria: Abiriba Joint Hospital, October 15, 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Cyril Gingerich to J. D. Graber, October 29, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962.

⁴⁵ Johnston, "The Canadian Contribution"; Cyril Gingerich to J. D. Graber, October 29, 1962.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Eby to J. D. Graber, October 29, 1963, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1963; Wilbert R. Shenk to Cyril Gingerich, September 7, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1964-1965; Wallace Shellenberger to Dorsa Mishler, July 24, 1966 and Dorsa J. Mishler to A. Meryl Grasse, September 8, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

Cyril Gingerich attempted to hire Nigerian staff, he had little success since the government pay scale was significantly less than what they could earn elsewhere.⁴⁷ Community members resisted the idea of local hires, suspicious that Nigerian doctors would give time to their own private practices and reduce their availability at the hospital. Such difficulties meant that a shortage of staff and funds were an ongoing problem.

Consistent with its missiological concerns, MBMC sought to apply the principles of indigenization to its work at Abiriba, but found the process as challenging as it had experienced in the ecclesial realm. In the wider domain of Protestant medical missions, devolution of mission initiatives to local actors was an issue of discussion, including the training of personnel and local participation in the administration of hospitals.⁴⁸ Desiring to train local health workers, Abiriba personnel sought and obtained governmental authorization to establish a grade-two midwifery training school connected to the hospital.⁴⁹ Two classes of midwives completed their training and the school was in the midst of upgrading to a grade-one facility when the outbreak of the civil war ended the program.⁵⁰ In 1965 MBMC Abiriba staff proposed a ten-year plan to indigenize the

⁴⁷ Cyril Gingerich to J. D. Graber, January 23, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; Usim Odum to Wallace Shellenberger, July 17, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Wallace Shellenberger to Dorsa Mishler, July 24, 1966; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 10, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

⁴⁸ Jansen, "Christian Ministry of Healing on Its Way to the Year 2000: An Archaeology of Medical Missions."

⁴⁹ John Grasse, Ruth Gingerich, and Cyril Gingerich to Nigerian Health Authorities, June 15, 1961 and John Grasse to J. D. Graber, August 2, 1961, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1960-61.

⁵⁰ Martha Bender to J. D. Graber, January 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 3, Bender, Martha 1961-1965; Mary Jane Eby to Esther Graber, May 26, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1964-1965; Cyril Gingerich, "Report from Abiriba," Annual Report (Abiriba, Nigeria: Mennonite Board of

hospital, hoping to start handing over administrative posts to Nigerians by 1970.⁵¹ Given the difficulty of acquiring sufficient funds and personnel and the crisis brought on by the war, the plan did not reach fruition.

Government funding and community support were supposed to ensure that impediments to indigenization would be less at the Abiriba hospital than they had been for similar mission institutions in India. In the end these challenges were no less at Abiriba than they had been elsewhere, but the initiative did provide missionaries a vehicle for Christian ministry in the region and it gained them trust among the established missions and government officials.

Schools

Similar to the medical work at Abiriba, providing teachers for schools in the region gave Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities a way to gain the trust of the established missions and the government as well as a medium through which to engage in Christian witness. As early as January 1960 the Weavers proposed the provision of teachers to government and mission schools.⁵² Among Nigerians there was a desire for education and the benefits that it could provide, especially via employment in

Missions and Charities, April 11, 1966), IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Annual Mission Board Meeting 1965; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966*, 209.

⁵¹ Cyril Gingerich, "A Proposal: A Ten-Year Plan for Administration of Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital," March 22, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1964-1965.

⁵² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 15, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

government or private agencies.⁵³ In the race to gain influence and members the Protestant and Catholic missions sought to meet this need from early in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ The Church of Scotland Mission and the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria that issued from it felt the pressure of Catholic competition, started more schools than they could staff, and looked to MBMC to provide teachers.⁵⁵

The Weavers recognized this as an opportunity and asked Graber and Yoder to find teachers. They noted that, in the needed fields of mathematics, the sciences, and languages, they could find placement for as many teachers as the mission could deliver.⁵⁶ This opportunity was sweetened by the fact that the schools would pay the teachers if

⁵³ James Smoot Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 115, 121–132; Felix K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*, (London: Cass, 1972), 178; Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 98–99, 114–115, 130–133, 383–284; William H Taylor, *Mission to Educate: A History of the Educational Work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria, 1846-1960* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 149–150, 163–165, 203–206.

⁵⁴ Magnus O Basse, “Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Southern Nigeria, 1885-1932.,” *Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 1 (1991): 36–46; P. B. Clarke, “The Methods and Ideology of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria 1885-1905.,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 2 (1974): 81–108; Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*; Taylor, *Mission to Educate*; Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950*.

⁵⁵ Glenn Miller to John H. Yoder, October 26, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; Johnston, *Of God and Maxim Guns: Presbyterianism in Nigeria, 1846-1966*, 174, 182–187; Taylor, *Mission to Educate*, 71; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 31, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 10, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; U. Iso to Kermit H. Derstine, November 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61; U. Iso to Edwin Weaver, February 18, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 16, Misc.

⁵⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to Kermit H. Derstine, July 5, 1960 and John H. Yoder to J. Winfield Fretz, March 27, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

they had masters' degrees.⁵⁷ For foreign teachers whose credentials it approved, the government reimbursed schools the costs involved in employing them when there were no qualified, local teachers available.⁵⁸ That such an initiative would pay for itself was an important factor since in the early 1960s MBMC's overall program exceeded its financial capacity, and it had to reign in its budget.⁵⁹ Here was a possibility for increased program without a corresponding financial burden. After his visit to Nigeria in December 1960, Graber instructed Yoder to make finding teachers for Nigeria a top priority.⁶⁰

Government assistance to mission schools was part of the British colonial legacy in Nigeria and was a familiar means of financing mission schools for MBMC as well. Already in the last years of the nineteenth century colonial authorities had started to subsidize mission schools in southern Nigeria, and during the twentieth century these subsidies became part of the educational system, increasing especially after World War II.⁶¹ They provided the government a way to prepare people for civil service jobs and to

⁵⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960; John H. Yoder to John Ingold, February 3, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 40, Yoder, John Howard, 1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1961.

⁵⁸ U. Iso to Edwin Weaver, May 19, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; V. N. Muoneke to All Educational Secretaries and Principals of Voluntary Agency Schools, September 21, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1963.

⁵⁹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 7, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 40, Yoder, John Howard, 1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, October 25, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, February 8, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962.

⁶⁰ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 7, 1961.

⁶¹ A. E. Afigbo, "The Background to the Southern Nigerian Education Code of 1903," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 2 (June 1968): 197-225; J. F. Ade Ajayi, "The Development of Secondary Grammar School Education in Nigeria," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 4 (December 1963): 517-35; A. E. Afigbo, "The Missions, the State and Education in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1956-71," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward W. Fasholé-Luke et al. (Bloomington: Indiana

fulfill the growing expectation that it had an educational responsibility. Relying on mission schools saved the government from having to develop and fund a full-scale educational system. The missions were often short of resources and welcomed such assistance. Mennonite missionaries had experienced a comparable dynamic in India where the colonial authorities and later the Indian government had similarly subsidized their schools.⁶² Now as British colonial authorities ceded governmental responsibility, their Nigerian counterparts continued the practice in order to fill the teaching positions for which Nigerian personnel were not available.

MBMC's teacher placement initiatives in southeastern Nigeria were successful in that they gained the confidence of both government officials and the established missions and provided missionaries a medium through which to engage in Christian witness. Nigerian government leaders, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, and the Qua Iboe Mission requested teachers for their schools.⁶³ Between July 1961 and July 1967 the mission sent thirteen missionaries to assist with schools in the region.⁶⁴ Five were teachers in Presbyterian schools, two in Qua Iboe Mission schools, one in a union school started by the Presbyterians and Methodists, and one in a community-owned school. Four

University Press, 1978), 176–92; Omenka, *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950*; Taylor, *Mission to Educate*.

⁶² John A. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 121–122, 202–204.

⁶³ Glenn Miller to J. D. Graber, August 7, 1962 and Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, February 22, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; U. Iso to Edwin Weaver, February 18, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, August 17, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; Glenn Miller to John H. Yoder, October 26, 1962.

⁶⁴ See Appendix 1.

were spouses who often provided clerical or other assistance to the schools in which their husbands worked. Two of these schools had connections with important government officials who had solicited the mission's assistance.

As with the assistance to the Abiriba hospital, missionary teachers demonstrated the mission's usefulness and willingness to collaborate to both government officials and educational officials in the mission schools. Qua Iboe Church national leaders noted as much, avowing publically that it was because Mennonite teachers had made such a significant contribution to their school at Etinan that they were convinced that MBMC was not working against their church in its collaboration with AICs.⁶⁵ For their part, missionary teachers found the work challenging, sometimes frustrating, but also rewarding.⁶⁶ They typically were active in the churches and communities related to the schools, sometimes playing leadership roles outside of the classroom.

The initial enthusiasm for the Nigeria teacher program was tempered by a number of difficulties that arose during the six years that MBMC provided teachers to schools in the region. At first the dire need for teachers, the prospect that the government would provide teachers' salaries, and an apparent supply of North American Mennonite young people qualified to teach, seemed to imply that a rather large influx of mission personnel

⁶⁵ Stanely and Delores Friesent to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 24, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

⁶⁶ Delbert and Lela Snyder to Esther Graber, October 19, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Snyder, Delbert and Lela Nigeria 1962-65; Delbert Snyders to Esther Graber, October 21, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Snyder, Delbert and Lela 1966-68; Clifford and Lois Amstutz to Supporters, July 1966, Clifford and Lois Amstutz to Supporters, November 1966 and Clifford and Lois Amstutz to Supporters, May 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1966-67; Joan Sauder to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 17, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Sauder, Joan 1966-1971.

would occur.⁶⁷ Yoder even suggested that the mission might simply serve as intermediary for North American Mennonites to find short-term employment in Nigerian schools.⁶⁸ He proposed a similar model of mission minded, professional Mennonites finding employment outside of North America in his pamphlet *As You Go*, an essay suggesting a new mission strategy for the post-colonial era that he wrote during the period MBMC was developing its teacher-placement program in Nigeria.⁶⁹

The reality turned out to be more modest since the government limited the number of foreign teachers and the subsidies that it provided in important ways. Because of differences between the British and American educational system, it required American-trained teachers to have masters' degrees.⁷⁰ In addition, because of the policy of "Nigerianization" and extra costs involved in hiring expatriate staff, the government

⁶⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, August 3, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 2, Graber 2nd; Kermit Derstine to John H. Yoder, August 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, November 8, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; John H. Yoder to John Ingold, February 3, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 40, Yoder, John Howard, 1961; John H. Yoder to J. Winfield Fretz, March 27, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61.

⁶⁸ John H. Yoder to U. Iso, October 17, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 7, 1961.

⁶⁹ "Executive Committee Minutes," (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 10, 1960), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4; John H. Yoder to Members of the Executive Committee, November 8, 1960 and John H. Yoder, "Herald Press Announces a New Book, *As You Go*," June 23, 1961, HM 1-48, Box 181, *As You Go* Articles; John Howard Yoder, *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day*, Focal Pamphlet 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961).

⁷⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 10, 1960; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 18, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; John H. Yoder to J. Winfield Fretz, March 27, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962.

funded salaries for foreigners only when local teachers were not available.⁷¹ It also limited such assistance to the fields of mathematics, the sciences, and certain languages.⁷² Program costs were typically greater than the actual governmental subsidies, and in some cases the Ministry of Education refused applications from teachers that MBMC had thought were qualified and had already sent to Nigeria.⁷³ This meant that the teaching program was not self-funding as the mission had hoped. Finally, government educational expenditures had skyrocketed in the region, rising to an average of forty-three percent of recurrent expenditures between the years 1957 and 1962.⁷⁴ Such budget outlays could only heighten officials' scrutiny of subsidies for foreign hires, increasing the likelihood that applicants would be rejected. These kinds of difficulties reduced significantly the number of teachers that the mission was able to place in the region.

The logistics of matching potential North American teachers to open positions in the region was also a significant challenge. School administrators preferred to submit credentials of possible candidates to the Ministry of Education to identify the positions for which they might qualify.⁷⁵ On the other hand, MBMC recruiters in North America

⁷¹ V. N. Muoneke to All Educational Secretaries and Principles of Voluntary Agency Schools.

⁷² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960.

⁷³ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, February 8, 1962 and J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, May 17, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962; Edwin Weaver to Daniel Diener, January 15, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 24, Misc.; Lloyd Fisher to John H. Yoder, May 7, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1965; Lloyd J. Fisher, "One Mission, One Message," Annual Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Annual Report 1966-67.

⁷⁴ Afigbo, "The Missions, the State and Education in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1956-71."

⁷⁵ John H. Yoder to Kermit Derstine, September 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

wanted lists of open positions with which to attract applicants.⁷⁶ Both sides tended to wait on the other, motivating Graber to recruit a worker to coordinate such placements.⁷⁷ Two missionaries served in this capacity at the eastern region's capital of Enugu during the six years of the teacher placement program.⁷⁸ In addition, the Ministry of Education could take months to evaluate candidates' credentials. Those who did not want to wait or who did not have a masters' degree often simply served with a different agency, of which there were numerous, that placed teachers in Nigeria and other African countries.⁷⁹ Some of these agencies financed their own personnel and so did not rely on funding from the Nigerian government.

The final blow to the mission's teacher placement program was the return of many Ibos to the region after the ethnic violence that broke out during the months leading up to the civil war. A military coup led by mostly Ibo officers in January 1966 resulted in a military regime led by another Ibo who abolished the federal system of government four months later.⁸⁰ Northerners saw this as a step towards Ibo dominance, and between

⁷⁶ Kermit Derstine to John H. Yoder, August 9, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Teachers for 1960-61.

⁷⁷ J. D. Graber to Orie O. Miller, January 19, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Orie O 1956-1965.

⁷⁸ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, April 30, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; John H. Yoder to Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Fisher, March 18, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

⁷⁹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 20, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; John H. Yoder to U. Iso, October 17, 1960; Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, August 17, 1962; John H. Yoder to Glenn Miller, October 15, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 18, Miller, Glen. These included programs like the African American Institute's Teacher Placement Service, the United States Peace Corps, and the Mennonite Central Committee Teachers Abroad Program.

⁸⁰ Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171-174.

May and September 1966 there were violent outbreaks against Ibos and other natives of eastern Nigeria in the North. Between 80,000 and 100,000 easterners lost their lives. The governor of the Eastern Region urged easterners to return home and northerners in the East to return to their homes. This precipitated significant migrations of easterners back to the Eastern Region, including many civil servants who in turn filled positions in the region that Nigerian teachers would normally have filled.⁸¹ There were suddenly more teachers available than there were open teaching positions. MBMC missionaries advised their home office to discontinue the teacher placement program in May 1967, just weeks before Biafra seceded from Nigeria and the outbreak of the war.

Agriculture

Along with the provision of medical personnel centered at the Abiriba hospital and the teacher placement program, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities also sent agricultural specialists to the region. In the post World War II period North American Mennonites had served in a variety of international settings where their agricultural expertise had provided much needed assistance.⁸² Yoder asked Weaver if such help might not be needed in southeastern Nigeria, noting that there were already mission candidates

⁸¹ Lloyd J. Fisher, "Field Coordinating Committee," Meeting Minutes (Abiriba, Nigeria: Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, May 8, 1967) and Lloyd J. Fisher to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 9, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967.

⁸² Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Pax Story: Service in the Name of Christ 1951-1976*, 67; John H. Yoder to Ray Horst, Cecil and Judy Miller, July 11, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Cecil and Judy 1961-65.

with agricultural expertise who had offered their services to the mission and were waiting for an assignment.⁸³

This genre of mission engagement corresponded well with the Nigeria Eastern Region government's focus on increasing agricultural production during the early post-colonial years. Already in the decade leading up to independence the government had identified agriculture as a priority and had sought to reinforce the oil palm industry, provide extension services, and establish demonstration schemes to improve local farmers' skills.⁸⁴ The opening of a new School of Agriculture at Umuahia in 1955 and the introduction of government subsidies for the rehabilitation of palm groves were indications of the new emphasis. The region's first premier M. I. Okpara and his minister of agriculture, P. N. Okeke, believed that their region's development hinged on an agricultural revolution that would create wealth for both the state and village farmers.⁸⁵

The Eastern Region government sought to encourage young people to choose a vocation of agricultural production. The proliferation of mission primary and secondary grammar schools, especially after 1952, had provided more than enough graduates to fill the needed clerical positions and the few select slots for university students.⁸⁶ Those who had completed only primary school along with the "school leavers" made up a large

⁸³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 6, 1960 and John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 28, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

⁸⁴ Chima J. Korie, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 197–199.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁸⁶ Afigbo, "The Missions, the State and Education in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1956-71."

group of unemployed young people who were not interested in returning to work the land but tended to hold out for the few available civil service jobs, which they considered a more prestigious form of work.⁸⁷ The government criticized the mission educational heritage for not placing enough emphasis on science, technology, and agriculture in particular and sought to shift the educational focus to remedy the situation.⁸⁸ Attempting to reorient focus towards more practically productive agricultural initiatives, Okpara's administration created large-scale, state-run oil palm, rubber tree, and cocoa tree projects.⁸⁹ These included an oil palm rehabilitation scheme, community plantations, and farm settlements. While seventy-five percent of the government's assistance went to cash-producing tree crops for export, there was also a modest focus on foodstuffs and poultry production, especially in the months leading up to the outbreak of the civil war.⁹⁰ MBMC's desire to place agricultural workers in southeastern Nigeria came during this period of significant governmental initiative in agricultural development.

Through the medical engagement at Abiriba, MBMC became aware of the Eastern Region government's focus on agricultural development, but without a clear idea about how best to engage that need, it looked to the Mennonite affiliated Goshen College for assistance. The Abiriba hospital had the support of the Eastern Region's prime

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria*, 205, 213–214.

⁸⁸ Afigbo, "The Missions, the State and Education in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1956-71."

⁸⁹ Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria*, 200–216.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 214, 220.

minister, Francis Ibiam, who had initiated medical work there some twenty-five years earlier. When Premier Okpara found out about Mennonite involvement at Abiriba, he invited Edwin Weaver to Enugu to discuss how the mission might assist in the push to increase agricultural productivity.⁹¹ Weaver's response was to promise to try to bring an agricultural specialist to Nigeria who would consult with Okpara's ministry of agriculture, advise about agricultural options, and investigate how MBMC might assist.

The mission negotiated the services of Dr. Frank Bishop, professor of Biology at Goshen College and a plant pathologist. His task was to investigate the agricultural situation in southeastern Nigeria, consult with the Eastern Region's ministry of agriculture, and suggest how the mission might help.⁹² Bishop spent six weeks in the United States and Nigeria doing his study during the summer of 1961, and his report reflects the priorities of the Eastern Region's Ministry of Agriculture.⁹³ He noted that ministry officials were in a hurry to increase productivity and intended to do so with large, state-managed schemes. Arguing that a local focus on particular villages would have less impact, he advised the mission to find personnel who might assist in the government's farm settlement scheme, as government authorized extension workers, or as staff at the University of Nigeria,

⁹¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 20, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 2, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

⁹² John H. Yoder to Frank Bishop, February 17, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 40, Yoder, John Howard, 1961; John H. Yoder to Frank Bishop, March 23, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, April 13, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 40, Yoder, John Howard, 1961; Frank C. Bishop, "An Eastern Nigerian Report," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 1961), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

⁹³ Bishop, "An Eastern Nigerian Report."

Glen Miller, chemistry professor from Goshen College, spent a sabbatical year, August 1962 to July 1963, as a MBMC worker in Nigeria and Ghana and followed through with some of Bishop's earlier contacts. Miller's primary responsibility was to serve as coordinator of the teacher placement program, but he also worked at finding opportunities for agricultural workers.⁹⁴ For example, after consultation with the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, he reported openings for agricultural technologists and technicians who would support agricultural research work at the university.⁹⁵ In the end the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) acted more quickly than MBMC and filled those positions.⁹⁶ The fact that the mission was still looking to place personnel in remunerated positions because of its financial limitations likely made its offer of agricultural personnel less attractive than the assistance of other agencies. Premier Okpara had traveled to Israel in 1961 and was so impressed with its *moshavin* settlements, in which settlers had title to land as part of a larger cooperative, that he followed that model in the Eastern Region's farm settlement scheme.⁹⁷ Bishop had recommended this scheme as a possible area of mission involvement, but in the end it was self-funded Israeli and USAID personnel who figured heavily in the project. MBMC

⁹⁴ J. D. Graber, "Memo of Understanding with Glen R. Miller," March 13, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, April 30, 1962.

⁹⁵ Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, October 25, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

⁹⁶ Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, March 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963.

⁹⁷ Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria*, 207.

participation in the government's state-run initiatives did not materialize as Bishop had hoped.

Despite the lack of success in getting personnel assigned to positions in the government's agricultural programs, the mission still had candidates with agricultural specialties available for its Nigeria work. The first to arrive was Clifford Amstutz and his family in the spring of 1962.⁹⁸ While there was not yet a clear job description for an agriculturalist in the mission's Nigeria program, the Presbyterian schools were desperate for teachers.⁹⁹ The Presbyterians assigned Amstutz to teach agriculture in their teacher training school, Macgregor College, at Afikpo.¹⁰⁰ He taught there until 1966 when he moved to the Uyo area to work more directly with agricultural projects in villages where there were Mennonite churches.¹⁰¹

Edwin Weaver was convinced that improvements in agriculture were a pressing need in the region and that addressing this need could be a fruitful missionary engagement. Nigerian educationalists and government officials with whom he interacted lamented the large number of unemployed graduates of the primary grammar schools and

⁹⁸ J. D. Graber to Whom It May Concern, November 14, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; A. R. Crosbie to Principle Immigration Officer, March 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 30, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

⁹⁹ John H. Yoder to Ray Horst, Cecil and Judy Miller, July 11, 1962.

¹⁰⁰ U. Iso to Edwin Weaver, October 13, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 16, Misc.; Clifford Amstutz to J. D. Graber, May 21, 1962 and Clifford Amstutz to John H. Yoder, February 8, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1961-65.

¹⁰¹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Amstutz, July 20, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1966-67; Clifford Amstutz, "Report on Agricultural Program" (Uyo, Nigeria, August 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Clifford Amstutz 1966-67; Clifford and Lois Amstutz to Supporters, November 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1966-67.

their apparent aversion to working the land.¹⁰² They noted in February 1962 that of about eighty thousand young people who had taken the primary school exam, only fifty to sixty percent would pass. Only a small percentage of those who passed would find the employment that they expected their education to provide. Unemployment, Weaver's contacts said, was on the rise.

Weaver came to agree with their analysis. Grammar schooling in the region was simply increasing unemployment, and a focus on agricultural education should take priority.¹⁰³ Weaver sought ways to support the government's farm settlement program and found places in government agricultural schools for young men from MCN.¹⁰⁴ He worked closely with I. U. Nsasak, secretary of the church, to arrange training for church members that would allow them to participate in the farm settlement program and to initiate village agricultural projects. Nsasak established a poultry project in his home village of Ikot Obio Ama, and Weaver lobbied MBMC for agricultural assistance. The mission sent Cecil and Judy Miller who arrived in December 1962 to live in Ikot Obio Ama and support agricultural work there and in other villages where there were Mennonite churches.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 20, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

¹⁰³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Franklin Bishop, February 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 14, Frank Bishop.

¹⁰⁴ Edwin Weaver to Senior Agriculture Officer, March 3, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 2, Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

¹⁰⁵ John H. Yoder to Glenn Miller, October 8, 1962, IV-7-2, General Corres. 1938-68, Box 36, Nigeria 1961-65; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 21, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Glen Miller to Ed and Irene Weaver, March 31, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 18, Miller, Glen; Cecil Miller to John H. Yoder, April 3, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Cecil and Judy 1961-65.

The Millers, and the two missionary couples that followed them in the agricultural work at Ikot Obio Ama and in other villages, primarily served to organize village groups and connect them with government sources of agricultural assistance. They organized Young Farmers' Clubs and community farms with projects that included various crops, oil palms, rubber trees, tree nurseries, poultry, and raising goats in eight different villages.¹⁰⁶ The mission financed their placement but provided only very limited, additional assistance for the work. Their main contribution was community organizing and connecting the village groups to the governmental resources that were available through the state-run schemes. This was a significant contribution since the schemes were supposed to assist peasant farmers but rarely managed to do so.¹⁰⁷ More often beneficiaries were not typical farmers but people with some formal education and non-farm commercial experience. Missionaries provided the villages in which they worked with a link to these government assistance schemes that they likely would not have developed otherwise.

¹⁰⁶ Glenn Miller to John H. Yoder, December 17, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; Cecil Miller to John H. Yoder, February 6, 1964, IV-7-2 General Corres. 1938-68, Box 36, Nigeria 1961-65; Cecil Miller to Roy Kreider, April 7, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Cecil and Judy 1961-65; Lloyd J. Fisher, "Field Coordinating Committee Meeting," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, March 22, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1963-65 Confidential; J. Robert and Evelyn Stauffer Family to Supporters, June 30, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Stauffer, J. Robert and Evelyn 1963-65; J. Robert Stauffer to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 19, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - J. Robert Stauffer 1966; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," Meeting Report (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, January 20, 1966), 20-21, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1966; Clifford Amstutz to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 27, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1966-67.

¹⁰⁷ Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria*, 216.

Along with Amstutz's teaching at Macgregor College and the agricultural assistance to villages with Mennonite churches, MBMC provided personnel for the Asaba Rural Training Center. Asaba was the location of one of the first Church Missionary Society stations in the Niger River region that had opened in 1874. The Center was an ecumenical initiative that provided agricultural training for farmers in the government's farm settlement program and for future agriculture schoolteachers.¹⁰⁸ It also provided agricultural extension workers for farmers who had not advanced past primary school, and it had oil and rubber palm plantations as well as arable crops on an eighteen hundred-acre site. One MBMC missionary couple served at the center from 1964 until the outbreak of the war and two single men served two years starting in 1964.¹⁰⁹ The single men were assigned to agricultural extension work and the couple served in administration. In all, eleven missionaries served in agricultural ministry settings in southeastern Nigeria between 1962 and 1967.¹¹⁰

Studying African Independent Churches

From the beginning of the Weavers' stay in Nigeria, they highlighted the need to study and learn about the context of southeastern Nigeria, both for themselves and for the established missions and their churches that had conflictual relationships with the African

¹⁰⁸ K. Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, 2nd ed. (Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1962), 17; Cecil Miller to John H. Yoder, May 2, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 17, Miller, Cecil; John H. Yoder to Mennonite Relief and Service Committee, November 12, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

¹⁰⁹ Clair and Faye Brenneman, "August Report" (Asaba Rural Training Center, Nigeria, September 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Asaba Rural Training Center 1966-67.

¹¹⁰ See Appendix 1.

Independent Churches in the region. The Weavers expected that the culture they encountered, the people with whom they worked, and the churches that they sought to assist would be different from what they had experienced elsewhere, and they resolved to study the situation for some time before making decisions about mission strategy in the region. When the issues of Mennonite Church Nigeria leadership, indigenization strategy, and inter-church relationships arose almost immediately upon their arrival, they felt compelled to act much sooner than they had anticipated. They stopped accepting new congregations into MCN, did not ordain leaders, and started a re-evaluation of the mission's relationship with the church and with the other missions and churches in the region. Although they acted to make these changes earlier than they had anticipated, they maintained their belief that a better understanding of the southeastern Nigerian context was necessary in order to develop appropriate missionary strategy and encourage inter-church reconciliation in the region.

This section outlines the establishment and work of the Inter-Church Study Group and of the Inter-Church Team, two initiatives through which the Weavers sought to educate themselves and others about AICs. It also shows how Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities and its missionaries appropriated the field of anthropology to better understand their context and develop their mission theory and strategy in Nigeria. Finally, this section shows that these initiatives were successful in increasing understanding about AICs and in moving mission churches and AICs toward more fruitful relationships.

The Inter-Church Study Group

The Inter-Church Study Group became one of the means through which Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities workers encouraged the study and understanding of AICs in order to decrease competition and mistrust between churches. It took two years, however, to rally the mission churches to join the Weavers in this endeavor. In January 1960 the Weavers had met Robert Macdonald, missionary with the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) and secretary of the Eastern Regional Committee of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), and found him sympathetic to an MBMC role of working to decrease the confusion and mistrust between churches in the region. When Macdonald organized a meeting of mission and church leaders to propose this, however, they emphatically rejected the idea.

A year later, after finding a solution to their visa difficulties and getting the Abiriba initiative up and running, the Weavers were ready to try again. Edwin and Macdonald invited each of the different denominations to send a missionary and a national leader to a meeting in which they might have an informal discussion about common problems they faced as Christian workers in the competitive and confused context of the region.¹¹¹ As secretary of the Eastern Regional Committee of the CCN, Macdonald invited the churches that were CCN members, and Weaver invited the churches that were not members. Most of the latter were American mission churches.

¹¹¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 11, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; R. M. Macdonald to Church Representatives, February 24, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.; Robert Macdonald to Edwin Weaver, March 2, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.; R. C. Stade to Edwin Weaver, March 6, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 41, S - Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to R. Headly, March 20, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 8, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to Glen Martin, March 20, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M - Miscellaneous.

Hoping to garner more support for their cause than they had found the year before, they framed the discussion around common mission problems instead of seeking a missionary role for MBMC in the region. The meeting was successful in bringing together CCN churches with non-CCN churches and the established mission churches with those that were newer and did not practice comity; it did not, however, result in more openness to AICs.¹¹² The participants discussed the causes for the appearance of “splintered churches” but were still decidedly against collaboration with them.¹¹³ The Weavers and Macdonald were again disappointed.¹¹⁴

Despite early setbacks, there was enough support for the vision of improving inter-church relationships from the Presbyterian Church and Eastern Regional Committee to keep the initiative alive. Macdonald arranged for Edwin Weaver to report on his work with “indigenous sects” to the Committee in September 1961.¹¹⁵ At that meeting Committee members agreed to form a group to work on the issue with Weaver. It was to be made up of two representatives of each of the Committee member churches along with

¹¹² Edwin Weaver, “Meeting of Christian Workers,” Meeting Report (Qua Iboe Church, Itam-Uyo Road, Nigeria, March 28, 1961), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to R. M. Macdonald, April 5, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; R. M. Macdonald to Edwin Weaver, April 6, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 13, MacDonald, R. M.

¹¹³ Weaver, “Meeting of Christian Workers,” March 28, 1961.

¹¹⁴ R. M. Macdonald to Edwin Weaver, April 6, 1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 7, 1961 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 15, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

¹¹⁵ R. M. Macdonald to Edwin Weaver, April 6, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 15, 1961; “Christian Council of Nigeria - Eastern Regional Committee,” Meeting Minutes (Aba, Nigeria: Christian Council of Nigeria, Eastern Regional Committee, September 19, 1961) and Edwin Weaver, “A Report to the Eastern Region Council” (Aba, Nigeria: Christian Council of Nigeria, Eastern Regional Committee, September 19, 1961), HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 20, Christian Council of Nigeria; Edwin I. Weaver, “Commentary on the Inter-Church Study Group Papers” September 1968, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

two representatives of the Qua Iboe Church and of any other of the churches that Weaver might choose.

The first meeting of the group took place on March 3, 1962. There were twelve participants, eight missionaries and four Nigerian church leaders, from seven different churches and missions: the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, Christ Faith Mission, the Salvation Army, the Church of God, World Crusade, and the Mennonite Church.¹¹⁶ The group read and discussed excerpts from Harold W. Turner's paper "The Significance of African Prophet Movements" and made some preliminary decisions about how the committee would work. It decided that members would gather information about AICs in their respective locations for presentation to the group at quarterly meetings. It also decided to use the term "independent" instead of "indigenous" when referring to AICs. Those present considered "indigenous" to be a "disparaging" term. At the following meeting in June, participants named their group the Inter-Church Study Group (ICSG).¹¹⁷

During the following five years the ICSG met almost every quarter. It came to include participants from CCN churches, non-CCN churches, AICs, the Catholic Church, local seminaries, and Nsukka University.¹¹⁸ At its last meeting, which took place on May

¹¹⁶ "Inter Church Study Committee," Meeting Report (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, March 3, 1962), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 6, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

¹¹⁷ "Inter Church Study Committee, Minutes of the Second Meeting," (Co-Bank Hall, Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, June 8, 1962), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

¹¹⁸ HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

23, 1967, just before the outbreak of the civil war, fifty-nine people attended from nineteen different churches, both mission churches and AICs.¹¹⁹

The purpose of the ICSG was to improve inter-church relationships through dialogue and data gathering about Christianity in the region, particularly about AICs. Early in their time in Nigeria the Weavers had identified the improvement of inter-church relations as an important missionary task in light of the confused, divisive, and competitive religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria. Edwin conceived of the ICSG as a medium in which mission churches could improve relationships among themselves and work together to assist and build relationships with AICs.¹²⁰ The method entailed having participants prepare and read papers about a common ecclesial problem or issue or about an AIC in the region and then discussing the papers. This provided a way for church leaders to get to know one another and to learn about each other's churches, particularly the AICs.

The ICSG embodied a belief that there was a link between increased knowledge about each other and better relationships between churches. At the beginning participants

¹¹⁹ Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Group, May 13, 1967), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

¹²⁰ Edwin and Irene Weaver, "Annual Report, Ed and Irene Weaver," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 1962), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver, "An Introductory Statement for a Special Study Committee," March 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 6, 1962; Edwin Weaver, "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting Minutes," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, September 4, 1963) and "Report of the Meeting of the Special Committee of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, January 27, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin I. Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 9, Inter-Church Study Group on AICs in Uyo, Nigeria; Edwin I. Weaver, "An Introduction to the Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 10, John Howard Yoder.

were mostly from mission churches, but as time progressed AIC leaders attended.¹²¹ ICSG meetings became a place where AICs could explain themselves to mission churches. Edwin was careful to identify the group as unofficial and not an attempt to work towards church union.¹²² This allowed non-CCN churches to participate without fear of being co-opted into the CCN or the Nigeria church union scheme. The ICSG collected fifty-eight different papers that participants discussed and/or distributed through their meetings.¹²³ The papers were diverse but focused primarily on AICs: descriptions and survey results of AICs, discussions about their significance, examples and proposals of how to study or work with them, and aspects of their faith, doctrine and practice.

The ICSG meetings also provided a medium for scholars who were studying AICs or Nigerian Christianity to dialogue, network, and exchange information among themselves and with missionaries and Nigerian church leaders. The Weavers met Harold W. Turner in February 1962, just two weeks before the first ICSG meeting.¹²⁴ Turner

¹²¹ "Inter Church Study Committee," March 3, 1962; Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967, HM-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; "Inter-Church Study Group," November 4, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967.

¹²² Edwin Weaver to Glen Martin, March 20, 1961; Weaver, "Annual Report, Ed and Irene Weaver," January 1962; Edwin Weaver, "Report to the Eastern Nigeria Christian Council" (Aba, Nigeria, October 17, 1962), HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 20, Christian Council of Nigeria.

¹²³ "Index: Inter-Church Study Papers," 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 1, Index to Inter-Church Study Papers (Uyo).

¹²⁴ A. G. Somerville to Harold J. Turner, January 6, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 12, Somerville, Rev. A. G.; Harold Turner to Edwin Weaver, January 25, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to Harold Turner, February 1, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; Edwin Weaver to Harold Turner, February 20 and John H. Yoder to H. W. Turner, March 2, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Harold W. Turner to Edwin Weaver, March 11, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; Harold W. Turner to John H. Yoder, March 11, 1962, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, April 14, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1962. Turner remembered meeting Edwin Weaver in Lagos in 1959, but this is

quickly became a confidant and advisor in MBMC's engagement with AICs. While Turner held a post in the Department of Religion at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, he participated in ICSG meetings.¹²⁵ He published extensively about new religious movements in Africa and particularly about the Church of the Lord Aladura, an AIC.¹²⁶ Andrew Walls directed the Department of Religion at Nsukka, participated in ICSG meetings, exchanged information about AICs with the Weavers, and arranged for the Department to take responsibility for the reproduction and distribution of the ICSG papers.¹²⁷ Walls subsequently became a prolific writer about non-western, particularly

highly unlikely. Given that the Weavers only spent a few days in Lagos in 1959 upon arrival in country, that Turner remembers a lone traveler when Edwin would have been with Irene and S. J. and Ida Hostettler, the letters of introduction in early 1962, their meeting in southeastern Nigeria in February 1962, and the subsequent affinity and flurry of letters between them, it is more likely that they met in February 1962. cf. Harold W. Turner, *The Laughter of Providence: Stories from a Life on the Margins* (Meadowbank, New Zealand: The DeepSight Trust, 2001), 33–34.

¹²⁵ Turner, *The Laughter of Providence: Stories from a Life on the Margins*, 34–35; “Inter-Church Study Group Minutes,” (Inter Church Study Committee, May 9, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Harold W Turner, “Pagan Features in West African Independent Churches” (Uyo, Nigeria, 1964), HM 1-563, Box 3, folder 17; Harold W. Turner to J. J. Coutts, September 16, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Howard W. Turner to Edwin and Irene Weaver, September 16, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; “Inter-Church Study Group Meeting,” Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, December 12, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver, “Inter-Church Study Group Minutes,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, April 24, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; “Agenda, Inter-Church Study Group,” December 18, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

¹²⁶ E. g. Harold W Turner, “Litany of an Independent West African Church,” *Practical Anthropology* 7, no. 6 (November 1, 1960): 256–62; H. W. Turner, “The Church of the Lord: The Expansion of a Nigerian Independent Church in Sierra Leone and Ghana,” *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1962): 91–110; Harold W. Turner, *Profile Through Preaching: A Study of the Sermon Texts Used in a West African Independent Church* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965); Robert Cameron Mitchell and Harold W. Turner, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966); Harold W. Turner, “A Typology for African Religious Movements,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1, no. 1 (1967): 1–34.

¹²⁷ Harold W. Turner to John H. Yoder, November 30, 1962, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; Weaver, “Inter-Church Study Group Meeting Minutes,” September 4, 1963; Andrew Walls to Edwin Weaver, September 10, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, October 2, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4,

African, Christianity.¹²⁸ After Turner and Walls left Nsukka, Tom S. Garrett, Haus J. Greschat, and Emmanuel M. Tobiah Epelle held posts there and continued collaborating with the ICSG.¹²⁹ Garrett directed the Department and Greschat and Epelle published works on African Christianity.¹³⁰ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, Robert Mitchell, and William Reyburn contributed papers at ICSG meetings and published about African Christianity, AICs, and linguistics.¹³¹

Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, February 7, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; "Inter-Church Study Group Minutes," IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, August 14, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

¹²⁸ E. g. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

¹²⁹ T. S. Garrett to Edwin Weaver, September 1, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver, "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting Minutes," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Group, October 8, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; T. S. Garrett to Edwin Weaver, October 14, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to H. T. Greschat, November 26, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; E. M. T. Epelle to T. S. Garrett, December 19, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Hans-Jürgen Greschat, "A Few Suggestions Pertaining to Research Methods and Procedures and the Abak Survey," February 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25C, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #3; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967; E. M. T. Epelle to Edwin Weaver, June 17, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.

¹³⁰ E. g. Hans-Jürgen Greschat, *Kitawala, Ursprung, Ausbreitung Und Religion Der Watch-Tower-Bewegung in Zentralafrika* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1967); Hans-Jürgen Greschat, *West African Prophets: The Morphology of a Religious Specialization* (Birmingham: Centre for New Religious Movements, 1985); Hans-Jürgen Greschat and Hans-Hermann Münkner, *Encounter of African Religiosity with Christianity: Selected Essays on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of Africana Marburgensia* (Marburg: Reimer, 1989); E. M. T. Epelle, *The Church in the Niger Delta: With Appendix on Archdeacon Crowther* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Niger Delta Diocese, 1955); E. M. T. Epelle, *Writing a Local Church History: A Short Guide* (Nsukka, Nigeria: University of Nigeria, Dept. of Religion, 1965).

¹³¹ Edwin Weaver, A. T. U. Ekong, and O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group Meeting" (Obot Idim, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, April 23, 1966), Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Inter Church Study Committee, July 2, 1966), and Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967; E. g. Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-Structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 8, no. 1 (1974): 55-72; Robert Cameron Mitchell, "Africa's Prophet Movements," *Christian Century* 18, no.

In mid 1966 the ICSG formed an ad-hoc committee to evaluate its work and plan for the future. Edwin Weaver had been the driving force behind its activity, and he was planning to retire from the Nigeria work in August 1967.¹³² It was time to develop the necessary structure for the work that would continue after the Weavers' departure. The committee presented its proposal to the ICSG in February 1967, and the Group modified then accepted its suggestions.¹³³ The ICSG would form a leadership committee with representatives from the CCN, the Department of Religion at University of Nigeria at Nsukka, and the Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran, and AIC churches. This committee would be responsible for the leadership of the ICSG that Edwin had been providing and would take charge of the Inter-Church Team and the theological education scholarships for AIC leaders that he had initiated. It would also name a representative to the governing body of the United Churches Bible College that MBMC missionaries had initiated with a number of AICs.

11 (1964): 1427; Mitchell and Turner, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements*; Robert Cameron Mitchell, "Towards the Sociology of Religious Independency," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 3, no. 1 (1970): 2-21; William D. Reyburn, "Certain Cameroun Translations: Analysis and Plan," *The Bible Translator* 9, no. 4 (October 1958): 171-82; William D. Reyburn, "The Role of the Heart in the Translation of Acts in Some Northern Bantu Languages," *The Bible Translator* 10, no. 1 (January 1959): 1-4; William D. Reyburn, "Polygamy, Economy, and Christianity in the Eastern Cameroun," *Practical Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (January 1959): 1-19.

¹³² Edwin Weaver to Members of the Inter-Church Study Group, May 12, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 27, 1966, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group," July 2, 1966; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 4, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1966.

¹³³ Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of Inter-Church Group Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Group, February 25, 1967), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 21, Misc, Papers; Edwin Weaver, "Report of the Planning Committee," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Group, February 11, 1967), HM 1-696, Box 7, Folder 5, Inter Church Study Papers.

The revised ICSG's objectives were consistent with those that Weaver had outlined five years earlier. They were to cooperatively study AICs in the region and encourage the establishment of a research center with Nsukka's Department of Religion, to encourage mission churches to assist AICs, to work with AICs through the Inter-Church Team, to integrate AIC leaders into ICSG activities, to work towards integration of AICs into the witness of the larger church community, and to assist AICs in the articulation of their doctrine and practice. The Group decided to drop the term "Study" from its title and became the Inter-Church Group.¹³⁴ It would still participate in AIC research but would collaborate with the Department of Religion at Nsukka and other seminaries in the region to establish a research center that would take the lead in research activities.¹³⁵

The ICSG also planned for its future leadership and funding. Participants were adamant that MBMC send a missionary to serve on the leadership committee and to organize the Group's activities; only a Mennonite could fill this position they argued.¹³⁶ The Weavers and their colleagues had established themselves as neutral and trustworthy players in the inter-church relationships of southeastern Nigeria, and this was essential to the success of the Group. The ICSG also solicited the World Council of Churches for

¹³⁴ Edwin Weaver, "Files on Inter-Church Study Group, Transcript," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

¹³⁵ Edwin Weaver to T. S. Garrett, P. J. Ross, and N. A. Bumby, August 11, 1966 and Edwin Weaver to P. J. Ross, June 15, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.

¹³⁶ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 5, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Edwin I. Weaver 1967.

funds to continue its activities, which would relieve MBMC of some of its financial burden.¹³⁷

Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war a few months later put an end to the ICSG's activity, and it could not implement its plans for the future. The last meeting took place on May 13, 1967.¹³⁸ William Reyburn, a linguist with the Bible Societies of West Africa who was based in Jos, gave the main paper, "Catholic Protestant Cooperation in the Translation of Scriptures."¹³⁹ Thirteen years earlier Reyburn's anthropological and linguistic assistance to MBMC missionaries in the Argentine Chaco had done much to motivate them to forfeit the establishment of a Mennonite church in favor of accompanying and resourcing an indigenous Toba expression of Christianity. This move provided the mission with a precedent that prepared the way for its acceptance of the Weavers' non-traditional mission approach with AICs in southeastern Nigeria. One medium of that approach was the ICSG, an initiative that similarly sought to embody a missionary role in relation to indigenous expressions of Christianity without insisting on the establishment of a church whose identity was defined primarily by its relationship with a western denomination.

¹³⁷ Robert Macdonald, "Project Application Form A, WCC," March 23, 1967 and Sunday Odoromah Udoukpong, "Project Application Form A, WCC," April 1, 1967, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969.

¹³⁸ Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967.

¹³⁹ Weaver, "Files on Inter-Church Study Group, Transcript."

The Inter-Church Team

While the Inter-Church Study Group provided an opportunity for inter-church interaction and reflection, Edwin also initiated an Inter-Church Team (ICT) that worked more directly with AICs. He argued that doing research about AICs and preparing and discussing papers about them was not enough.¹⁴⁰ One needed also to provide assistance. Doing so would not only benefit the AICs but would also help Weaver and his co-workers learn about them.

Weaver was adamant, however, that the attempt to assist AICs was a task best done in collaboration with other missions and churches. Given the competitive religious context of southeastern Nigeria, a unilateral approach by Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities would raise suspicions that it might use its connections with AICs to bolster Mennonite Church Nigeria.¹⁴¹ From the arrival of MBMC to the region, the established missions feared that it would build its own church by drawing away members and leaders that, according to comity agreements, should be theirs.

Once again Macdonald and the Presbyterians provided crucial assistance. They assigned one of their evangelists to work with the ICT alongside Weaver and encouraged, through the Eastern Regional Committee of the Christian Council of Nigeria, other

¹⁴⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; "A Plan of Work for The Independent Church Team," August 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Edwin Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript," 1968, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 19, Weaver Background - Transcribed.

¹⁴¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 5, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; Edwin Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo," March 25, 1966, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Stanley and Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 24, 1967.

churches to do the same.¹⁴² Eventually the Presbyterian, Anglican, and Mennonite churches provided personnel, as did one of the AICs.¹⁴³ These were Nigerian workers who received their salaries from their churches. The department of religion at Nsukka also helped to fund the initiative.¹⁴⁴ The ICT worked with Weaver and his colleagues in their ministry among AICs. Although Weaver led the ICT, it was an inter-church initiative and reported on its activities to the Inter-Church Study Group.¹⁴⁵ This provided transparency that allowed MBMC to work with AICs without losing the confidence of the established missions and their churches.

The ICT provided assistance to AICs and gathered data about them in a number of different ways. Team members taught at the United Churches Bible College that MBMC missionaries founded to serve AIC leaders.¹⁴⁶ They preached and taught in AIC

¹⁴² A. G. Somerville to Edwin Weaver, May 25, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963; "Report of the Meeting of the Eastern Regional Committee," (Aba, Nigeria: Christian Council of Nigeria, Eastern Regional Committee, September 18, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 20, Christian Council of Nigeria; N. Eme to Edwin Weaver, February 3, 1964, N. Eme to Edwin Weaver, February 21, 1964, and Edwin Weaver to N. Eme, March 6, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65.

¹⁴³ W. E. McBay to Edwin Weaver, January 31, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin, April 9, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 21, Rev G. E. I. Cockin; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, July 12, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; T. O. Alozie and E. Timothy to Edwin Weaver, July 24, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Walls to Edwin Weaver, June 10, 1965 and Andrew Walls to Edwin Weaver, June 24, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, July 12, 1965; T. S. Garrett to Edwin Weaver, October 14, 1966.

¹⁴⁵ O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group," August 14, 1965; "Agenda, Inter-Church Study Group," December 18, 1965; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group," July 2, 1966; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967.

¹⁴⁶ "A Plan of Work for The Independent Church Team," August 1965, "Independent Church Team," Meeting Report (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 2, 1965), and I. U. Nsajak, "Independent Church Team," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 23, 1965),

congregations, often at the invitation of AIC leaders who were students at the Bible College. The ICT initiated and led the Independent Church Leaders Meetings, a series of meetings in which AIC leaders studied and discussed common concerns and challenges.¹⁴⁷ The team also conducted surveys of AICs, attempting to document their number, the reasons for their existence, and their beliefs and practices.¹⁴⁸ Weaver provided leadership for the ICT until his departure in 1967 when, if not for the civil war, the Inter-Church Study Group had planned to absorb the team into its structure.¹⁴⁹

The collection of data via surveys of churches was an important part of the ICT's work. By mid 1965 the team had collected information about AICs within a five-mile radius of Uyo. In June Weaver reported that it had documented two hundred and twenty-five congregations in forty-one different denominations.¹⁵⁰ This was a rather superficial survey in that it was primarily concerned with the number of congregations and

HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Edwin Weaver, "Weaver Reflections on Inter-Church Study Group (transcripts)" 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 24, Inter-Church Study comm., Papers (transcripts).

¹⁴⁷ Edwin Weaver to Leaders of Independent Churches of Eastern Nigeria, April 11, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1966; Weaver, "Weaver Reflections on Inter-Church Study Group (transcripts)."

¹⁴⁸ "Independent Church Team," Meeting Report (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 2, 1965) and "Report of the Inter-Church Team," Meeting Report (Inter Church Study Team, July 29, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; "Inter-Church Group" (Inter Church Study Group, November 4, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; "Study Team Documents," February 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25C, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #3.

¹⁴⁹ Edwin I. Weaver, "Reorganization of the Inter-Church Study Group," November 4, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 20, Inter Church Study Group Again; Edwin Weaver, "Report of the Planning Committee," February 25, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 7, Folder 5, Inter Church Study Papers; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967; Edwin I. Weaver, "Reorganization of the Inter-Church Study Group, Revised," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 20, Inter Church Study Group Again.

¹⁵⁰ O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group," August 14, 1965.

denominations around Uyo. The ICT soon shifted its attention to the Abak area, a hotbed of AIC activity.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the initial Uyo survey did provide preliminary data about the high density of churches, many of them AICs, in the region.

Upon the completion of its preliminary work around Uyo, the ICT shifted its attention to a survey of the town of Abak. It studied all churches within a five-mile radius, this time doing a more thorough investigation and collecting more data about particular congregations than it had in the Uyo survey. The team consulted the local government in Abak to make sure it did not miss any villages and collected information about churches' leaders, historical background, type of building, and membership numbers.¹⁵² By mid 1966 the team had completed the Abak survey, and it subsequently prepared a booklet of its findings.¹⁵³ It had found two hundred and fifty-one congregations that belonged to fifty different denominations.¹⁵⁴ For eighty-one of the congregations, the ICT gathered data about how they were founded, the number of members they had, the identity of their leaders, the type of building they used, and

¹⁵¹ Edwin Weaver to Andrew Walls and Harold Turner, June 18, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; I. U. Nsasak, "Transport Claim August 1965," Financial Report (Inter Church Study Team, September 1, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Weaver, "Weaver Reflections on Inter-Church Study Group (transcripts)."

¹⁵² Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, October 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; "Preliminary Survey Guide," 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1.

¹⁵³ Edwin Weaver to V. A. Kurtz, March 7, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 1, K - Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Inter Church Study Committee, July 2, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; I. U. Nsasak et al., "The Abak Story," Research Report (Inter Church Study Team, February 1967), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 3, The Abak Story.

¹⁵⁴ Nsasak et al., "The Abak Story," 29.

whether or not they had foreign sponsorship.¹⁵⁵ Out of the total two hundred and fifty-one congregations, thirty-eight belonged to the Qua Iboe Church of the Qua Iboe Mission in whose comity area Abak fell.¹⁵⁶

In addition, there were many congregations that were affiliated with other denominations that arrived during the middle decades of the twentieth century from North America, Europe, or other regions in Nigeria. For example, there were twenty-eight Apostolic Church congregations, twenty-four Roman Catholic, eighteen Church of Christ, thirteen Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, twelve African Church, eleven Church of the Nazarene, ten Salvation Army, and eight Faith Tabernacle.¹⁵⁷ Frequently they had sought these denominational affiliations by invitation, similar to the way the congregations that made up MCN had requested affiliation with MBMC.¹⁵⁸ There was significant fluidity as congregations left one denomination in order to join another that appeared more able or willing to help it with a school or other assistance.

The remaining eighty-nine congregations did not belong to denominational networks that contained significant numbers of congregations.¹⁵⁹ In fact, twenty-six of the fifty “denominations” that the ICT identified were simply congregations with no wider, denominational relationship. They were independent, stand-alone congregations. The

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 1–28.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 35–36.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1–28.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

team considered each of them a denomination unto itself, even though each one was the only congregation in its “denomination.”¹⁶⁰ Although he does not give his sources, the statistics that David Barrett cites in *Schism and Renewal in Africa* to support his view that this region had “probably the densest concentration of independency in all Africa,” corresponds directly with the data that the ICT collected.¹⁶¹ He likely obtained the statistics from the Uyo and Abak surveys through the department of religion at Nsukka.

The third survey that the ICT did was a re-survey of the Uyo area. The first one had simply identified and counted existent congregations and their denominational affiliation. During the last six months of the Abak survey, the team met with researchers from Nsukka three times in order to receive feedback and advice about the methods and procedures it was using.¹⁶² The Nsukka staff gave team members advice about how to improve their interviews, encouraged them to seek reasons for the emergence of AIC congregations, suggested ways to categorize the congregations, and identified topics to include. Weaver observed that with this advice, the re-survey of the Uyo area produced better results.¹⁶³ The team did this third survey during the six months leading up to the civil war. Unfortunately, during the war the building that housed the material suffered

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶¹ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 114, 291.

¹⁶² “Study and Discussion Notes,” July 3, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; E. M. T. Epelle to T. S. Garrett, December 19, 1966; I. U. Nsasak, “Meeting with Dr. Greschat of University of Nigeria, Nsukka,” Meeting Report, (December 21, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25B, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #2.

¹⁶³ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 26, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Edwin I. Weaver 1967; Weaver, “Weaver Reflections on Inter-Church Study Group (transcripts).”

looting, and the survey data disappeared.¹⁶⁴ It has never been available to scholars or other interested parties. Fighting also destroyed the building that housed the department of religion at Nsukka, so the data it collected is not available either.¹⁶⁵

Anthropology

In the post World War II period, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities increasingly sought to appropriate the tools of anthropology and linguistics in its missionary initiatives; anthropology especially figured in missionaries' attempt to understand the religious context in southeastern Nigeria. In 1951 MBMC, along with Goshen Biblical Seminary, solicited the assistance of Eugene Nida to establish a training program for missionaries.¹⁶⁶ It engaged the services of William Reyburn in its re-evaluation of its work with the Toba people in Argentina in 1954, and it subsequently sent personnel to the Kennedy School of Missions for training in linguistics and anthropology.¹⁶⁷ By the 1960s MBMC and other Mennonite missions depended on anthropological analysis in their strategic deliberations, and their workers sought

¹⁶⁴ I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

¹⁶⁵ Andrew F. Walls, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 154–155; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Challenging the Academy, Breaking Barriers," in *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*, ed. William R Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ Harold S. Bender, *Report to the Seminary on the Conference on Missionary Linguistics* (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), Levi C. Hartzler, *Conference on Missionary Linguistics and Anthropology, Meeting Report* (Elkhart, IN, April 21, 1951), and Harold S. Bender to J. D. Graber, May 3, 1951, IV-18-10, MBM Office of the Secretary 1941-1957, Box 3, Linguistics and Anthropology 1951-53.

¹⁶⁷ William David Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, An Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954).

advanced degrees in the field.¹⁶⁸ This interest was not unique to Mennonites but reflected the larger missionary movement's recognition of the importance of the field for mission theory and practice during this period.¹⁶⁹ For MBMC, anthropological reflection gave voice to many of the challenges that crossing cultural boundaries had generated during six decades of missionary experience.¹⁷⁰

Indications of the importance of anthropology for MBMC personnel include their advocacy for training in the discipline for new missionaries and their use of literature that employed it in missiological reflections, both monographs and the journal *Practical Anthropology*. By the early 1960s the mission expected its missionaries to have training in anthropology and related fields in addition to seminary training.¹⁷¹ Edwin Weaver even suggested training in linguistics and anthropology for voluntary service workers whose terms were only two years long.¹⁷² When the Weavers decided to accept the call to return to the mission field in 1959, Edwin turned his attention to works like Eugene Nida's *Customs and Culture* and Stanley Soltau's *Missions at the Crossroads*, books that

¹⁶⁸ J. Stanley Friesen and Delores Friesen, "Anthropology, Anabaptists and Mission," *Mission Focus Annual Review* 8 (2000): 55–62.

¹⁶⁹ William A. Smalley, "Selected and Annotated Bibliography of Anthropology for Missionaries," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 1 (January 20, 1960): 1–37; Paul G. Hiebert, "Missions and Anthropology: A Love/Hate Relationship," *Missiology: An International Review* 6, no. 2 (April 1978): 165–80.

¹⁷⁰ J. D. Graber, "Mennonite Distinctive, Speech given to Bapt/Menn Seminar, Japan" (Japan, 1964), HM 1-48, Box 181, The Church as Indigenous.

¹⁷¹ John H. Yoder to Mission Board Executive Committee, January 13, 1960, HM 1-48, Box 181, As You Go Articles.

¹⁷² Edwin Weaver to Ray Horst, November 30, 1961, IV-7-2, General Corres. 1938-68, Box 36, Nigeria 1961-65.

highlighted local cultures and indigenous church theory.¹⁷³ The journal *Practical Anthropology* was also an important source for Weaver and his colleagues. He maintained a subscription throughout his time in Nigeria and referred to its articles regularly.¹⁷⁴ Weaver's MBMC colleagues Delores and J. Stanley Friesen recalled the importance of the journal for the Nigeria missionaries, writing, "It was part of missionary folklore when we arrived in Nigeria in 1965, that you could count on finding two things on the bedside table of missionaries, their devotional material and an issue of *Practical Anthropology*."¹⁷⁵

Recourse to the discipline was not only a matter of theory; MBMC personnel sought to marshal the tools of anthropology for practical and strategic purposes on the field. For example, in November 1959 Yoder referred to William Smalley's article in the July-August number of *Practical Anthropology* to advise Hostetler about corrections to *The Mennonite Hour* correspondence courses that he supervised in Ghana.¹⁷⁶ One month later and just weeks after arriving in southeastern Nigeria, the Weavers pointed Yoder to

¹⁷³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59; Eugene A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper, 1954); Stanley T. Soltau, *Missions at the Crossroads: The Indigenous Church—A Solution for the Unfinished Task* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955).

¹⁷⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin Weaver to *Practical Anthropology*, August 6, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous; "Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the Inter-Church Study Group," (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Committee, October 31, 1962), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin and Irene Weaver to Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Hostetler, August 1, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 13, Darrel and Marian Hostetler.

¹⁷⁵ Friesen and Friesen, "Anthropology, Anabaptists and Mission."

¹⁷⁶ John H. Yoder to S. J. Hostetler, November 16, 1959, HM 1-48, Box 182, Principles; William A. Smalley, "Vocabulary and the Preaching of the Gospel," *Practical Anthropology* 6, no. 4 (August 1959): 182-85.

an article in the May-June issue in an attempt to explain the situation they faced among the Anang people, a subgroup of the Ibibio, in southeastern Nigeria.¹⁷⁷

The Anang region presented a challenge for the missionaries. There were Mennonite Church Nigeria congregations there in the Ibianga area where missionary activity in previous decades had not been as intense or successful as around Uyo.¹⁷⁸ The Ibianga congregations consistently requested that the mission appoint a resident missionary to their area.¹⁷⁹ Yoder, as a result of correspondence with missionary anthropologist Jacob Loewen, argued that instead of sending a resident missionary or providing traditional mission services, the Ibianga congregations would benefit from periodic but timely short-term missionary interventions.¹⁸⁰ Loewen had argued that introducing a long-term missionary or mission institution in a stable context often disrupted traditional structures of the society because mission activity tended to re-organize the social structures around the mission. This risked creating unhelpful, non-indigenous structures that would be perpetrated even after the missionaries left. Yoder suggested that short-term, occasional missionary visits were more likely to encourage positive results in Ibianga than would a traditional longer-term missionary presence.

¹⁷⁷ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; John C. Messenger, "The Christian Concept of Forgiveness and Anang Morality," *Practical Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (June 1959): 97–103.

¹⁷⁸ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

¹⁷⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

¹⁸⁰ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963; Jacob A. Loewen, "Short-Term Summer Programs Focus Attention on Time and Timing in Missions," HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964; Loewen later published the paper to which Yoder referred as Jacob A. Loewen, "Field, Term, and Timing in Missionary Method," *Practical Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (February 1965): 1–21.

Edwin replied that he agreed with Yoder's analysis, referring to two of Loewen's earlier *Practical Anthropology* articles in his letter of response.¹⁸¹ Such examples demonstrate that missionaries used anthropological reflection about mission to understand the contexts in which they worked and to orient their missionary engagement, both practically and strategically.

Finally, as part of their attempt to understand AICs better, MBMC missionaries sought the services of a professionally trained anthropologist to study these churches. Edwin Weaver had suggested this possibility at the Eastern Regional Committee meeting in 1961 when he reported on his work with AICs.¹⁸² At that meeting the Committee approved both the establishment of the Inter-Church Study Group and the plan to invite an anthropologist to the region to do such a study.¹⁸³

Weaver and MBMC administrators contacted a number of people with anthropological training. They first invited Calvin Redekop, a Mennonite college professor who had recently completed a PhD in sociology and anthropology.¹⁸⁴ Redekop's obligations at a new teaching position kept him from accepting, so Weaver turned to Donald Jacobs, anthropologist and Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities

¹⁸¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963; Jacob A. Loewen, "Chocó Indian in Hillsboro, Kansas," *Practical Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (June 1962): 129–33; Jacob A. Loewen, "Church Among the Chocó of Panama," *Practical Anthropology* 10, no. 3 (June 1963): 97–108.

¹⁸² Weaver, "A Report to the Eastern Region Council," September 19, 1961.

¹⁸³ "Christian Council of Nigeria - Eastern Regional Committee," September 19, 1961.

¹⁸⁴ Calvin Redekop to Ed Weaver, Joe Graber, and John H. Yoder, March 31, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

missionary in East Africa.¹⁸⁵ Jacobs expressed interest in this opportunity but was not able to get a leave of absence from the church he served there.¹⁸⁶ Weaver tried yet again with D. Paul Miller, a Mennonite anthropologist who taught at Illinois Wesleyan University.¹⁸⁷ Once again the attempt failed.¹⁸⁸ The Inter-Church Team, with advice from Nsukka, became the primary organ through which MBMC collected and analyzed data about AICs in the region. Nevertheless, these numerous attempts to get an anthropologist to study AICs in southeastern Nigeria demonstrate the mission's conviction that anthropology was a useful discipline for missiological reflection and the development of missionary strategy.

Ministry Among African Independent Churches

If the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' goal of reconciliation between mission churches and African Independent Churches motivated the Weavers and their colleagues to investigate and study AICs, it also motivated them to engage in initiatives of ministry among these churches. During the first years in Nigeria this was limited to

¹⁸⁵ Edwin Weaver to Calvin Redekop, April 10, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to Donald Jacobs, May 21, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

¹⁸⁶ Donald Jacobs to Edwin Weaver, July 5, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.; Don Jacobs to Edwin Weaver, August 21, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

¹⁸⁷ Edwin Weaver to D. Paul Miller, October 24, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M - Miscellaneous; John H. Yoder to D. Paul Miller, November 2, 1962, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969; D. Paul Miller to Edwin Weaver, November 13, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M - Miscellaneous; John H. Yoder to Paul Erb, January 15, 1963, IV-18-2, MBM Overseas Correspondence, Box 1, Overseas Committee Correspondence 1963-1964.

¹⁸⁸ D. Paul Miller to John H. Yoder, September 24, 1963, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, December 23, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966.

their work with Mennonite Church Nigeria as missionaries sought to provide training for its leaders, establish the structure necessary for an orderly church, and advocate for what they described as New Testament standards. With time, however, the Weavers envisioned broadening their work to include the numerous other AICs in the region. This vision they eventually embodied in a number of initiatives: the United Independent Churches Fellowship, the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings, the United Churches' Bible College, and a theological education scholarship program for AIC leaders. This section describes the development and work of these initiatives.

The United Independent Churches Fellowship

Edwin Weaver took steps to form the United Independent Churches Fellowship (UICF) in the fall of 1963, nearly four years after his arrival and midway through his stay in Nigeria. It had taken two years to convince the mission churches, through the Eastern Regional Committee of the Christian Council of Nigeria, to back the establishment of the Inter-Church Study Group in order to support the Weavers' ministry of interaction with, and better understanding of, AICs.¹⁸⁹ If the mission churches had been hesitant to engage the issue of the existence of AICs as authentic Christian entities, the AICs demonstrated their own strong mistrust of the mission churches.¹⁹⁰ While some were anxious to receive assistance from foreign missions, they were hesitant to participate in Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' missionary focus of inter-church reconciliation.

¹⁸⁹ "Christian Council of Nigeria - Eastern Regional Committee," September 19, 1961.

¹⁹⁰ Edwin Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript," 1968, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship.

It was not until September 1963 that the Weavers formed the United Independent Churches Fellowship. They meant it to be a medium through which to make contact with the wider AIC community and to encourage AICs towards better communication with, and understanding of, mission churches.¹⁹¹ This new group was made up of AIC leaders, in contrast to the Inter-Church Study Group that was made up primarily of mission church representatives with few AIC representatives.¹⁹² The Weavers and their MBMC colleagues worked with both groups, trying to build confidence between the two expressions of Christianity that the respective groups represented. Before September 1963 the Weavers' ministry among AICs had been limited largely to Mennonite Church Nigeria. The establishment of the UICF was pivotal in that they now sought to broaden their focus and reorient it towards the challenge that the greater AIC movement presented to the Christian community in the region.¹⁹³ Edwin wrote to Graber, "In light of how things are developing should we rethink our whole Nigeria mission strategy? Should more of our total Nigeria budget and personnel go into our Independent Church program?"¹⁹⁴ In fact, in the months and years that followed the Weavers and the mission reoriented their focus in that direction.

¹⁹¹ Adolph E. Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, September 21, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

¹⁹² Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript"; Weaver, "Commentary on the Inter-Church Study Group Papers."

¹⁹³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963.

¹⁹⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 13, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

The creation of the UICF supported the Weavers' missionary goal of inter-church reconciliation in a number of ways. They hoped that it would help MBMC move beyond the relatively narrow focus on MCN.¹⁹⁵ If the mission was going to provide a reconciling presence in the larger competitive religious milieu of southeastern Nigeria, it had to develop relationships with the whole range of AICs and mission churches that existed in the region. The UICF would help missionaries become acquainted with AIC leaders and gain their confidence. Given the animosity that existed, they did not expect MCN and other AICs to engage with mission churches right away. Creating a medium in which AICs could learn about each other and discuss and work on common concerns was a workable, intermediate step that might lead to AIC relationships with mission churches in the future.¹⁹⁶

In addition, Edwin hoped that the UICF would provide a way to legitimately respond to AIC requests for assistance. He was especially interested in their requests for Bible College training for church leaders.¹⁹⁷ While the Weavers were not swayed by requests for the establishment of mission institutions that AICs requested, they and their MBMC supervisors did find common ground with these churches in their desire for leadership training.¹⁹⁸ Such training would improve the quality of the AICs and prepare

¹⁹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript."

¹⁹⁶ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

¹⁹⁷ Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton, September 10, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 33, S. G. Elton; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 13, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

¹⁹⁸ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, November 23, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1962; Edwin Weaver to David Roberts, March 6, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous.

them to enter into relationship with the mission churches. The establishment of UICF might be a means through which the mission could provide leadership training via biblical and theological education for a larger number of AICs.¹⁹⁹ The Weavers had already started such training within MCN but had come to believe that it was insufficient.²⁰⁰ The church was too small to justify the establishment of a formal Bible college, but working with a larger number of AICs would increase the number of potential students and make such an initiative feasible.²⁰¹ MCN would benefit along with other AICs. It was this kind of direct ministry with AICs via the UICF that Edwin identified as his missionary priority. He wrote to Yoder, “I would like to think that most of my time should be given not to our Inter-Church Study Group but with UICF. The former is more marginal to our major purpose and the latter right at the heart of what we are trying to do in Nigeria.”²⁰²

The Weavers collaborated with S. G. Elton and his mission, the World Christian Crusade, to establish the UICF. Elton had been with the Apostolic Church mission from Great Britain before becoming an independent Pentecostal missionary.²⁰³ He had already been working with AICs in the region when the Weavers arrived, providing theological

¹⁹⁹ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963; Weaver, “Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript.”

²⁰⁰ Weaver, “Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript.”

²⁰¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963; Weaver, “Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript.”

²⁰² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 12, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

²⁰³ Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army : Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, Religion in Contemporary Africa Series (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), 38.

education via a Bible College and financial support to leaders in three AICs: Full Gospel Church, Pentecostal Faith Mission, and Mount Zion Mission.²⁰⁴ In May 1960 when the Weavers were having difficulty obtaining resident visas, they considered working under the World Christian Crusade's umbrella before finally deciding to work under the Presbyterians.²⁰⁵

Given Elton's experience with AICs, Edwin considered him something of an expert and a potential partner. He sought Elton's counsel and wanted to build on his work.²⁰⁶ When John Yoder visited Nigeria in 1962, he was impressed with the utility of Elton's Bible College initiative and encouraged Weaver to collaborate with it. Yoder saw this as a way to provide a needed service to AICs and to build relationships with a wider group of AICs than what MCN represented.²⁰⁷ Elton's World Christian Crusade was short of personnel and financial resources, and the Weavers too found that alone MBMC would have difficulty broadening its ministry to include more AICs.²⁰⁸ Consequently, in

²⁰⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria, July 11, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton, September 10, 1963; Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship."

²⁰⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 11, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

²⁰⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 13, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 13, Yoder, John H 1962-64; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 23, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, September 6, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton," September 10, 1963.

²⁰⁷ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962.

²⁰⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 23, 1963; Edwin Weaver to Don Jacobs, July 13, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.; Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton, February 7, 1963 and S. G. Elton to Edwin Weaver, February 15, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 33, S. G. Elton; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, September 6, 1963; Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton, September 10, 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript."

September 1963 Edwin and World Christian Crusade missionary Miss Ungermann met with representatives from the MCN, from the three AICs with which Ungermann worked, and from the Holy Face Church, whose leader one of the AICs had invited.²⁰⁹ These five AICs, MBMC, and World Christian Crusade formed the UICF.

The most significant aspect of the UICF's work was the establishment of the United Churches Bible College for the training of leaders, a common concern of MBMC, World Wide Crusade, and the AICs with whom they worked. At the UICF's organizational meeting Edwin identified this as one of its primary objectives, and plans moved forward to open a Bible College in February of 1964.²¹⁰ The mission churches had their own training programs for leaders, but their academic level was too high for most AIC leaders.²¹¹ The UICF appointed a school board but relied on MBMC to provide most of the necessary legwork, funding, and personnel for the initiative.²¹² Between 1964 and 1967 missionaries Darrel and Marian Hostetler and Stanley and Delores Friesen spent

²⁰⁹ Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship."

²¹⁰ Ibid.; "Minutes of the Second Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," (Mbak Itam, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, October 19, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

²¹¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963.

²¹² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; A. E. Inim, "Third Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (United Independent Churches Fellowship, November 23, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1964; John H. Yoder to Darrel Hostetler, September 22, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65; Stanley Friesen, "Minutes of the Bible School Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, October 18, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript."

much time and energy working with the Bible College. Edwin, Darrel and Stanley all served as principal at different times.²¹³ The Inter-Church Team members also taught classes.²¹⁴ The AICs that made up the UICF represented over two hundred congregations from which forty-eight students enrolled for the first term in February 1964.²¹⁵

While Edwin Weaver and MBMC had hoped the UICF would provide a place for AIC leaders to gather, learn to know each other, discuss common concerns, and promote the spiritual life and fellowship of member churches, the Bible College became its almost exclusive focus. Minutes from its meetings during UICF's three years of existence show that the College dominated its time and energy.²¹⁶ The focus on the Bible College did, however, help the Weavers and MBMC accomplish their goal of developing relationships with a broader range of AICs.²¹⁷ Students often invited them and the members of the Inter-Church Team into their churches to preach and/or teach. This provided the Weavers with the contacts they sought in order to build trust with AICs and their leaders.

²¹³ A. E. Inin, "Minutes of the School Committee of the United Independent Church's Fellowship," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, December 16, 1963), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 21, Misc., Papers; Friesen, "Minutes of the Bible School Meeting," October 18, 1965.

²¹⁴ Edwin Weaver to N. Eme, March 6, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65; Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin, April 9, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 21, Rev G. E. I. Cockin; I. U. Nsatak, "Independent Church Team," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 23, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1.

²¹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963; "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the United Independent Churches' Fellowship," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, February 29, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship.

²¹⁶ HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship.

²¹⁷ Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin, April 9, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 21, Rev G. E. I. Cockin; "A Plan of Work for The Independent Church Team," August 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript"; Edwin I. Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group," December 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 9, Inter-Church Study Group on AICs in Uyo, Nigeria.

Aside from the Bible College's utility for introducing MBMC to a wide group of AICs, the UICF did not provide the medium through which AICs learned to know each other better and move toward positive relationships with mission churches. The Bible College was all-encompassing, especially the ongoing and unsuccessful quest to find a site on which to build a permanent campus in Uyo, and did not leave much time or energy for other initiatives.²¹⁸ In addition, the five member AICs of the UICF resisted Edwin's suggestions that they invite others to join the group.²¹⁹ Weaver came to believe that they feared that adding other AICs would decrease their part in any benefits that the mission might provide. Other AICs, however, did send their leaders to the Bible College.²²⁰

Problems arose that led Weaver to allow the UICF to lapse. Elton's World Christian Crusade experienced difficulties and broke apart, cutting off support for the AIC leaders with whom it worked.²²¹ This created somewhat of a crisis in the UICF, and collaboration between member churches decreased. By 1966 the Fellowship had become ineffectual, and Weaver, seeing that it was not the relationship-building medium that he

²¹⁸ HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship.

²¹⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 15, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to E. E. Essien, February 22, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 18, Independent Churches, 1965; "The 17th Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (United Independent Churches Fellowship, November 6, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript."

²²⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 15, 1965; Weaver, "The Inter-Church Study Group."

²²¹ S. G. Elton to Edwin and Irene Weaver, August 25, 1965 and Edwin Weaver to S. G. Elton, August 30, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 33, S. G. Elton; Edwin Weaver to Darrel Hostetler, April 17, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 13, Darrel and Marian Hostetler; Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript"; Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript."

had hoped and losing faith in the efficacy of Elton's approach, allowed it to founder. The Bible College was not affected since MBMC provided the necessary financial and personnel resources. By this time the Inter-Church Team was making many contacts with AICs and was organizing regular meetings with AIC leaders.²²² Out of this initiative would evolve the Independent Church Leaders Meetings. These were more successful than the UICF at providing a venue for cultivating inter-AIC relationships and reconciliation with mission churches and took over where the UICF left off.²²³

The Independent Churches Leaders' Meetings

Towards the end of 1965, as the United Independent Churches Fellowship was becoming increasingly ineffectual, Edwin Weaver and the Inter-Church Team initiated regular meetings of AIC leaders, the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings (ICLM), to serve the unfulfilled purposes that Weaver had envisioned for the United Independent Churches Fellowship. The meetings were to help AIC leaders get to know one another, to provide an arena where they might set aside differences and realistically address common challenges, to inform them of the findings of the Inter-Church Team, and to help them understand the thinking and attitude of the Christian Council of Nigeria and the mission

²²² "A Plan of Work for The Independent Church Team," August 1965 and "Meeting of Independent Churches' Leaders," November 8, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; I. U. Nsarak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, December 17, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 18, Independent Churches, 1965; Edwin Weaver to Leaders of Independent Churches of Eastern Nigeria, April 11, 1966.

²²³ Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript."

churches towards AICs.²²⁴ Weaver and the Inter-Church Team planned the first gatherings, but participants soon appointed a planning committee of AIC leaders that worked with the Team to organize the ICLM, choose topics for discussion, and invite speakers.²²⁵ The organizers scheduled meetings every two months and encouraged wide participation, typically drawing between forty and sixty participants from as many as twenty-five different AICs as well as two to seven expatriate missionaries each time.²²⁶ The ICLM followed the structure of the Inter-Church Study Group meetings. Presenters read papers that participants then discussed and that the Inter-Church Team later reproduced and distributed.²²⁷ Papers were in English or a local language.

²²⁴ “Meeting of Independent Churches’ Leaders,” November 8, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; Nsasak, “Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” December 17, 1965.

²²⁵ Edwin Weaver to Leaders of Independent Churches of Eastern Nigeria, April 11, 1966; Weaver, “Files on Independent Churches, Transcript”; I. U. Nsasak, “Minutes of Planning Committee For Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” (Uyo, Nigeria, August 8, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; I. U. Nsasak, “Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, August 8, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; I. U. Nsasak, “Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, October 31, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25C, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #3.

²²⁶ Weaver, “Files on Independent Churches, Transcript”; Edwin Weaver to Leaders of Independent Churches of Eastern Nigeria, April 11, 1966; I. U. Nsasak, “Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, May 14, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; I. U. Nsasak, “Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches,” (Independent Churches Leaders, July 16, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; I. U. Nsasak, “Report of Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, October 15, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

²²⁷ Nsasak, “Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders”; Y. E. O. Eta, “An Address Delivered by the Rev. Y. E. O. Eta on the ‘Church Organization’ to the United Independent Churches at Uyo” (Presentation, Uyo, Nigeria, May 14, 1966) and Edwin Weaver to Young E. O. Eta, May 24, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Nsasak, “Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches”; E. A. Okon, “Christian Stewardship,” July 16, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 20, Inter Church Study Group Again; I. U. Nsasak to Independent Church Leaders, September 1, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Nsasak, “Report of

In its presentations and discussions, the ICLM addressed issues that the AICs and missionaries considered pertinent. Leadership was one such concern. Mennonite Church Nigeria leaders early on sought credentials from Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities to reinforce their leadership authority. The Weavers, for their part, identified a leadership weakness in MCN and sought ways to encourage and train church leaders. The ICLM made this issue one of its priorities, and it arose often during the meetings.²²⁸ Meeting minutes show that there was general agreement that leadership training for AICs was an important need and that varying levels of training were necessary, including training programs for lay and young people.²²⁹ This was a significant challenge since AICs did not have access to mission-sponsored theological training institutions as did their mission church counterparts. The ICLM planning committee endorsed the Bible College that the United Independent Churches Fellowship had started, and Edwin hoped that this new group would eventually assume responsibility for it.²³⁰

While the AIC leaders affirmed the need for leadership training, they were cautious in their proposals about how such training might happen. They were hesitant to

Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” October 15, 1966; D. U. Otong, “Methods of Ministering Healing to the Sick,” 1966, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 4, I. U. Nsasak and D. U. Otong.

²²⁸ Nsasak, “Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders”; I. U. Nsasak, “Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, August 8, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Nsasak, “Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders,” October 31, 1966; I. U. Nsasak, “Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, February 18, 1967), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967.

²²⁹ Nsasak, “Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders.”

²³⁰ Nsasak, “Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders, October 31, 1966”; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 18, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

send students to programs of a higher level than that of the Bible College in Uyo.²³¹ The only higher-level schools in the region were the established missions' theological training institutions, and ICLM participants feared that they might convince students to change doctrines and beliefs that AICs held dear. The AIC leaders also expressed preference for training in practical approaches to Christianity instead of theological or academic theory. The ICLM discussions show that leadership training was a common concern of both AICs and MBMC missionaries but that AICs were cautious about assistance that mission church training programs might provide to fill this need.

A second topic that received significant attention in the ICLM was the need to increase the economic capacity of AICs and their members. This too was an early concern of MCN and included the capacity to establish institutions such as schools as well as the ability to support pastors. The Weavers had been careful about responding to such concerns because of their desire to protect the indigenous nature of MCN, but the ICLM proved a context where they and AIC leaders could pool ideas and discuss solutions.²³²

AIC leaders lamented that their churches did not have schools and other resources from which the mission churches benefited and looked for ways to remedy the situation. They noted that they needed to do a better job of helping members enroll in the schools

²³¹ Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

²³² Nsasak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders"; Nsasak, "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches"; Nsasak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," August 15, 1966; Nsasak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders," October 31, 1966; Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

that were available, find employment, and organize successful fundraising projects.²³³ E. A. Okon, General Manager of the A.M.E. Zion Church schools in the region, gave a paper on Christian stewardship in which he sought to give biblical evidence for tithing and fund-raising initiatives, and the ICLM planning committee urged AICs to organize better their financial affairs, to prepare budgets, and to appoint finance committees to oversee fundraising and expenditures.²³⁴ ICLM participants urged MBMC to include training in trades such as carpentry, vegetable farming, and poultry in its Bible College curriculum so that churches and their pastors would be better equipped to support themselves.²³⁵ Through the ICLM, missionaries and the Inter-Church Team provided a context where AIC leaders could dialogue about, and discern solutions for, challenges that were important to churches that did not benefit from the support of foreign missions.

The ICLM was one way for the Weavers to embody their aspiration that AICs gain the capacity and desire to engage mission churches in constructive dialogue that might lead to reconciliation. Wide participation from across the AIC community meant that AIC leaders learned to know each other, started to dialogue and cooperate, and came to know and trust MBMC. As most AIC leaders did not have the contacts in the wider Christian community that their mission church counterparts enjoyed, the planning

²³³ Nsagak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders."

²³⁴ Nsagak, "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches"; Okon, "Christian Stewardship"; Nsagak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," August 15, 1966.

²³⁵ Nsagak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders," October 31, 1966; Nsagak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

committee invited representatives from institutions such as the Bible Society of West Africa and the Department of Religion at Nsukka University to give presentations to the ICLM.²³⁶ This increased participants' awareness of the larger Christian community and of how they might collaborate with such institutions.

At least some ICLM members came to desire more interaction with their mission church counterparts. At the same meeting were members raised the concern that mission-sponsored theological schools might compromise AIC students' doctrines and beliefs, they also suggested that, given these concerns, "missionaries from Mission Churches be encouraged to attend our meetings and to help in working these things out."²³⁷ This indicates openness to dialogue and demonstrates a move in the direction of greater understanding and reconciliation. Such movement and trust building was, however, a long-term project. When the Inter-Church Study Group assessed its relationship to the ICLM in February 1967, it recommended, "This meeting [the ICLM] to continue as a separate body from the Inter-Church Group until such time when a better understanding between the two bodies can be developed, and a better basis be found for discussion of mutual problems. The Mennonite Mission continue [sic] to act as a bridge between the two bodies."²³⁸

²³⁶ Nsagak, "Meeting of Independent Church Leaders," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, December 12, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Nsagak, "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of Leaders from Independent Churches"; Edwin Weaver, "Files on Independent Churches, Transcript."

²³⁷ Nsagak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

²³⁸ Weaver, "Report of the Planning Committee," February 25, 1967.

At the last ICLM in May 1967 it continued the work of creating space for movement towards better relationships. The three guest speakers were William Reyburn from the Bible Society of West Africa, E. M. T. Epelle from Nsukka University, and Presbyterian missionary R. M. Macdonald.²³⁹ Rayburn provided AIC participants with another contact within an important parachurch organization. Epelle spoke on how to write local church history. Documenting AICs' history was one way the Weavers sought to help AICs get to know each other and to help mission churches understand them. Macdonald's topic was "Older Missions and Independent Churches."²⁴⁰ Macdonald, as someone who was sympathetic to AICs and a long-time worker for inter-church cooperation, was the right missionary from an established mission to broach the subject of the complicated relationship between the mission churches and AICs in the region. When the civil war broke out weeks after this meeting, Weaver and the other MBMC missionaries who were working with MCN and AICs evacuated. With the hardships of war and the difficult situation of its aftermath, the ICLM ended, meeting the same fate as the Inter-Church Study Group, its counterpart among the mission churches.

Theological Education and Leadership Training

Strengthening the church through biblical and theological education and leadership training by providing scholarships at secondary schools and Bible colleges was one of the Weavers' early mission strategies with Mennonite Church Nigeria, and

²³⁹ "Agenda, Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," May 12, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

that focus continued as they engaged the wider AIC community in southeastern Nigeria. They had been surprised that so many of MCN's leaders were illiterate and disappointed that a number appeared unscrupulous. In fact, a number of the leaders took their congregations out of MCN as a result of the Weavers' critique of their leadership practices.²⁴¹ Others ceded their positions to sons or other younger leaders who had more capacity for schooling. The Weavers came to believe that one of the best ways to assist MCN was to help it develop good leadership.²⁴² They found a similar situation in the wider church community, and the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities identified leadership training as the most important aspect of its work in the region.²⁴³ Many AIC leaders agreed, and both the United Independent Church Fellowship and the Independent Churches Leaders Meeting made leadership training a priority in their deliberations and activities.²⁴⁴

The importance of training for church leaders was not a priority unique to the Weavers and MBMC work in Nigeria. The wider missionary community considered it

²⁴¹ I. U. Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, April 10, 1961), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961 Confidential.

²⁴² Edwin Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria," Annual Report, (February 6, 1961), IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Annual Mission Board Meeting 1961.

²⁴³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962; J. D. Graber to Ed Weaver, February 8, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

²⁴⁴ "Minutes of the Second Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; Nsagak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," August 8, 1966; Nsagak, "Report of the Planning Committee for the Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders," October 31, 1966.

similarly important.²⁴⁵ The Department of Missionary Studies of the World Council of Churches sponsored a consultation on the AIC phenomenon in August 1962 in Mindolo, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).²⁴⁶ Edwin planned to attend and read a paper about building understanding and reconciliation between AICs and mission churches but canceled at the last minute because of complications with his Nigerian re-entry permit.²⁴⁷ The World Council's publication that issued from that meeting identified biblical training for AIC leaders as one of the "chief services which could be rendered by the Older to the Independent church."²⁴⁸ Participants at Mindolo encouraged the newly formed Theological Education Fund to assist such training opportunities.²⁴⁹ The consultation also encouraged fellowship between AICs and other churches. The interest in AICs, the concern for better relationships between them and mission churches, and the identification of theological education as a means of engaging these movements corresponded nicely to the Weavers' approach in southeastern Nigeria.

²⁴⁵ Robert S. Bilheimer to Edwin I. Weaver, January 30, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 8.

²⁴⁶ Victor E. W. Hayward to Edwin Weaver, April 26, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 9, Victor W. Hayward.

²⁴⁷ Edwin Weaver to Victor Hayward, June 18, 1962, Victor Hayward to Edwin Weaver, July 4, 1962, "Consultation on African Independent Church Movements, Provisional Agenda," September 6, 1962, Edwin Weaver to Victor Hayward, July 19, 1962, Edwin Weaver to Victor Hayward, September 10, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 9, Victor W. Hayward.

²⁴⁸ WCC, "Statement on African Independent Church Movements," *Occasional Papers Issued by the Division of Missionary Studies, World Council of Churches* 2, no. 4 (September 1962): 1-9.

²⁴⁹ The International Missionary Council founded the Theological Education Fund to fund ministerial training in the Younger Churches at its December 1957-January 1958 meeting in Ghana. See Christine Lienemann-Perrin, *Training for a Relevant Ministry: A Study of the Contribution of the Theological Education Fund* (Madras, India: The Christian Literature Society, 1981), 15-29.

Edwin identified four levels of training that might benefit MCN and other AICs. Local lay leaders, or catechists, could provide the first level in the congregations among other lay members of the churches.²⁵⁰ The Weavers had started monthly three-day classes at this level a few months after arriving to Nigeria and continued them in the years that followed.²⁵¹ Most of the local leaders in the region, however, had no preparation for leading such classes or for providing pastoral care. The Weavers found that in both mission churches and AICs this resulted in a lack of pastoral care and leadership at the congregational level.²⁵² Because people found these needs unmet, they became easy prey to unscrupulous leaders or unorthodox religious practices. There was, therefore, the need to provide the second level of training for local leaders. This became the primary focus of the Weavers and their colleagues and led to the founding of the United Churches Bible College in 1964.²⁵³ The third level of training concerned those who supervised groups of congregations, area leaders in Edwin's description. This level could be obtained in denominational Bible colleges that trained pastors, of which there were a number in the region.²⁵⁴ Finally, the fourth level was the Bachelor of Divinity or its equivalent. The

²⁵⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

²⁵¹ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

²⁵² Edwin I. Weaver, "A Leadership Training Program (For Independent Churches in Eastern Nigeria)," in *Messages and Reports, Africa Mennonite Fellowship* (Bulawayo, Rhodesia, 1965), 33–37.

²⁵³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963; "Minutes of the Second Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, November 7, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.

²⁵⁴ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

newly created University of Nigeria at Nsukka could provide this last, higher level of theological training.

In addition to identifying various levels of training and focusing on the training of local, congregational leaders, Edwin argued that those leaders and the training they received needed to fit into the local congregational contexts in which they served. This corresponded to the move towards indigenization. Since he believed that most village congregations did not have the means to pay a salary to full-time congregational leaders, Edwin argued for a diversity of leadership that would involve more people in the total ministry of the church.²⁵⁵ Churches needed to train people to be pastors, preachers, evangelists, Sunday school workers, youth leaders, and women's leaders. If there were those that did not have a way to support themselves, then leadership preparation should include training in the different trades that could provide for their livelihood. The Bible College included classes in agriculture in an attempt to increase the capacity of students to support themselves and their families.²⁵⁶ The Independent Churches Leaders Meetings urged missionary Bible College principal Stanley Friesen, to add a course in carpentry to the curriculum.²⁵⁷

Leadership training also had to respond to the local culture; the economic, social, and religious contexts had to be considered as well as the prevalent patterns of African

²⁵⁵ Weaver, "A Leadership Training Program (For Independent Churches in Eastern Nigeria)."

²⁵⁶ J. Robert Stauffer to John H. Yoder, April 3, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - J. Robert Stauffer 1964-65; J. Robert and Evelyn Stauffer Family to Supporters, June 30, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Stauffer, J. Robert and Evelyn 1963-65.

²⁵⁷ Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

leadership. The Weavers and their colleagues focused on Bible study, using especially the inductive method, and practical areas such as preaching, evangelism, and Christian education instead of teaching systematic, doctrinal formulations of the faith that seemed overly tied to western ways of thinking.²⁵⁸

Scholarships

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities had already provided scholarship assistance to Mennonite Church Nigeria students before the Weavers' arrival in the region, and the Weavers continued this practice. This was a way to train leaders for the church in the absence of its own mission schools. Such aid included scholarships for young people to attend secondary school and for church leaders to attend Bible colleges.²⁵⁹ Between 1960 and 1967 the mission typically provided six to fourteen high school scholarships to MCN students and two to three Bible college scholarships to church leaders each year.²⁶⁰ Church leaders studied at the Qua Iboe Church Bible College at Abak, the United Missionary Society Theological College at Ilorin, and Trinity College at Umuahia, the union college sponsored by the Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian

²⁵⁸ "Teaching New African Christians," October 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Stanley and Delores Friesen, "Friesen Report," May 19, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores 1965-69; Ken Anderson, *Africa in Three Dimensions*, DVD (converted from 16mm film) (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1967); Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), Mennonite Mission Network, Elkhart, Indiana.

²⁵⁹ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

²⁶⁰ I. U. Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Edwin Weaver to Norman Derstine, November 25, 1961 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 20, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; J. D. Graber to I. U. Nsagak, January 5, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961-1962; Philip Ross to Edwin Weaver, July 11, 1962 and N. Eme to P. J. Ross, September 20, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; C. A. Witt to Edwin Weaver, October 6, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 30, W - Miscellaneous.

churches. As leaders graduated from one of the Bible colleges they took over leadership of the Bible classes at the congregational level that the Weavers had initiated.²⁶¹

By late 1962 the Weavers, looking for ways to engage the AIC community beyond MCN, moved to extend the scholarship program to other AICs. During their first three years in Nigeria, they had been occupied with the establishment and staffing of the Abiriba hospital, the creation and activities of the Inter-Church Study Group, the recruitment of MBMC personnel for Presbyterian schools, pastoral duties at the Ikot Inyang Presbyterian parish, and the guidance of the fledgling MCN and had little time for other engagements.

A number of events during 1962 encouraged them to focus more directly on the larger AIC community. In February they met Harold Turner with whose sympathetic approach to AICs they identified deeply and with whom they developed a long and significant friendship. Later, during the summer, Yoder made an administrative visit to Nigeria and observed in his characteristically insightful way, “We entered the country with the understanding that there were thousands of Christians interested in receiving some kind of guidance from a Mennonite mission, and then discovered that there are only a few hundred who want this guidance to come in the form of a denominational discipline. What does this mean about our duty to the others? Are they no longer our concern...? And what about the still greater number which were never contemplating a relationship to the Mennonite group but whose leaders would be very desirous of Bible

²⁶¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 5, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

training if it were not tied to a denominational allegiance?"²⁶² Finally, the World Council of Churches statement that came out of its Department of Missionary Studies' consultation at Mindolo in September encouraged western missions to provide AIC leaders with opportunities for theological education. By October Edwin was proposing both the establishment of a Bible school for congregational leaders of AICs and scholarships to attend Bible colleges for those who qualified for a higher level of training.²⁶³

Although it took some time for the Weavers to find funding, Edwin eventually implemented a scholarship program for AIC leaders. He envisioned providing the same kind of program that he had developed with MCN for the wider AIC community.²⁶⁴ In late 1962, however, MBMC was facing budget constraints, and he had to delay his plans.²⁶⁵ AIC leaders continued to push for training opportunities, and other missionaries encouraged Edwin to find ways to assist them.²⁶⁶ In late 1963 D. H. W. Gensichen of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) wrote to Weaver, expressing appreciation for his work with AICs and offering to consider applications for bursaries for training AIC

²⁶² John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962.

²⁶³ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Weaver, "Report to the Eastern Nigeria Christian Council," October 17, 1962; Edwin Weaver to C. A. Witt, October 24 and Augburn Witt to Edwin Weaver, November 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 30, W - Miscellaneous.

²⁶⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, August 1, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, February 15, 1965.

²⁶⁵ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 9, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962.

²⁶⁶ Edwin Weaver, "In Conversation with Rev. O. M. Akpan," Meeting Report (Ikot Inyang, Nigeria, June 8, 1963), N. M. Obot to Edwin Weaver, July 3, 1963, Edwin Weaver to N. M. Obot, July 10, 1963, Edwin Weaver to N. M. Obot, July 23, 1963, and Edwin Weaver to S. A. Umo Knight, July 23, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; David Roberts to Edwin Weaver, February 16, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to David Roberts, March 6, 1963, HM-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous.

leaders as part of the TEF's Special Program for Theological Education in Africa.²⁶⁷ In 1964 the TEF approved bursaries for three students and subsequently increased its assistance in order to send a total of six AIC students to Bible colleges between 1964 and 1967.²⁶⁸ The Inter-Church Study Group set up a Theological Education Fund Nigeria and a committee to receive and manage the assistance from TEF and other interested donors.²⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the scholarship program did not finally develop as the Inter-Church Study Group had envisioned because of the outbreak of the civil war in the summer of 1967.

United Churches Bible College

In addition to providing scholarships to attend Bible colleges, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities and the United Independent Churches Fellowship founded the interdenominational United Churches Bible College (UCBC). Their primary motivation was to train congregational leaders, but the initiative was also consistent with the goal of better inter-church relations in the region. The Weavers had found that local, or congregational, leaders usually had no formal training for the roles they played and that pastoral care and leadership suffered as a result. The UCBC was a way to fill this void in Mennonite Church Nigeria as well as in other AICs since there was no other school in the

²⁶⁷ H. W. Gensichen to Edwin I. Weaver, December 5, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.

²⁶⁸ J. Walter Cason to Edwin Weaver, June 11, 1964, Edwin Weaver to Walter Cason, January 1, 1965, Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, May 20, 1965, J. Walter Cason to Edwin Weaver, June 16, 1965, and Charles W. Forman to Edwin Weaver, November 3, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, April 12, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Edwin I. Weaver 1967.

²⁶⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, January 26, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Weaver, "Report of the Planning Committee," February 25, 1967.

region that focused on training leaders at that level.²⁷⁰ The denominational Bible colleges trained people at the pastoral level, and their graduates normally supervised multiple congregations. Edwin referred to these pastoral workers as area leaders, and the mission provided scholarships to train a number of AIC leaders at this level. The UCBC, however, focused on training local, congregational leaders.

There was also an ecumenical motivation for the UCBC. The Weavers believed that getting different churches to work together to establish an interdenominational school was one way to encourage collaboration and understanding between churches that competed with each other and were often in discord.²⁷¹ This was consistent with other projects they initiated such as the Inter-Church Study Group, the United Independent Churches Fellowship, the Inter-Church Team, and the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings that were all motivated partly by a desire to get people who did not normally collaborate, especially mission churches and AICs, to work together.

Finally, the Weavers and their MBMC colleagues saw the UCBC as one way to establish relationships with AICs and their leaders.²⁷² Elton's World Christian Crusade was already operating a Bible school for AICs when the Weavers arrived in Nigeria and through it had established significant relationships with a large number of AIC

²⁷⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 23, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 23, 1963; Weaver, "A Leadership Training Program (For Independent Churches in Eastern Nigeria)."

²⁷¹ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

²⁷² John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Weaver, "Report to the Eastern Nigeria Christian Council," October 17, 1962; Edwin Weaver to Lloyd Fisher, Earl Roberts, and N. Eme, March 31, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1964.

congregations.²⁷³ Taking Elton's experience as an example and counting on his assistance, Edwin and Yoder both argued that MBMC might similarly be able to connect with a larger number of AICs and gain their trust through the provision of leadership training in the form of a Bible college.

While Edwin had raised the possibility of establishing a school to train church leaders already in January 1961, a number of factors worked to retard its development. The first was simply the lack of necessary personnel. The Weavers were busy with responsibilities at Ikot Inyang and with MCN, and other mission personnel worked at the Abiriba hospital and in mission schools during the first years. The first missionaries assigned to help the Weavers in church work, Darrel and Marian Hostetler, did not arrive until October 1963.²⁷⁴ Darrel taught at UCBC and eventually became principal.²⁷⁵ Other teachers only arrived in 1964 and 1965 when the Presbyterian and Anglican churches respectively assigned personnel to work with Weaver on the Inter-Church Team.²⁷⁶ These workers taught courses at the UCBC in addition to conducting their research activities.

²⁷³ Edwin Weaver to Don Jacobs, July 13, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 13, 1962.

²⁷⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 12, 1963; "Minutes of the Second Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship."

²⁷⁵ Inin, "Minutes of the School Committee of the United Independent Church's Fellowship," December 16, 1963; "Courses Offered Term I, 1964, Uyo Bible School," 1964, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 7, Other AIC Docs.

²⁷⁶ N. Eme to Edwin Weaver, February 3, 1964; Edwin Weaver to N. Eme, March 6, 1964; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 15, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1963; Edwin Weaver to G. E. I. Cockin, December 30, 1964 and Edwin Weaver to G. E. I. Cockin, February 16, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 23, Inter-Church Study Comm., Corresp.; Edwin Weaver to C. E. I. Cockin, April 9, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 21, Rev G. E. I. Cockin.

The mission also lacked the necessary financial resources during the first years that the Weavers were in Nigeria. MBMC was experiencing budget shortfalls and was slow to approve new expenditures. After asking Graber and Yoder several times to clarify the mission's financial commitment to the Bible college idea without success, Edwin informed them in December 1962 that he had "given up" on the idea because of the lack of resources.²⁷⁷

Weaver was also concerned to make the Bible College project a shared initiative. He hesitated to start it until a wide range of churches and missions in the region gave their support.²⁷⁸ He had two concerns. The first was the size of the AIC community. He was convinced that no one mission had sufficient resources on its own to provide training for the large number of church leaders that needed it.²⁷⁹ The second concern had to do with inter-church relationships. For their first years in Nigeria, the Weavers' work with AICs was largely limited to MCN. Any Bible college they initiated would necessarily have been a Mennonite Bible college. As MCN was relatively small and could not provide enough students to make a Bible college feasible, it would have had to draw students from other churches.²⁸⁰ Edwin feared that other missions and churches would see this as proselytization, an attempt to draw members from their churches to MCN. It

²⁷⁷ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 10, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 9, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962.

²⁷⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 5, 1963.

²⁷⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, September 6, 1963.

²⁸⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962.

would have added to the inter-church competition and rivalry that the mission was hoping to counter in the region. When MBMC did start a Bible college, it was only after the Weavers had formed the United Independent Churches Fellowship which provided an inter-church, non-proselytizing identity and governance structure for the initiative.²⁸¹

The UCBC opened its doors in February 1964 and provided training for AIC congregational leaders until the civil war forced its closure in 1967. “College” in this context meant a school at the secondary level where the training was specialized in a particular field.²⁸² The UCBC’s terms were three months long followed by three months of time off.²⁸³ This provided six months of school per year and allowed students to return home to maintain relationships and leadership positions in their churches between terms. There were forty-eight students during the first term and between twenty-three and forty-two students during subsequent terms.²⁸⁴ Teachers included Mennonite missionaries, a World Christian Crusade missionary, Inter-Church Team members, and sometimes AIC leaders.²⁸⁵ MBMC personnel sought to attract mature students, those who already had

²⁸¹ Inim, “First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship.”

²⁸² Darrel and Marian Hostetler to Supporters, March 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, Hostetler, Darrel Marian 1960-64.

²⁸³ Edwin Weaver to Lloyd Fisher, Earl Roberts, and N. Eme, March 31, 1964; John H. Yoder to Whom It May Concern, August 10, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965.

²⁸⁴ “Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the United Independent Churches’ Fellowship”; Darrel and Marian Hostetler to Friends, August 26, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 5, Hostetler, Darrel Marian 1960-64; Darrel Hostetler to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 31, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 28, 1966 and Stanley and Delores Friesen, “Mission Report for November,” December 12, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967; Stanley and Delores Friesen, “Friesen Report,” May 19, 1967.

²⁸⁵ “Courses Offered Term I, 1964, Uyo Bible School”; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 18, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1964.

significant leadership positions in their churches, and encouraged the admittance of women leaders.²⁸⁶ There were four women students out of twenty-eight total during the last term in 1967.²⁸⁷ At first all but a few of the students were from the five churches that were members of the United Independent Churches Fellowship, but as time went on an increasing number of AICs sent students.²⁸⁸ By December 1966 students enrolled came from ten different churches. As they had hoped, the UCBC provided MBMC missionaries and the other members of the Inter-Church Team the opportunity to develop relationships with a wide range of AICs.²⁸⁹

The most significant challenge that the UCBC faced during its existence was finding a permanent physical structure in which to house the college. Having to move a number of times when its rented facilities were no longer available, MBMC decided to acquire land and build a campus.²⁹⁰ Unable to find affordable land with clear title in the

²⁸⁶ Friesen, "Minutes of the Bible School Meeting," October 18, 1965.

²⁸⁷ Friesen, "Friesen Report," May 19, 1967.

²⁸⁸ "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the United Independent Churches' Fellowship"; Edwin Weaver to The Theological Fund, November 25, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Friesen, "Mission Report for November," December 12, 1966.

²⁸⁹ Timothy Essien, "Report on United Churches Bible College, Uyo" (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 28, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; "Inter-Church Group," November 4, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

²⁹⁰ Adolph E. Inim, "The Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the Independent Churches Fellowship," (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, April 29, 1964) and "The 9th Meeting of the Independent Churches' Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, August 1, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; John H. Yoder to Whom It May Concern, August, 10, 1964; John H. Yoder to Darrel Hostetler, October 12, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964; Edwin Weaver to David C. Leatherman, July 29, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 9, Leatherman, David C.; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 4, 1966, Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 1, 1966, and Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 17, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

Uyo area after months of searching, missionaries finally negotiated for a fifteen-acre plot in a village north of the town.²⁹¹ The deal was never finalized, however, since the survey paperwork was waiting for the signature of the Surveyor General of the Eastern Region when the war broke out and the missionaries evacuated.²⁹²

The plans to acquire land and build a structure to house the UCBC opened again the conversation about the challenge of reconciling the impulse to build mission institutions and the focus on indigenization and avoiding dependency on foreign funding. Yoder encouraged Weaver to take over the work of Elton's Bible College that he had been forced to discontinue when the missionary in charge left the field.²⁹³ Yoder warned, however, against committing significant mission subsidies when Weaver asked for funds and personnel to develop such a college.²⁹⁴ His concerns were both the budget shortfalls that the mission was experiencing and the danger of Nigerian churches becoming dependent on foreign funds, a condition that he thought might "paternalize national churches."²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Stanley Friesen to Wilbert Shenk, November 2, 1966, Stanley and Delores Friesen, "Mission Report for November," December 12, 1966, and Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 31, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

²⁹² Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 17, 1967.

²⁹³ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962.

²⁹⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 9, 1962.

²⁹⁵ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 9, 1962; John H. Yoder to Darrel Hostetler, January 22, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 41, Yoder, John Howard, 1965-1972; John H. Yoder to Darrel Hostetler, May 26, 1965, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65.

Weaver agreed with Yoder's concerns but pointed out that funding of some sort was necessary. Elton's college had closed precisely because of a lack of resources.²⁹⁶ Weaver argued that the mission should find a way to provide assistance without necessarily making AICs dependent on MBMC for leadership or funding.²⁹⁷ When the UCBC started he agreed that MBMC would pay the rent for the necessary physical structure if the churches involved in the United Independent Churches Fellowship would help pay the salary of the clerk that the college hired.²⁹⁸ Churches that sent students were to support them financially during and after their studies. The UCBC did not pay teachers directly because they were, for the most part, MBMC or World Christian Crusade missionaries and members of the Inter-Church Team that the Presbyterian and Anglican churches funded. In the end MBMC had to provide most of the resources to run the college since the member churches of the United Independent Churches Fellowship found it difficult to contribute as they had promised.²⁹⁹ The Fellowship ceased to exist in any case, and MBMC became the major funder of the initiative.

For Weaver the UCBC reliance on mission funding was not as problematic as it was for some of his colleagues. He argued that the important point was to keep churches

²⁹⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; S. G. Elton to Edwin Weaver, February 15, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 33, S. G. Elton.

²⁹⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963.

²⁹⁸ Inim, "Third Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; Inim, "Minutes of the School Committee of the United Independent Church's Fellowship," December 16, 1963.

²⁹⁹ J. E. Akpan, "Minutes of the United Churches' Bible College Committee Meeting," March 28, 1964 and "Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: United Independent Churches Fellowship, December 5, 1964), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 1, 1966.

from being dependent on foreign funds for their operating costs and pastors' salaries, and that funding a Bible college to train their leaders would not encourage such dependency.³⁰⁰ His missionary colleagues and supervisors agreed that the mission should provide assistance, but they also sought to slow down the institutionalization of the initiative, giving the AICs more time to develop a sense of ownership and find ways to help fund the college.³⁰¹ When the Nigeria missionaries sought MBMC approval for an accelerated plan to build a campus for the UCBC over a number of months at a cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000, the mission's Overseas Committee balked, preferring instead a previously approved, incremental building plan to provide \$5,000 annually for five years.³⁰² In the end it was a moot point, since approval of the land survey of the building site was not complete before the outbreak of war. The discussion does show, however, that despite their hesitancy to develop mission institutions, the Weavers were willing to do so when those institutions did not threaten the indigenous nature of the Nigerian churches.

³⁰⁰ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 9, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966.

³⁰¹ Darrel M. Hostetler to John H. Yoder and Edwin Weaver, September 21, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 1, 1966; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Stanley Friesen, February 11, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966.

³⁰² Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 4, 1966 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Stan and Delores Friesen, January 12, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, J. Robert Stauffer, Lloyd J. Fisher, and Cyril K. Gingerich, January 12, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Stanley Friesen, February 11, 1966; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, March 23, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Stanley Friesen, May 12, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

The Relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria

Although they refocused Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' approach in order to encourage better inter-church relationships and engage the dynamic African Independent Church movement in the region, the Weavers and their colleagues continued to work with Mennonite Church Nigeria. The mission had sent the Weavers to southeastern Nigeria to guide and assist a large influx of AIC congregations and members into the Mennonite fold, but concerns about inter-church relations, indigenization, and leadership motivated them to modify their approach to the burgeoning Mennonite movement. This section will describe both the Weavers' changing relationship with MCN during their time in Nigeria and the church's response to the new mission approach. It will show that while they had stopped the early flow of congregations into the movement, ending its rapid growth, missionaries worked to strengthen the church by providing scholarships, helping develop a workable organizational structure, facilitating agricultural development in villages where MCN congregations were located, and solidifying the church's relationship with the global Mennonite community. They also sought to protect its indigenous nature by avoiding assistance that might encourage dependency on foreign funders, by facilitating collaboration with other AICs, and by encouraging theological reflection and faith practice that would be appropriate for its particular context.

The Weavers and their MBMC colleagues included MCN in the various inter-church ministries that they developed and came to see the church as an asset in their work to ameliorate inter-church relationships and engage AICs. They saw themselves as

fraternal workers and fellow church members in the church, although their status as mission representatives gave them significant power in their relationship with the church.

This section will show that while MCN articulated some appreciation for the mission's novel mission approach in the region, it also demonstrated unease with MBMC's relationship with other AICs and the Presbyterian Church, and sometimes disagreed outright with the way missionaries attempted to protect its indigenous nature. Since the religious history of the region led MCN to expect the mission to invest in its well-being via mission services such as schools and health care institutions, it likely understood assistance to other churches and their institutions as a diversion of resources that by right should have been theirs. The mission's decision to limit the direct support that it gave the church in order to protect its indigenous nature similarly would have seemed like a denial of its entitlement.

The Mennonite Mission's Evolving Relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria

During their first weeks in Nigeria, the Weavers made a number of discoveries that cooled their enthusiasm for adding congregations to Mennonite Church Nigeria. Its leaders were untrained and some were illiterate, causing the Weavers to question if they were capable of developing the movement into a strong church.³⁰³ Some even seemed unscrupulous, appearing to use their churches or their relationships with foreign

³⁰³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 14, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

missionaries for personal gain.³⁰⁴ Some were polygamous, a situation Weaver noted he might accept if they were new Christians.³⁰⁵ In fact they were not and had benefited from the presence and teaching of the established mission churches for decades already. The other mission churches in the region did not permit polygamous leadership, so for the church to be accepted in the wider church community, it would have to conform. In addition, the presence of the new MCN seemed to exacerbate the already highly competitive and confusing religious milieu in which churches and missions competed with each other for members.³⁰⁶

The Weavers also found that although MCN had taken on the name “Mennonite,” it was unacquainted with Mennonite identity as understood by the North American Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities’ constituency and unaware of Mennonite and Anabaptist streams in the larger movement of western Christianity.³⁰⁷ They concluded that it was not really any different from other AICs in the region.³⁰⁸ As such, its religious identity grew out of the religious history of the region and the contemporary mix of Christian witness represented by the many churches and missions that were active there.

³⁰⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; I. U. Nsasak, “Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria),” (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, April 10, 1961), IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961 Confidential; Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, 36–37.

³⁰⁵ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

³⁰⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959.

³⁰⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.

³⁰⁸ Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo.”

The situation, along with the fact that there were then over fifty congregations in MCN and dozens more that wanted to join, created for the Weavers an impression of an unwieldy movement and raised questions in their minds about the feasibility of trying to form it into a respectable church.³⁰⁹

There were, however, reasons to remain in Nigeria and work with MCN. The Hostetlers had already accepted these congregations into the Mennonite fold and the mission had committed to work with them and to assist with medical, educational, and agricultural services, the kinds of assistance that foreign missions often provided.³¹⁰ Graber argued that the creation of a strong Mennonite church would provide a stabilizing influence in the confused and competitive religious milieu in the region.³¹¹ For their part, the Weavers and Yoder suggested that MBMC might be able to help decrease the confusion and play a reconciling role in the competitive religious milieu of the region, particularly between AICs and the established mission churches.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Edwin Weaver to Earl D. Hunter, November 8, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 27, United Independent Churches Fellowship; Edwin Weaver, "Milestones in Nigeria," April 13, 1964, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

³¹⁰ J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; J. D. Graber, "Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities," (April 8, 1959), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59 and IV-18-16; "Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities Minutes of the Executive Committee," (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 8, 1959), IV-06-02 MBM Exec Committee Documents and Mtg Minutes 1906-1971, Box 4.

³¹¹ J. D. Graber to Edwin Weaver, December 25, 1959 and J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, January 26, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961.

³¹² John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1959 and John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 15, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and John H. Yoder, January 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 18, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 29, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960;

In light of the complicated situation in which they found themselves, the Weavers sought to make the challenge facing them more workable. They stopped receiving congregations into MCN, thus limiting the size of the church and avoiding an even more unmanageable task.³¹³ In February 1960 they also stipulated that they would work only with those leaders and congregations that were willing to build a church with “New Testament standards.”³¹⁴ For them this meant that while polygamy might be tolerated for church members, it was not acceptable for church leaders. Edwin Weaver suggested that polygamous leaders step down from their leadership positions and choose a son or other relative, whom MBMC would then provide theological training, to take their place.

The Weavers’ response to the situation they faced resulted in significant changes in MCN. There was a thinning of the church. Leaders that refused to abide by the Weavers’ stipulations left the church, taking their congregations with them.³¹⁵ In the end only ten of the original congregations remained. The others left because they were

John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, February 1, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

³¹³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 13, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 1960 and Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 12, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60; Edwin Weaver to Earl D. Hunter, November 8, 1963; Weaver, “Milestones in Nigeria.”

³¹⁴ “Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria,” (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church, Nigeria, February 26, 1960), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 6, 1960, and I. U. Nsagak to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; “Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” (Uyo, Nigeria: Independent Churches Leaders, March 12, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo.”

³¹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 6, 1960; “Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” March 12, 1966; Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo.”

polygamous and, in some cases, because MCN decided to ban their practice of requiring payment for communion, healing, or other church services.³¹⁶ Only two former leaders accepted Weaver's offer to train a younger leader to take their place. Those who remained accepted the standards that the Weavers stipulated and tended to be literate and young leaders.³¹⁷

Strengthening MCN

The Weavers and their Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities colleagues sought to strengthen Mennonite Church Nigeria, both for its own benefit and to increase its ability to relate to other churches, particularly mission churches. One way to strengthen the church was to provide biblical and theological training in congregations and via Bible schools in the region. The Weavers started monthly Bible studies in congregations already in January 1960, and these became regular events that drew participation from across multiple congregations.³¹⁸ The mission also provided church leaders with scholarships to study at Bible Colleges in the region.³¹⁹ Those who graduated eventually took responsibility for the monthly MCN congregational-level training.³²⁰

³¹⁶ Nsasak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)."

³¹⁷ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960.

³¹⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 5, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 12, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 22, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, March 15, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960; Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 4, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

³¹⁹ Nsasak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Edwin Weaver, "Nigeria," in *The Church in Mission 1961* (Morton, IL: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1961), 275-76; Edwin Weaver to Norman Derstine, November 25, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 29, 1962,

The Weavers also sought to strengthen the church by introducing a new organizational structure. When they first arrived MCN was made up of a number of groups of congregations that had come together to solicit the mission's assistance.³²¹ Each group had a leader who held the bulk of the decision-making power, to whom his group's congregations were loyal, and who represented the group to the larger church.³²² In order to encourage congregational initiative, loyalty to MCN instead of to the group leaders, and collaboration on common projects, the Weavers and the church leadership that remained after the thinning of the church established a more centralized structure in which the church executive committee related directly to each congregation.³²³

This worked for a while, until the church started to grow. Then it became cumbersome, and MCN subsequently reorganized, dividing its congregations into three and then four local, geographical areas that held most of the leadership authority.³²⁴

IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver, "Nigeria," in *Obeying Christ in Crisis 1962* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1962), 235–37.

³²⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963; Friesen, "Mission Report for November," December 12, 1966.

³²¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960; "Meeting of Independent Church Leaders," March 12, 1966.

³²² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³²³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 6, 1960; Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)."

³²⁴ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 8, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963; Darrel and Marian Hostetler to Supporters, March 1964; "Constitution of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria, Revised 1965," May 6, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966."

Weaver noted that this decentralized system worked better.³²⁵ This is not surprising since a decentralized arrangement would have corresponded better with traditional Ibibio social structures in which religious authority rested primarily with local actors.

MBMC missionaries also sought to strengthen MCN through agricultural and medical assistance. After the mission was unsuccessful at placing agricultural specialists at the Eastern Regional Government level, three missionary couples worked at agricultural development in villages where there were MCN congregations.³²⁶ While the mission did not have significant financial resources for agricultural initiatives, missionaries provided technical expertise and helped villagers access assistance from the government's agricultural schemes from which they would not have benefited otherwise.³²⁷ MBMC doctors and nurses from Abiriba provided periodic clinic services in communities where there were MCN congregations.³²⁸ At the outbreak of the civil war they were in the midst of investigating the possibility of establishing permanent

³²⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 8, 1962.

³²⁶ Glen Miller to J. D. Graber, March 17, 1963 and Glen Miller, "MBMC in Nigeria and Ghana" (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 30, 1963), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; Cecil Miller to Roy Kreider, April 7, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Cecil and Judy 1961-65; J. Robert Stauffer to John H. Yoder, April 3, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - J. Robert Stauffer 1964-65; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966"; Clifford Amstutz, "Report on Agricultural Program" (Uyo, Nigeria, August 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Clifford Amstutz 1966-67; Clifford Amstutz to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 27, 1967.

³²⁷ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Franklin Bishop, February 2, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 14, Frank Bishop; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Glen Miller to John H. Yoder, December 17, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Glen R. Miller 1962-1963; J. Robert and Evelyn Stauffer Family to Supporters, June 30, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Stauffer, J. Robert and Evelyn 1963-65; J. Robert Stauffer to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 19, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - J. Robert Stauffer 1966; Clifford Amstutz to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 27, 1967; Chima J. Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria*, 216.

³²⁸ John Grasse to J. D. Graber, September 24, 1962 and John Grasse to John H. Yoder, October 26, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962.

outpatient work in Ukanafun that would have served MCN congregations and their villages in Ibianga and Abak areas.³²⁹ Such agricultural and medical initiatives involved whole communities and not just Mennonite congregations, so likely enhanced the standing of those congregations in their respective villages.

The Weavers and their missionary colleagues introduced MCN to the wider ecclesial circles of southeastern Nigeria, facilitated its introduction to the global Mennonite movement, and helped it to solidify those relationships, both inside and outside of Nigeria. The Weavers encouraged MCN to develop working relationships with other AICs and included it as a founding member of the United Independent Churches Fellowship.³³⁰ MCN leaders participated in the Independent Churches Leadership Meetings.³³¹ Ime U. Nsasak, who was the MCN executive committee's secretary for most of the eight years that the Weavers were in Nigeria, participated regularly in the Inter-Church Study Group, authored six of the ICSG's papers, and was a member of the Inter-

³²⁹ Lloyd J. Fisher, "Field Coordinating Committee," Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, June 24, 1967), Lena Weber and Nelda Rhodes, "Report to Mission Field Coordinating Committee Concerning Running of a Proposed Hospital" (Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, June 24, 1967), Lloyd J. Fisher, "Field Coordinating Committee," Meeting Minutes (Enugu, Nigeria: Field Coordinating Committee, MBMC Nigeria, June 28, 1967), Lloyd J. Fisher to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 30, 1967, and Lloyd J. Fisher to M. A. Udofia, June 30, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967.

³³⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963; Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 10, 24-26; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 15, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966.

³³¹ Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," December 17, 1965; Nsasak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders"; Nsasak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," February 18, 1967.

Church Team.³³² Edwin Weaver worked to develop collaboration between MCN and the two mission churches in whose comity territories it had congregations, and he sought ways to help it relate positively with Christian Council of Nigeria churches, even suggesting that it might desire and be able to join the Council some day.³³³ Building relationships with other churches contributed to the mission's goal of inter-church reconciliation in the region, but the principle of indigenization was another reason for encouraging such relationships. The Weavers and their colleagues believed that interaction with other churches from its culture and context would be more useful for MCN's religious development than would a reliance on North American Mennonite religious beliefs and practices.³³⁴

The Weavers did consider relationships to the larger Mennonite movement valuable for the church and sought to develop such ties. Edwin and Nsagak traveled together to the African Mennonite Fellowship meetings in Kenya in 1961 where Nsagak

³³² "Inter Church Study Committee, Minutes of the Second Meeting," June 8, 1962; O. Mbuk, "Inter-Church Study Group," August 14, 1965; Weaver, "Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting," May 13, 1967; "Index to Inter-Church Study Group Papers," July 1967, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, July 12, 1965; "Independent Church Team," August 2, 1965.

³³³ Edwin Weaver to Norman Green, January 26, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria"; Weaver, "A Report to the Eastern Region Council," September 19, 1961; Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, June 12, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 18, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, November 14, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 15, 1967; Edwin Weaver to H. Ernest Bennett, July 6, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

³³⁴ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, May 31, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 13, Yoder, John H 1956-61; J. D. Graber to I. U. Nsagak, June 6, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; Weaver, "A Report to the Eastern Region Council," September 19, 1961; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria; Edwin Weaver to Alan Griffiths, April 15, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.

represented MCN to the Africa-wide network of Mennonite churches.³³⁵ The Weavers hosted the visit of a commission from the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and introduced MCN to it, eventually helping to form MEDANigeria to provide small business loans to church members, another initiative that was abruptly halted by the civil war.³³⁶

After the thinning process of 1960, MCN grew once again through baptizing new members, by creating new congregations, and by accepting existing congregations that sought to join the church. Those congregations that wanted to join applied directly to the MCN, and the church discussed and decided their cases at the annual church business meeting.³³⁷ At least in some cases a commission of church leaders visited the congregations and required them to study and accept MCN teaching to join.³³⁸ This process differed from the former practice of Hostetler who visited congregations, read a list of doctrines, answered questions that arose, and accepted the congregations into the church after a positive congregational vote. The church also established new

³³⁵ Norman Derstine to Edwin Weaver, I. U. Nsasak, and S. J. Hostetler, October 4, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 26, Norman Derstine; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 25, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, April 6, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, April 11, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961-1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

³³⁶ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, September 17, 1964 and Edwin and Irene Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, September 30, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Edwin Weaver to Orie O. Miller, October 12, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; J. Robert Stauffer, "Minutes of Medan Meeting," (Uyo, Nigeria: MEDA, May 3, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1965.

³³⁷ Nsasak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 5.

³³⁸ I. U. Nsasak, Frank A. Udo, and O. E. Essiet, "Report on Visit to New Churches in Ikot Eyo Seeking Affiliation with MCN" (Mennonite Church Nigeria, December 8, 1962), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 4, I. U. Nsasak and D. U. Otong.

congregations in areas where groups of people sought to join the church.³³⁹ In some cases healing homes and those that frequented them evolved into new congregations.³⁴⁰ The Weavers participated, helping to teach and baptize new members and forming new congregations.³⁴¹ They continued to be aware of the tendency of people to leave the established mission churches to join other groups and sought to keep that from happening in their work.³⁴²

MCN grew significantly between 1960 and the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. Even during the early period of thinning in 1960, the congregations that remained reported some fifty new members through baptism.³⁴³ In November 1962 Weaver reported a membership of around five hundred in sixteen different congregations with six new congregations in the process of forming.³⁴⁴ When the sixth annual conference met in April 1964 the numbers had increased to twenty-five congregations with over one

³³⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 9, 1961 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 4, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; I. U. Nsagak to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria National Correspondence 1961-1962; Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, June 12, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62.

³⁴⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 9, 1961.

³⁴¹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, November 4, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 18, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 21, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

³⁴² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 8, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to Boyd Nelson, January 1, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 24, Nelson, Boyd.

³⁴³ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

³⁴⁴ Edwin Weaver to Swartzendruber, November 24, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M - Miscellaneous.

thousand members.³⁴⁵ The eighth annual conference in February 1966 reported one hundred and twenty-seven baptisms and ninety child dedications during the previous year, and in January 1967 Weaver wrote that the MCN counted thirty-six congregations with two thousand four hundred and six members with a number of new congregations in formation.³⁴⁶

While Edwin Weaver had early on identified the danger that the formation of MCN might add to the religious confusion and competition in the region, he came to believe that the presence of the church was an important asset in MBMC's mission approach. He argued that the church provided an avenue through which to help other AICs and that if the work with MCN did not succeed there would be consequent adverse affects on the mission's work with other AICs.³⁴⁷ The church's presence also gave the mission stability, meaningful relationships, and belonging in the region, and this was a valuable advantage.³⁴⁸ In addition, as it engaged and assisted the church, both AICs and mission churches were able to see the integrity of MBMC's goals and approach, and it gained credibility among churches in both camps.³⁴⁹ The engagement with MCN,

³⁴⁵ Edwin Weaver, "Address at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church at Mbiabm" (Mbiabm, Nigeria, April 30, 1964), IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Annual Mission Board Meeting 1964.

³⁴⁶ Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67; Edwin Weaver to Boyd Nelson, January 1, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 24, Nelson, Boyd.

³⁴⁷ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 15, 1967; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 29, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

³⁴⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Verney Unruh, October 27, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, General Conference Mennonite Board of Missions 1966-69.

³⁴⁹ Weaver, "Files on the United Independent Churches Fellowship, Transcript," 6-7.

working from within as fraternal workers and fellow church members to help it become a viable and strong church, was essential to the mission's overall strategy. It helped win the confidence of the various churches and missions, facilitating the mission's mediating role in its various inter-church initiatives.

Protecting Mennonite Church Nigeria's Indigenous Nature

Missionaries sought to protect and reinforce the indigenous nature of Mennonite Church Nigeria and decrease the likelihood of dependency. They put limits on the provision of financial and human resources to the church; they encouraged relationships with other AICs; and they encouraged theological understandings that were appropriate for the local context. When the Weavers arrived in Nigeria, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities had already begun providing a monthly subsidy (£20) to the church for its leaders' travel costs.³⁵⁰ As the church grew it requested an increase, but the mission consistently refused, citing the danger of financial dependency on foreign funds.³⁵¹ The Weavers solicited new missionary personnel for the Nigeria field when their workload

³⁵⁰ Graber, "Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities," April 8, 1959; Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, January 6, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1960.

³⁵¹ "Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria," February 26, 1960; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1960; John H. Yoder to I. U. Nsasak, May 24, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960; Edwin Weaver to David C. Leatherman, February 2, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; "An Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church Nigeria to Mr. W. R. Shenk," November 7, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1965; I. U. Nsasak to MBMC, December 22, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Edwin I. Weaver 1967; Edwin I. Weaver, "A Philosophy of Mission," 1967, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 2, A Philosophy of Mission by Weavers; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak, February 3, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Edwin I. Weaver 1967.

became heavy, but they and their colleagues warned against assigning too many missionaries to work with MCN lest the church become dependent on mission personnel.³⁵² Missionaries encouraged the church to collaborate with and strengthen its ties to other churches, including AICs, in the region.³⁵³ They believed that those relationships would be more useful and more important for the church as it developed its theology and religious practice than would be its relationship with MBMC and the Mennonite Church in North America.³⁵⁴

Edwin Weaver articulated the need for MCN to develop theological understandings and spiritual practices that were meaningful in its particular context. He hoped not to impose North American Mennonite doctrine and practice on the church.³⁵⁵ Missionaries instead sought to focus their teaching efforts primarily on biblical studies and advocated standards they identified with the New Testament instead of using

³⁵² Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1962, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 30, 1962, and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and Roy Kreider, July 5, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Darrel M. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, November 24, 1964, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65.

³⁵³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963; Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 10, 27-28; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

³⁵⁴ Weaver, "A Report to the Eastern Region Council," September 19, 1961; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 27-28; Edwin Weaver to Anni Dyck, October 25, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 24, Misc.

³⁵⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963; Edwin Weaver to Andrew F. Walls, October 2, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 31, Walls, A. F.; Edwin Weaver to Alan Griffiths, April 15, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Ken Anderson, *Africa in Three Dimensions*.

systematic theological frameworks common in western theology.³⁵⁶ Whether in their deliberations about how much support to give the church or in their provision of biblical and theological training, missionaries sought to assist MCN in ways that encouraged and protected its indigenous nature.

The case of MBMC's missionary approach in Ibianga, one of the MCN areas, provides an example of the way the mission's concerns for indigenization played out on the ground in Nigeria. The MCN congregations in Ibianga had benefited less from missionary assistance than had those around Uyo.³⁵⁷ Although it was in the Qua Iboe Mission comity area, expatriate missionaries had not made significant progress and the health and educational institutions and services that normally accompanied them were few.³⁵⁸ Many people continued to practice the traditional religion and were ignorant of the principles of modern health care.³⁵⁹

MBMC missionaries lived over twenty kilometers away, around Uyo, but visited Ibianga regularly. Irene Weaver worked with the women's group, Abiriba personnel sometimes provided medical clinics, and for a while Edwin and Irene spent one week

³⁵⁶ "Teaching New African Christians"; Friesen, "Friesen Report," May 19, 1967; Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*.

³⁵⁷ S. E. Akuri and S. I. Okembe, "The Evangelical Campaign Held at Ibianga by the Presbyterian Students of the Trinity College," July 16, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; John H. Yoder to Overseas Committee, November 9, 1964, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

³⁵⁸ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 30, 1962.

³⁵⁹ S. E. Akuri and S. I. Okembe, "The Evangelical Campaign Held at Ibianga by the Presbyterian Students of the Trinity College," July 16, 1962 and Kalu U. Achuoha, "Report on Ikot Ibianga Evangelism," August 9, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 36 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1960-62; Edwin Weaver to Clayton Beyler, November 29, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 8; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

each month leading Bible studies in Ibianga congregations.³⁶⁰ Since the area had not been exposed to significant missionary engagement, Yoder suggested that instead of following old patterns of placing resident missionaries and building mission institutions there, the mission treat it as a test case for a new missionary approach.³⁶¹ He had followed closely missiologist Jacob Loewen's reports about a non-resident strategy in which missionaries visited their mission fields regularly but did not reside there or build institutions.³⁶² This appeared to allow local people the time between visits to process missionary teaching and appropriate it in useful ways. It also avoided replacing local cultural ways with those that the missionary brought, apparently a common problem with the traditional, resident missionary paradigm. In the past such replacement had resulted in dependency on foreign missionaries and their resources and helped destroy indigenous social systems. The Weavers agreed with Yoder's concerns and also found Loewen's missiological analysis helpful.³⁶³

The Ibianga congregations, however, were persistent. They repeatedly requested the placement of a resident missionary couple in their area.³⁶⁴ After extensive work there,

³⁶⁰ John H. Yoder to Overseas Committee, November 9, 1964; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, November 14, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962.

³⁶¹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 2, 1963 and John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, June 7, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

³⁶² John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963; Loewen, "Short-Term Summer Programs Focus Attention on Time and Timing in Missions"; John H. Yoder to Overseas Committee, November 9, 1964.

³⁶³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1963.

³⁶⁴ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 30, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962.

Edwin suggested that the mission should find ways to increase its engagement in Ibianga and that a resident missionary couple might, in fact, be the correct strategy to adopt.³⁶⁵ He went as far as suggesting that MBMC should build a house there for the future missionaries.³⁶⁶ The Weavers were not doctrinaire in their application of mission theory and in their work often relied more on their experience on the ground than on rigid missiological principles. Yoder reacted sharply, however, to Edwin's suggestion, arguing that the mission should maintain its strategy in order to test more completely the new approach.³⁶⁷ The Weavers relented, and MBMC built a small, three-room house where missionaries could lodge during their periodic visits.³⁶⁸ Missionaries continued to reside in the Uyo area where they worked most closely with the United Churches Bible College, visiting Ibianga on a regular basis.

Independent and/or Indigenous Mission Church?

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' policies and approach to Mennonite Church Nigeria grew partly from its own notion of the church as an African Independent

³⁶⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 15, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 30, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 5, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

³⁶⁶ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 28, 1963 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963.

³⁶⁷ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, September 26, 1963; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 10, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964.

³⁶⁸ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 15, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1963; Edwin Weaver to Roy Kreider, March 30, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1964; Darrel M. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, November 24, 1964, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Darrell Hostetler 1964-65.

and/or a mission church, an understanding that evolved over time. In late 1958 as Hostetler engaged the AIC congregations that invited the mission to Nigeria, he referred to them as an “indigenous” church.³⁶⁹ This was a missiological construct that implied that the church met the three-self standard of being self-administering, self-propagating, and self-financing.³⁷⁰ According to indigenous church theory this was the goal of missions and implied autonomy and a certain amount of maturity. During 1959 Hostetler and the congregations that invited the mission to Nigeria collaborated in the establishment of MCN and envisioned mission assistance for educational and medical initiatives that the church could not provide on its own.³⁷¹ The assumption was that the Weavers would continue with the same approach when they arrived.³⁷² In that sense MCN would be a mission church like the Mennonite Church in India that continued to receive subsidies for the mission institutions it had inherited. MCN was autonomous but had taken on the name “Mennonite” and would receive assistance from the mission, especially for its mission institutions. The difference between the church in India and MCN would be that

³⁶⁹ S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 1, 1958 and S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, November 5, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1958; S. J. Hostetler to Paul Peachey, November 2, 1958, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 21, Nigeria Church, 1958-1960.

³⁷⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk, “Henry Venn’s Legacy,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 2 (1977): 16–19; Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983); T. Stanley Soltau, *Missions at the Crossroads: The Indigenous Church—A Solution for the Unfinished Task* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1959).

³⁷¹ S. J. Hostetler, “Report of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in Calabar Province,” November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-1959; Graber, “Report to the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities,” April 8, 1959.

³⁷² J. D. Graber to S. J. Hostetler, August 13, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60.

the mission had created the Indian church over half a century while it had received functioning congregations into the Nigerian church over a ten-month period in 1959.

When the Weavers arrived they questioned this understanding of the church and its relationship with the mission. Although they agreed that MCN congregations were functioning churches, the Weavers argued that they were not as indigenous as Hostetler and Graber had assumed. They wrote to Hostetler in Ghana, “They are indigenous, unattached churches, but not in the sense that we are taking it.”³⁷³ The Weavers doubted that their leaders were of the quality necessary for a strong and successful church, and they feared that the church was susceptible to an increasing dependency on foreign funding. In addition, the church was Mennonite in name and by formal decision of the mission, but its religious identity was not related to the Anabaptist or Mennonite movement one finds in western church history, nor did it find its inspiration in the beliefs and practices that North American Mennonites would have found familiar. MCN was indigenous but not really, Mennonite but not really. This ambiguity continued in the thinking of MBMC missionaries throughout the period of the mission’s presence in Nigeria, embodied in competing understandings of the church as either an Independent or a mission church.

A review of the nomenclature that missionaries used for the church in their letters and reports shows that their understanding of its identity evolved over time. In the end neither the term Independent Church nor mission church was fully adequate since the church’s identity was a mixture of both. The Weavers had arrived in Nigeria in mid

³⁷³ Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 1960.

November 1959 and by the early months of 1960 were no longer referring to MCN as an indigenous church. Instead they used terms like “so called independent groups,” and “our Uyo churches” along with some references to “Mennonite Church Nigeria.”³⁷⁴ In early May Nigerian immigration authorities informed the Weavers that they would only be able to gain permission to stay in the country by promising to not start a new mission or church.³⁷⁵ Subsequent negotiations with the Church of Scotland Mission led to the same stipulation.³⁷⁶ The CSM agreed to allow them to work with MCN, but only to “shepherd them [MCN congregations] into the doctrine and discipline of the Churches which are members of the Christian Council of Nigeria, in the hope that they may eventually desire to enter and be accepted into a United Church of Nigeria.”³⁷⁷ They could not help them become Mennonite in the way MBMC missionaries normally did with churches they developed.

The Weavers’ communication with Yoder and Graber reflected this new situation. From early May through August they referred to MCN as “the groups we have started working with,” “the Uyo churches,” “our group,” “the independent churches,” “our independent Uyo churches,” and the “little independent churches.”³⁷⁸ The only time they

³⁷⁴ Edwin Weaver to W. H. Graddon, March 9, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 6, Graddon, W. H.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 30, 1960 and Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria Jan - May 1960.

³⁷⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 8, 1960.

³⁷⁶ “Tentative Agreement Between the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and MBMC,” June 1960, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 10, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 24, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 27, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 5, 1960;

used the qualifier “Mennonite” was in a letter to Graber in July when they described the restrictions under which they were working and the complications and embarrassment of the existence of a church that called itself Mennonite and that MBMC had sanctioned eighteen months earlier.³⁷⁹ Even in that one letter they referred to MCN in a number of ways: “Mennonite Church Nigeria,” “these independent churches [congregations],” and “the Uyo churches [congregations].”³⁸⁰ They might work in an ecumenical manner with these AICs, but there was no question of following a mission church model. This simplified the situation for the Weavers since it freed them of any expectations that the church harbored about assistance with traditional mission institutions like schools and hospitals and freed them to pursue their goal of inter-church reconciliation.

In early August 1960 the Weavers learned that Nigerian authorities had granted official recognition to MCN, and during the next seven years the identity of the church became much more ambiguous for the missionaries. They referred to it sometimes as Mennonite Church Nigeria but often instead used the terms “independent church” or “our independent church.”³⁸¹ Sometimes they referred to it as the “so-called” Mennonite

Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 8, 1960; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 31, 1960; Edwin and Irene Weaver to J. D. Graber, August 10, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria June - Dec 1960.

³⁷⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 21, 1960.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 4, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to Norman Green, January 26, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, September 6, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, January 29, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Weaver, “A Leadership Training Program (For Independent Churches in Eastern Nigeria)”; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67; Edwin Weaver to Kenneth I. Brown, September 7, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 16, Kenneth and Muriel Brown; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 24, 1966,

church or as the group “calling itself” Mennonite or having “taken on” the Mennonite name.³⁸² This likely was the result of the missionaries’ belief that MCN’s identification with North American Mennonite religious belief and practice was tenuous and less useful for it than local faith expressions. In October 1961 and in March 1962 Edwin Weaver used the term indigenous to refer to the church once again.³⁸³ This was after the thinning of the church, after he had developed significant relationships with the remaining congregations, and after he had started sending positive reports about the church’s progress back to the mission.

The reappearance of the term “indigenous”, however, is an exception to a change in terminology to “independent” during this period. The Weavers met Harold Turner in February 1962, and subsequently became familiar with his and others’ work that referred to African Christian movements outside mission churches as “independent.”³⁸⁴ By the last two years leading up to the civil war MBMC missionaries increasingly referred to MCN

IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Missionary Education Study Course 1967; Wilbert R. Shenk to Verney Unruh, October 27, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, General Conference Mennonite Board of Missions 1966-69.

³⁸² Weaver, “Milestones in Nigeria”; Edwin Weaver to Harold Turner, January 23, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; John H. Yoder to Wilbert Shenk, May 24, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to Kenneth I. Brown, September 7, 1966.

³⁸³ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 5, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 6, 1962.

³⁸⁴ Harold Turner to Edwin Weaver, January 25, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to Harold Turner, February 1, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; Edwin Weaver to Harold Turner, February 20, 1962 and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, February 20, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962.

as the “independent Mennonite church” or “our independent Mennonite church.”³⁸⁵ They also suggested that the church was “a type of independent church.”³⁸⁶

The change in nomenclature expressed missionary belief that neither the designation “independent church” nor “indigenous mission church” alone accurately described MCN. The concept of African Independent Churches or movements (AICs) was a construct developed by western researchers and missionaries who sought to describe those African churches that chose not to integrate into mission churches. During this period Harold Turner described them as churches “founded in Africa, by Africans, and primarily for Africans.”³⁸⁷ MBMC missionaries became aware of this way of understanding the movement through researchers like Turner and through the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. The AIC construct was similar to the construct of the indigenous church in that westerners who interacted with Christians in the non-western world developed it. It was different in other ways. The indigenous church construct grew out of missionaries’ theoretical proposals of what they hoped to achieve in their work. The AIC construct, on the other hand, grew out of western scholars and missionaries’ interaction with actual Christian movements that embodied contextual African beliefs and practices. It was an attempt to better understand

³⁸⁵ Weaver, “A Leadership Training Program (For Independent Churches in Eastern Nigeria)”; Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, May 20, 1965; Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo”; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 11, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

³⁸⁶ Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 24, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Missionary Education Study Course 1967; Wilbert R. Shenk to Verney Unruh, October 27, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, General Conference Mennonite Board of Missions 1966-69.

³⁸⁷ Harold W. Turner, “A Typology for African Religious Movements,” in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1, Fasc 1 (1967): 1-34.

those movements. The evolving nomenclature of MBMC missionaries reflects a corresponding change in their approach. Their primary frame of reference shifted from one that assumed the establishment of a church that embodied a theoretical ideal they had brought with them to one that prioritized consideration of the local African context and the Christian expressions that arose out of it.

Referring to MCN as an “independent Mennonite church” was a way to recognize its attachment to MBMC and the North American Mennonite movement and at the same time affirm its primary identity as an African expression of the faith. The new nomenclature introduced yet a third ecclesial category, a kind of hybrid category in recognition that neither Independent Church nor mission church by itself was an adequate term to describe the church. It was not that missionaries made a formal decision about how to identify the church; their articulation of MCN’s identity and how best to engage the church was an ongoing process.

Missionaries affirmed the church’s Independent Church identity at the same time as they facilitated its Mennonite connections. At the MCN annual conference in January 1966, Edwin Weaver suggested that the church might want to drop the designation “Mennonite” from its name, arguing that doing so would make other AICs more likely to collaborate with the church in the future.³⁸⁸ The church refused, but Weaver’s suggestion shows his continuing doubt about the usefulness of a Mennonite identity for the church. On the other hand, after working with the church for the first couple of years, he

³⁸⁸ “Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966,” 27–28; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966.

repeatedly suggested to his superiors that the mission should find more ways to assist the church, even as he sought to ensure that such assistance did not create dependency.³⁸⁹ In addition, he helped introduce the church to the larger Mennonite community and argued that the mission's future work with AICs would depend on a successful outcome of its engagement with MCN.³⁹⁰ Missionary practice was consistent with a MCN identity that allowed it to be both Mennonite and AIC. Missionaries worked to solidify the church's relationships with the wider African and global Mennonite community while at the same time encouraging it to deepen collaboration with other AICs and involving it in MBMC inter-church initiatives such as the Inter-Church Study Group, the United Independent Churches Fellowship, the United Churches Bible College, and the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings.

The Search for an Appropriate Missionary Role

If the Weavers and their colleagues sought to strengthen Mennonite Church Nigeria and protect its indigenous nature instead of building mission institutions and competing with other missions, the role of the missionary had to conform to the those new priorities. John Lapp's history of the Mennonite Church in India describes the

³⁸⁹ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, December 15, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 9, 1962, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 30, 1962, and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber and Roy Kreider, July 5, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 11, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

³⁹⁰ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 25, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1962; Edwin Weaver to Norman Perry, January 22, 1965, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 12, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 29, 1966.

change in missionary role once church and mission were amalgamated as a change from that of master to servant.³⁹¹ What would be the role of the missionaries in this new mission approach in Nigeria if they were not managing the church and mission institutions? Yoder had suggested early in the Weavers' time in Nigeria that the role of fraternal worker and fellow church member might be the most appropriate way to engage the Nigeria situation.³⁹² The Weavers agreed, but what that meant for them was not necessarily what it meant for others who sought to work in a fraternal manner.³⁹³ For example, some missionaries in the new postcolonial era worked under the supervision of national church leaders.³⁹⁴ By doing so they recognized the newly gained autonomy of national churches but continued to offer missionary service to the church. The Weavers and their colleagues who worked with Mennonite Church Nigeria and with the different AIC ministries did not work under the supervision of national leaders, although Mennonite personnel who served as teachers in Presbyterian and Qua Iboe Church schools did work under Nigerian leadership.

Edwin described his role as working in Christian fellowship. He worked with MCN leaders, without attempting to dominate or control, for the development and growth

³⁹¹ Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India, 1897-1962*, 211.

³⁹² John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver and S. J. Hostetler, March 15, 1960, John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, March 28, 1960, and John H. Yoder to A. G. Somerville, May 14, 1960, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 39, Yoder, John Howard, 1959-1960.

³⁹³ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

³⁹⁴ Artemio R. Guillermo, "Missionary Role in the Philippines," *The Christian Century* 76, no. 13 (April 1, 1959): 388-89; Georg F. Vicedom, "The Role of the Missionary: A Consultation at Nagpur," *International Review of Mission* 51, no. 202 (April 1962): 163-70; J. S. Kingsnorth, "The Changing Role of Missionary Societies in Africa," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 111, no. 5079 (February 1963): 224-38.

of the church.³⁹⁵ Missionaries, he wrote, were members of MCN who participated in the church and accepted whatever role it decided to assign to them.³⁹⁶ Accepting such a role also meant identifying with their Nigerian counterparts, by living in rented houses or apartments instead of on a missionary compound for example. Irene wrote back to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities staff in Indiana that she was adjusting to life in an apartment in Uyo, but that the smell of crayfish from their neighbor's cooking and the loud noise from across the street at times made her long for the quiet missionary compounds to which she had been accustomed in India.³⁹⁷ Such adjustments, she noted, depended on a change in attitude that comes from within the missionary.

Edwin Weaver described the missionary approaches that he sought to avoid as much as he described his preferred methods. In early 1961 he wrote, "It seems right to continue to work with the new established Mennonite Church in a fraternal, rather than paternal pattern," describing missionary relationships with the church as analogous to that of siblings instead of parental.³⁹⁸ Paternalism as a missionary attitude belonged to the past, especially in the case of MCN since the mission was not the church's parent body.³⁹⁹ Weaver also sought to avoid "the pattern of the old colonial style mission churches" and

³⁹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo"; Weaver, "A Philosophy of Mission."

³⁹⁶ Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo."

³⁹⁷ Irene Weaver to Esther Graber, February 9, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential.

³⁹⁸ Weaver, "A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria."

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, October 3, 1962; Edwin Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo."

the “old line of mission program and methods.”⁴⁰⁰ By this he meant refusing to use foreign funds to attract congregations and build church infrastructure, a practice he associated with outdated missionary methods. Finally, he wanted to avoid a strict separation between mission and church that would result in the mission transferring its missionaries and resources away when the church reached a certain level of maturity.⁴⁰¹ Such abandonment was a mistake, he thought. Instead, missionaries should remain and work in fellowship and cooperation, fraternally, with the church.

Yoder and the Weavers argued that their proposal of an appropriate missionary role was particularly apt for the situation they found in southeastern Nigeria, but in fact MBMC had begun to affirm the same values on an institutional level. It expected missionaries to be able both to lead and share leadership with national co-workers.⁴⁰² The mission encouraged its missionaries to identify with national Christians in the building of the church in its various missionary fields and identified partnership with Mennonite churches overseas as being at the heart of its strategic deliberations.⁴⁰³ Graber argued that leadership and management should be in the hands of national churches and that missionaries should work with, and not for, the church. By the mid 1960s one of the mission’s objectives for overseas missions was “to respect the right of the national church

⁴⁰⁰ Weaver, “A Statement on Mission Policy, Nigeria”; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, March 6, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961.

⁴⁰¹ Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo”; Weaver, “A Philosophy of Mission.”

⁴⁰² “Missionary Principles,” May 1961, HM 1-48, Box 182, Principles.

⁴⁰³ J. D. Graber to Missionaries Serving Abroad, March 29, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962; J. D. Graber, “Partners in World Mission,” in *Partners in World Mission 1965: General Mission Handbook Including Annual Reports* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1965), 242–53.

to determine its own pattern and development and to encourage local responsibility and self-administration at an early stage, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide and empower his church.”⁴⁰⁴

While the Weavers and their colleagues sought to work alongside MCN and not control or dominate it, they still commanded significant power with which to affect change and influence the church. Church leaders visited and negotiated with congregations that wanted to join MCN, and annual church conventions made final decisions about which congregations to accept.⁴⁰⁵ It was the Weavers, however, who in December 1959 stopped the large influx of congregations into the newly formed MCN by not continuing Hostetler’s practice of visiting and accepting new congregations upon confession of a series of doctrinal statements.⁴⁰⁶ I. U. Nsasak and other like-minded church leaders promulgated standards that precluded polygamous leadership and prohibited leaders from accepting payment for spiritual services such as healing, baptism, and communion.⁴⁰⁷ This resulted in the exodus of the majority of congregations that had joined MCN. It was the Weavers, however, who precipitated such a move by announcing

⁴⁰⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk and J. D. Graber, “Overseas Missions Committee Minutes,” (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 6, 1967), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969.

⁴⁰⁵ Nsasak, Udo, and Essiet, “Report on Visit to New Churches in Ikot Eyo Seeking Affiliation with MCN”; Nsasak, “Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)”; “Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966,” 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Edwin and Irene Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1959; Edwin Weaver to S. J. Hostetler, January 12, 1960.

⁴⁰⁷ “Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria,” February 1960; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, May 4, 1960; Nsasak, “Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria).”

that they would work only with congregations that sought to orient the church according to New Testament standards, which for them precluded polygamous leaders.⁴⁰⁸ While the church leadership and the executive committee coordinated the scholarship program that the mission funded, when the church implicated and disciplined some leaders for accepting bribes in the process, the Weavers, as mission representatives, took over the responsibility to choose beneficiaries.⁴⁰⁹ Against Edwin's advice, MCN refused to ordain pastoral leadership until 1967 and also refused to allow non-ordained leaders to officiate at baptisms or communions.⁴¹⁰ This meant that as an ordained pastor Edwin served as a roving sacramental provider, giving him significant spiritual authority.⁴¹¹ MCN also insisted that he chair its executive committee, giving him administrative authority.⁴¹²

While the Weavers and their colleagues did not have the authority within MCN that missionaries of the colonial era often had in the churches they planted and led, they did have significant power to affect change; they were not simply fellow members of the church. This power came from church's desire to be in relationship with the mission and benefit from help it might provide and from the missionaries' status as mission

⁴⁰⁸ S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 21, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960; Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo."

⁴⁰⁹ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, May 13, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 8, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 42, Yoder, John Howard, 1963-1964; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, June 17, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 24, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1960-65 Confidential.

⁴¹⁰ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 10, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962; Weaver, "Address at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church at Mbiabm."

⁴¹¹ John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria.

⁴¹² Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder and J. D. Graber, March 28, 1960.

representatives. The historical precedents in the region, whereby Nigerians chose to be part of some mission churches instead of others in exchange for schooling, medical services, or other assistance, only intensified this dynamic.

Mennonite Church Nigeria's Point of View

Mennonite Church Nigeria's response to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities' novel mission approach in southeastern Nigeria was mixed, approving of some aspects and rejecting others. The church expressed appreciation for the secondary school and trade school scholarships as well as for the agricultural assistance that the mission provided, even offering land to start agricultural projects.⁴¹³ The church also applauded the short-term medical clinics that Abiriba missionaries organized in villages where it had congregations and readily collaborated with Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) representatives from North America when they visited in 1965 to form a committee to manage MEDA loans in Nigeria.⁴¹⁴ Mission scholarships, clinics, and small business loans fit nicely into MCN's expectations that Christian missions would assist in ways that would improve the vitality and well-being of church members.

The church did not agree, however, with other aspects of the mission's approach, particularly those that seemed to infringe on its entitlement to mission services. It

⁴¹³ Nsasak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1961; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; "An Address of Appreciation from the MCN to Mr. and Mrs. E. I. Weaver," May 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, September 17, 1964; "An Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church Nigeria to Mr. W. R. Shenk," November 7, 1965.

⁴¹⁴ John Grasse to J. D. Graber, September 24, 1962, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1962; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, September 17, 1964; Edwin Weaver to Norman Perry, January 22, 1965; J. Robert Stauffer, "Minutes of Medan Meeting," May 3, 1965.

continued to be disappointed that the mission did not initiate schools and medical institutions to serve MCN communities, that it maintained the United Churches Bible College's nature as an inter-church institution instead of a proprietary Mennonite school, and that it did not provide significant capital investment for agricultural projects.⁴¹⁵ The church expressed consternation about MBMC policy that provided assistance for training church leaders but then, because of concerns about the churches' financial self sufficiency, refused to help the church pay the salaries of those leaders after their training.⁴¹⁶ The church repeatedly and unsuccessfully requested a change in this policy and for assistance to help it pay its leaders as well as for more missionary personnel.⁴¹⁷

In addition, church members criticized the mission for its policy of not building permanent structures for its initiatives or for housing its missionaries, instead spending significant amounts of money to rent buildings.⁴¹⁸ MBMC sought to keep its missionary force mobile and flexible and was hesitant to invest in property or institutions that the

⁴¹⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, March 18, 1961, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1961; Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria; John H. Yoder to Lloyd Fisher, October 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1963; "An Address of Appreciation from the MCN to Mr. and Mrs. E. I. Weaver," May 1964; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 26–27; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 1, 1966; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963.

⁴¹⁶ Friesen, "Mission Report for November," December 12, 1966.

⁴¹⁷ "An Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church Nigeria to Mr. W. R. Shenk"; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 25, 15; I. U. Nsagak to MBMC, December 22, 1966; Weaver, "A Philosophy of Mission"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, January 16, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 28, 1962; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, October 2, 1962; Weaver, "A Mission Strategy for Uyo."

⁴¹⁸ "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 26–27; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966, 26–27, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67.

local church might not be able to maintain after the missionaries departed.⁴¹⁹ For MCN such investment was part and parcel of the role of foreign missions, and it likely understood it as a way the mission might reinforce the church's well-being. Church members voiced criticisms of the lack of institutional investment and other forms of assistance at MCN yearly conventions and argued that the mission's assistance was not sufficient.⁴²⁰ They were also critical of MEDA after it moved the management of its loan program away from the Uyo region where MCN had congregations to missionary Lloyd Fisher's care in Enugu and applied restrictive loan policies.⁴²¹

MCN believed that the mission's assistance to other missions' institutions and its involvement in the various inter-church initiatives decreased the mission's contribution to the church's own well-being and was therefore suspicious of its ecumenical-leaning vision and strategy. The church questioned why the mission did not give a higher priority to its needs, and missionaries reported that it seemed to expect preferred treatment from the mission.⁴²² Already in 1961 the church requested that MBMC send a missionary to

⁴¹⁹ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, October 10, 1963; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966.

⁴²⁰ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, April 18, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1963; "An Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church Nigeria to Mr. W. R. Shenk," November 7, 1965; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 26-27; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966.

⁴²¹ Edwin Weaver to Norman Perry, January 22, 1965; Stauffer, "Minutes of Medan Meeting," May 3, 1965; John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, May 21, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 27-28.

⁴²² Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; John H. Yoder to Lloyd Fisher, October 17, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1963; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 17, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 26-28; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 1, 1966; Delores Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 7, 1966.

work directly with the church instead of under the umbrella of the Presbyterian Church.⁴²³ The Weavers argued that they could not do so because of the agreement under which they received visas as Church of Scotland Mission and Presbyterian Church of Nigeria missionary appointees. MCN responded by requesting that the MBMC start work under its umbrella since the Nigerian government had given it legal status the year before and urged the Weavers to negotiate such an arrangement with the mission. The mission was not swayed by the request and continued sending its personnel through the Presbyterian Church as per the original agreement between the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities and the Church of Scotland Mission.

In 1964 the government gave MBMC permission to obtain missionary visas and work independently of the Presbyterians. The mission did not change its general approach as a result even though it no longer relied on the Presbyterian Church for visas.⁴²⁴ While MBMC missionaries continued to work with MCN congregations, their primary focus from early 1964 until their departure in 1967 was on inter-church initiatives such as the Inter-Church Study Group, the United Churches Bible College, the Inter-Church Team, the United Independent Churches Fellowship, and Independent Churches Leaders Meetings as well as on the various mission institutions in which many of them worked.

⁴²³ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)."

⁴²⁴ N. Eme to Chief Federal Immigration Officer, February 10, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65; Lloyd Fisher to Edwin and Irene Weaver, March 4, 1964 and Lloyd and Evelyn Fisher to Co-Workers, March 9, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 39; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 15, 1964.

One way that MCN expressed its desire that MBMC play a more traditional mission role of sponsor and ecclesial authority was by its refusal to ordain pastors for itself until the Weavers' departure. MCN leadership pressed the Weavers for ordination credentials from the mission when they first arrived in country, but after the exodus of many congregations and the growing influence of younger leaders the tune changed.⁴²⁵ The church organized its leadership into three charges: preachers, evangelists, and pastors.⁴²⁶ Preachers provided leadership at a single congregation while evangelists supervised several congregations. Pastors were to be the ordained ministers of the church, but until 1967 there were no ordinations.

Early on Yoder had advised Weaver to help MCN set up some kind of church order and credentialing system, but the church dug its feet on the matter of ordination, allowing authority to rest with ordained missionaries. Ordaining its own leaders would have decreased dependency on the mission's ecclesial authority.⁴²⁷ Weaver encouraged the church to ordain pastors, especially after he found it would allow only ordained ministers to preside over communion services and baptisms.⁴²⁸ The church was slow to move on the issue, so that it depended on missionaries who were already ordained when

⁴²⁵ Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959.

⁴²⁶ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)."

⁴²⁷ John H. Yoder to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1959.

⁴²⁸ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 10, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962; Weaver, "Address at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church at Mbiabm."

they arrived on the field to provide such services.⁴²⁹ For the first few years this was limited to Edwin Weaver and Cyril Gingerich, the Abiriba hospital administrator.⁴³⁰ Hence, they carried a higher level of spiritual authority in the church than they intended in their self-appointed roles as fraternal workers. From a practical point of view, Edwin served essentially as bishop of the church since he was chairman of its executive committee and was the primary communion server and baptizer for the church.⁴³¹ It was not until the Weavers had confirmed their intention to leave Nigeria for good that MCN finally ordained one of its own, O. E. Essiet, on Easter Sunday 1967.⁴³²

Later, in the post civil war years there was significant conflict in the church about ordination. Some accused O. E. Essiet, the sole ordained pastor, of blocking the ordination of others unless the church ordained him bishop.⁴³³ The hesitancy to ordain pastors in the years before the civil war likely arose out of fear about how ordained pastors would use their authority, an aspect of the competition for power in the church.

⁴²⁹ Edwin Weaver to Boyd Nelson, January 1, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 24, Nelson, Boyd; Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970), 77.

⁴³⁰ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, March 10, 1962, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 4, J. D. Graber, 1962.

⁴³¹ Nsagak, "Minutes of the Third General Conference (Nigeria)"; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 28; John H. Yoder to J. D. Graber, General Reporting on Mission Strategy in Nigeria.

⁴³² Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 31, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Stan and Delores Friesen 1965-67; Clifford and Lois Amstutz to Supporters, May 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Amstutz, Clifford and Lois 1966-67; Weaver and Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 77-79.

⁴³³ B. O. Obong, "Minutes of the Mennonite Church Nigeria 13th Annual Conference," (Mennonite church Nigeria, December 29-31, 1972) and F. A. Udo to O. E. Essiet, January 2, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

Given such concerns about the use of authority, the church's approach of allowing authority to rest with the missionaries was a logical administrative strategy.

In his reflections on the church's relationship with the mission, Edwin Weaver argued that over the nearly eight years he spent in Nigeria there was movement in the church towards a more supportive posture vis-à-vis the mission's inter-church initiatives. MCN participated in the United Independent Churches Fellowship, the United Churches Bible College, and the Independent Churches Leadership Meetings and invited speakers from other churches to its annual conventions and congregational training sessions.⁴³⁴ MCN leaders benefitted from training in other churches' Bible schools and expressed appreciation for the Weavers' focus on inter-church reconciliation.⁴³⁵ The church seemed to be warming to the mission's approach.⁴³⁶

Movement towards supporting the mission's approach was particularly embodied in I. U. Nsagak, secretary of MCN during much of this period and a close co-worker of Edwin Weaver. As a member of the Inter-Church Team, Nsagak was directly involved

⁴³⁴ Inim, "First Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; Inim, "Third Meeting of the United Independent Churches Fellowship"; "Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the United Independent Churches' Fellowship"; Weaver, "Address at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church at Mbiabm"; Nsagak, "Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches," December 17, 1965; Nsagak, "Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders"; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 18, 1962; "Mennonite Church Nigeria Annual Conference 1966," 24-26; Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, July 5, 1963; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, July 24, 1963.

⁴³⁵ Edwin Weaver to Norman J. Greene, October 2, 1961, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to Norman Derstine, November 25, 1961; Edwin Weaver to John L. Bontrager, January 9, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 1, Schools and Scholarships; "An Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church Nigeria to Mr. W. R. Shenk," November 7, 1965.

⁴³⁶ Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, June 12, 1962; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Report on Administrative Visit to Nigeria," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 19, 1965), IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1965; Edwin Weaver, "In the Mennonite Church," Annual Report, (April 13, 1966), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 15, 1967.

with the surveys of AICs in the Uyo and Abak areas, helping to gather and interpret data.⁴³⁷ He attended the Inter-Church Study Group regularly and was one of the primary leaders of the Independent Churches Leaders Meetings, reporting on the work of the Inter-Church Team and reading papers.⁴³⁸ In a paper entitled “Problems of Independent Churches” that he gave to the ICLM, Nsasak expressed a number of views that were quite close to those of Weaver.⁴³⁹ He referred to MCN as an Independent Church, identified the lack of leadership training and insufficient organizational structures as problems that the churches should seek to resolve, and argued that Nigerian churches should support their own pastoral leadership without foreign subsidies. These were positions that corresponded closely to the mission’s concerns and strategy.

In March 1966 Weaver outlined his thinking about mission strategy in a paper entitled “A Mission Strategy for Uyo” and gave a copy to Nsasak for critique and feedback.⁴⁴⁰ Weaver’s paper outlined the reasons for MBMC’s policy of personnel

⁴³⁷ “Independent Church Team,” Meeting Report (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 2, 1965) and I. U. Nsasak, “Independent Church Team,” Meeting Minutes (Uyo, Nigeria: Inter Church Study Team, August 23, 1965), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 25A, Inter-Church Study Team Folder #1; “Agenda, Inter-Church Study Group,” December 18, 1965 and Edwin Weaver, “Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group,” (Inter Church Study Committee, July 2, 1966), HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.; Nsasak et al., “The Abak Story.”

⁴³⁸ “Inter Church Study Committee, Minutes of the Second Meeting,” June 8, 1962; Weaver, “Inter-Church Study Group Meeting Minutes,” September 4, 1963; Nsasak, “Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” December 17, 1965; Nsasak, “Minutes of the 4th Meeting of Independent Churches Leaders”; I. U. Nsasak to Leaders of Independent Churches, June 15, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 19, Independent Churches 1966-1967; I. U. Nsasak to Independent Church Leaders, September 1, 1966; Weaver, “Minutes of the Inter-Church Study Group,” July 2, 1966; Weaver, “Minutes of the Inter-Church Group Meeting,” May 13, 1967; Nsasak, “Minutes of Meeting of Leaders of Independent Churches,” December 17, 1965; “Index to Inter-Church Study Group Papers,” July 1967.

⁴³⁹ “Meeting of Independent Church Leaders,” March 12, 1966.

⁴⁴⁰ Weaver, “A Mission Strategy for Uyo.”

support for the institutions of other missions and the focus on inter-church work, especially with Independent Churches. Nsasak's evaluation was positive.⁴⁴¹ He made a number of suggestions to improve the paper but overwhelmingly affirmed Weaver's articulation of the mission's approach. Nsasak was one voice from within MCN that expressed appreciation for MBMC's mission approach in southeastern Nigeria, but given the general discontent of the church, he represented a minority opinion.

The Weavers' desire to work towards inter-church reconciliation as a missionary task motivated a rich diversity of Christian witness in southeastern Nigeria between 1960 and the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities provided personnel for the Abiriba hospital, the Asaba Rural Training Center, and mission schools, thus cultivating the good will of both the established missions and government officials. Second, the Weavers and their MBMC colleagues initiated and provided leadership for various ministries that studied and assisted the dynamic AIC movement in the region. These included the Inter-Church Study Group, the Inter-Church Team, the United Independent Churches Fellowship, the United Churches Bible College, and the Independent Churches Leadership Meetings, initiatives that provided opportunities for inter-church relationships to flourish and for a more informed and sympathetic understanding of AICs.

⁴⁴¹ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, March 31, 1966, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 22, Inter-Church Study Group, Minutes, etc.

The work with Mennonite Church Nigeria was a third category of engagement through which missionaries provided educational, agricultural, and theological expertise and assistance. In the shifting post-colonial context of more autonomy for the African church, missionaries struggled to find categories with which to describe MCN. The term “Independent Mennonite” was an attempt that permitted an ongoing tension between the church’s organizational and cultural autonomy and its integration into the worldwide Mennonite movement.

For its part, MCN expressed sharp discontent with the mission’s inter-church approach. I. U. Nsagak, church secretary and the Weavers’ close collaborator who expressed some sympathy with the approach, was the exception. The mission’s hesitancy to provide traditional mission services and significant direct support to the church grated against MCN’s sense of entitlement that grew both from its understanding that religion should provide for human well-being and from the legacy of traditional missionary service institutions in the region. The post-colonial context gave voice to MCN and obliged missionaries to listen, but did not provide an evident way to reconcile their differences of opinion.

Despite MCN’s troubling discontent, the mission’s various ministry engagements contributed to its goal of inter-church reconciliation, particularly the amelioration of relationships between AICs and the established missions and their churches. In addition, each one of these ministries was a missionary witness in itself, irrespective of the priority of inter-church reconciliation. The fifty-four MBMC teachers, doctors, nurses, agriculturalists, and church workers who served in southeastern Nigeria during this

period experienced them as such. The mission's engagement in the region was multi-layered and diverse, addressing the larger inter-church dynamics of competition and conflict as well as specific educational, medical, agricultural, ecclesial, and institutional needs at the same time that it left unresolved MCN and MBMC's divergent understandings.

CHAPTER SIX

ENGAGING AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES IN DIVERSE WEST AFRICAN CONTEXTS

The departure of most of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) missionaries from southeastern Nigeria because of the civil war ended their mission experiment in inter-church reconciliation and engagement with African Independent Churches (AICs) in the region. Five missionaries stayed at their posts at the Abiriba hospital; three of them served there throughout the war except during their furlough in late 1968. MBMC also maintained its relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) despite being unable to obtain visas to return resident missionaries to the region during the war and in the years immediately afterward. Missionaries and administrators visited the church periodically, and the mission provided funding for agricultural and leadership training projects. Not able to reside in southeastern Nigeria, missionaries engaged AICs across West Africa, seeking to reinforce their capacity and integrity via biblical training for leaders and working to improve the relationship among AICs and between them and the mission churches. The Nigeria experience provided a paradigm for this work during the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

This chapter will describe MBMC's mission efforts after the start of the war in 1967 and show that it continued to adapt to the changing West African context even as it sought to carry forward the Weavers' vision of indigenization, of improving inter-church relationships, and of resourcing AICs via biblical training for church leaders. It will

outline the Abiriba personnel's experience of the war and the mission's struggle to navigate the political, humanitarian, logistic, and religious challenges that the war presented. This chapter will describe the mission's experience of helping the Nigerian Church of the Lord Aladura establish its first seminary and describe the MBMC's articulation of a "Vision for West Africa," which appropriated the Nigeria experience with AICs as a paradigm to guide its engagement with these movements in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and the Republic of Benin (Dahomey). It will show how the different contexts, especially the distinctive post-colonial, socio-political and religious situations of the different countries influenced the work. Finally, this chapter will explain MBMC's continuing relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria and show that, encouraged by the post-war political situation in Nigeria, the church criticized the mission's approach. The Nigerian church also experienced growing discord between its various geographical areas, complicating its relationship with the mission and leading to a halt in collaboration for a period. While the mission sought to appropriate what it had learned in its Nigerian experience in its subsequent engagement in West Africa, it continued to adjust its strategy in the evolving post-colonial West Africa contexts.

Abiriba During the War

This section will describe numerous challenges that Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities missionaries faced in their work at the Abiriba hospital during the shifting socio-political context of the Nigerian civil war. It will explain why some Abiriba missionaries stayed in Nigeria when their colleagues left at the outbreak of the war and will describe the situation they encountered during the conflict. It will also describe the

mission's deliberations about whether or not to send more personnel to the region to assist at the hospital as the number of patients increased and malnutrition, especially among children, became prevalent. The missionaries' workload was overwhelming and they repeatedly asked for more mission personnel to meet the needs they faced. MBMC administrators were slow to respond to their request, both because the interruption of mail service meant they did not receive the requests until months later and because the medical personnel they had recruited before the war were novices and unaccustomed to working in Africa, much less an African war zone. Finally, this section will describe the mission's collaboration with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as both agencies sought to provide assistance during the war and after it ended in January 1970.¹ Because MCC's area of expertise was relief services after disasters and because it had more medical personnel available than did the mission, it became the primary Mennonite agency through which medical assistance flowed to the region during the last half of the war.

When the civil war broke out during the summer of 1967, five missionaries at the Abiriba hospital stayed in the region when the other mission personnel working in southeastern Nigeria evacuated. The decision to evacuate or not played out differently among the missionaries and depended on the different roles they played.² Families with

¹ Mennonite Central Committee is "the cooperative relief, service and development agency of North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches." It represents a broad range of North American churches from the Anabaptist tradition while the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities was the mission agency of the North American Mennonite Church, one of those bodies that participated in MCC. Harold S. Bender and Elmer Neufeld, "Mennonite Central Committee (International)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Central_Committee_\(International\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Central_Committee_(International)) (accessed April 28, 2016).

² Lloyd J. Fisher to Wilbert R. Shenk and Vern Preheim, June 4, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967.

children left first, along with those whose furlough was coming up. When schools and seminaries in eastern Nigeria closed because of the crisis, missionary teachers were without work and found little reason to stay. Missionaries Stanley and Delores Friesen arranged for national leadership to take responsibility for their work at the United Churches Bible College in the event it could continue later.³ Increasing uncertainty and insecurity distracted the members of the Inter-Church Team that was collecting data about AICs, and the research ground to a halt. With the new milieu of insecurity, decreased mobility due to roadblocks, and an inability to continue the work they had come to do, most MBMC missionaries decided to evacuate.⁴ The Weavers were among them, Irene first and Edwin later.⁵

The last five missionaries at Abiriba had planned to evacuate, but they changed their minds on the morning that they intended to leave. Doctor Wallace Shellenberger considered the hospital full of patients who would be without a doctor upon his departure, and he and his wife Evelyn, a nurse, decided to stay until a replacement arrived.⁶ Cyril and Ruth Gingerich, hospital administrator and nurse, made the same decision in order to

³ Delbert Snyder to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 16, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Snyder, Delbert and Lela 1966-68; Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria, July 19, 1967 and Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, July 20, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

⁴ Lloyd J. Fisher to Esther Graber, July 24, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967.

⁵ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, June 8, 1967 and Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria, July 19, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69. When he left the region, Edwin took with him drums of documentation that make up a significant part of the source material for this dissertation.

⁶ Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 26, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Evelyn Shellenberger to Family Members, June 8, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

assist the Shellenbergers as did Martha Bender, a nurse who had served at the hospital since October 1962. At first they made a daily decision whether to leave or stay, but when no replacements arrived, days turned into weeks and months. The Gingeriches stayed until May 1968 while the Shellenbergers and Bender spent much of the war in the Biafra enclave.⁷

During the war the Abiriba missionaries faced a dramatic increase in the number of patients, a troubling rise of malnutrition and starvation, insecurity from the approaching front lines of the conflict, and the moral dilemma that their services might contribute to the Biafra war effort. The war increased the Abiriba team's patient load dramatically as other hospitals closed for lack of supplies or because of attack.⁸ Dr. Shellenberger saw hundreds of patients daily, both at the hospital and in rural clinics that he visited regularly.⁹ In addition, authorities made him responsible for the medical care of

⁷ Neil C. Bernard, "The Church of Scotland Biafra Circular," May 29, 1968 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, May 29, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Report on Telephone Call" (MBMC, September 23, 1968), IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Atlee Beechy, "Nigeria/Biafra Report Part II," January 21, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, March 20, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report" (Church of Scotland, June 2, 1969), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969; Martha Bender to Esther Graber, December 28, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Bender, Martha 1966-70; Paul Erb to M. J. Udoh, February 1970, V-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

⁸ Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 25, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Evelyn and Wallace Shellenberger to family, December 5, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1966-69; Evelyn Shellenberger to family, April 26, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

⁹ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 1, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

at first twelve and then twenty-five thousand refugees in the area.¹⁰ Shellenberger and his MBMC colleagues felt the stress of overwork and fatigue as they struggled to keep the hospital operating with diminishing supplies and a greater number of patients.¹¹ Federalist forces blockaded Biafra as part of their war effort and allowed only limited medical supplies into the region through the International Red Cross.¹² The mission and MCC tried unsuccessfully to ship supplies to Abiriba.¹³ Due to his large stock at the beginning of the war, Shellenberger was able to continue to do surgery after most hospitals in Biafra had stopped.¹⁴ Nevertheless, by July 1968 he too had to cease all elective surgery.¹⁵

The shortage of food and the resulting malnutrition and starvation soon became a significant concern. Food supply decreased dramatically and prices became prohibitively

¹⁰ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03 and Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

¹¹ Wallace and Evie Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to family, March 31, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

¹² Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 11, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174–176; United States Department of State, “The Nigerian Relief Problem,” 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

¹³ Wilbert R. Shenk to Cyril Gingerich, March 13, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to John Hostetler, March 13, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mennonite Central Committee - 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, May 7, 1968 and John Hostetler to Committee of the International Red Cross, May 13, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

¹⁴ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, August 10, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to family, March 31, 1968.

¹⁵ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 1, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

high because of the blockade.¹⁶ Malnutrition and starvation became endemic, especially among young children who suffered acute lack of protein even when they did find starch-based food to eat.¹⁷ By July 1968 the Shellenbergers estimated that ninety percent of the children in the area were malnourished, many of them severely so, and that hundreds were dying daily from starvation.¹⁸ The missionaries sought to address the situation by developing a high protein mixture of dried eggs, dried milk, and a protein cereal, although the ingredients were not always available and had to be rationed.¹⁹ The need vastly outstripped the supply. The nutrition clinic saw one thousand three hundred children daily, but it had to turn many away.²⁰ The missionaries reported that although they found food to eat, their diets were severely restricted and the cost of food skyrocketed.²¹

As the war dragged on and the front approached Abiriba, the patient load increased, and medical staff finally had to move to keep ahead of the fighting. This

¹⁶ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 176.

¹⁷ Evelyn and Wallace Shellenberger to family, December 5, 1967; Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to family, March 31, 1968; Evelyn Shellenberger to Family Members, June 8, 1968; "Joint Statement on Nigerian Relief by The International Committee of the Red Cross, Caritas Internationalis, World Council of Churches and the United Nations Children's Fund," August 16, 1968, HM 1-48, Box 86, Biafra-Nigeria Situation, 1968-1969; Evelyn Shellenberger, "Staving off Starvation," *The American Journal of Nursing* 69, no. 3 (March 1969): 534-36.

¹⁸ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 1, 1968.

¹⁹ Ibid.; Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 18, 1968 and Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Shellenberger, Et. Al., September 3, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Shellenberger, "Staving off Starvation."

²⁰ Shellenberger, "Staving off Starvation."

²¹ Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 25, 1967; Evelyn and Wallace Shellenberger to family, December 5, 1967.

increased the work and stress of the missionaries and raised troubling questions about how their presence might implicitly support the violence and bloodshed of the war effort. At the beginning of the war Abiriba was far from the front lines and less troubled than the outlying regions of Biafra such as the Uyo area.²² As Federalist forces advanced and tightened the noose around Biafra, however, the staff was forced to relocate, first to Ohafia when Abiriba was shelled in April 1969, then to Aba, and finally to an unspecified area east of the Imo River during the last days of the war.²³

Despite their efforts to the contrary, the war effort seemed to implicate the missionaries. The army took over part of the Abiriba hospital for its wounded, and in May 1968 commandeered the mission's vehicles.²⁴ The missionaries at first resisted, citing their Mennonite faith convictions against contributing to violence and any war effort. When they saw that the soldiers were simply going to hot-wire the vehicles despite their arguments, however, they handed over the keys in frustration.

The creation of the Biafra state was the initiative of the Ibo people, and other ethnic groups in the region were not automatically allies. Biafran authorities mistrusted

²² Lloyd J. Fisher to Esther Graber, July 12, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Lloyd Fisher 1967; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 30, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, August 10, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Cyril Gingerich to Overseas Mission Office, August 20, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

²³ Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Circular," April 3, 1969, Gehman to Joyce Bratton, April 1969, Neil C. Bernard to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 25, 1969, Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Circular," April 25, 1969, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, May 14, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan 1 May 31, 1969; Martha Bender to Esther Graber.

²⁴ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

other ethnic groups.²⁵ Dr. Shellenberger reported that the authorities detained and beat five non-Ibo staff of the hospital and that Ibo militants killed thousands of people from a different ethnic group just fifteen miles from Abiriba.²⁶ They put the women and children who survived the massacre in refugee camps. Other missionaries reported similar mistreatment of non-Ibo groups in the heat of the war.²⁷

MBMC missionaries were sympathetic to the Biafra cause, but they did not agree with the war effort and sought to keep from contributing to it. They understood Ibo sentiments of fear and vulnerability after the 1966 riots left many Ibo dead and others fleeing for their lives.²⁸ They did not agree, however, with the Biafra's resort to war, its resulting violence, or the Biafran tendency to interpret its cause as being sanctioned by God.²⁹ They sought to meet the needs they encountered among the people around them without contributing to the war effort. They worried, however, that their presence implied acquiescence and hence somehow supported the ongoing violence.

²⁵ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 174–175.

²⁶ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968.

²⁷ Neil C. Bernard to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

²⁸ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 174; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 25, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Cyril Gingerich, "Biafra Review" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 12, 1968), IV-18-13-03, Box 3, Gingerich, Cyril and Ruth 1966-69 Confidential.

²⁹ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 28, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1966-69; Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968; Andrew F. Walls, "Religion and the Press in 'the Enclave' in the Nigerian Civil War," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

The increasing patient load at the hospital and the growing number of people who needed medical care in refugee camps resulted in overworked missionaries who repeatedly asked the mission to send reinforcements and were frustrated when no new staff arrived. MBMC was finalizing visa requirements and preparing to send a second doctor, Warren Lambright, and his wife to Abiriba when the war broke out in the summer of 1967.³⁰ Gingerich wrote to mission administrators urging them to send Lambright despite the war since the number of patients was increasing and Dr. Shellenberger was overworked.³¹ Gingerich wrote repeatedly, noting that life in Abiriba was back to “normal” and that the Abiriba staff was in no immediate danger.³² During those first months Abiriba was far from the front lines and somewhat isolated from the violence of the war. As time went on and Lambright did not arrive, letters from the missionaries expressed bewilderment and eventually frustration at the mission’s failure to send additional medical personnel.³³

³⁰ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, June 1, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³¹ Cyril Gingerich to Overseas Mission Office, August 20, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68.

³² Ibid.; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 30, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 10, 1967, and Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 17, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Gingerich, “Biafra Review.”

³³ Wallace and Evie Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Evelyn Shellenberger to family, April 26, 1968, Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 31, 1968, Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 1, 1968, Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 18, 1968, and Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

The Federalist blockade of Biafra impeded communication between the missionaries and mission headquarters, increasing frustration on the part of the missionaries. The blockade was successful in dramatically reducing mail service to the region.³⁴ While the missionaries sent at least eleven letters to MBMC between July 1967 and February 1968, seven specifically requesting more personnel, they received only one piece of mail from headquarters, a mission newsletter that said nothing about the missionaries who had evacuated or of more missionaries being assigned to Abiriba.³⁵ They knew nothing of the mission administrators' deliberation about how best to use personnel in the new war-torn context of southeastern Nigeria, about why the Lambrichts had not arrived, or about why those who had evacuated did not return. The Church of Scotland Mission arranged to get some of its workers into and out of Biafra through Cameroon despite the blockade, and Gingerich informed MBMC that this was an option for the Lambrichts.³⁶ It was not until the beginning of the last year of the war, however,

³⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Friesen, November 13, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores 1965-69; Colin G. Macdonald to MBMC, December 15, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968; Neil C. Bernard to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 22, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 17, 1968.

³⁵ Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 26, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 30, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Overseas Mission Office, August 20, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 30, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 10, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967, Wallace and Evie Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967, Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 11, 1967, Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 25, 1967, and Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 3, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1966-68; Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 28, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1966-69; Cyril K. Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 18, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, October 12, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³⁶ Cyril Gingerich to Overseas Mission Office; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 30, 1967; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 10, 1967; Cyril Gingerich to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1967.

that an additional Mennonite doctor arrived to work at Abiriba, thanks to collaboration between the mission and MCC; the lack of reinforcements earlier was a source of frustration for the Abiriba missionaries.³⁷

MBMC sought to support the Abiriba hospital ministry and fulfill the obligation it had made to the community in 1960, but a number of factors combined to keep it from sending additional personnel to Abiriba in the first year and a half of the war. With the disruption of mail service, very little information getting out about the situation in Biafra, and the varying viewpoints of people and agencies involved, mission administrators found it difficult to evaluate what was happening on the ground.³⁸ Secondly, the Lambrights were novices in Africa and the medical supplies that they would need to do their work were increasingly in short supply.³⁹ It seemed unwise to send them into a situation for which they were unprepared and for which they would likely have insufficient supplies, so the mission sent them to Ghana to work and wait for a more favorable moment to continue on to Nigeria. When Gingerich pressed the issue mission administrator Wilbert R. Shenk consulted with Neil Bernard of the Church of Scotland Mission.⁴⁰ Bernard's mission was sending some personnel into the region despite the war.

³⁷ Atlee Beechy, "Nigeria/Biafra Report Part II," January 21, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; James D. Kratz to Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger File, October 16, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1966-69.

³⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Friesen, November 13, 1967; Neil C Bernard to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 19, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, September 4, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

³⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, April 4, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

He replied that the usefulness of medical personnel in Biafra depended on their knowledge of the country and its people and recommended sending only personnel who knew the region well.⁴¹ This corresponded with advice Shenk had received from Church World Service and the World Council of Churches. MBMC's Overseas Committee came to the same conclusion, deciding to keep the Lambrichts in Ghana until the situation improved in Nigeria.⁴²

At the beginning of the conflict there was hope that it might not last long, and the mission sought a way to respond to the situation that would not hinder its ability to maintain relationships in the region after a Federalist victory. In the early months of the war it seemed like it might be a short affair.⁴³ Federalist forces pushed into Biafran territory and on October 4, 1967 took the capital, Enugu. In the end the war dragged on for two and a half years, much longer than Federalist forces or the international community had anticipated.

As MBMC considered what to do in the face of a longer, drawn out conflict, it was concerned about the politics of Nigeria's relationships with the international community, specifically the mission's ability to return missionaries to the region after the war. Federalist forces established the blockade of Biafra to force the breakaway region to

⁴¹ Neil C. Bernard to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 10, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

⁴² Wilbert R. Shenk to Milo Kauffman, May 22, 1968, Wilbert R. Shenk, "Report on Telephone Call with Jan S. F. van Hoogstraten" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 28, 1968), Burgess Carr to Wallace Shellenberger, August 5, 1968, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Dr. and Mrs. Wallace Shellenberger, July 19, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

⁴³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 176.

end its secession.⁴⁴ Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk noted that Nigerian authorities would likely consider countries or missions that assisted Biafra to be aiding and abetting the enemy.⁴⁵ Waiting for the opportunity to participate in a postwar relief effort might be a way to decrease the likelihood that the missionaries would be blacklisted, but there was no way to foresee what might happen. The mission desired a continuing relationship with its ministry partners in Nigeria after the war and sought to engage the situation in a neutral way that would maximize the possibility that its personnel would receive permission to return.⁴⁶ Officials had already shown their willingness to deny permission to work in Nigeria in 1960, and MBMC did not care to repeat that experience.

Despite the factors that encouraged hesitancy, the mission did in the end seek to send more personnel to Abiriba. Once it was clear that the war was dragging on and missionaries in Abiriba were able to consistently communicate the dire needs there, the mission changed its position and moved to send replacement personnel.⁴⁷ By this time the Lambrights in Ghana had medical reasons for not wanting to enter Biafra.⁴⁸ Shenk contacted MBMC doctors who had worked at Abiriba in the past, but no one was able to

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, April 18, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

⁴⁶ Vern Preheim to William T. Snyder, November 14, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. George Weber, December 30, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weber, George and Lena 1966-68 Confidential.

⁴⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Fischer, August 5, 1968, MBMC to John Grasse, Lawrence Eby, Carl Hostetler, Meryl Grasse, and Charles Hertzler, August 16, 1968, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Delmar Stahly, August 23, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Cyril K. Gingerich, September 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 3, Gingerich, Cyril and Ruth 1966-69 Confidential.

⁴⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Dr. and Mrs. Wallace Shellenberger, August 20, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

go. In the end it was MCC that found another doctor to go to Abiriba in January 1969.⁴⁹ The Shellenbergers also returned, as did Martha Bender, after their furlough during the last months of 1968.⁵⁰ From this point on, however, the team worked under the auspices of MCC and the American Friends Service Committee.⁵¹

Five Mennonite missionaries served at Abiriba during the Nigerian civil war. Cyril and Ruth Gingerich stayed at the outbreak of the war and returned to North America in May 1968 for health reasons.⁵² Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger and Martha Bender stayed in Biafran territory and returned to North America for furlough in September 1968 after they were able to arrange for International Red Cross personnel to cover for them during their absence.⁵³

After their furlough the missionaries' returned under the joint auspices of MCC and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The mission and MCC

⁴⁹ Vern Preheim to Nuonye Otue, November 20, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Beechy, "Nigeria/Biafra Report Part II"; Gehman to Joyce Bratton.

⁵⁰ Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 9, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1966-69; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, March 20, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Martha Bender to Esther Graber.

⁵¹ James Kratz to Martha Bender, November 27, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Bender, Martha 1966-70; "Proposed Jointly Sponsored Program of The American Friends Service Committee and The Mennonite Central Committee," December 9, 1968, HM 1-48, Box 86, Biafra-Nigeria Situation, 1968-1969; Vern Preheim to James D. Kratz, December 16, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. George Weber, December 30, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weber, George and Lena 1966-68 Confidential.

⁵² Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968; Wallace Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 3, Gingerich, Cyril and Ruth 1966-69 Confidential; Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, May 29, 1968.

⁵³ Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 5, 1968, Wilbert R. Shenk, "Report on Telephone Call with Martha Bender" (MBMC, September 23, 1968), and Wilbert R. Shenk to Neil C. Bernard, September 24, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

collaborated closely in their efforts to provide assistance to the region during the last two years of the war and immediately afterward.⁵⁴ Because the mission sought to maintain a positive relationship with Federal authorities in order to obtain permission to send missionaries back to the Uyo area, by then under the control of Federalist forces, and because MCC had a special mandate for relief and service in war situations, MBMC and MCC decided to send their personnel under the auspices of MCC instead of under the mission.⁵⁵ Since the AFSC had recently obtained permission from Federal authorities to do relief work in Nigeria, MCC relied on it for logistical support.⁵⁶ Those who returned to the region in early 1969, therefore, worked under joint MCC/AFSC sponsorship.⁵⁷ MCC and AFSC succeeded in getting permission from Biafran authorities for the Shellenbergers to return to Abiriba with MCC doctor Linford Gehman in early January

⁵⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk to John Hostetler, March 13, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mennonite Central Committee - 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, April 18, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968; Overseas Missions Committee Minutes, (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, April 20, 1968), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969; Harms, Doreen, "Minutes MCC Executive Committee Telephone Conference," (MCC, September 12, 1968), Vern Preheim to William T. Snyder, September 13, 1968, Vern Preheim to Roger Frederickson, November 19, 1968, and James D. Kratz to Vern Preheim, December 4, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. George Weber, December 30, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weber, George and Lena 1966-68 Confidential; Wilbert R. Shenk to William T. Snyder, Vern Preheim, and H. Ernest Bennett, June 19, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Relief and Rehabilitation 1969; Vern Preheim to Wilbert Shenk, June 11, 1970, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, June 16, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Christian Trust Poultry Farmers 1970-71.

⁵⁵ Vern Preheim to William T. Snyder, November 14, 1968; James Kratz to Martha Bender; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. George Weber.

⁵⁶ James Kratz, "Nigeria/Biafra Report" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 8, 1968), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968; Vern Preheim to William T. Snyder.

⁵⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. George Weber; Ruby Lind to Miss Martha Bender, February 3, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Bender, Martha 1966-70.

1969 and for Bender in March.⁵⁸ The Shellenbergers completed a six-month term in June and Gehman and Bender stayed in the region until the last days of the war in early January 1970.⁵⁹

After the war the call to assist in Abiriba came to MBMC again. Local authorities there asked for medical personnel.⁶⁰ The mission, however, preferred to allow Mennonite assistance to flow through the AFSC since it had already taken over management of the hospital and because Mennonite missionaries were not able to obtain government approval to return to the region.⁶¹ Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk also cited the mission's desire to encourage self-reliance on the part of the community and government as an additional factor. Indigenization was an enduring MBMC value.

Church of the Lord Aladura Seminary

Although the Nigerian civil war halted the Weavers' work in southeastern Nigeria, Harold Turner had introduced the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) to Church of the Lord Aladura leaders whose request for assistance provided

⁵⁸ James D. Kratz to Nigeria Missionaries, December 12, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968; Atlee Beechy, "Nigeria/Biafra Report Part II," January 21, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, March 20, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

⁵⁹ Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report," June 2, 1969; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, June 12, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Martha Bender to Esther Graber; Paul Erb to M. J. Udoh.

⁶⁰ E. Emole to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 28, 1970, and U. Ikwan-Onwuka to the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 11, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74.

⁶¹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Keith E. Gingrich, October 26, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Chief E. Emole, February 3, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74.

another arena for ministry among African Independent Churches (AICs). During the year after the outbreak of the war, church leaders intensified their requests for assistance with plans to start a seminary, and the Theological Education Fund (TEF) offered to assist with some funding. MBMC's work with AICs in southeastern Nigeria had ended because of the war and the wider West Africa initiative was not yet underway. The mission accepted the opportunity to collaborate with the Church of the Lord and the TEF in the establishment of the Church of the Lord seminary. This section will outline the mission's involvement in the seminary initiative and the issues that arose during the six years it provided assistance. It will show that the value of indigenization continued to be a strong concern for both MBMC and the TEF and was a major factor in their missiological deliberations. Assisting the Church of the Lord provided the mission the opportunity to gain experience in ministry with a significant AIC and to collaborate with those in the wider Protestant mission movement who were also engaging these movements, people such as Harold Turner and institutions such as the Theological Education Fund.

An Opportunity Outside the War Zone

It was the Weavers' relationship with Harold Turner that resulted in the Church of the Lord's invitation to help the church develop a seminary for its leaders. The site of the church's planned seminary campus was near Lagos in southwestern Nigeria, outside of the war zone and more accessible to missionary personnel than the eastern region.⁶² Turner had done research on the church and written a two-volume work about the

⁶² Harold W. Turner to Edwin and Irene Weaver, October 8, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude.

movement.⁶³ His casual encounter with Church of the Lord leader Adeleke Adejobi on a beach in Sierra Leone in 1957 had introduced him to the church, and Turner arranged for Adejobi to study at the Glasgow Bible Training Institute in Scotland.⁶⁴ Study at Glasgow convinced Adejobi of the importance of Bible training for church leaders, and he proposed to establish a seminary to provide such training for the church in Nigeria.⁶⁵ He approached Turner seeking advice about western sources of assistance in the venture. Turner was cool to the idea at first, fearing that missionaries might be “too doctrinal and dogmatic and not tolerant and adaptable enough,” but he eventually recommended that MBMC assist the church.⁶⁶

Turner had met Edwin and Irene Weaver in 1962 and found common cause with them in their approach to AICs. They recognized churches such as the Church of the Lord as authentic Christian movements and sought to assist them without imposing western systematic doctrines. A warm, trusting working relationship developed between Turner and the Weavers, and in 1964 he recommended that Adejobi discuss the seminary project with Edwin. Turner wrote to the Weavers explaining Adejobi’s request and inquired if their mission would be interested in this ministry.⁶⁷ Both Weaver and mission

⁶³ Harold W. Turner, *History of an African Church. Vol. 1, The Church of the Lord (Aladura)*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Harold W. Turner, *History of an African Church. Vol. 2, The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁶⁴ Harold W. Turner, *The Laughter of Providence: Stories from a Life on the Margins* (Meadowbank, New Zealand: The DeepSight Trust, 2001), 30–32, 45.

⁶⁵ Harold W. Turner to Edwin and Irene Weaver; E. O. A. Adejobi to Edwin Weaver, February 28, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 2, Miscellaneous.

⁶⁶ Harold W. Turner to Edwin and Irene Weaver.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

administrator John Yoder considered this invitation an important opportunity, but the mission's expanding program in southeastern Nigeria, concern about insufficient personnel, and the Church of the Lord's uncertainty about how to begin the seminary combined to keep the idea inert for the next three years.⁶⁸

The idea resurged in 1967 when the Church of the Lord chose Adejobi to become its new primate, and he used his new authority to move the seminary project forward, soliciting assistance from MBMC and the Theological Education Fund. From the mission he sought instructors, materials, and scholarships to train future teachers.⁶⁹ The TEF was looking for ways to support training for AIC leaders and had already provided bursaries for some of them in southeastern Nigeria at the instigation of Weaver and the Inter-Church Study Group.⁷⁰

Like Turner, the TEF had come to appreciate Weaver and his colleagues' approach to AICs and was willing to collaborate with the mission in the work that the Weavers had started.⁷¹ After Adejobi approached the Glasgow Bible Training Institute, where he had studied, for lecturers, TEF director Walter Cason informed MBMC that the

⁶⁸ Edwin Weaver to Harold and Maude Turner, October 28, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; John H. Yoder to Overseas Committee, November 9, 1964, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, March 24, 1967, HM 1-696, Box 3, Shenk, Wilbert, 1965-1966; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 18, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966-68 Confidential; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, June 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69.

⁶⁹ E. O. A. Adejobi to Edwin Weaver.

⁷⁰ Edwin Weaver to the Theological Education Fund, November 25, 1965 and Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, November 26, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1964-1965; J. Walter Cason to MBMC, February 17, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1966.

⁷¹ J. Walter Cason to W. R. Shenk, January 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966-68 Confidential.

TEF was ready to help but preferred to assist in the placement of Mennonite missionaries rather than Bible School graduates from the U.K.⁷² With this encouragement the mission quickly approved in July 1968 a six-year period of assistance to the seminary initiative, two instructors for the six years as well as the services of the Weavers for the seminary's initial year.⁷³ The TEF committed to providing fifteen thousand dollars to support the provision of mission personnel to the seminary.⁷⁴ In September 1968 MBMC formally appointed the Weavers to the seminary for a one-year term and B. Charles and Grace Hostetter for three years.⁷⁵ B. Charles had previously served fifteen years as the preacher and director of the *Mennonite Hour*, the same radio ministry that had been instrumental in the mission's arrival to Ghana some twelve years before and from which the AICs in southeastern Nigeria had learned of the Mennonite Church.⁷⁶

MBMC's contribution to the Church of the Lord seminary scheme via the Weavers and Hostetters was retarded by the Nigerian immigration authorities' hesitancy to issue them visas. Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk had already raised the concern

⁷² J. Walter Cason to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 25, 1968 and J. Walter Cason to Wilbert R. Shenk," June 6, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69.

⁷³ Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, July 9, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69; Wilbert R. Shenk to Overseas Missions Committee, July 18, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966-68 Confidential; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, August 23, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Theological Education Fund 1966-68.

⁷⁴ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 26, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74; B. Charles Hostetter to E. O. Ashamu and M. K. Kafaru, October 1, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74.

⁷⁵ Overseas Missions Committee Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 25, 1968), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969.

⁷⁶ Hubert R. Pellman, *Mennonite Broadcasts: The First 25 Years* (Harrisonburg, VA: Mennonite Broadcasts, Inc., 1978), 26-41.

that involvement at Abiriba, in Biafran territory, might negatively affect missionaries' ability to obtain visas to return to Nigeria.⁷⁷ I. U. Nsagak, Mennonite Church Nigeria secretary, informed Edwin Weaver in 1968 that federalist forces had found letters between Weaver and Lloyd Fisher that they had interpreted as being pro-Biafra.⁷⁸ For its first years in Nigeria Mennonite missionaries had entered the country under the Church of Scotland Mission's quota and collaborated closely with that mission and the Presbyterian Church that issued from it, including the Abiriba work. This put the Mennonite mission in an awkward position since Mennonite and Church of Scotland missionaries provided relief and humanitarian services on the Biafra side, a contribution that opened MBMC to critique from the Federalist side that it had aided and abetted the enemy.⁷⁹ As Federalist forces reclaimed territory from the Biafran secessionists and missionaries sought to re-enter southeastern Nigeria, immigration authorities were clear that visas would be issued sparingly and only to those whose role fit closely with governmental priorities.⁸⁰ Fears that authorities would refuse visas to MBMC turned out

⁷⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, April 18, 1968.

⁷⁸ I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968, Lloyd J. Fisher to Stanley Friesen, June 19, 1967, and Lloyd J. Fisher to Edwin Weaver, June 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

⁷⁹ Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report," numerous reports in IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968, and Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969.

⁸⁰ I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968; C. A. Ekere to The Divisional Officer, Uyo, January 4, 1969 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Overseas Missions Committee, February 11, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Vern Preheim to Elizabeth Schowalter, March 20, 1970, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Elizabeth Schowalter 1969-70.

to be justified when the Weavers and Hostetters waited months after applying without word from Nigeria.⁸¹

In the end the Hostetters, who had no history in Nigeria, received their visas, but the Weavers did not. Primate Adejobi himself intervened with immigration authorities in an attempt to move the process along.⁸² After waiting a full year for a response to their application, the Hostetters received visas in May 1970 and traveled to Nigeria in June.⁸³ The Weavers' situation, however, was different. They applied in October 1968, and Adejobi informed them in April 1969 that immigration authorities indicated that they would not receive visas.⁸⁴ Hostetter reported after his arrival that the chief immigration official in Lagos hinted that the rejection was because of the Weavers' association with certain people.⁸⁵ Government officials felt that some missionaries had unwisely entered politics during the war and that many church officials were "spies in clerical garbs."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Edwin Weaver to Harold W. Turner, October 28, 1968, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 15, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Warren L. Grasse, March 13, 1969, B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 11, 1969, and H. Olu Atansui to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 10, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 3, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1968-69; Charles and Grace Hostetter to Family and Friends, May 8, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 14, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter.

⁸² James D. Kratz to Those Involved in AIC Leadership Training, November 25, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69; H. Olu Atansui to Wilbert R. Shenk.

⁸³ Wilbert R. Shenk to Warren L. Grasse; Charles and Grace Hostetter to Family and Friends; B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 24, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

⁸⁴ Edwin Weaver to Harold W. Turner; O. A. Adejobi to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 2, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69.

⁸⁵ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert Shenk, July 8, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 14, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The Weavers' contribution to ministry among AICs would henceforth be in other countries.

The Ongoing Challenge of Indigenization

As in its engagement in southeastern Nigeria and consistent with its post-World War II initiatives, the principle of indigenization was a primary concern for MBMC in its relationship with the Church of the Lord seminary. Shenk noted that the mission did not anticipate that its responsibility at the seminary would be long-term and expected that Africans would assume leadership of the initiative as quickly as possible.⁸⁷ Ultimate responsibility and authority would rest with the church.⁸⁸ The mission entered into its relationship with the seminary without a specific action plan, instead hoping for a creative initiative that would be responsive to the West African context. In close collaboration with the church, missionaries would develop curricula that spoke to the situation of the church and would reinforce positive African cultural values.⁸⁹ Finding authentic expressions of Christianity would be a dialogical process. Hostetter was to avoid subsidizing the program or taking day-to-day leadership of it.⁹⁰ Such an approach was meant to ensure that the theological education that the seminary provided would

⁸⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, July 9, 1968; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, May 27, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74.

⁸⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to James Kratz, John H. Yoder, Edwin Weaver, and B. Charles Hostetter, December 19, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Theological Education Fund 1966-68.

⁸⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk and James Kratz, "Notes on Consultation Regarding Development of a Theological Training School with the Church of the Lord Aladura, Dec. 16, 1968," January 10, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69.

⁹⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to B. Charles Hostetter, October 20, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74.

meet the real needs of its students in their Nigerian context and that the institution would not become dependent on western financing and personnel.

In its concern for indigenization of the seminary initiative, the mission found common ground with its partner the Theological Education Fund. In 1972, two years after the Hostetters arrived to Nigeria, the TEF was entering its third mandate and implemented a policy of contextualization. Director Shoki Coe had articulated this new conceptual understanding to describe the way an ongoing mix of indigenous factors; global influences such as secularity, technology, the struggle for human justice, and the inter-dependence of contexts; and the primacy of the *Missio Dei* coalesce in a way that results in authentic expressions of Christianity in particular settings.⁹¹ The concept of indigenization, according to Coe, was incomplete and static, tending to limit its attention to traditional cultures. Coe and the TEF African Director, Desmond Tutu, would henceforth judge requests for aid from the Church of the Lord seminary by the measure of how well they could demonstrate contextualization in mission, theological approach, educational method, and structure.⁹²

The new conceptual understanding of contextualization articulated concerns with which Weaver and his colleagues had been wrestling for the previous two decades in

⁹¹ T.E.F Committee, "A Working Policy for the Implementation of the Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund," 1972, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches..."; Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 233-43; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Theological Education in Historical and Global Perspective," in *Theology in Missionary Perspective: Lesslie Newbigin's Legacy* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

⁹² Shoki Coe to the Principals of Theological Colleges in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Caribbean and Oceania, August 1972, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches..."

their deliberations about indigenization and about the relationship between MBMC and autonomous churches in the global south. It brought together the importance of local contexts, the adaptability of theory and strategy to those contexts, local engagement with the wider Christian tradition, indigenous agency, the eclipse of unjust colonial structures, and the commitment to ongoing engagement between Christians of different cultures.

The concept of *glocalization* that Roland Robertson suggested two decades later helps situate Coe's focus on contextualization in globalization discourse. Robertson suggested the term to correct what he considered the mistaken assumption that globalization overrides locality, that global forces from outside local contexts necessarily counter and tend to dominate local concerns and conceptions of reality.⁹³ Instead, globalization involves, and depends on, universal and particular forces interacting, both influencing the outcome the interaction. Outside of the theoreticians, he noted, many people in the world assume that the two tendencies can and should interact. The question is not whether they should but how and what result is desirable. Coe's concern was similar to that of Robertson but from the other direction. While he was clear about the importance of local contexts, he argued that indigenization discourse was incomplete, too static and focused on local, traditional cultures.⁹⁴ There is, Coe argued, an interdependence of those local contexts. He highlighted the need to pay attention to both indigenous and global factors as part of the ongoing mix of influences as Christianity and

⁹³ Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities, Theory, Culture and Society*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 25–44.

⁹⁴ T.E.F. Committee, "A Working Policy for the Implementation of the Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund"; Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education."

theological education take form in faithful ways in different contexts around the world. Of utmost concern for Coe was that such interaction result in forms faithful to the *Mission Dei*, the mission of God. As such the process of contextualization he envisioned is value-laden. It and its result are to be evaluated theologically. Contextualization can be explained as value-laden glocalization in the world Christian movement.

The issue of how to engage the Church of the Lord's seminary initiative in a way that would increase the likelihood of it being successful and useful in its own context was a primary concern for the Hostetters during their assignment in Nigeria. Despite the mission's desire that responsibility and authority rest with Nigerian leadership, B. Charles reported that Adejobi and the church would have preferred him to administer and finance the seminary.⁹⁵ The mission was adamant that it neither wanted to provide financial subsidies nor have Hostetter provide primary leadership for the school.⁹⁶ His assignment was to be an instructor. The Hostetters found balancing the differing expectations to be a significant challenge as they sought to implement indigenization policy as well as respond to the felt needs of the Church of the Lord with which, and under whose authority, they worked day-to-day.⁹⁷ Following the church's wishes, B.

⁹⁵ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 13, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74.

⁹⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to B. Charles Hostetter, October 20, 1970.

⁹⁷ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 2, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74.

Charles accepted the post of principal of the seminary, but the mission pushed the church to train its own personnel to take over the position.⁹⁸

The Hostetters sought to work in a way that would be helpful but avoid institutional dependency on western resources. They encouraged the seminary to build structures and programs that the church could manage and sustain and that would respond directly to its needs, thus avoiding dependence on western financing, personnel, and theology.⁹⁹ Something as simple as providing food for the students suddenly had ideological implications.¹⁰⁰ The church had agreed to meet this need, but when there were insufficient funds the person in charge simply left the campus for days at a time, and the students did not eat. The Hostetters finally provided food for the students from their own funds, even if this seemed to encourage the seminary's dependence on western assistance. The church failed to realize its plans for building classrooms and dormitories for the seminary but concurrently established on the same site a high school with its own classrooms while seminary classes met in the Hostetters' house.¹⁰¹ B. Charles reported that the church seemed to expect him as principal to find funding and build the seminary

⁹⁸ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, J. Walter Cason, Harold W. Turner, and Edwin Weaver, April 19, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 14, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter; B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 2, 1971; Wilbert R. Shenk to E. O. A. Adejobi, May 23, 1972, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972.

⁹⁹ B. Charles Hostetter, "A Small Beginning at Last," February 1, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 14, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter.

¹⁰⁰ B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert Shenk, May 24, 1972, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.; B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 6, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74.

buildings from the contacts he had in North America.¹⁰² The tension between encouraging the seminary to be self-sufficient financially and responding to the Church of the Lord's expectations was an ongoing challenge.

MBMC's assistance to the seminary initiative consisted essentially of the Hostetters' contribution during their two three-year terms from 1970 to 1976. Although applying principles of indigenization to their work presented a significant challenge, they expressed deep appreciation for the relationships they developed with church personnel and the students they taught.¹⁰³ Upon the Hostetters' departure Adejobi reminded the mission that it had only sent one instructor, B. Charles, and that he was waiting for the second instructor that the mission had approved.¹⁰⁴ In the end the mission decided not to recruit another teacher for the seminary, citing the church's failure to develop infrastructure, train local teachers, and generally move the seminary in the direction of indigenization.¹⁰⁵ The mission had understood church's willingness to do so to be an indicator of its commitment to the indigenization principle. Given the lack of movement in that direction and what seemed like a reliance on B. Charles to develop the seminary

¹⁰² B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert Shenk, May 24, 1972; B. Charles Hostetter to J. D. Graber, August 10, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74.

¹⁰³ B. Charlie Hostetter to Wilbert Shenk, May 31, 1972, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 14, B. Charles and Grace Hostetter; B. Charles Hostetter, "A Historical Report on the Aladura Theological Seminary," June 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79.

¹⁰⁴ E. O. A. Adejobi to J. D. Graber, February 1975, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79.

¹⁰⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to E. O. A. Adejobi, November 19, 1975, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to Harold W. Turner, December 17, 1975, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Turner, Dr. Harold W--75-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to E. O. A. Adejobi, February 2, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79.

during the Hostetters' time in Nigeria, MBMC decided that not sending another teacher would be more conducive to encouraging an indigenous seminary than sending one.

Nevertheless, the mission did contribute teachers for the seminary's periodic "crash courses" for church leaders during the following four years. The Hostetters returned twice to teach these short courses, in 1977 and 1980, and visited the church on their way through Lagos in 1984.¹⁰⁶ The mission sent two ministers, Paul Landis and Richard Detweiler, for a week of Bible teaching in 1978.¹⁰⁷

Engagement with African Independent Churches Across West Africa

Unable to get visas to reenter Nigeria in order to work with the Church of the Lord, the Weavers shifted their focus to African Independent Churches (AICs) across West Africa as the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) sought to better understand and engage this dynamic movement. This section will describe the mission's initiatives among AICs in the years following the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war. Included is the Weavers' information-gathering visits to six countries in 1969 and MBMC's subsequent ministry in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Dahomey (People's Republic of Benin from 1975 to 1990 and Republic of Benin thereafter). This section also

¹⁰⁶ E. O. A. Adejobi to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 6, 1977 and E. O. A. Adejobi to B. Charles Hostetter, August 9, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79; B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 24, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Charles and Grace 1980-84; B. Charles Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 12, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1980-84; B. Charles Hostetter to Ronald E. Yoder, August 8, 1984, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Charles and Grace 1980-84.

¹⁰⁷ B. Charles Hostetter to E. O. A. Adejobi, January 18, 1979, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Church of the Lord (Aladura) 75-79.

outlines the vision the mission articulated for its work at the beginning of its regional West Africa effort. The vision highlighted the strategy of biblical training for church leaders as well as improving inter-church relations, especially between AICs and mission churches, that the Weavers' earlier work inspired. While this vision guided the missionaries' efforts, the different socio-political and religious contexts they encountered conditioned the shape and nature of their strategies and the results of their various initiatives.

A West Africa Survey

The idea of an information-gathering visit to explore the AIC movements across West Africa grew out of the southeastern Nigeria experience, AIC requests for assistance, the availability of the Weavers once they were not able to return to Nigeria, and the mission's desire to explore new missionary opportunities. Work with AICs in Nigeria and interaction with missionaries and researchers who worked with and studied them convinced the Weavers and their MBMC colleagues of the significance of these movements.¹⁰⁸ The Weavers had expected to retire in 1967, but they kept in touch with contacts in Nigeria and after a year in Kansas were ready to return.¹⁰⁹ Their reputation for working with AICs had already prompted the Church of the Lord to invite the mission to

¹⁰⁸ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilber R. Shenk, February 15, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1969; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 18, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1968-69; Wilbert R. Shenk to Overseas Committee, March 19, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1969.

¹⁰⁹ Edwin Weaver to E. O. Adejobi, December 1, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966-68 Confidential; E. O. A. Adeleke Adejobi to Edwin Weaver, January 15, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Church of the Lord Aladura 1968-69; E. J. Akam to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1968 and Edwin and Irene Weaver to John Coutts, July 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1966-68 Confidential.

send teachers to help create its seminary in Lagos. In Belgium, Mennonite missionary David Shank had developed contacts with the Kimbanguist Church, a Congolese AIC, and was exploring possible mission engagement with that movement.¹¹⁰ Such opportunities raised the possibility that the Nigeria experience might provide a paradigm for similar work with these kinds of movements more widely.

Within a year of the missionaries' evacuation from southeastern Nigeria, the mission decided to investigate similar ministry opportunities in the broader West African region. In July 1968 the mission's Overseas Missions Committee encouraged its staff to explore "possibilities for teaching ministries to independent churches in West Africa."¹¹¹ This opened the way for the Weavers' assignment to spend a year in Lagos to help start the Church of the Lord seminary.¹¹² When their visas were not forthcoming, MBMC proposed an alternative, an investigation of AICs in other West African countries.¹¹³ Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk had already suggested the development of a West African strategy for working with AICs instead of a country-by-country approach.¹¹⁴ Now the Overseas Office proposed visits to countries across West Africa that would produce

¹¹⁰ David Shank, *Mission From the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministries of David A. Shank*, ed. James Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 51; John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 20, 1968 and John H. Yoder to Vern Preheim, November 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Kimbanguists - Confidential 1967-69.

¹¹¹ "Overseas Missions Committee Minutes," (Kalona, IA: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 1, 1969), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969.

¹¹² Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Walter Cason, July 9, 1968.

¹¹³ Wilbert R. Shenk to Overseas Committee.

¹¹⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilber R. Shenk.

reports, analysis, identification of strategic factors, and recommendations.¹¹⁵ With this investigative tour the mission sought to gain understanding of the AIC movement and awareness of opportunities for future work and witness. The Weavers accepted the assignment that lasted from May to November 1969.¹¹⁶

The Weavers' survey took place in the decade after nations gained their independence across the region and at the moment when western Christians were questioning the missionary project. They were also starting, however, to notice the twentieth century surge of Christians in the global South. In West Africa as in other southern regions people appropriated the new faith and adapted it to their particular contexts in increasing numbers, even if not always as fast or to the extent that had happened in Ibibioland.¹¹⁷ Indigenization and native agency had already been a value of the larger Protestant missionary movement for some time; Barrett had published his *Schism and Renewal in Africa* that highlighted the significance of AIC movements the year before; and Shoki Coe would soon implement his concept of contextualization in the work of the Theological Education Fund.¹¹⁸ Increasingly the condemnation of colonialism

¹¹⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to Overseas Committee.

¹¹⁶ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 19, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Resume of Edwin Weavers' West Africa Survey Assignment, May - November 1969," December 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

¹¹⁷ Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 50-58; Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross, and Sandra S. K. Lee, eds., "Christianity in Western Africa, 1910-2010," in *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 132-133.

¹¹⁸ Dana L. Robert, "The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (2002): 50-66; David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious*

included missionaries in its accusations of paternalism and domination and in the next years there would be a movement calling for a moratorium on missionaries. While not everyone whom the Weavers engaged in their survey and subsequent work agreed with their AIC mission strategy, the post-colonial context meant that those who were not repudiating mission engagement altogether were looking for mission approaches that renounced the colonial legacy. The time was ripe for a mission strategy that sought to support indigenous Christian movements such as AICs, and the Weavers would find growing support among both western missionaries and African Christians for their approach.

Their West Africa survey took the Weavers first to New York, London, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Brussels, and Paris, then through six countries in West Africa. In New York they exchanged ideas with others who shared their interest in work with AICs. This included David Barrett and members of both the African Committee of the National Council of Churches and the United Methodist Church, who provided contact information for possible collaborators in West Africa.¹¹⁹ In London, personnel of the London Conference of British Missionary Societies and the Methodist Missionary Society expressed sympathy for the Weavers' engagement with AICs and provided letters

Movements (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968); Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education."

¹¹⁹ Edwin Weaver to Harold and Maude Turner, April 14, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 18, Turner, Harold and Maude; Esther L. Magill to Clyde Galow, B. A. Carew, and S. Trowen Nagbe, May 15, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 12, M - Miscellaneous; Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 1" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 19, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports.

of introduction addressed to Methodist leaders in West Africa.¹²⁰ One of those was the Reverend Harry Y. Henry, the head of the Methodist Church in Dahomey and Togo, with whom MBMC missionaries would collaborate closely in their work with AICs in Dahomey in subsequent years. In London too they met with J. Walter Cason of the Theological Education Fund, who expressed interest in continuing the assistance for AIC leadership training that the Fund had provided before the outbreak of the civil war in Nigeria.¹²¹

After London the visits continued in Great Britain and then on the continent. In Edinburgh Robert Macdonald, who had proven indispensable in his support of the Weavers' work in southeastern Nigeria, now introduced them to key Church of Scotland Mission personnel who provided encouragement and information about possible contacts and AIC ministry opportunities.¹²² In Edinburgh they also met former acquaintance John Litwiller, guest speaker at the Church of Scotland Mission's general assembly meetings and now a leader in its church in South America. Litwiller had earlier been an MBMC missionary in the Argentine Chaco, and it was he who wrote the proposal that the mission reorient its ministry to resource the indigenous Toba church there instead of continuing with the traditional mission station approach. Before leaving Great Britain the Weavers traveled to Aberdeen and Leicester to consult with Andrew Walls and Harold Turner,

¹²⁰ Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 2" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 4, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports; Hugh E. Thomas to Mr. and Mrs. Weaver, May 30, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 15, T - Miscellaneous.

¹²¹ Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 2."

¹²² Ibid.; Neil C. Bernard to Wilbert S. Shenk, May 22, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969.

with whom they had collaborated in Nigeria. In Brussels and Paris the Weavers met with Mennonite missionaries David and Wilma Shank and Marlin and Ruth Ann Miller and found them interested in AIC movements and willing to assist with the West Africa survey.¹²³ The Shanks and Millers both worked with African university students and David had already established relationships with Kimbanguist contacts. The Weavers suggested that David continue to cultivate ministry opportunities with the Kimbanguists while Marlin assist with the work in Francophone West Africa.¹²⁴

After Europe the tour continued through Sierra Leone and Liberia before the Weavers arrived to Ghana where they settled for a time, visiting Ivory Coast, Togo, and Dahomey from there. In Sierra Leone they met for the first time Primate Adejobi of the Church of the Lord Aladura, who was visiting his churches there.¹²⁵ They also met with leaders from across the various mission churches, most of whom were Sierra Leonean, and found cautious openness to their focus on assisting AICs.¹²⁶ In the Methodist Church there were individuals already working with these movements.¹²⁷ In Liberia the Weavers met with leaders of the Church of the Lord as well as with leaders of a number of mission

¹²³ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 4, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 3" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 9, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports.

¹²⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 4, 1969.

¹²⁵ Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 4" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 20, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin and Irene Weaver, July 1, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

¹²⁷ Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, July 8, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

churches.¹²⁸ They also met Werner Korte, a German student studying Liberian AICs, of which he had found over one hundred that had no connections with foreign missions.

The Weavers stopped in Accra, Ghana, making it their base for the rest of their time in West Africa. There were other MBMC missionaries there, some who had been their colleagues in Nigeria, and resident visas were easier to obtain than in some other countries.¹²⁹ It appeared to the Weavers that there was an unusually large number of AICs in the country. In Ghana too the Weavers visited Church of the Lord leaders who received them well.¹³⁰ Throughout their survey tour they found that Church of the Lord congregations already knew about the proposed Lagos seminary and were looking forward to the training that it would provide.¹³¹ While the Weavers found a few individuals among the Ghanaian mission church leadership who were sympathetic to their AIC focus, in general these churches and the Christian Council of Ghana were not.¹³²

Just as the Eastern Regional Council of the Christian Council of Nigeria was slow to accept the legitimacy of AICs, so the Christian Council of Ghana would be slow to warm to the idea. The Wesleyan Methodists, Presbyterians, Evangelical Presbyterians,

¹²⁸ Edwin Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 5" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 3, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports.

¹²⁹ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, Missionary Studies 3 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1975), 12–13.

¹³⁰ Edwin Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 6" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 26, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*; Edwin Weaver to J. Walter Cason, July 8, 1969.

¹³² Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 6."

and Anglicans had formed the Council in 1929 and had a forty-year history of inter-church collaboration by the time the Weavers arrived on the scene.¹³³ They had worked together on the issue of theological education since the 1940s and had established Trinity College as an ecumenical training center ten years earlier. The Christian Council churches were by this time part of a Ghanaian mission church tradition and likely found the AICs to be theologically unreflective, if not downright heretical, in their cultural construal of the Christian faith.

The All African Council of Churches (AACC) meeting in Abidjan in September 1969 provided Edwin Weaver the opportunity to gauge interest about AICs among the meeting's participants and to visit the Ivory Coast. At the meeting Weaver met a number of AIC leaders, other participants who were convinced of the significance of these movements, and people who knew of his work in Nigeria and were sympathetic with his approach.¹³⁴ He met Harry Y. Henry, president of the Methodist Church in Dahomey and Togo, to whom he had a letter of introduction from the Methodist Missionary Society of London.¹³⁵ Henry had already established positive relationships with some AICs in Dahomey, and he invited the Weavers to join forces with him in working among these churches.

¹³³ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 715-717.

¹³⁴ Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 8, Part Two - Abidjan" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 30, 1969); Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 17.

¹³⁵ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 17.

Less positively, in Abidjan tensions mounted between AIC leaders and the AACC. The AIC leaders found that the AACC had agreed to set up a service agency for their churches without consulting them.¹³⁶ The leaders boycotted a meeting that the AACC had arranged for AICs, much to the embarrassment of the organizers. Weaver had the trust of both sides because of his work in Nigeria and was able to play a mediating role and assure the presence of an AACC representative at a closed meeting of AIC leaders where the matter was resolved.¹³⁷ AIC leaders also expressed disgruntlement with the term “Independent Churches,” believing that the term somehow disconnected them from the larger African church movement.¹³⁸ Those present at the Abidjan meeting preferred the term *indigenous* churches.

Weaver used the visit to Abidjan to contact Ivoirian mission church leaders, primarily of the Methodist Church. He found them less positive about the possibilities of fruitful engagement with AICs than he had hoped.¹³⁹ The principal AIC in the Ivory Coast was the Harrist Church, the result of the ministry of Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris who had passed through the country in 1913-14. Marlin Miller visited the Ivory Coast later in the fall and found similar ambivalence among mission church leaders; few were interested in engaging in ministry with the movement, except perhaps

¹³⁶ Donald R. Jacobs to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 18, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.

¹³⁷ Ibid.; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsagak, September 9, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

¹³⁸ Weaver, “West Africa Report No. 8, Part Two - Abidjan.”

¹³⁹ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 17.

to encourage its members to integrate into the mission churches.¹⁴⁰ Miller's initial investigations found no indication that a ministry of strengthening the Harrist Church or of building better relationships between it and the mission churches was feasible.

Edwin Weaver and Miller traveled to Togo and Dahomey later in the year, found AICs there eager for contact and assistance, and noted that in Dahomey a missionary presence seemed to enhance the possibilities of inter-church relationships. In both countries leaders invited them to return soon to explore ways MBMC might capacitate and work with their churches.¹⁴¹ In Dahomey they met with Reverend Henry who introduced them to a number of AICs and organized a meeting with their leaders.¹⁴² Miller noted that his and Weaver's presence provided the impetus for the gathering, allowing both Henry and the AIC leaders to participate in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. Without such a motivation AIC leaders would have been suspicious that Henry and the Methodist Church were trying to draw them into their own church. On the other hand, without Miller and Weaver's presence the Methodist Church would have criticized Henry for meeting with groups with which it was not in fellowship. MBMC missionaries were able to bring together mission churches and AICs in a way that did not

¹⁴⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969," December 1969, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Marlin Miller, "Report on Ivory Coast" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 18, 1970), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

¹⁴¹ Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969."

¹⁴² Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell, December 4, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 19, Hobart Campbell.

seem possible otherwise. Miller and Weaver made tentative plans to return to Dahomey in the next year to lead seminar-type Bible studies.

A Vision for West Africa

With the completion of the West Africa Survey towards the end of 1969, Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities weighed the significance of what the Weavers had found and the contacts they had made and formulated an approach for initiating its mission engagement in West Africa. The survey had confirmed that across the region relationships between AICs and mission churches were fractured.¹⁴³ A ministry of bridge building between these two streams of the Christian movement would be a vital contribution to the African church. It had also found that AICs' most common appeal to the Weavers was for training, leadership training and the establishment of Bible schools. As these priorities corresponded to what the Weavers had found in southeastern Nigeria, mission administrator Wilbert Shenk suggested that the Nigeria experience might provide a paradigm for missionary method in the larger West African region.¹⁴⁴ In conversation with MBMC personnel on the ground, he penned a "Vision for West Africa" that outlined

¹⁴³ "Summary of Dec. 1, 1969 Discussion of West Africa Strategy" (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, December 1, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 10, Background Material for "Among Indigenous.... chapter 6; Shenk, "Resume of Edwin Weavers' West Africa Survey Assignment, May - November 1969"; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - West Africa," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, December 19, 1969), IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

¹⁴⁴ Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - West Africa."

a mission approach to address this new missionary opportunity, taking into consideration both the Nigeria experience and the Weavers' subsequent survey.¹⁴⁵

Shenk's Vision outlined a framework for the mission's novel approach with AICs in West Africa. He noted that the issues facing West African Christians in the relatively new post-colonial context were different from those of earlier generations.¹⁴⁶ As in Nigeria the mission would seek to develop new patterns of relationships instead of simply establishing a church with organic ties to a Western denomination. While the region was relatively well covered by other missions and churches, Shenk argued that there were still reasons to engage in new missionary activity. MBMC was prepared to be a prophetic witness within the Christian community and push for opportunities for reconciliation between AICs and mission churches. No one else appeared to be willing or able to do this. The fact that MBMC was a relative newcomer to the region meant that it had a fresh start and was not bogged down by involvement in earlier discord that was behind inter-church friction. It was largely free of the legacy of colonial involvement that plagued missions that had been there since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hence it enjoyed relatively broad acceptability among the various church groups.

The new vision called for a regional, West African approach instead of one that focused on individual countries, and it sought to be strategic in its engagement. The

¹⁴⁵ "MBM, A Developing Vision for West Africa," October 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, October 3, 1969 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, October 3, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; "Summary of Dec. 1, 1969 Discussion of West Africa Strategy"; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Vision for West Africa (Revised from A Developing Vision for West Africa)," December 1969, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

¹⁴⁶ Shenk, "Vision for West Africa (Revised from A Developing Vision for West Africa)."

approach would be regional because some of the AICs, like the Church of the Lord, crossed national borders, demonstrating the trans-national nature of these movements in a region where colonial borders had often cut across ethnic and cultural boundaries.¹⁴⁷

Theologically, with such an approach MBMC sought to affirm that the church truly does transcend nationalism and provincialism. In addition, the mission had limited resources, both financial and personnel, for its new engagement. A regional approach would make limited resources available as widely as possible since personnel and programs could respond across a broad geographical area. Missionaries would have a variety of assignments, sometimes filling specific roles within a community or partner agency and sometimes having countrywide or regionwide responsibilities to represent MBMC to other agencies, churches, or governments. Also, given the mission's limited resources, Sherk encouraged missionaries to focus on engagement that would be the most significant over the long term instead of getting caught up in responding to what seemed most urgent. This meant that missionaries would have to evaluate different opportunities with respect to their missiological significance and then choose the most promising alternatives.

The "Vision for West Africa" included some traditional missionary concerns such as evangelism, church planting, Bible study, and leadership training but was innovative in its focus on offering help and encouragement to AICs. MBMC sought to encourage and assist the Mennonite churches in Ghana and Nigeria to engage in mission activity through evangelism and church planting. The Vision noted, however, that AICs made up the most

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

vigorous missionary movement of the day in Africa.¹⁴⁸ One of its priorities was to “sympathetically understand this movement and learn from it while also offering whatever help and encouragement we can toward strengthening it.”¹⁴⁹ The Vision also gave priority to Bible study and leadership training, again including but not limiting its focus to Mennonite churches. Study and training were to be at both the congregational level and in larger cooperative ventures with other Christian groups. Such initiatives might well be inter-church or inter-denominational and provide opportunities to witness to the mission’s concern for greater unity among churches. They might also provide the mission with opportunities for service by placing Mennonite personnel in projects administered by other denominations, a model that had been successful in Nigeria and helped strengthen the greater Christian witness beyond denominational identity. With such opportunities MBMC would seek to embody discipleship by keeping service activity vitally linked to witness and by seeking to ensure that institutional programs contributed positively to the church’s development.

Mission Engagement Across West Africa

The “Vision for West Africa” provided the initial outline for the mission’s engagement across the region during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Mennonite Board of Missionaries and Charities (MBMC) personnel worked in five different West African countries: Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, the Republic of Benin

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

(Dahomey), and Nigeria. In all five countries they engaged the AIC movement and in Ghana and Nigeria also worked to accompany and resource Mennonite churches.

This subsection will outline MBMC's engagement with AICs in West African countries other than Nigeria during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Since the Weavers and their colleagues were not able to get visas to return to southeastern Nigeria because of the political repercussions of the civil war, Ghana became their focus of ministry. They worked with colleagues to provide opportunities for biblical study and leadership training for AICs and to encourage better relationships between them and the mission churches. Early contacts in Togo and Dahomey appeared promising, especially with the able collaboration of Reverend Harry Henry. A change of government in Dahomey in 1972, however, brought a new regime to power, and its subsequent installation of Marxist rule made it difficult to develop work there. Attention for work in francophone countries turned to the Ivory Coast where for a decade missionaries worked with the Harrist church. Collaboration with the Harrists wound down in the late 1980s and the focus of MBMC's mission engagement during the last decade of the twentieth century returned to the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey). An initiative in Liberia in 1989 was cut short when newly arrived missionaries were forced to evacuate because of the rebellion that shook the country during the period.

The focus on improving inter-church relationships and resourcing AICs was a common feature of MBMC's ministry in West African countries, but each country presented a unique context, and mission engagement varied as a result. When the Weavers arrived in Ghana the Presbyterian and Methodist churches had already begun to

recognize the relevance of AICs, and AICs themselves had organized among themselves. The mission found willing partners and two formal programs of biblical training as well as a program of meetings to work at better inter-church relationships developed.

In the Ivory Coast the large Harrist church was the primary AIC presence. Missionaries produced significant scholarly work about its founder and about Harrist hymnody. There was less interest among churches, however, in working at inter-church relationships. In addition, among the Harrists the colonial legacy was strong, creating suspicion about the missionaries' motives. Consequently, formal inter-church conversations and an ongoing program of biblical training did not develop, and missionaries found a graceful way to exit after a decade of engagement.

In the Republic of Benin Methodist leader Harry Henry and later the Inter-Confessional Protestant Council provided capable partners for missionaries to provide AICs biblical training and health services from an inter-church base. When the arrival of democracy increased religious freedom and the inter-church structure of the Council fractured, missionaries formed an autonomous mission that allowed them to continue both ministries. With the schismatic nature of the church community in Benin, however, a formal effort to work at inter-church relationships did not materialize. The "Vision for West Africa" that grew out of the Weaver's work in Nigeria guided MBMC's engagement in the region during the last three decades of the twentieth century, but the specifics of the different contexts determined how the concerns for inter-church relationships and resourcing AICs developed in the different countries.

Ghana: A Continuation of the Nigeria Mission

In June 1969 the Weavers settled in Accra to finish their West Africa survey assignment and initiate ministry among AICs in Ghana with the help of other Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities personnel. As in Nigeria, and consistent with the priorities set out in Shenk's "Vision for West Africa," the main foci of their work were biblical training for AIC leaders and improved relationships among AICs and between AICs and mission churches. Primate Adejobi had given the Weavers letters of introduction to Ghanaian Church of the Lord leaders who requested Bible training classes for congregational leaders almost immediately upon their arrival.¹⁵⁰ In September, even before they had finished their survey work, the Weavers started teaching Bible classes at the Nima Temple, a Church of the Lord congregation in Accra.¹⁵¹ These soon included students from other AICs as well. Mennonite missionaries Willard and Alice Roth, Stanley and Delores Friesen, and Erma Grove assisted with teaching as other AICs requested classes in their churches.¹⁵²

Soon these grassroots Bible classes were happening throughout Accra and became a formal program. The classes seemed to fill a felt need as sometimes they attracted over one hundred people to class sessions.¹⁵³ Because the Weavers and their colleagues used

¹⁵⁰ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 19.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19–20; Edwin Weaver to Donald Jacobs, September 24, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.

¹⁵² Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 7, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 39–42; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 8, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

¹⁵³ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, December 3, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Edwin Weaver to Willard and Alice Roth, December 10,

the new *Good News for Modern Man* New Testament translation in their teaching, they gave the name “Good News Bible Classes” to the initiative.¹⁵⁴ By late 1970 MBMC missionaries were networking with other missionaries and with mission church leaders who were interested in working with AICs, and the Good News classes were expanding rapidly.¹⁵⁵

With their leadership training initiatives in Ghana, the Weavers utilized some of the same strategies that they had used in Nigeria. They sought to collaborate with other churches and missions. Lutheran personnel, both Ghanaian and North American, sympathized with the mission’s focus on AICs and cooperated in the work by teaching Good News classes.¹⁵⁶ When leaders from the Presbyterian and Methodist churches warmed to the idea of assisting AICs, Edwin sought to work with them.¹⁵⁷ He arranged for some AIC leaders to be trained in the Presbyterian lay training center at Abetifi and

1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 40, Roth, Willard E.; Edwin Weaver to Pastors and Leaders of Churches, January 20, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 18, Theological Education for Ind Churches.

¹⁵⁴ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 23.

¹⁵⁵ Edwin Weaver to A. K. Abutiate, June 1, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 2, Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to Fritz Rosingh, June 1, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to James Sarpei, October 16, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 41, S - Miscellaneous.

¹⁵⁶ Edwin Weaver to Stan and Dee Friesen, June 13, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 19, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 29, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Ghana 1970-74; Marlin Miller, “Current Shape and Projection of Cooperation with Spiritualist Churches in Ghana,” October 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 10, Background Material for “Among Indigenous.... chapter 6.

¹⁵⁷ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 19, 1970; Edwin Weaver to Cecilia Irvine, August 29, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 27, Irvine, Cecilia; Edwin Weaver to Theodore L. Tucker, November 9, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 15, T - Miscellaneous.

obtained partial funding from the Theological Education Fund for the training.¹⁵⁸ A number of mission church leaders taught Good News classes, and Weaver approached Trinity Theological Seminary, the Ghanaian seminary sponsored jointly by mission churches, suggesting that their students might assist AICs as part of their practical experience requirements.¹⁵⁹ The leadership at Trinity resisted at first but later warmed to the idea.¹⁶⁰ In the fall of 1970, for example, sixteen Trinity students met their practical experience requirements by assisting AICs that wanted to start Sunday school programs.¹⁶¹ This initiative not only provided assistance to AICs but also exposed future mission church leaders to the movement, establishing relationships that could bridge the discord that was often characteristic of the relationship between AICs and mission churches.

Other ways that the Weavers drew on their Nigeria experience was with respect to the academic level of the Good News program and their inductive Bible study method. They sought to meet the training needs of congregational leaders at a grass roots level, among people who did not have the academic background to attend schools or seminaries

¹⁵⁸ Edwin Weaver to Walter Cason, December 2, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 18, Misc.; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 51–53.

¹⁵⁹ Edwin Weaver to Willard and Alice Roth; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 42; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 19, 1970.

¹⁶⁰ Edwin Weaver to Eugene Grau, October 16, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 42, Misc.; Edwin Weaver to Walter Cason; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 42–26.

¹⁶¹ Edwin Weaver to Theodore L. Tucker.

that offered degree programs.¹⁶² The Good News classes focused on inductive Bible study as an alternative to introducing western theological concepts and systems. The program included twelve classes: ten that were oriented to biblical study, primarily biblical book studies, one to teach basic English, and one that sought to encourage a theology for AICs by addressing biblical and African thought patterns about God, man, sin, Satan, salvation, faith and works.¹⁶³ Indigenization of the faith was a high priority; AICs needed to develop doctrines and worship patterns that would meet the needs of their specific contexts.¹⁶⁴

While the Good News Bible Classes drew significant participation in the Accra area and appeared to fill a felt need among AICs, Mennonite missionaries also worked with their Lutheran and AIC counterparts to establish an institute to provide training at a higher level. The need for such a program had already been a topic of discussion among MBMC personnel in Ghana when in March 1971 Weaver and his colleagues, including AIC partners, convened a meeting of interested persons to discuss the matter.¹⁶⁵ Thirty people attended, including five Mennonite missionaries, one Lutheran missionary, one Lutheran church leader, one representative of the Christian Council of Ghana, and twenty-two representatives from fourteen different AICs. Participants decided that indeed

¹⁶² Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 11, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Miller, "Current Shape and Projection of Cooperation with Spiritualist Churches in Ghana"; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 23.

¹⁶³ "Good News Brochure," 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."

¹⁶⁴ Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 19, 1970.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, "Current Shape and Projection of Cooperation with Spiritualist Churches in Ghana"; "Theological Education for AICs Meeting," March 2, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 18, Theological Education for Ind Churches.

AICs needed two levels of biblical study, the Good News classes and a more advanced level of training. They appointed a committee to draft a proposal for establishing such an option.

Over the next two months the committee, along with representatives from nineteen different AICs, worked to put together a proposal. The theological education plan they developed included nine months of courses in basic pastoral training.¹⁶⁶ A general meeting of interested parties approved the plan, and the Good News Training Institute (GNTI) came into being.¹⁶⁷ Classes started in October 1971 with twenty students, two from the Lutheran Church of Ghana and eighteen from eight different AICs.¹⁶⁸

From the beginning GNTI sought to serve AICs by providing training that focused on biblical study in light of African culture. By November 1972 Institute leaders

¹⁶⁶ Willard E. Roth, "Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 16, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."; "A Proposal for a Theological Training Program Among Independent Churches," March 20, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."; Willard E. Roth, "Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 11, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."

¹⁶⁷ "Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 18, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."; Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Interim Steering Committee Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 8, 1971) and Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 22, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches..."; Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 20, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 18, Theological Education for Ind Churches; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 94–112.

¹⁶⁸ "Good News Training Institute Newsletter," December 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."

were calling attention to Shoki Coe's principle of contextualization.¹⁶⁹ The study of the AIC movement and of West African religions was part of the curriculum.¹⁷⁰

GNTI was a shared initiative between AICs, Mennonite and Lutheran missionaries, and sympathetic mission church leaders. A team of three, Mennonite missionary Willard Roth and two Ghanaian church leaders, provided day-to-day leadership during the first year, and AIC leaders as well as mission church leaders, such as well known churchman C. G. Baëta, made up the Board of Governors.¹⁷¹ Classes were first held at the YMCA in Accra, but eventually GNTI purchased its own site.¹⁷² Funding came from student fees, local donations, and foreign donations, including the Theological Education Fund during the start-up period.¹⁷³ Throughout the last three decades of the

¹⁶⁹ "Good News Training Institute Prospectus," October 1971 and Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Board of Governors Minutes," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana, November 25, 1972), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."

¹⁷⁰ "Good News Training Institute Syllabus for Course of Study," September 1972, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."

¹⁷¹ Roth, "Good News Training Institute Theological Education Planning Meeting," July 20, 1971; "Good News Training Institute Newsletter," June 1972, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."; John S. Pobee, "Baëta, Christian G(oncalves) K(wami)," *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (Dictionary of African Christian Biography), http://www.dacb.org/stories/ghana/baeta_christian.html (accessed March 10, 2016).

¹⁷² Roth, "Good News Training Institute Theological Education Planning Meeting," July 20, 1971; Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Joint Directors' Meeting 2," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 10, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."; Willard E. Roth, "Good News Training Institute Theological Education Planning Meeting," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 7, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 18, Theological Education for Ind Churches; "Good News Training Institute Newsletter," December 1971; Ronald E. Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report -- Africa," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 1, 1992), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

¹⁷³ "Good News Training Institute Board of Governors Minutes," (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 24, 1972), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."; Roth, "Good News Training Institute Board of Governors Minutes,"

twentieth century MBMC, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and other foreign partners provided periodic personnel and financial support to GNTI.¹⁷⁴ The Institute's name changed to the Good News Theological College and Seminary and continued into the twenty-first century as the sole ongoing institutional legacy of MBMC's earlier work with AICs in Ghana.¹⁷⁵

In addition to working to create opportunities for training AIC leaders, the Weavers and their colleagues sought ways to bridge the troubled relations between AICs and mission churches. As in Nigeria they wanted to build relationships with both mission churches through the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and the AICs, hoping to encourage dialogue within the two groups and between them. The situation was different in Ghana in that some of the mission churches had already slowly started to move towards accepting AICs as vital and legitimate churches. In 1965 the Presbyterian Church of Ghana had appointed a committee to study "sects, prayer groups, and Bible study groups," in an attempt to understand why large numbers of people were leaving the church for AICs, were attending meetings of healers and prophets, or were forming chapters within the Presbyterian Church that had characteristics similar to these

November 25, 1972; Ocansey Darke and Co., "Auditor's Report," December 1972, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."

¹⁷⁴ David Shank, "Summary of Visit to Accra," February 21, 1981, IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986; Ronald E. Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Asia, Africa, and Middle East Regions Quarterly Program Report" (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 1985), IV-18-13-07, Box 4, Overseas Min Div Committee Reports 1985-1989; Ronald E. Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Department" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 1988), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986; Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report -- Africa."

¹⁷⁵ Good News Theological College and Seminary, "Good News Theological College and Seminary Website," <http://www.gntcs.org> (accessed March 10, 2016).

movements.¹⁷⁶ While not affirming all that it found in such movements, the committee recognized the vitality of these groups, acknowledged the way they met needs of members that its own church was not able to meet, and proposed changes that would incorporate some of the spiritual practices and vitality of these movements into the Presbyterian Church. The Methodist Church, Ghana commissioned a similar study in 1969.¹⁷⁷

AICs, for their part, had already started initiatives to collaborate among themselves and form associations. One such association was the Ghana Council for Liberal Churches that eventually became the Ghana Council for Spiritual Churches and sought to unite AICs and other Christian organizations that were not part of the CCG.¹⁷⁸ Another was the Pentecostal Association of Ghana, whose letterhead parenthetically referred to it as the National Fellowship of Spiritual Churches, that included some two hundred AIC groups and maintained relationships with Pentecostal fellowships in other parts of the world.¹⁷⁹ Hence, when the Weavers arrived in Ghana in 1969, there was

¹⁷⁶ “Report on ‘Prayer Groups and Sects,’” August 1967, HM 1-48, Box 85, African Independents, 1965-1969.

¹⁷⁷ J. Kwabena Asomoah-Gyadu, “Foreward, The Prophetic in Christian G. Baëta’s Prophetism in Ghana,” in *Prophetism in Ghana*, Reprint (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 2004).

¹⁷⁸ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 73–74; “Ghana Council for Liberal Churches Newsletter No. 1,” August 1970, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 13, General Ghana AICs; Secretary General of the Ghana Council for Liberal Churches to The General Secretary of the Ghana Christian Council, May 11, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 10, Background Material for “Among Indigenous.... chapter 6.”

¹⁷⁹ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 74–76; E. H. Anaman to All Member Churches Etc., April 2, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 6, Rev Anaman.

already movement towards more intentional inter-AIC relationships and more respect between AICs and mission churches.

Such movement was, however, tentative, and MBMC personnel found that mission churches warmed slowly to their mission goal. The Weavers' first meetings with church leaders in November 1969 and January 1970 gave rise to theological debate and opposition, although they did find some support at the level of the CCG.¹⁸⁰ In September 1970 Edwin proposed the creation of a team that the CCG would supervise to work with AICs, a plan that followed the model that had been successful in Nigeria.¹⁸¹ What had been effective in Nigeria, however, would not necessarily work in Ghana. The team approach that Weaver proposed did not gather support and did not materialize.

Individuals and groups did, over time, join the effort. By late 1970 Trinity Seminary was allowing its students to work with AICs to meet their practical experience requirements.¹⁸² During the same period the Presbyterian affiliated Ramseyer Training Center opened its doors to AIC leaders at the request of Edwin and his AIC colleagues.¹⁸³ In April 1971 Methodist Church leaders asked Edwin to address the committee the church had formed to study the AIC movements and their relationship to the Methodist

¹⁸⁰ Edwin Weaver to Jim Dretke, December 3, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 27; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 19, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 78-84, 89.

¹⁸¹ Edwin Weaver, "A Report on Interchurch Team and West Africa Team," September 22, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 6, Folder 14, West Africa Reports; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 25, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 85.

¹⁸² Edwin Weaver to Eugene Grau.

¹⁸³ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 51-53.

church.¹⁸⁴ The committee's study led it to recommend a positive and collaborative relationship with AICs. One Methodist leader, I. K. A. Thompson, was quite interested in the AIC movement and taught in the Good News Bible Classes program. The CCG too moved in the same direction, opening membership to AICs and accepting the Eden Revival Church as a member.¹⁸⁵

Such momentum was encouraging for MBMC missionaries, and they sought to strengthen it. At the request of some AICs and CCG members they organized a meeting for leaders from both groups in May 1971, hoping to encourage increased understanding and dialogue about common concerns.¹⁸⁶ The meeting was successful, drawing sixty representatives from AICs and CCG churches.¹⁸⁷ Eminent churchman C. G. Baëta chaired the meeting in which Edwin presented his vision for inter-church collaboration, and participants followed with comments and observations. The gathering was helpful enough that participants named a committee to plan follow-up meetings and assigned Mennonite missionary Willard Roth as convener of the planning committee. These gatherings, called the Inter-Church Conversations, were in the spirit of the Inter-Church

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 86–88; “The Methodist Church and the Spiritual Churches,” October 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 11, Background Material for “Among”

¹⁸⁵ David J. Herrell to Nancy L. Nicalo, May 24, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 8, Misc.; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 74.

¹⁸⁶ Willard Roth to Isaac Bondul Et. Al., May 15, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for “Among Indigenous Churches... Good News.”; Willard Roth to H. Senoo, May 15, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 40, Roth, Willard E.; Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 89–93.

¹⁸⁷ Willard E. Roth, “Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 1,” Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 25, 1971), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 11, Background Material for “Among”

Study Group from the Nigeria experience and continued during the years that followed after the departure of the Weavers.¹⁸⁸ In the case of this ministry of inter-church conversation, no institutional embodiment developed as happened for the focus on leadership training via the Good News Theological College and Seminary.

Among the AICs there were leaders who identified quickly with the Weavers' vision for inter-church understanding and cooperation and readily participated with the mission's initiatives in that direction. One was Prophet F. A. Mills of the Faith Brotherhood Praying Circle who earlier had been involved in initiatives to bring AICs closer together in fellowship and who became a close collaborator with the Mennonite missionaries.¹⁸⁹ Mills worked with the Weavers and Willard and Alice Roth in their efforts to increase inter-church understanding and implement biblical training for AIC leaders. Edwin Weaver, Willard Roth, and Mills initiated a Bible study and fellowship group of AIC leaders that met regularly, drawing eight to twelve participants each time.¹⁹⁰ This group was instrumental in helping establish the Good News Bible Classes and eventually the Good News Training Institute. Weaver, Mills, and Ghanaian Lutheran

¹⁸⁸ Willard E. Roth, "Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 2," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, April 14, 1972), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 11, Background Material for "Among"; Willard E. Roth, "Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 3," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 15, 1972), Willard E. Roth, "Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 4," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 25, 1972), and Willard E. Roth, "Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 5," Meeting Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 24, 1973), HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 8, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches... Good News."

¹⁸⁹ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 71–76, 123–127.

¹⁹⁰ F. K. Erwuah, "Minutes of the Inaugural Exploratory Meeting of Church Leaders Held in the Accra Community Center," (Accra, Ghana, April 8, 1970), HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 43, Ghana Misc.

pastor Paul Fynn convened the meeting that led to the establishment of the Institute.¹⁹¹

Fellowship members also participated in the inter-church conversations with other AIC leaders and CCG members.¹⁹²

In Ghana the Weavers did not engage in significant research projects as they had done via church surveys around the towns of Abak and Uyo in Nigeria, but they did assist David Barrett in the collection of data for his *World Christian Handbook 1972* project. Barrett asked Edwin to gather data about AICs and to be associate editor for African Independent Churches in West Africa.¹⁹³ Weaver agreed to collect data but did not want to take on responsibilities of an associate editor.¹⁹⁴ His contacts among AICs, especially the assistance of F. A. Mills, were invaluable in collecting the data Barrett was looking for.¹⁹⁵ Peter Barker, literature secretary for the CCG who was also gathering data about Ghanaian churches, joined the effort as well.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ "Theological Education for AICs Meeting."

¹⁹² Roth, "Inter-Church Conversations, Mtg. No. 1."

¹⁹³ David Barrett to Edwin Weaver, April 23, 1970 and David Barrett to Edwin Weaver," April 24, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 10, David B. Barrett.

¹⁹⁴ Edwin Weaver to David B. Barrett, May 8, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 10, David B. Barrett.

¹⁹⁵ Ghana Council for Liberal Churches to Edwin Weaver, June 3, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 23, N - O Miscellaneous; Edwin Weaver to E. H. Anaman, June 18, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 6, Rev Anaman; Edwin Weaver to David Barrett, July 3, 1970 and David B. Barrett to Edwin Weaver, September 30, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 10, David B. Barrett.

¹⁹⁶ Edwin Weaver to David Barrett, September 15, 1970 and Edwin Weaver to David Barrett, January 16, 1971, Center For the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA.

Ivory Coast: Research, Teaching and Colonial Legacy

Mennonite missionaries' work with the Harrist church in Ivory Coast was the mission's first extended engagement with AICs in francophone West Africa. At the time of the Weavers' West Africa survey, Togo and Dahomey had appeared to be the most promising new areas of engagement.¹⁹⁷ AICs in Togo had encouraged Edwin Weaver and Marlin Miller to return after their brief visit in 1969, and Methodist Church president Harry Henry's encouragement and collaboration gave Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities a well-connected partner in Dahomey.¹⁹⁸ The Marxist regime, however, demonstrated anti-religious hostility during its early years, and missionaries were not able to continue engagement there, turning their attention to Ivory Coast and its large Harrist church instead.¹⁹⁹ The Harrist church had emerged out of the ministry of William Wadé Harris, a Liberian Christian prophet who had preached and baptized thousands during evangelistic travels in southern Ivory Coast during 1913 and 1914.²⁰⁰ In the years following his ministry, many who had responded to his message joined the Methodist or Catholic churches, but some formed their own Harrist churches without affiliation with a mission church.

¹⁹⁷ "Summary of Dec. 1, 1969 Discussion of West Africa Strategy"; Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - West Africa."

¹⁹⁸ Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969"; Marlin Miller, "Report On Bible Institute" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 27, 1970), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

¹⁹⁹ David Shank, "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies in West Africa (GERB)" (Study Conference on Ministry to AICS, Abidjan, 1986).

²⁰⁰ Gordon MacKay Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris: A Study of an African Prophet and His Mass-Movement in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, 1913-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Sheila Suzanne Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and His*

Preliminary Contacts

After Edwin Weaver's visit to Abidjan in September 1969 for the All African Council of Churches meetings, MBMC personnel visited nine times between October 1969 and May 1978 to cultivate relationships with the Harrists before the first resident missionaries arrived in 1978. Weaver informed Marlin Miller of the significance of the Harrist church after the All African Council of Churches meetings, and Miller made the first two visits in October 1969 and May 1970.²⁰¹ He was not able to meet with Harrist leaders, instead making contacts among people who knew the movement in order to gather information and advice.

During visits in October 1970 and September 1971, Miller did meet Harrist leaders. Upon hearing of the mission's interest in providing biblical training for leaders, however, they explained to their visitor that they would not accept such training from teachers outside of their own church.²⁰² They did ask if MBMC would provide teachers for primary and secondary schools that the church would establish. The mission agreed that once such schools were built, it would seek to provide teachers. A visit by Wilbert

Church (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*, ed. Jocelyn Murray, Studies on Religion in Africa 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); David A. Shank, "Wadé Harris, William," *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, http://www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/legacy_harris.html (accessed March 14, 2016).

²⁰¹ Edwin Weaver to Marlin Miller, September 16, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 19, Miller, Marlin E.; Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969"; Miller, "Report on Ivory Coast."

²⁰² Marlin Miller, "Report on Visit to Ivory Coast, October 1970" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 19, 1970) and Marlin Miller, "Report on Trip to Ivory Coast," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 16, 1971), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

and Juanita Shenk and Willard Roth in 1972 brought the same request for schoolteachers and hesitancy to accept Bible teachers.²⁰³

The Harrists demonstrated ambivalence with respect to MBMC's offer of assistance in the area of biblical training. The church was sometimes open to receiving missionary Bible teachers but often clearly stated that this task was reserved for in-house teachers.²⁰⁴ In Nigeria and Ghana significant numbers of AICs and their leaders were eager to collaborate and participate in biblical training that missionaries offered. Among the Harrists, however, some were keen to receive help while others warned that assistance from westerners would be detrimental, perhaps threatening the church's authenticity.²⁰⁵ Since in some previous cases western missionaries had drawn away Harrist members and leaders into their own churches, there was also mistrust and suspicion that MBMC might do the same.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Notes on Visit to Ivory Coast," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, April 13, 1972), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

²⁰⁴ Miller, "Report on Trip to Ivory Coast"; Shenk, "Notes on Visit to Ivory Coast"; Miller and Shank, "Report on West Africa Trip"; Shank, "West Africa Visit"; Miller, "Marlin Miller Journal," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 29, 1977), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986; Ronald E. Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 4, 1984) and Ronald E. Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Africa Region Report on Administrative Trip, July 10-19, 1986" (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 19, 1986), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

²⁰⁵ David A. Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission," in *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank*, ed. James R. Krabill (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 29-83; "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II"; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; James R. Krabill, "Mennonite Ministry Among the Dida Harrists of Ivory Coast: A Test Case" (Study Conference on Ministry to AICs, Abidjan, 1986).

²⁰⁶ James and Jeanette Krabill, "Report and Evaluation by Jeanette and James Krabill" (Ivory Coast: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 11, 1981), IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Africa Region Report on Administrative Trip,

In February 1973 Marlin Miller visited with David and Wilma Shank and this time found more openness for missionary assistance. The Shanks would soon take over responsibility for the mission's francophone contacts in West Africa and were becoming acquainted with the work there.²⁰⁷ They had spent twenty years as missionaries in Belgium and had become interested in AIC movements through contact with representatives from the Congolese Kimbanguist church.²⁰⁸ With limited resources and others already assisting the Kimbanguists, MBMC limited its focus to West Africa and the Shanks reoriented their attention to Dahomey and Ivory Coast.²⁰⁹ During the 1973 visit Harrist leaders asked for Bible teachers for the first time, reversing their earlier position.²¹⁰ They also asked if the mission could arrange for Gordon Haliburton's book, *The Prophet Harris*, to be translated into French.²¹¹ Wilbert Shenk had sent them a copy after his visit the year before, and they had found it a good resource, both for explaining

July 10-19, 1986"; Krabill, "Mennonite Ministry Among the Dida Harrists of Ivory Coast: A Test Case"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²⁰⁷ "Continuing West Africa Agenda," June 6, 1973, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 9, Background for "Among the"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²⁰⁸ Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission"; John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 20, 1968; Vern Preheim to Mennonites Interested in Kimbanguists, September 30, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Kimbanguists - Confidential 1967-69.

²⁰⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, September 17, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, December 17, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Kimbanguists - Confidential 1967-69; Donald Jacobs to Edwin Weaver, December 18, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.; Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, August 19, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

²¹⁰ Marlin Miller and David and Wilma Shank, "Report on West Africa Trip," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 1973), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Shank, "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies in West Africa (GERB)."

²¹¹ Haliburton, *The Prophet Harris: A Study of an African Prophet and His Mass-Movement in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, 1913-1915*.

the church externally and for internal teaching.²¹² The mission obliged, and Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines published the French translation in 1984.²¹³ Three more visits in 1974, 1977, and 1978 revealed once again hesitation about using non-Harrist Bible teachers, and the schools in which mission teachers were to teach did not materialize.²¹⁴ In the meantime David Shank did doctoral studies focusing on the prophet Harris in anticipation of ministry in West Africa among AICs, including the Harrist church.²¹⁵

Resident Missionaries Among the Harrists

MBMC assigned missionaries David and Wilma Shank and James and Janette Krabill to the Ivory Coast to continue the new mission approach that the Weavers had initiated in Nigeria and continued in Ghana. The Krabills arrived in 1978 and the Shanks in 1979. They arrived without a clear mandate from the Harrists but with the desire to be available and to develop opportunities for ministry among them and others. The missionaries sought to be a resource for the Harrist church, cultivate relationships with it and with other AICs in West Africa, provide biblical training as opportunities arose, learn about this dynamic African Christian movement, and build bridges of understanding

²¹² Shenk, "Notes on Visit to Ivory Coast"; Miller and Shank, "Report on West Africa Trip."

²¹³ Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission," 55; Gordon MacKay Haliburton, *Le Prophète Harris*, trans. Marie-Noëlle Faure (Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1984).

²¹⁴ David and Wilma Shank, "West Africa Visit," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 16, 1974) and Marlin Miller, "Marlin Miller Journal"; David and Wilma Shank to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 5, 1978, IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981.

²¹⁵ David A. Shank, "A Prophet of Modern Times: The Thought of William Wadé Harris, West African Precursor of the Reign of Christ" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1980); Shank, *Prophet Harris, the "Black Elijah" of West Africa*; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

between the AICs and mission churches.²¹⁶ Their ministry would be plagued, however, by ambivalence about missionary assistance by some Harrists and the suspicion that missionaries might coopt Harrist church members or leaders to establish their own Mennonite church. MBMC missionaries arrived in the Ivory Coast nearly two decades after the country gained its independence, but the colonial legacy was still strong among the Harrists.

The Shanks' work among the Harrists was largely with the Ebrié and Attié peoples in the greater Abidjan region. David Shank led Bible studies and shared the findings of the research that he had done on the Prophet Harris as opportunity arose in formal and informal settings.²¹⁷ The Shanks collected documentation about the Prophet and his ministry and participated in Harrist worship services and celebrations. They also sought to strengthen relationships with key Harrist leaders, collected documentation on AICs, and presented their research findings and spoke on mission themes across a wide range of other Christian groups in Ivory Coast and beyond, sometimes in academic settings.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ David and Wilma Shank to Overseas Committee and Staff; "Overseas Missions Committee Minutes," (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, February 2, 1981), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Overseas Min Div Committee - Minutes 1981-83; "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies," May 1981, IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; Krabill, "Report and Evaluation by Jeanette and James Krabill"; Shank, "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies in West Africa (GERB)"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission"; David and Wilma Shank to Overseas Committee and Staff, January 15, 1979 and "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 1983), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

²¹⁷ Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²¹⁸ "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II."

The Krabills' ministry developed differently. They spent their first years sharing in the work in Abidjan, including providing Bible studies to the Nigerian founded Sacred Cherubim and Seraphim Society, but subsequently focused their ministry on the Harrist movement among the Dida people from their base in the village of Yocoboué and later from the city of Divo.²¹⁹ This part of the Harrist church was more open to receiving teaching assistance from missionaries than others and invited the Krabills to establish a program of Bible study for future church leaders. The Krabills moved to Yocoboué in 1982 where they participated in village life and initiated a program in which James provided regular Bible training classes in thirteen different Dida villages. The training classes followed previous MBMC methodology of working at the grass roots, congregational level, and focusing on the Bible instead of on themes from western schemes of systematic theology. James also regularly asked his students to articulate the implications of their study for Dida Harrists, thus encouraging indigenous agency in theological reflection. In addition the Krabills documented Dida hymns and sermons as well as the history of local Harrist congregations. James subsequently did doctoral studies in which his research focused on Dida hymnody.²²⁰

The Shanks and Krabills had gone to the Ivory Coast to continue the new mission approach that the Weavers had initiated in Nigeria and later in Ghana, but the new context was unique and so their ministry developed differently. First, the Methodist

²¹⁹ Krabill, "Report and Evaluation by Jeanette and James Krabill"; "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II"; Krabill, "Mennonite Ministry Among the Dida Harrists of Ivory Coast: A Test Case."

²²⁰ James R. Krabill, *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South-Central Ivory Coast (1913-1949): A Historico-Religious Study* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995).

Church, the principal Protestant mission church in the Ivory Coast, was less open to assistance to, or engagement with, AICs than were mission churches in Nigeria and Ghana.²²¹ In those two countries key individuals and eventually mission church leaders had become allies in the project to create opportunities for dialogue and relationship between their churches and AICs. With the exception of a few individuals, MBMC missionaries found that this was not the case with the Methodist church in the Ivory Coast.²²² Second, there was ambivalence among the Harrists with respect to the mission's offer to provide biblical training, with some parts of the church accepting and others refusing. The context of heightened hesitancy by mission churches and ambivalence on the part of the Harrists meant that MBMC's engagement in the Ivory Coast did not develop significant inter-church ministry or garner wide-spread support for its initiatives of biblical training as it had in Nigeria and Ghana.

The Salience of the Colonial Legacy

After a decade of missionary work focused largely on the Harrist church, MBMC chose to seek a graceful way to reorient its Francophone AIC work towards another context. The Harrists' ambivalence toward the mission's assistance plagued its engagement with the church even if the ministry had been fruitful in a number of ways. Interaction with colonial authorities and mission churches after Harris' ministry had

²²¹ Miller, "Report on Trip to Ivory Coast"; Miller and Shank, "Report on West Africa Trip"; David and Wilma Shank to Wilbert R. Shenk.

²²² Miller, "Report on Ivory Coast."

created significant mistrust of foreigners, especially missionaries, within the church.²²³ Parts of the church consistently opposed MBMC's assistance, fearing that it would corrupt Harris' African legacy or allow the missionaries to coopt Harrist members and leaders to form their own Mennonite church.²²⁴ As factions jockeyed for influence in the church, the presence of foreign missionaries became a point of contention among competing parties.²²⁵ Seeing that its involvement seemed to be adding to tensions that were already present in the church, the mission informed the Harrist leadership that it would not replace the Shanks and the Krabills at the approaching end of their terms, but that it would consider filling positions for which the church might solicit missionaries in the future.²²⁶ As no invitation was forthcoming, the focus shifted in the following years to the Republic of Benin.

MBMC had identified its late arrival to West Africa in 1957 as an advantage in its work with AICs, since as a mission it was free of colonial mission relationships in the

²²³ Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission"; "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II"; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; James R. Krabill, "Mennonite Ministry Among the Dida Harrists of Ivory Coast: A Test Case."

²²⁴ James and Jeanette Krabill, "Report and Evaluation by Jeanette and James Krabill"; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Africa Region Report on Administrative Trip, July 10-19, 1986"; Krabill, "Mennonite Ministry Among the Dida Harrists of Ivory Coast: A Test Case"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²²⁵ "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section II"; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Africa Region Report on Administrative Trip, July 10-19, 1986"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²²⁶ Ronald E. Yoder to Dr. Tchotche-Mel Felix, January 20, 1988 and David and Wilma Shank, "Report on Meeting with Harrist National Committee" (Abidjan: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 23, 1988), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

region.²²⁷ The Ivory Coast experience demonstrated that arriving after independence did not necessarily ensure freedom from the colonial legacy.

Despite the difficulty of navigating the colonial legacy present among the Harrists, missionaries were able to make progress on some of the goals of the “Vision for West Africa.” Building bridges between AICs and mission churches meant researching AICs in order to help mission churches better understand them. This had been true with the Inter-Church Team in Nigeria and to a lesser extent with Weaver’s assistance in gathering data for the *World Christian Handbook* in Ghana. With respect to the Harrists, MBMC personnel produced significant research including David Shank and James Krabill’s doctoral studies and documentation they collected over a decade of residency in Ivory Coast. MBMC deposited the collected documentation at the *Centre Evangélique de Formation en Communication pour l’Afrique* (African Evangelical Center for Communication Training) in Abidjan.²²⁸ As there were far fewer individual AICs in Ivory Coast than in Nigeria and Ghana, and most AIC members were Harrists, the goal of building relationships between AICs was simply not as relevant as it had been earlier for the Weavers and their coworkers. Although MBMC personnel were not able to implement an extensive Bible training program for the Harrist church as they may have envisioned, the Krabills were able to provide important training opportunities among the Dida for half a decade. Such opportunities and the research missionaries produced were

²²⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk, “Vision for West Africa (Revised from A Developing Vision for West Africa)”; David and Wilma Shank to Overseas Committee and Staff.

²²⁸ Yoder, “Administrative Trip Report, Africa Department.”

no small feat in the challenging religious context of the Ivory Coast during the ninth decade of the twentieth century.

The Republic of Benin (Dahomey): Biblical Training, Health Work, and Disruptive Democratic Impulses

The possibility of ministry among AICs in Dahomey seemed promising at the time of the Weavers' West Africa survey, but Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities was not able to place missionaries there in the years that followed because the government became hostile toward religious activity. During their visit to London in 1969, the Methodist Missionary Society had given the Weavers a letter of introduction for Reverend Harry Henry, president of the Methodist Church in Dahomey and Togo.²²⁹ Later in the year at the All African Council of Churches meetings in Abidjan, Edwin Weaver and Henry met, and each found in the other a potential colleague for shared ministry with AICs.²³⁰ Henry was familiar with the Dahomey AICs as many of their members were former Methodists, and some were members of his extended family.²³¹ He invited Weaver to Dahomey to explore the possibility of a joint effort with these

²²⁹ Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 2"; Hugh E. Thomas to Rev. and Mrs. Ed. Weaver, May 30, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 15, T - Miscellaneous.

²³⁰ Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 17.

²³¹ Miller, "Report On Bible Institute"; Marlin Miller, "Report of Our Visit to Dahomey October, 1970," October 9, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

churches.²³² Weaver and Miller traveled to Dahomey and met with Henry and AIC leaders for the first time in November 1969.²³³

The missionaries came away from their visit with the distinct impression that the time was right for fruitful engagement there. Their visit had provided Henry a reason to gather leaders of AICs together, the first time they had all met together.²³⁴ They gathered without suspicion that the goal was to bring them into the Methodist fold. On Henry's part, he was able to participate as host of the missionaries without drawing criticism from his own church for legitimizing separatist groups. Miller reported that as an outsider, a third party, it appeared that MBMC might play the role of catalyst for building inter-church relationships. Henry's style of leadership with the AICs was collaborative, so he seemed like a good ally in the work to increase understanding between AICs and mission churches and among AICs, a challenge for which they explicitly asked the mission's help.²³⁵ In addition, biblical training for church leaders was a common concern of the mission, Henry, and the Dahomey AICs.²³⁶ This would be with the relatively small number of AICs in the country, not with dozens as had been the case in southeastern Nigeria and was later in Ghana. An initiative to work among them would be more

²³² Weaver and Weaver, *From Kuku Hill: Among Indigenous Churches in West Africa*, 17, 48–51.

²³³ Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969"; Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell.

²³⁴ Shenk, "Notes on Marlin Miller Togo, Dahomey and Ivory Coast Visit Fall 1969"; Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell.

²³⁵ Miller, "Report On Bible Institute"; "Continuing West Africa Agenda."

²³⁶ Edwin Weaver to Harry Y. Henry, March 21, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Miller, "Report On Bible Institute."

manageable than if they had been many. The possibilities in Dahomey, therefore, corresponded nicely with the mission's approach of cultivating better inter-church relationships and resourcing AICs via biblical education.

In the two years after their first visit, missionaries returned to Dahomey three times to get to know the churches and provide Bible studies to AIC and Methodist participants. Visits typically were about a week long and included time for encountering AIC leaders individually and meeting with them as a group.²³⁷ Weaver and Miller did the first Bible training seminar together in April-May 1970, and Miller and his wife made a follow-up visit in October of that year. In October 1971 Miller returned to teach another seminar, without Weaver this time. The seminars followed Weaver's method of inductive Bible studies and aimed for a secondary school level.²³⁸ The content was organized around book studies; they studied, for example, Genesis, Mark, and the Acts of the Apostles.²³⁹ Attendance varied from only a few to as many as thirty. Visiting for an intense time of teaching and discussion, the missionaries hoped that those who participated would share what they had learned more widely in their churches.²⁴⁰ Participants decided that they would continue to meet for Bible studies between MBMC's

²³⁷ Miller, "Report On Bible Institute"; Miller, "Report of Our Visit to Dahomey October, 1970"; Marlin Miller, "Report on Trip to Ghana and Dahomey," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 14, 1971), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

²³⁸ Edwin Weaver to Harry Y. Henry.

²³⁹ Miller, "Report On Bible Institute"; Miller, "Report on Trip to Ghana and Dahomey."

²⁴⁰ Edwin Weaver to Cecelia Irvine, March 23, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 27, Irvine, Cecilia; Edwin Weaver to Donald Jacobs, March 30, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs, Donald R.

visits, but for some reason found it hard to do so on a regular basis.²⁴¹ Henry asked Miller to provide him with outlines and suggestions for a series of studies that they might do between visits. Miller prepared some lessons and reported when he visited in the fall of 1971 that Henry had taught two of them.

Periodic Bible training seminars were not enough, and the AICs wanted to establish a biblical and theological training center that would provide ongoing training for their churches. They looked to MBMC to assist in this, and asked for long-term personnel to work in Dahomey, a request that Miller affirmed in his report.²⁴² When Miller and David Shank visited in February 1973, Henry ask the mission to help establish a “polytechnic institute” for Bible study but that would also address issues such as healing and social problems.²⁴³ This, he said, would correspond to AICs’ concern for health and psychological welfare, a trait that made them distinct from mission churches. With the advent of a Marxist-Leninist regime in 1974, however, there was repression of churches and the government took over Christian schools.²⁴⁴ The mission was not able to increase engagement in the country and instead turned its attention to the Ivory Coast.

For a decade MBMC was not involved in the now People’s Republic of Benin, but in 1983 it re-established regular visits that would result in the arrival of missionaries

²⁴¹ Miller, “Report of Our Visit to Dahomey October, 1970”; Miller, “Report on Trip to Ghana and Dahomey.”

²⁴² Marlin Miller to Edwin Weaver, October 3, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 19, Miller, Marlin E.

²⁴³ Miller and Shank, “Report on West Africa Trip.”

²⁴⁴ Yoder, “Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip.”

in 1987. The Shanks maintained contact with Harry Henry via correspondence while they were in Ivory Coast.²⁴⁵ By 1981 there appeared to be more openness on the part of the regime, and Henry indicated that there was an opening for the mission to collaborate with the churches in Benin on development projects that had governmental approval. At the time MBMC did not have the resources to respond, and its sister organization, Mennonite Central Committee, did not want to enter yet another African country.

In 1983 the relationship deepened when Henry issued another invitation to the Shanks to visit Benin. The regime had recognized the Catholic Church but required the other churches to form a council, the Inter-Confessional Protestant Council (IPC), in order to represent their churches with a unified voice to the government.²⁴⁶ Henry was president of the IPC.²⁴⁷ The Shanks, Wilbert Shenk, and Ron Yoder, a newly appointed MBMC administrator, visited Benin in September 1983, met with the Council, and agreed to send David Shank to lead a weeklong Bible seminar.²⁴⁸ Shank returned in December, and such seminars became a yearly event.²⁴⁹ Structurally the IPC embodied positive inter-church relationships, and it articulated the need for a trusted third party to facilitate such relationships and who would not establish a denomination in competition with others. The Council also requested assistance in the establishment of biblical

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.; Shank, "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies in West Africa (GERB)."

²⁴⁷ Ronald E. Yoder to MBM Overseas Divisional Committee, February 1, 1984, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Overseas Min Div Committee 1984.

²⁴⁸ "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Region, Section IV," (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 1983), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

²⁴⁹ Ronald E. Yoder to MBM Overseas Divisional Committee.

training for church leaders, making it an attractive partner for the mission given its West Africa mission approach.²⁵⁰

The domains in which the IPC sought assistance were, however, not limited to biblical training. The Council identified three main areas of concern: the establishment of a Bible training center, health programs that included both a preventative focus and an institutional health center with accompanying pharmacy services, and agricultural development.²⁵¹ The mission found the energy and initiative of the IPC timely and committed to assisting, especially in the establishment of a Bible training center.²⁵²

Resident Missionaries in Benin

In the end MBMC's contribution depended on the personnel it was able to recruit to work in Benin. In February 1987 Rodney and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen arrived from North America.²⁵³ Rodney assisted the IPC's biblical training commission while Lynda worked with the health commission.²⁵⁴ French missionaries Daniel and Marianne

²⁵⁰ Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; Shank, "Group for Religious and Biblical Studies in West Africa (GERB)"; Shank, "On the Margins: My Pilgrimage in Mission."

²⁵¹ Ronald E. Yoder to MBM Overseas Divisional Committee; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; David Shank to Ron Yoder, November 1984, IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

²⁵² Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division, Africa Region, Report on Administrative Trip"; Ronald E. Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Asia, Africa, and Middle East Regions Quarterly Program Report" (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 1985), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Overseas Min Div Committee 1984.

²⁵³ Nancy Frey and Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2015), 4.

²⁵⁴ Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Department."

Goldschmidt-Nussbaumer arrived in August of the same year.²⁵⁵ Daniel was a medical doctor and Marianne a midwife.²⁵⁶ They assisted the IPC's health commission and spearheaded a number of initiatives.²⁵⁷ Subsequent missionaries also worked in the areas of biblical and theological training and community healthcare.²⁵⁸

The arrival of resident missionaries in 1987 was the beginning of two decades of MBMC engagement in Benin that both tested its West Africa approach and produced fruitful results. Henry's desire to assist AICs and increase understanding between them and the Methodist church as well as the IPC's embodiment of inter-church cooperation provided a base on which missionaries could work in their different fields within the framework of the mission's "Vision for West Africa." Rodney continued the yearly weeklong Bible seminars that Shank had initiated and organized occasional special study sessions in collaboration with the IPC Bible training commission.²⁵⁹ The Goldschmidt-Nussbaumers and Lynda provided organizational and professional assistance to the health commission in a number of different initiatives, both village-based and in the city of Cotonou. The combination of missionary expertise and the IPC's local structure and credibility resulted in effective ministry during the early years of the missionaries'

²⁵⁵ Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*, 4.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵⁷ Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Department."

²⁵⁸ Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*.

²⁵⁹ Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report, Africa Department"; Ronald Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report," (August 14, 1990), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986.

engagement in Benin and allowed the missionaries to develop relationships with AICs and their leaders. These relationships provided the base for ongoing ministry once the IPC lost its prominent role in the Christian community in the early years of the 1990s.

Disruptive Democratic Impulses

The political crisis that rocked the country at the end of the 1980s and the socio-political context that resulted caused division in the IPC and the Christian community that adversely affected the missionaries' work. The political crisis led to a National Conference in February 1990 at which representatives from all levels of society met to find a way forward.²⁶⁰ The Conference rejected the Marxist regime and chose to move the country toward multi-party democracy. Democracy brought increased freedom of expression and freed churches to engage more openly and aggressively in their different ministries.²⁶¹ Within churches too members sought to implement democracy and felt free to create factions, schisms, and new churches. The number of new churches increased dramatically during the 1990s and during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The socio-political dynamics threatened the stability of the IPC, and MBMC's assistance became a factor as members used it to maneuver for power within the Council. Churches were free to create their own groupings and form alliances with foreign mission

²⁶⁰ Michel Alokpo, "L'histoire Des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques Au Bénin," in *Nos Racines Racontées: Récits Historiques Sur L'Eglise En Afrique de l'Ouest*, ed. James Krabill (Abidjan: Presses Bibliques Africaines, 1996), 64–65.

²⁶¹ Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*, 7.

agencies and churches.²⁶² Members of the Council jockeyed for power, and the missionaries struggled not to get caught up in the fray, a challenge since the health and Bible training commissions gained influence within the IPC partly because of missionary assistance.²⁶³ In fact, it seemed as if the mission's collaboration simply strengthened one faction in its maneuvers for influence and power.

Collaboration among the churches in the IPC weakened, and the Council ceased to embody the mission's value of positive inter-church relations. A group of churches, both mission founded and AICs, formed their own federation that did not allow members to maintain membership in the IPC.²⁶⁴ The IPC responded by asking those churches to withdraw from the Bible training and health commissions. The IPC president informed the missionaries that they could not work with the churches that withdrew as long as the mission partnered with the Council, despite those churches having expressed interest in continuing collaboration with the health and Bible training initiatives. The IPC had appeared to be an ideal ally in the desire to work at inter-church collaboration, but now MBMC's relation with it seemed rather to impede progress in that direction and implicate the mission's assistance in divisive internal positioning among Council members.

The Utility of An Autonomous Mission

With the crisis coming to a head in the IPC, missionaries sought to free themselves from the Council's troubles in order to fulfill their "Vision for West Africa."

²⁶² Alokpo, "L'histoire Des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques Au Bénin," 71–72.

²⁶³ Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report."

²⁶⁴ Yoder, "Administrative Trip Report -- Africa."

In Ivory Coast missionaries had found a way to gracefully exit when their presence seemed to be a source of contention in the Harrist church. In the Beninese context missionaries followed a different strategy. They formed a new entity, *Service Mennonite au Bénin* (SMB, Mennonite Services in Benin), which gave them autonomy, allowing them to relate freely to churches, church federations, and councils.²⁶⁵ They focused their attention on those churches that had limited resources for self-development, de facto the AICs. By this time missionaries had developed contacts with a wide range of AICs through their work with the IPC. These relationships were important now as the missionaries worked from their autonomous SMB base. Missionary health workers helped develop the Cotonou-based, non-governmental organization Bethesda, which eventually included a hospital, a community development branch, and a community bank that provided microenterprise loans.²⁶⁶ Rodney and his colleague Steve Wiebe-Johnson formalized a Bible training program under the auspice of SMB, which evolved into the Benin Bible Institute.²⁶⁷ These examples are in addition to the ministries that did not finally become institutions.

While the creation of an autonomous entity allowed missionaries to contribute in health and biblical training initiatives, it did not provide a medium to work in an explicit

²⁶⁵ Alokpo, "L'histoire Des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques Au Bénin," 77; Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*, 9.

²⁶⁶ Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonites to Holistic Partnership*; "ONG Bethesda - Bénin," <http://bethesdabenin.org/> (accessed March 19, 2016).

²⁶⁷ "Institut Biblique Du Bénin," <http://www.institutbibliquedubenin.org/> (accessed March 19, 2016); Frey and Hollinger-Janzen, *3-D Gospel in Benin: Beninese Churches Invite Mennonite to Holistic Partnership*, 10-12.

way to increase inter-church understanding and reconciliation in Benin as Weaver and Miller had originally envisioned and as had been the case with the Inter-Church Study Group in Nigeria and the Inter-Church Conversations in Ghana. Both Bethesda and the Benin Bible Institute, however, did provide opportunities for people from across different faith communities to work and minister together and build relationships. This was significant in the fractured Beninese Christian community of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. MBMC assigned its last missionary couple to Benin in 1999, and their departure in 2009 signaled the end of the mission's focus on AICs via its "Vision for West Africa," a half-century after the Weavers' arrival in Nigeria in 1959.

The Weavers' Ministry in Southern Africa

While Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities had limited resources, both personnel and financial, and consequently chose to limit its African Independent Church focus to West Africa, it did send the Weavers to southern Africa to assist Mennonite initiatives among AICs there. By the early 1970s other North American Mennonite agencies such as the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission were hoping to extend their work to AICs in southern Africa.²⁶⁸ Mennonite Central Committee had been providing teachers to schools in the region since 1968.²⁶⁹ MBMC did not have the resources to take leadership in an additional region but

²⁶⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, May 27, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Donald Jacobs to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 17, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 28, Jacobs; Jim Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace* (Elkhart, IN: AIMM, 1998), 272–274, 446–447.

²⁶⁹ Ronald D. Sawatzky and Richard D. Thiessen, "Botswana," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Botswana>, (accessed March 26, 2016).

along with the other agencies formed a Southern Africa Task Force to discern how to proceed.²⁷⁰ The mission helped finance the Weavers' work in southern Africa when the Task Force asked for their assistance.²⁷¹ Similar to the West Africa Survey, the Task Force asked the Weavers to make contacts, explore opportunities, encourage the process of developing relationships with AICs in the region, and generally prepare the way for future ministry. The focus was on Swaziland because Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Central Committee personnel were already working there, but they also made investigative visits to Lesotho, Botswana, the Republic of South Africa, and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).²⁷²

The Weavers spent three months in 1973 in southern Africa doing exploratory visits for the Task Force and found dynamics similar to those they had experienced in West Africa. In Swaziland the socio-political context of recent national independence resembled what they had found elsewhere. They had been in India in 1947 when it gained independence from Great Britain, in Nigeria in 1960 when it too gained independence, and now in Swaziland in 1973 when the king repealed the constitution that the British had left at independence.²⁷³ In a context of political independence many churches also reinforced their independence from western missions and AICs were numerous. As in

²⁷⁰ Donald Jacobs to Edwin Weaver; Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, 531.

²⁷¹ Ray Brubacher to Southern Africa Task Force, September 1, 1972, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 8.

²⁷² Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *Letters from Southern Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Southern Africa Task Force, Council of Mission Board Secretaries, 1974), 5.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 16.

West Africa the Weavers found these churches eager for assistance in leadership and Bible training.²⁷⁴

The Weavers nurtured contacts with others interested in AICs. They visited Marthinus Daneel, for example, who had recently completed doctoral studies and was on his way to becoming an expert on the movement.²⁷⁵ Daneel had developed an organization of AICs to work at leadership training and solicited MBMC's assistance with Bible teachers. The mission was inclined to assist in this way but once again did not have the resources to do so.²⁷⁶ Its involvement in southern Africa would be limited to the Weavers' short-term participation.

The Weavers returned for a one-year assignment under Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions in 1975. During that year they laid the groundwork for further engagement with AICs, and their contribution set the tone for Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission's AIC ministry in the decades to come.²⁷⁷ While

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 33–35; Marthinus L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills: An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970); Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Vol. 1, Background and Rise of the Major Movements*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol. 2, Church Growth: Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques*, Change and Continuity in Africa (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches Vol. 3, Leadership and Fission Dynamics*, vol. 3 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1988); Marthinus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987).

²⁷⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, June 30, 1973, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 7, Shenk, Wilbert, 1973; Wilbert R. Shenk to M. L. Daneel, July 6, 1973 and Wilbert R. Shenk to M. L. Daneel, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Daneel, M. L. 1971-74.

²⁷⁷ "Overseas Missions Committee," Meeting Minutes (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 23, 1974), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1972-1976; Irene Weaver, *Irene Weaver, Reminiscing for MBM*, Transcript (Elkhart, IN, 1983), 66, Mennonite Mission Network; Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, 479–483.

MBMC's focus would continue to be limited to West Africa, a number of North American Mennonite agencies collaborated in the subsequent southern Africa AIC initiative: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions, and Mennonite Central Committee.²⁷⁸

Ongoing Engagement with Mennonite Church Nigeria

The Nigerian civil war disrupted the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities relationship with Mennonite Church Nigeria, but the two parties rekindled their association in the months that followed, now in a different socio-political context that left its mark on their collaboration during the last decades of the twentieth century. The relationship developed concurrently with the mission's work with AICs in the larger West African region. The civil war had touched the various areas of MCN differently. Uyo came under Federalist control already in March 1968, but congregations in Ibiono and Ibianga were on the front lines for varying periods of time. The Nigerian government accused some nongovernmental organizations and Christian missions that provided relief goods and services to the Biafran side of having supported the rebellion, hence prolonging the war. It took action to stop such interference in Nigerian internal affairs by strictly controlling Christian missions' work in the region in the post-war years and limiting their contributions to initiatives that fit into the government's reconstruction priorities. Mennonite congregations were made up of Ibibio people who had not, on the whole, supported the Ibo's Biafra project and had welcomed Federalist forces as

²⁷⁸ Vern Preheim, "Minutes of the Southern Africa Task Force of COMBS and MCC," (Rosedale, OH: South African Task Force of COMBS and MCC, May 12, 1975), IV-18-13-05, Box 4, South Africa--75-79.

liberators. When church leaders were finally able to make contact with the mission they expressed affinity with the Federalist side. In the months and years that followed they too took measures to manage the influence of their foreign partner, MBMC, and reinvigorated their pre-war arguments that the mission follow Mennonite Church Nigeria's priorities.

This section outlines the church's civil war experience, its post-war approach to MBMC, the conflicts that repeatedly divided it, and the relationship between the mission and the church. It will describe the church and mission's collaboration in the areas of scholarships, agriculture, and theological education and will show that, despite significant differences about the proper role of the mission, both sides sought to maintain the relationship and find ways to work together.

The Civil War and its Aftermath

The civil war brought hardship and suffering to many of the Mennonite congregations, especially those located on the front lines for parts of the conflict. All four church areas, Itam, Ibiono, Abak, and Ubium were in the territory that the short-lived Biafran state claimed in the summer of 1967, but congregations came under Federal control successively as its forces took back terrain. Federal troops advanced into the Itam and Ibiono areas on March 28, 1968, taking the towns of Uyo and Ikot Ekpene less than a year after the conflict started.²⁷⁹ On August 9, however, Biafran forces retook Ikot

²⁷⁹ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, July 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin and Irene Weaver, September 6, 1968, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; I. U. Nsasak et al., "Transcript of Interview with I. U. Nsasak of Nigeria," July 27, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

Ekpene and advanced toward Uyo, arriving within two miles of the town before Federalist forces turned them back, eventually routing them from Ikot Ekpene on September 1. During this time the Ibiono congregations between Uyo and Ikot Ekpene were on the front line. Residents of the area fled their villages to hide from soldiers a number of times, and Biafran troops killed three Mennonite boys. The church building in Ndoe Okore was burned with the rest of the village and in late 1968 eyewitnesses reported severe malnutrition and death by starvation among children in the area.²⁸⁰

It took some time for the area to return to a sense of normalcy. Ibiono remained under federal control after September 1968, but the Nigerian Red Cross was slow to start relief work there, and large groups of people who had moved back and forth to escape fighting remained in dire condition through the end of the year.²⁸¹ By April 1969 church leaders reported that authorities had relaxed security measures, and they were able to have a church-wide conference at Ikot Ada Idem in Ibiono.²⁸² Only the Abak area congregations did not attend.

The Abak and Ubium areas west and southwest of Ibiono had their own war stories to tell. The Abak area reported that eight of its ten church buildings were destroyed during the war and that church members had fled and abandoned their homes

²⁸⁰ I. U. Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria, April 25, 1969), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan 1 May 31, 1969; Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report" (Church of Scotland, December 11, 1968), IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968.

²⁸¹ Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report" (Church of Scotland, January 21, 1969) and Neil C. Bernard, "Visit to Nigeria/Biafra 1968-69: Report to Africa Committee," February 28, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969.

²⁸² I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria."

for over seven months.²⁸³ A visit by Mennonite Central Committee personnel in March 1969 found that the war had damaged about a third of the tin-roofed houses in the area and about the same ratio of preschool children showed signs of malnutrition.²⁸⁴ The Ibianga congregations, within Abak, evacuated their villages for nearly a year and lived in the bush.²⁸⁵ The Ubium area reported that Biafran troops burned down a number of Mennonite families' houses as well as several of the areas' church buildings.²⁸⁶ They recounted how in the village of Ndukpo Ise troops buried alive over one hundred people, including some church members, in wells before burning the village. Across the church people who had accumulated savings before the war lost them since Biafran authorities required everyone to change their Nigerian currency to Biafran notes, which became worthless when Federal troops took over.²⁸⁷

The Nigerian federal government believed that Christian missions and private aid organizations had prolonged the war unnecessarily with their material aid and public support of Biafra, and it sought to curb such foreign influences during the post-war years.

²⁸³ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, November 3, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Million Belete, "The Mennonite Church Nigeria," September 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969.

²⁸⁴ Warren L. Grasse, "Report of Visit of Nigerian Mennonite Areas," March 6, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969.

²⁸⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, March 25, 1970), IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Administrative Trip Resources 1970-74.

²⁸⁶ O. E. Essiet to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 12, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 36, O. E. Essiet; Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria."

²⁸⁷ Belete, "The Mennonite Church Nigeria"; Reuben K. Udo, "Reconstruction in the War-Affected Areas of Nigeria," *The Royal Geographical Society* 2, no. 3 (1970): 9–12; Jodi Liss, "Making Monetary Mischief: Using Currency as a Weapon" *World Policy Journal* 24, no. 4 (Winter /2008 2007): 29–38.

The International Red Cross was the sole aid organization that served the Biafran territory with government approval during the conflict.²⁸⁸ When the Federal government's blockade threatened the population in the enclave by depriving it of food and medicine, the Red Cross started an airlift to provide humanitarian assistance. It ended the initiative when forces shot down one of the planes, and the Federal government accused the Biafrans of bringing in arms with aid materials. Recognizing the reality of malnutrition, starvation, and disease caused by lack of protein on the ground and facing the prospect of the situation deteriorating even more, Joint Church Aid, a project of thirty-five aid agencies, broke the Federal government's blockade and flew in some forty million pounds of assistance between the fall of 1968 and the end of the war in January 1970.²⁸⁹ Aid flights flew in at night so as to avoid federal forces' fire, and a network of workers, many of them foreign missionaries turned aid distributors, subsequently delivered the food and medicines.²⁹⁰ Missionaries also reported to their supporters in Europe and North America the suffering and death that the blockade and Federal bombing attacks on civilian targets caused, providing news organizations with stories and images that shocked the world to action.

Reports of starvation and civilian casualties motivated international assistance to the Biafran side, quickly turning humanitarian aid into a political issue. Aid poured in

²⁸⁸ Ken Waters, "Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War," *The Catholic Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (October 2004): 697–718.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*; Neil C. Bernard, "Church of Scotland Biafra Report," numerous reports in IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968, Nigeria - Biafra - Sept to Dec 1968, and Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Beechy, "Nigeria/Biafra Report Part II.

via private agencies and missions, and the Biafran government capitalized on the situation for propaganda purposes.²⁹¹ Such aid and support allowed the Biafran project to hold out in the face of Federalist advances longer than would have been possible otherwise. During the war and the years that followed the Nigerian government took action to counter such foreign intervention by deporting missionaries who had participated directly or who had voiced their support for the Biafran cause.²⁹² It sought to curb the influence of foreign Christian missions in the region by refusing visas to missionaries whose assistance nationals could provide on their own and whose role did not fit strictly within its own priorities for post-war reconstruction. Those priorities were primarily the establishment and support of healthcare and educational institutions. MBMC administrator Wilbert Shenk described the mood in southeastern Nigeria when he visited just weeks after the end of the war. He found “no-nonsense anti-foreign attitudes being expressed both officially and by the public generally,” and observed, “Having gained a military victory over the rebellious Biafrans (a term now out of vogue), the government and people of Nigeria are trying to ensure that they will not be subjected to unwanted manipulations from the outside world.”²⁹³

²⁹¹ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 176–178; Waters, “Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War.”

²⁹² Waters, “Influencing the Message: The Role of Catholic Missionaries in Media Coverage of the Nigerian Civil War”; C. A. Ekere to The Divisional Officer, Uyo; I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968; Vern Preheim to Elizabeth Schowalter; Shenk, “Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria,” March 25, 1970.

²⁹³ Shenk, “Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria,” March 25, 1970.

In the aftermath of the civil war, the Nigerian Mennonites identified with the Federal government's narrative against the Biafra project. Letters to MBMC from church leaders and other former coworkers described the victory of Federal forces in their areas as liberation from Biafran rebels and indicated significant anti-Ibo hostility.²⁹⁴ Ibibios and other minority tribes had been agitating for a new state for years, and the government's decision to form the Southeastern State outside of Ibo control satisfied those ambitions, making an alliance with the Ibos less attractive.²⁹⁵ Feeling like they had already experienced Ibo domination, minority tribes had no desire to be a minority in an Ibo controlled Biafra. Mennonite church leaders followed the government's line, recounting Biafran soldiers' mistreatment of the civilian population, arguing that the government was willing to provide aid to suffering Biafrans if there were no arms in the shipments, lamenting that some MBMC missionaries had seemed to sympathize with the Biafran rebels, and countering the claim that the conflict was a religious war pitting the Muslim controlled Federal government against Christian Ibos.²⁹⁶

For some, association with the mission had become a dangerous liability. I. U. Nsagak, who had been a member of the Inter-Church Team and worked closely with

²⁹⁴ E. J. Akam to Edwin Weaver; I. U. Nsagak to Edwin and Irene Weaver; O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 18, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 17, O. P. Ibok; S. G. Elton to Edwin and Irene Weaver, July 15, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan to Aug 1968.

²⁹⁵ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 175–176; Egodi Uchendu, "Recollections of Childhood Experiences during the Nigerian Civil War," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 77, no. 3 (2007): 393–418; O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 18, 1969; Nsagak et al., "Transcript of Interview with I. U. Nsagak of Nigeria."

²⁹⁶ I. U. Nsagak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968; I. U. Nsagak to Edwin and Irene Weaver; Nsagak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 18, 1969; Nsagak et al., "Transcript of Interview with I. U. Nsagak of Nigeria."

Weaver, wrote that his association with MBMC had nearly caused his execution.²⁹⁷ In the apartment where the Weavers had lived, federal forces had found letters from missionary Lloyd Fisher to Weaver and Stanley Friesen that seemed to sympathize with the Biafran cause.²⁹⁸ The letters implicated Nsasak because of his association with Weaver. Nsasak described the letters as “treasonable documents” and noted that he made a written statement in defense of himself to convince the authorities of his innocence.²⁹⁹ He lamented Fisher’s sympathies and pointed out that Federal troops executed two of Weaver’s other Nigerian acquaintances for offences similar to Fisher’s letters.

Partaking in the post-war surge of self-determination and sovereignty, Mennonite Church Nigeria too flexed its muscles, insisting that its foreign partner, MBMC, limit its work in Nigeria to the church’s own priorities. Those priorities aligned nicely with those of the Nigerian government, since the church had consistently sought assistance for schools and medical facilities such as maternity clinics and a hospital. Until a few decades earlier church members and their fellow Ibibios had looked to their traditional religion to provide well-being, fecundity, and success. That religion had shown itself ineffective in the face of the British colonial onslaught. In the colonial context mission clinics and hospitals that were able to facilitate health and effective maternity care and mission schools that provided the knowledge and skills to be successful in the colonial economy were means of well-being characteristic of the new Christian religion. Church

²⁹⁷ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968.

²⁹⁸ Lloyd J. Fisher to Edwin Weaver; Lloyd J. Fisher to Stanley Friesen.

²⁹⁹ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin and Irene Weaver.

members had assumed that MBMC would provide them with such institutions as other missions had for their respective churches in the previous decades.

While missionaries and mission administrators were sympathetic to the desire for better medical care and education, they wanted to avoid the situation they had experienced in India where mission institutions often had not been financially sustainable and their management had absorbed the church's focus to the detriment of its other concerns. They had been careful not to burden Mennonite Church Nigeria with unsustainable institutions, instead providing scholarships for youth and providing medical and educational personnel to reinforce already existing mission and government institutions. Furthermore, MBMC simply did not have sufficient resources to easily establish and manage such costly institutions in the early 1960s. Missionary assistance at Abiriba and in mission schools had allowed Mennonite missionaries to provide Christian service, obtain permission to reside in Nigeria, assist Mennonite Church Nigeria, and develop a new mission approach that sought to encourage reconciliation between mission churches and AICs.

In the post civil war era, the church categorically rejected the new mission approach that favored inter-church reconciliation and biblical training instead of material assistance through mission institutions. The church articulated with new vigor its expectation that the mission would deliver the financial, institutional, and personnel resources that would deliver the well-being it expected of the new religion and that missions traditionally had provided in the region.

A striking example of the church's position came from Nsasak who had been a member of the Inter-Church Team and had been, of all the Mennonite Church Nigeria leaders, the most sympathetic to the mission's work with AICs before the war. In August 1968 while there was still fighting close by around Ikot Ekpene, he lamented the "confused work which the Mennonite Mission got involved in [the] Uyo area."³⁰⁰ Likely referring to the AIC surveys, in a letter to Edwin Weaver he asked rhetorically, "Has the mission actually understood the problems of the Christian Community in the Uyo area or is our work merely satisfying our curiosities?"³⁰¹ Nsasak reminded Weaver that in early 1967 before the war when the Weavers were preparing to retire, Reverend Graddon, a veteran Qua Iboe Mission missionary, had predicted that once the Weavers left, the work they had started with the Inter-Church Study Group and Inter-Church team would simply end. Nsasak suggested, "Maybe as an older or almost the oldest missionary in the Uyo area he had been observing our work, had known the sandy grounds under [upon] which we were toiling, had out of our confused and uncertain ramblings foreseen a dead future for our program."³⁰² He advised Weaver that the mission should change its focus and plan to do something that would help rebuild the South Eastern State. He suggested that only

³⁰⁰ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 31, 1968.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

projects like secondary schools, technical schools, a hospital, or agricultural work would gain governmental approval and provide MBMC an entree into the region once again.³⁰³

Nsagak's views reflected that of the church, and the church suggested that if the mission was not willing to conform to its expectations, its missionaries should not return to the region. Upon hearing of the plan to send the Weavers to Lagos from where they might collaborate with Mennonite Church Nigeria in the Southeast, the church convened a special conference in late 1968 to discuss the insufficiencies of its mission's former work in the region and communicated its position to MBMC.³⁰⁴ The church demanded that the mission set aside its concerns for indigenization and provide direct financial support for native evangelists, noting, "What is good for the goose is also good for the gander. If Mission Board can adequately support expatriate missionaries, why is it reluctant to support native preachers?"³⁰⁵ The church also urged the mission to invest in permanent buildings for missionary housing and a Bible school instead of relying on rented facilities that left no enduring value to the church. The same was true with medical and educational institutions. While recognizing the need to collaborate with state officials, the church was clear that the mission should collaborate with the church to establish proprietary institutions. Finally, the church admonished the mission to provide capital for agricultural projects and coordinate the establishment of a Mennonite

³⁰³ Ibid.; I. U. Nsagak to MBMC, October 20, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969; I. U. Nsagak to Edwain Weaver, October 20, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsagak, I. U.

³⁰⁴ O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsagak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 11, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan 1 May 31, 1969.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

Economic Develop Associates small business loan program. Such assistance would have fulfilled the church's expectation that one of the roles of a Christian mission was to contribute to the well-being of the members of its national church.

The following April, during its regularly scheduled yearly conference, the church repeated its concerns. It noted that MBMC had not yet responded adequately to its earlier admonitions and again urged the mission to build proprietary educational and medical institutions if indeed it planned to send missionaries to the region once again.³⁰⁶ If the mission was not willing to make such an institutional investment, then there was no need to send missionaries.³⁰⁷ Later church leaders noted that they had in fact taken action with the authorities to bar the entry of some MBMC missionaries.³⁰⁸ In the months and years that followed the church would continue to press the mission to provide the durable institutional infrastructure that it considered to be the avenue to the church's well-being and the responsibility of Christian missions in the region.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria."

³⁰⁷ O. P. Ibok to Edwin and Irene Weaver, July 19, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 17, O. P. Ibok.

³⁰⁸ Stanley Friesen to Edwin and Irene Weaver, November 8, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen; Imeh Udo Nsasak to The Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, August 20, 1984, IV-18-13-07, Box 4, Nigeria--Mennonite Church 1985-89.

³⁰⁹ O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak, "Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church of Nigeria to Wilbert R. Shenk and Vern Preheim," March 2, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; O. E. Essiet and Basse O. Udoh, "Address of Welcome to Willard Roth," August 24, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 40, Roth, Willard E.; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber, October 12, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 17, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Ekerete, Dick--75-76; O. E. Essiet and Dick A. Ekerete, "Answer to Mission Board Question," September 12, 1980 and M. U. Eka, A. U. Ebu, and G. O. Udo, "An Address of Welcome Presented to Willard Roth and James Snider by the Mennonite Church Ibiono/Itak Area," October 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

Mennonite Church Nigeria also expressed strong dissatisfaction with MBMC's characterization of it as an AIC and called on the mission to affirm the church as truly Mennonite. When missionaries visited Nigeria in April 1971, they reported that the church was upset with the way the mission described it.³¹⁰ The Weavers had written *The Uyo Story*, an account of their work in southeastern Nigeria that explained their discovery of AICs and implied that the church was part of that movement.³¹¹ The Nigerian Mennonites were offended by the Weavers' depiction that their church was an AIC and by extension not really Mennonite. Later in the month Mennonite Church Nigeria met in conference session and appealed to MBMC to reconsider its approach to the church. It wanted the mission to think of it no longer as a splinter group that took on the name Mennonite but as a "member of the Mennonite brotherhood" that shared the same "beliefs and doctrines such as befit true Christians."³¹²

MBMC recognized the appropriateness of the church's forceful articulation of its own priorities and understandings and sought ways to assist and collaborate with the church without abandoning its own missiological values and priorities. Before it was clear that he would not receive a visa to return to Nigeria, Weaver responded to the church's concerns by agreeing that henceforth the mission's Nigerian work would need to

³¹⁰ Stanley Friesen, "A Visit to the Mennonite Churches in S. E. State by Stan and Delores Friesen and B. Charles and Grace Hostetter and Sons," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, May 1971), HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen.

³¹¹ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970).

³¹² Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 3, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

follow the church's priorities and those of the Nigerian government much more closely than it had previously.³¹³ There were clearly differences of opinion about priorities, MBMC continued to place a higher value on inter-church relationships than did the church for example, but Weaver believed that there would be enough common ground for fruitful collaboration.³¹⁴ If the church decided that it preferred to work without missionaries, however, that was its prerogative.³¹⁵ Weaver also reflected on the perennial requests for institutions from Mennonite Church Nigeria and other independent churches and suggested, along with mission administrator Wilbert Shenk, that MBMC might respond by assisting with projects that followed the pre-war Abiriba model.³¹⁶ The church was categorical, however, in rejecting a community and government owned initiative, preferring a model in which the church and mission were owners.³¹⁷

Shenk too sought ways that MBMC could collaborate with the church. He attempted to find ways to do so that recognized the differences of opinion but maintained

³¹³ Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, September 30, 1968 and Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak and O. E. Essiet, December 5, 1968, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, April 24, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1968-69; Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 11, 1969.

³¹⁴ Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak and M. A. Udofia, February 5, 1970, V-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³¹⁵ Edwin Weaver to O. P. Ibok, August 14, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 17, O. P. Ibok; Edwin Weaver to Frank A. Udoh, February 5, 1970, V-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³¹⁶ Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 7" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, August 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin I Weaver, August 28, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Edwin Weaver, Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 28, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

³¹⁷ O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities; Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; Essiet and Udoh, "Address of Welcome to Willard Roth."

the mission's concern to encourage indigenization and discourage dependency.³¹⁸ Even if the mission wanted to embark on the establishment of major new mission institutions in southeastern Nigeria, he noted, it did not have the financial resources to do so.³¹⁹ It could, however, work to show the Nigerian Mennonites that the mission valued them as brothers.³²⁰ Shenk noted that this was an ongoing challenge that MBMC could not dodge. When missionary Willard Roth visited the church from his Ghana base in September 1971 he sought a formula amenable to both sides—that the mission would relate to Mennonite Church Nigeria as an independent, autonomous unit of the world Mennonite brotherhood.³²¹ This tension of different expectations and understandings would remain, however, in the relationship between the church and mission in the years to come.

In the immediate post-war period the relationship between the church and mission would develop without resident missionaries. Given the government's hesitancy to issue visas, the heightened suspicion of foreign missions, and the church's resilience during the war, MBMC decided not to send missionaries to the region for two years following the

³¹⁸ "Overseas Missions Committee Minutes" (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, January 30, 1969), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsagak and O. E. Essiet, March 4, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Biafra - Jan 1 to May 31, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin I Weaver; Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, October 29, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Benton Rhoades and Peter G. Batchelor, April 7, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to B. Charles Hostetter, May 11, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Stanley Friesen, June 11, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores, 1970-74.

³¹⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin I Weaver.

³²⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to Stanley Friesen, May 28, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972.

³²¹ Willard E. Roth, "Visit of Pastor Willard E. Roth to Mennonite Church Nigeria," Trip Report (Accra, Ghana: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 9, 1971), IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

cessation of hostilities.³²² Shenk noted that the attempt to maintain a vital and mutually helpful relationship with the church without resident missionaries would be a new experience for the mission and would require reassessment of the relationship and of how to keep it alive. Collaboration with the church in the following years would be in the areas of agricultural development, educational scholarships, and biblical and theological training for church leaders. The relationship would be maintained by mail and visits of mission personnel from time to time. MBMC would have to satisfy its interests in resourcing AICs and in inter-church relations with work in other West African countries.

Agriculture, Scholarships and Leadership Training

The mission's collaboration with Mennonite Church Nigeria in the post-war period mirrored its pre-war assistance to the church and included the three areas of agricultural development, scholarships for young people, and theological training for church leaders. Before their evacuation in 1967, missionaries had organized agricultural projects, hired national workers to coordinate the projects, and facilitated church members' access to governmental assistance. After the war the church requested that the mission continue such assistance, but it declared its preference for agricultural training at a higher level, at least at secondary school level, instead of at the lower, trade school level.³²³ Higher-level graduates were well equipped to find useful employment but lower

³²² Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," March 25, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak, March 17, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³²³ Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, April 29, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan 1 May 31, 1969; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, August 22, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Bassey O.

level training did not provide such opportunities. Such training was only helpful, the church argued, if MBMC could provide employment, land, or capital to the trainees when they completed their studies in order to launch their own projects.

The mission agreed to provide assistance for agricultural development.³²⁴ It agreed to fund village agricultural initiatives in each of the church's four areas and to fund the salary of Bassey Udoh, a former secondary school mission scholarship recipient trained in agriculture, to supervise them.³²⁵ MBMC stipulated that this assistance would be limited to three years in order to avoid making the project dependent on long-term outside funding. Weaver and his missionary colleagues worked to find university level agricultural training for Mennonite Church Nigeria secretary I. U. Nsasak and Udoh.³²⁶ If the mission could not send missionaries to assist the church, it could at least train national personnel to develop the agricultural capacity of church members. The mission also

Udoh to the Secretary for Overseas Missions, MBMC, December 3, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Relief and Rehabilitation 1969.

³²⁴ Edwin Weaver to Bassey O. Udoh, December 3, 1969 and Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, December 3, 1969, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, December 16, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

³²⁵ Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," March 25, 1970; Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 11, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Christian Trust Poultry Farmers 1970-71; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak; Edwin Weaver to Bassey O. Udoh.

³²⁶ Peter G. Batchelor to Benton Rhoades, November 14, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 35, P - R Miscellaneous; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Benton Rhoades, December 16, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Peter G. Batchelor to I. U. Nsasak, December 18, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 11, Peter Batchelor; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, December 19, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsasak, I. U.; Peter G. Batchelor J. Benton Rhoades, March 30, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Christian Trust Poultry Farmers 1970-71; Peter G. Batchelor to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 1, 1972 and Willard Roth to Bassey O. Obong, June 22, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Batchelor, Peter 1970-74; Willard Roth to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 1, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Ghana 1970-74.

arranged for Peter Batchelor, a missionary with Agricultural Missions and the Christian Rural Advisory Council who was based in Nigeria, to assist the church.³²⁷

Mennonite Church Nigeria and MBMC's collaboration in agricultural development in the post-war years produced only modest gains. Udoh intended the projects he started to be community initiatives, but they did not draw the participation necessary to be successful.³²⁸ Nsasak became embroiled in controversy when the church disciplined him for misusing church funds that then were not available for the agricultural projects.³²⁹ Bachelor transferred out of Nigeria, and Udoh eventually chose to pursue studies in a different field.³³⁰ The church asked MBMC to send an agricultural missionary to reinforce its initiatives, and the mission looked for an appropriate candidate.³³¹ In the end it did not find one, and the collaborative agricultural initiative fizzled out.

³²⁷ Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, September 12, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969; Peter G. Batchelor to I. U. Nsasak, September 16, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 11, Peter Batchelor; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 16, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria - Edwin I. Weaver 1968-69; Peter G. Batchelor to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 4, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Batchelor, Peter 1970-74.

³²⁸ Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 6, 1971 and Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 1, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³²⁹ Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 15, 1970 and O. E. Essiet and Bassey O. Udoh, "Emergency Church Conference Report Held on May 12, 1970" (Mennonite Church Nigeria, May 29, 1970), IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³³⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to Peter Batchelor, May 2, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Batchelor, Peter 1970-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak, August 17, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³³¹ Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 4, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74 3; Bassey O. Udoh, "Minutes of the Special Church Meeting at Ikot Eyo, Ubium with Willard E. Roth," (Ikot Eyo, Eket, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, August 24, 1971), IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Wilbur Bontrager, December 10, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74.

The provision of scholarships was another form of assistance that MBMC reinstated from the pre-war years. From the beginning the church had asked for help to establish schools, but the mission consistently refused to invest in such institutions for fear they would not be sustainable without foreign assistance. Providing scholarships was a way to contribute to the well-being of the church and the education of future leaders without embarking on the creation of mission institutions.³³² Scholarship recipients' study was interrupted by the war, but the mission continued the scholarship program as schools opened up after the war so that students could complete their studies.³³³ Eighteen students at technical and secondary schools participated in 1969, and MBMC increased assistance to provide scholarships for forty-five to fifty students each year after Shenk's visit to the region in early 1970.³³⁴

Like the agricultural development projects, the scholarship scheme suffered its share of problems and changed its focus over time. The church sanctioned one of its leaders for accepting bribes to include students in the program, and the misappropriation of funds that affected the agricultural work also affected scholarships.³³⁵ The church executive committee reduced payments to scholarship students in order to replace the

³³² Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," March 25, 1970.

³³³ Edwin Weaver to Sunday O. Umoren, March 31, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 24, Umoren, Sunday O.; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, April 15, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak and Standard Bank of West Africa, Calabar, July 9, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969.

³³⁴ O. E. Essiet, S. U. Mbaba, and I. U. Nsasak to the Secretary to Overseas Missions, MBMC, December 27, 1969 and O. E. Essiet, S. U. Mbaba, and I. U. Nsasak, "List of Scholarship Holders 1969-70," December 27, 1969, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," March 25, 1970; Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 1, 1971.

³³⁵ Bassey O. Udoh to Edwin Weaver, June 24, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 21, Udoh, B. O.; Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 1, 1971.

missing monies and make other expenditures such as pastoral support. In addition, MBMC's priority was biblical and theological training for church leaders, so secondary school scholarships decreased over time.³³⁶ Even though the amount of mission assistance increased in the years following the civil war, the support for high school scholarships decreased.³³⁷ By 1977 the mission earmarked all of its assistance for the church's theological education program, eliminating other scholarship assistance entirely.³³⁸

Biblical and theological training was the third area of collaboration that the mission and the church carried over into the post-war years. Before the war missionaries had initiated a program of biblical training in Mennonite congregations, had provided scholarships for church leaders to attend local Bible schools, and had established the United Churches Bible College. After the war the church requested that the mission reinstate scholarships for those who had been studying in Bible colleges at the outbreak of the war, and MBMC readily did so.³³⁹

The church's attitude towards such training for its church leaders was, however, ambiguous. On the one hand, it sought the mission's assistance to help those studying to

³³⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Willard Roth and Stanley Friesen, May 28, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Stanley Friesen and Willard E. Roth, July 30, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972.

³³⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak, December 23, 1975, Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak and D. A. Ekerete, February 3, 1977 and Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, December 7, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet, July 29, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³³⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak, November 10, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79.

³³⁹ Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver; Wilbert R. Shenk to A. N. Udonsak, May 21, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - Jan 1 May 31, 1969.

finish their training after the war, sought scholarship aid for three new Bible College students in 1970, and gave its approval, although somewhat hesitantly, to the establishment of a school to train church leaders.³⁴⁰

On the other hand, the church's primary concern with respect to church leaders was not theological training but how to ensure their remuneration. Despite the mission's repeated insistence that it would not provide financial support for church leaders such as evangelists, preachers, and pastors, the church regularly requested such support.³⁴¹ At its first church-wide conference after the war when it was still basking in the post-war confidence of the Federal victory over the Biafran experiment and its foreign supporters, the church decided to not send any more people for theological training.³⁴² The minutes of the conference reported, "Rather we will continue wrestling with the problem of giving adequate support to those that [who] have already been trained, to enable them to carry

³⁴⁰ A. N. Udonsak to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 22, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria-Biafra - June 1 to Dec 31, 1969; Essiet, Mbaba, and Nsasak, "List of Scholarship Holders 1969-70"; J. Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 12, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores, 1970-74; Essiet and Udoh, "Emergency Church Conference Report Held on May 12, 1970"; O. E. Essiet and Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 24, 1970, I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 18, 1973, I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 6, 1973, Carl Kreider to I. U. Nsasak, June 12, 1974 and Frank Akpan Udoh and Ime Udo Nsasak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, June 22, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³⁴¹ O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities; O. E. Essiet to Edwin and Irene Weaver; Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; Essiet and Nsasak, "Address of Welcome from the Mennonite Church of Nigeria to Wilbert R. Shenk and Vern Preheim"; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak; Wilbert R. Shenk to Willard Roth, September 17, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Willard Roth, October 28, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, December 10, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 12, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁴² Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria."

on the work for which they were trained.”³⁴³ When funds were short, the church’s executive committee reduced the assistance designated for scholarship recipients in order to pay its preachers.³⁴⁴ Despite such ambiguity, the provision of biblical and theological education for church leaders would become the longest lasting and most significant, in terms of the implicated personnel and financial resources, of the mission and church collaborative initiatives in the post-war period.

While MBMC provided scholarships for study at Bible colleges during the first years after the war, the primary embodiment of collaboration with the church in leadership training was its support for the school that the Abak congregations started in Ibianga. Dick Ekerete, former resident tutor at the United Churches Bible College (UCBC) at Uyo, opened the school in February 1969 with fifteen students from four different denominations.³⁴⁵ The name of the school was the Mennonite Theological Seminary, although it was basically a secondary school that sought to prepare students to take the General Certificate of Education exams but also provided the option of a Bible school curriculum.³⁴⁶

In some ways the Seminary was a continuation of the UCBC, but in other ways it was quite different. It was a continuation in that Ekerete had received his training through

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Bassey O. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 1, 1971.

³⁴⁵ Grasse, “Report of Visit of Nigerian Mennonite Areas.”

³⁴⁶ N. J. Ekaiko, F. A. Udoh, Moses Akpanudo, Dick Ekerete, M A. Udofia and Edwin J. Umouko to Warren L. Grasse, June 9, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Akpanudo, Moses J. 1968-70; J. Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk and Edwin Weaver, July 20, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 41, Stan and Dee Friesen.

a MBMC scholarship, had been resident tutor at UCBC, and had been missionary principal Stanley Friesen's assistant. It was different in that it included the curriculum of a secondary school along with Bible college courses, did not have the support of either the entire Mennonite Church Nigeria or the mission at its founding, and was in one of the four areas of the church instead of in a neutral location as the missionaries had envisioned with an Uyo site.

Upon learning of the founding of the Seminary, MBMC affirmed the move, but many in the church were suspicious of the project. For the mission the Seminary represented indigenous agency and its opening was to be congratulated. The mission recognized the school as a medium through which it might assist the church in the theological and biblical training of its leaders.³⁴⁷ Ekerete asked for financial support and missionary personnel, and MBMC was willing to provide help as part of its assistance to the church as long as that assistance was designated for the leadership training track of the Seminary and not the secondary school program.³⁴⁸ The other three areas of the church were suspicious of the Seminary initiative, fearing that it was a ploy to move the

³⁴⁷ Edwin Weaver to Dick A. Ekerete, December 2, 1969, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Stanley Friesen to Dick A. Ekerete, December 16, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores 1965-69; Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," March 25, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 20, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; "Overseas Missions Committee," Meeting Report (Rosemont, Illinois: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, October 1, 1975), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1972-1976.

³⁴⁸ N. J. Ekaiko, F. A. Udoh, Moses Akpanudo, Dick Ekerete, M. A. Udofofia and Edwin J. Umouko to Warren L. Grasse; Dick A. Ekerete to Edwin Weaver, November 7, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 32, D. A. Ekerete; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 25, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, July 27, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 20, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, August 25, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria Scholarships 1970-72; Bassey O. Obong to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 5, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

formerly centrally located UCBC to Abak and draw mission resources to that area at the expense of the other areas.³⁴⁹ They eventually acquiesced, however, and gave their blessing to the initiative, clearing the way for collaboration between the church and mission on the Seminary project.³⁵⁰

The Seminary embodied a compromise between the priorities of church and those of the mission. The church had long desired both a Bible college and a secondary school, institutions that foreign missions in the region normally provided for the churches they established. With its dual curriculum of programs for secondary school and leadership training, the Seminary sought to fulfill the church's needs in a structure that was likely to also draw mission support due to MBMC's priority of theological education for church leaders. Given its desire to assist the church with leadership training, the mission sought to support that particular track in the Seminary. Consistent with the value it placed on indigenization, the mission also sought to avoid creating an institution that would rely on foreign funds, thus becoming a possible future burden on the church and increasing dependency.³⁵¹ If the church decided to establish a school, the mission was willing to

³⁴⁹ O. E. Essiet, S. U. Mbaba, and I. U. Nsasak to the Secretary to Overseas Missions, MBMC; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, November 3, 1969; I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, December 29, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 28, Nigeria – Miscellaneous.

³⁵⁰ J. Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk; Bassey O. Obong to Wilbert R. Shenk; I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 18, 1973; Carl Kreider to I. U. Nsasak, June 12, 1974; Frank Akpan Udoh and Ime Udo Nsasak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities.

³⁵¹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, July 27, 1970; Carl Kreider to Dick A. Ekerete, November 15, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Ekerete, Dick 1972-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. D. A. Ekerete, May 28, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Ekerete, Dick--75-76; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 14, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherrill Hostetter, May 2, 1979, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherrill (King) 1979-81; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, May 25, 1979, IV-18-13-05, Box 4,

collaborate in the initiative as long as it could do so in a way that focused its contribution on the training of church leaders and that protected its concern for indigenization.

MBMC responded to the church's requests for assistance in the Seminary project in a number of ways. In the beginning it provided assistance for church leaders in the theological training track, approving scholarships for between eleven and twenty-one students during any particular year.³⁵² Seminary principle Ekerete also asked for missionary personnel to help provide leadership and serve as teachers.³⁵³ The mission appointed Stanley Friesen to visit the Seminary and consult periodically, but the church insisted that the Seminary needed resident missionaries.³⁵⁴

The mission agreed to send short-term teachers at first but in later years also recruited resident missionaries to serve as teachers, funded training for the Seminary principle, and provided funding for construction costs.³⁵⁵ Teaching school was one of the few positions for which the Nigerian government would grant missionary visas in the

Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherrill Hostetter, February 19, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherrill (King) 1979-81.

³⁵² Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 20, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, August 25, 1972.

³⁵³ Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 25, 1970.

³⁵⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, July 27, 1970; I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 18, 1973; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 9, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Ekerete, Dick 1972-74; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 5, 1979, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79.

³⁵⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, July 27, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, June 7, 1972, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Carl Kreider and James Kratz, "Program an Budget Planning 1974 and Past Years Expenditures," January 7, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Overseas Committee 1970-74; J. D. Graber to I. U. Nsasak, January 29, 1975, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79; "Overseas Missions Committee," October 1, 1975.

region during the 1970s.³⁵⁶ Between 1973 and 1979 MBMC recruited three missionary couples to serve as teachers.³⁵⁷ The first two couples waited long periods for the Nigerian government to approve their visas without success.³⁵⁸ The third couple received visas, arrived in August 1979, but served only one year before the Seminary project folded in the midst of a financial crisis and a period of conflict in the church.³⁵⁹ The mission also provided Dick Ekerete scholarship assistance to study in Nigeria and later at a Mennonite seminary in the United States in preparation for his role as principal.³⁶⁰ Finally, the

³⁵⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherrill Hostetter.

³⁵⁷ Carl Kreider to F. A. Udoh and I. U. Nsasak, February 11, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Alfred Polzin to Wilbert R. Shenk, April 20, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Polzen, Alfred and Noreen--75-79; "Overseas Missions Committee," Meeting Minutes (Rosemont, IL: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, April 28, 1976), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1972-1976; Wilbert R. Shenk to Dick A. Ekerete, February 27, 1979, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79; Dick A. Ekerete to Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Hostetter, March 26, 1979, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherrill (King) 1979-81.

³⁵⁸ Carl Kreider to B. Charles Hostetter, June 12, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 2, Hostetter, B. Charles and Grace 1970-74; Carl Kreider to I. U. Nsasak, July 12, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - Nigeria," Trip Report (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 1, 1977), IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, December 7, 1977; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 24, 1978, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79.

³⁵⁹ Darrel Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 25, 1979 and Darrel Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 31, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherrill (King) 1979-81; O. E. Essiet and Dick A. Ekerete, "General Conference Held at Ikot Anse in Itu Area," Meeting Minutes (Ikot Anse, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, April 25, 1980), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet and D. A. Ekerete, July 2, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Charles and Grace 1980-84; Darrel Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 10, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherrill (King) 1979-81; I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁶⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to J. Stanley Friesen, March 27, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Obong, June 7, 1972; Willard Roth to Wilbert R. Shenk; Carl Kreider to I. U. Nsasak, June 12, 1974; Frank Akpan Udoh and Ime Udo Nsasak to Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities; Carl Kreider to Dick A. Ekerete, July 5, 1974 and Carl Kreider to Whom It May Concern, July 5, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 1, Ekerete, Dick 1972-74; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 8, 1976, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria--Ekerete, Dick--75-76.

mission provided funding for capital and operating expenses, contributing approximately \$123,415 US dollars between 1976 and 1980.³⁶¹

With high operating costs and low student fees the Seminary was often in financial crisis. Establishing and operating a school was an expensive undertaking, and the church repeatedly asked the mission to take it over or at least underwrite more of its costs.³⁶² The school did not meet the standards necessary to receive governmental support; hence the state did not pay teachers' salaries, as had been the case with other schools where MBMC and MCC teachers had served.³⁶³ In addition to its concern about dependency, the mission was experiencing budget deficits in the late 1970s and was not in a position to provide the resources necessary to finance the entire Seminary infrastructure.³⁶⁴ During a visit by MBMC board member Ray Horst in 1979, he found the Seminary's projected budget for the year to be over 50,000 Nira but the student fees to add up to only 1,000 Nira. The mission could not, and was not willing, to cover such a

³⁶¹ Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet; "Analysis of Budget Funds for Nigeria Support and Program," July 29, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁶² I. U. Nsasak to B. Charles Hostetter, January 21, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; I. U. Nsasak to J. D. Graber.

³⁶³ Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 9, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79.

³⁶⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, October 14, 1977; Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, February 14, 1978, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79; Wilbert R. Shenk, Wilbert R. Shenk to Dick A. Ekerete, January 4, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria - Mennonite Seminary.

staggering difference.³⁶⁵ The Seminary had no books to provide to students. Occasionally it was not able to pay its teachers, and they consequently threatened to cease teaching.³⁶⁶

Facing financial crisis, pressure from the local population to make secular, secondary education the school's sole focus, and doubts about its ownership, the Seminary closed in early 1981. In the fall of 1980, the church called on the mission to take full responsibility for funding the initiative since it could not meet the institutional requirements of the Ministry of Education.³⁶⁷ The mission had always intended its support to be a grant that would encourage and stimulate Nigerian resources, thus reinforcing its indigenous character as a self-financing institution.³⁶⁸ Since its contributions had been ineffective in that regard and since the church rejected the mission's refusal to assume ownership of the institution, MBMC terminated its support for the Seminary in October 1980. During the same month the village that had provided the land on which to build the Seminary called on the mission to turn it into the Nigeria Mennonite Secondary School in order to draw educational assistance from the government.³⁶⁹ Given the financial difficulties and after discovering that its ownership was in doubt, the church dismissed Ekerete as principle and closed the Seminary in

³⁶⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, May 25, 1979.

³⁶⁶ Darrel Hostetter to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 31, 1980.

³⁶⁷ Essiet and Ekerete, "Answer to Mission Board Question"; O. E. Essiet and Dick A. Ekerete, "An Address of Welcome Presented to Pastor Willard Roth and Dr. and Mrs. James Snider by the Executive Committee," October 31, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁶⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Willard Roth and Jim and Janice Snider, October 13, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁶⁹ "An Address of Welcome Presented by the People of Southern Afaha to the American Mennonite Envoys," October 30, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

February 1981.³⁷⁰ Legally it was not clear if proprietorship rested with the church or the village where the Seminary was located. So ended the Mennonite Theological Seminary.

Conflict and Division in Mennonite Church Nigeria

During the last three decades of the twentieth century, Mennonite Church Nigeria experienced four major internal conflicts that risked causing schism in the church and influenced the relationship between the mission and the church. That such was the case is not surprising since schism had been a characteristic of Christianity in the region for decades, a situation that had motivated the Weavers to develop a mission approach that encouraged inter-church work and reconciliation. Before the war the different geographical areas of the church had found common cause in their relationship with MBMC and its missionaries. After the war there were no resident missionaries and the relationship with the mission was carried on from a distance. Without the common focus that the missionaries provided, disagreements more easily provoked different areas of the church to move towards schism. This subsection will describe briefly the four major conflicts that created division in the church during the post-war period and outline how they affected MBMC's engagement with the church.

The first threat of schism within the church came as the war was winding down after Federal forces liberated the various areas of the church in 1968. The Abak area refused to participate in the 1969 church-wide conference, sought to establish its own

³⁷⁰ I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1981.

church structure, and sought to gain recognition from MBMC and other North American Mennonites.³⁷¹

There are a number of factors that, combined, may have motivated such a move. The Abak area people were of the Anang ethnic group, a sub group of the Ibibio.³⁷² There were, therefore, some ethnic differences that separated the Abak area from the other three areas of the church. MBMC missionary Stanley Friesen noted that the Full Gospel Faith Mission church and the Lutheran Church both experienced similar schisms when their Abak regions split from their churches.³⁷³ The tendency in southeastern Nigeria to invest religious and political authority in local, as opposed to regional, structures also militated against an effective concentration of authority at the level of the church and its executive committee. In addition, the isolation of each of the areas during the war meant that each became accustomed to functioning quite independently of the others.³⁷⁴ There was also a reversion to the intense letter writing activity to foreign sources to obtain financial

³⁷¹ Nsagak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; Stanley Friesen and Wilbert R. Shenk, "Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria," October 9, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Frank A. Udoh, Johnson Uwa, Dick A. Ekerete, Alfred Udo, J. Miem, S. F. Ukoh, Sunday Udoh, and M. A. Udofia to The Executive Committee, MCN, January 26, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 22, Udoh, F. A.; M. A. Udofia to Edwin Weaver, January 27, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 20, Udofia, M. A.; Frank A. Udoh, Dick A. Ekerete, and M. A. Udofia, "Address of Welcome Presented by the Mennonite Church, Abak Area, to Mr. Wilbert Shenk," March 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Moses J. Akpanudo, "Application for Appointment as Action Mennonite Mission Representative in Nigeria," August 8, 1969 Wilbert R. Shenk to Paul N. Kraybill, Harold S. Stauffer, July 18, 1968 and Moses Akpanudo to Lloyd Fisher, September 22, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Akpanudo, Moses J. 1968-70; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsagak and O. E. Essiet.

³⁷² Grasse, "Report of Visit of Nigerian Mennonite Areas"; Friesen and Shenk, "Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria"; Frank A. Udoh, Johnson Uwa, Dick A. Ekerete, Alfred Udo, J. Miem, S. F. Ukoh, Sunday Udoh, and M. A. Udofia to The Executive Committee, MCN.

³⁷³ Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, March 16, 1971, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria 1971-74, MCUSA Archives.

³⁷⁴ Friesen and Shenk, "Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria."

assistance that Weaver had found on his arrival a decade earlier. One of the leaders who had allied with the Abak area during the war launched a letter-writing campaign to North American Mennonites asking for assistance and reinforcing the Abak area's independent spirit with promises to establish schools and other mission institutions with the assistance he hoped to receive.³⁷⁵

The church responded to the Abak area's move to form a new church in a number of ways. One was to recognize the need for more autonomy for each of the four church areas. At its conference in April 1969, the church decided to allow each area to plan and implement its own program, appoint preachers, and prepare its own budgets.³⁷⁶ The development of institutions, the relationship with MBMC, and the management of the scholarship program would remain with the executive committee. It also made plans to ordain a pastor for each area; previously there had been only one ordained pastor in the whole church. The church also prohibited Abak from using the name "Mennonite" for projects not approved by the rest of the church and discouraged the mission from recognizing it as a new church structure. It accused Abak of citing a loan that Mennonite Economic Development Associates had provided in the area before the war to increase false hopes that more assistance would be forthcoming, thus enticing people to join the breakaway area. The church also accused Abak of using Ekerete's Seminary initiative to coopt the United Churches Bible College by moving it from its more centralized pre-war

³⁷⁵ Wilbert R. Sherk to Paul N. Kraybill and Harold S. Stauffer; Moses Akpanudo to Lloyd Fisher; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, April 24, 1969; Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria"; O. E. Essiet and I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver.

³⁷⁶ Nsasak, "Minutes, 10th Annual Conference of the Mennonite Church Nigeria."

Uyo site to Ibianga, thus attempting to draw mission resources to itself and away from the rest of the church.³⁷⁷

The conflict in the church led Weaver to regret the mission strategy he had used in the Abak area. He lamented that he had not dedicated more time and energy to the Ibianga congregations, which made up the greater part of the Abak area congregations, during his time as resident missionary in the region.³⁷⁸ Weaver had followed John Yoder's suggestion to limit missionary presence in, and assistance to, Ibianga as a way to test Jacob Loewen's idea that missionaries who visited instead of residing full-time in an area might be more successful at encouraging the establishment of a truly indigenous church. Weaver now regretted that decision and wished that the mission had provided more assistance there, perhaps generating more affinity among those congregations for the larger Mennonite Church Nigeria and reducing the likelihood that Abak would desire to secede.

In the end MBMC's response to the conflict between Abak and the rest of the church was to refuse to deal with more than one church structure and to affirm both reconciliation between the parties and the move to give more autonomy to each of the areas. Missionaries had already come to believe that heavily centralized church structures would not work in the region and congratulated the church in its move towards more area autonomy.³⁷⁹ In addition, MBMC signaled its willingness to assist the Seminary and

³⁷⁷ I. U. Nsasak to Edwin Weaver, November 3, 1969.

³⁷⁸ Edwin Weaver to Dick A. Ekerete.

³⁷⁹ Edwin Weaver to Dick A. Ekerete; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, December 3, 1969; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak and M. A. Udofia; Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, November 2, 1970, IV-18-

encouraged the two sides to find ways to work together and to reconcile.³⁸⁰ Finally, the mission refused to recognize any Mennonite church structure other than Mennonite Church Nigeria, effectively choosing the church's executive committee to disburse its assistance.³⁸¹ By doing so at the same time that it affirmed increased autonomy for Abak, MBMC sought to encourage a workable balance of unity and area autonomy in the church. Eventually the Abak area came to an agreement with the other areas so that it remained a part of the church, and Mennonite Church Nigeria officially authorized mission support for the Seminary.³⁸²

The second and third conflicts that moved the church toward schism in the post-war period arose out of leadership struggles in the church and competition to control its resources. The different sides did not follow ethnic divides, indicating that the differences between the Anang and larger Ibibio identities were not the major issue. These struggles should be seen within the context of the post-civil war socio-economic situation in which an economy based on petroleum exports created a small group of Nigerians who became

13-04, Box 2, Friesen, Stanley and Delores, 1970-74; Wilbert R. Shenk to Stanley Friesen, November 13, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

³⁸⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to Dick A. Ekerete, May 26, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; J. Stanley Friesen to D. A. Ekerete, June 30, 1970, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria Scholarships 1970-72; Wilbert R. Shenk to Bassey O. Udoh, July 27, 1970; Wilbert R. Shenk to M. A. Udofia, F. A. Udoh, and D. A. Ekerete, October 9, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Edwin Weaver to Dick A. Ekerete; Edwin Weaver to I. U. Nsasak, December 3, 1969.

³⁸¹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Moses Akpanudo, F. A. Udoh, Dick Ekerete, M. A. Udofia, Edwin J. Umouko, and N. J. Ekaiko, July 11, 1969 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Larry Kehler, August 28, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Akpanudo, Moses J. 1968-70; Nsasak et al., "Transcript of Interview with I. U. Nsasak of Nigeria"; Friesen and Shenk, "Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria."

³⁸² Bassey O. Udoh, "Report on a Reconciliation Meeting Between Abak and Ubium Areas" (Mennonite Church Nigeria, November 15, 1971), IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74; Bassey O. Obong to Wilbert R. Shenk.

exceedingly wealthy while the majority, including those in the villages where Mennonite congregations existed, remained mired in poverty.³⁸³ The civil war and the post-war dependence on petroleum exports had put an end to the government's pre-war agricultural focus.³⁸⁴ This helped to destroy the earlier optimism of the immediate post-independence years as most Mennonites earned their livelihood in the agricultural sector that was now not only stagnating but in decline. By the early 1980s the purchasing power of average Nigerians decreased significantly and the government failed to pay public servants for months at a time.³⁸⁵ By mid decade a structural adjustment program resulted in further decline in the economy and people found it difficult to afford basic necessities.³⁸⁶ Such a context of increasing scarcity could only increase the likelihood that material assistance from the mission would tend to exacerbate competition among leaders and the areas they represented.

The second conflict arose when the Abak leader F. A. Udoh became chair of Mennonite Church Nigeria and, along with Ibiono leader Nsasak defrocked the church's sole pastor, O. E. Essiet, of his leadership responsibilities.³⁸⁷ Their grievances included accusations of mismanagement of MBMC scholarship funds, their perception that Essiet

³⁸³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 181-185

³⁸⁴ Chima J. Korieh, *The Land has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 229-237.

³⁸⁵ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 203-204.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 209, 217-219.

³⁸⁷ Bassey O. Udoh, "Minutes of the Mennonite Church, Nigeria 13th Annual Conference," (Ikot Ada Idem, Ibiono, Nigeria: Mennonite Church Nigeria, December 29, 1972) and F. A. Udoh to O. E. Essiet, January 2, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

worked to keep the church from ordaining more pastors, and Essiet's supposedly "dictatorial" leadership style. Essiet responded by disqualifying the decision to remove him from power.³⁸⁸

Both sides attempted to garner the mission's sympathy. Each sought to explain why they were justified in their actions and attempted to gain mission support against the other.³⁸⁹ Nsasak even compared Essiet to Biafran leader C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, implying that Essiet was seeking sympathy and support of foreign friends against the church, a veiled warning to MBMC to not intervene in support of the rebel area as some missions had done in support of Biafra during the civil war.³⁹⁰ The mission refused to become part of the conflict or to impose a solution.³⁹¹ When pressed to take sides mission administrator Wilbert Shenk refused, stating that he had "no opinion" in the matter.³⁹² Following a number of failed attempts, Mennonite Church Nigeria and Essiet and his Ubium area found a solution to their differences and reconciled two years after the conflict erupted.

³⁸⁸ O. E. Essiet to The Secretary, Mennonite Church Nigeria, January 4, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³⁸⁹ O. E. Essiet to Willard Roth, February 13, 1973, D. A. Essien, Etok Ikpe Udoffia, et al. to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 18, 1973 and I. U. Nsasak to Willard Roth, March 12, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³⁹⁰ I. U. Nsasak to Willard Roth.

³⁹¹ Willard Roth to Mennonite Church Nigeria, February 17, 1973, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 40, Roth, Willard E.; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak, June 21, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

³⁹² Wilbert R. Shenk to Ubium Area Committee, March 9, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

The third conflict arose when Ekerete returned from his studies in the United States. He moved the Seminary from Ibianga to his home in Ukanafon, and took two Ibianga congregations to form a new Mennonite Church Nigeria area there.³⁹³ Ibianga leader F. A. Udoh protested and when the church leadership sided with Ekerete, Udoh took his congregations out of the church and formed a new structure called The Gospel of Christ Church.³⁹⁴ Again, MBMC refused to get involved in intra-church conflict.³⁹⁵ The Ibianga congregations did not return to the church until after the fourth conflict erupted.³⁹⁶

The fourth and most significant conflict arose after the church closed the Seminary. The Ibiono and Itam areas supported the closure but the Ukanafon and Ubium areas did not.³⁹⁷ Ukanafon and Ubium leaders Ekerete and Essiet claimed to lead the

³⁹³ Mennonite Churches in Abak Area to The Executive Committee, Nigeria Mennonite Church, May 30, 1977 and F. A. Udoh to Wilbert R. Shenk,” June 4, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79.

³⁹⁴ Essiet and Ekerete, “General Conference Held at Ikot Anse in Itu Area.”

³⁹⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk to F. A. Udoh, June 21, 1977, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Church--75-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherrill Hostetter, October 30, 1979, IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet, D. A. Ekerete, and I. U. Nsasak, November 20, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁹⁶ I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 11, 1982, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984.

³⁹⁷ I. U. Nsasak, “Statement in Special Conference on February 7, 1981,” February 7, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1981; Dick A. Ekerete to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 20, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria - Mennonite Seminary; Mennonite Churches Ibiono Area to Chairman of Conference and the Executive Committee, March 14, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984, I. U. Nsasak to O. E. Essiet, June 1, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984, O. E. Essiet to I. U. Nsasak, July 5, 1981, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984, Ray E. Horst to Wilbert R. Shenk, July 22, 1982, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984, I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 30, 1982, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984, Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet, D. A. Ekerete, and I. U. Nsasak, January 7, 1983, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Nancy Heisey Longacre, April 14, 1983, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; “Overseas Division Program Report --

church's executive committee. The Ibiono and Itam leaders established their own executive committee, and the Ibianga congregations that had left to form the Church of Christ returned to the Mennonite fold by supporting the Ibiono and Itam committee.³⁹⁸ The division crossed ethnic lines since Ibianga and Ukanfon were both part of the Anang people while the other areas were part of the general Ibibio population. Hence there were two structures, each claiming to represent the church and lobbying MBMC heavily, competing for its recognition.

Once again MBMC decided that a viable solution would have to come from the two parties and refused to act as judge in the situation. Instead, it ended all official contact with Mennonite Church Nigeria until such time that the two parties reunited or conversely accepted each other as two separate Mennonite churches.³⁹⁹ In the meantime the mission committed to maintaining informal contact with individuals in the church who desired to do so.⁴⁰⁰ It also offered to send missionaries to do short-term teaching or

West Africa" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 31, 1983), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Overseas Min Div Committee 1984; I. U. Nsasak and N. F. Uko to Ronald E. Yoder, March 24, 1986, IV-18-13-07, Box 4, Nigeria--Mennonite Church 1985-89; O. E. Essiet and D. A. Ekerete to Ronald E. Yoder, November 12, 1990, IV-18-13-08, Box 3, Nigeria Mennonite Church, 1988-93, Folder 67.

³⁹⁸ I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 30, 1982; I. U. Nsasak to Wilbert R. Shenk, October 11, 1982.

³⁹⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet, D. A. Ekerete, and I. U. Nsasak, November 20, 1980; Wilbert R. Shenk to F. A. Udoh, April 21, 1981 and Wilbert R. Shenk to D. A. Ekerete, December 10, 1982, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; Wilbert R. Shenk to O. E. Essiet, D. A. Ekerete, and I. U. Nsasak, January 7, 1983; Wilbert R. Shenk to Nancy Heisey Longacre; Wilbert R. Shenk to I. U. Nsasak and D. A. Ekerete, April 14, 1983, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; "Overseas Division Program Report -- West Africa."

⁴⁰⁰ "Overseas Division Program Report -- West Africa."

preaching if both structures could agree how to receive such assistance.⁴⁰¹ They never did agree.

In addition, MBMC sought to recruit teachers whom it could place in universities in Calabar or Port Harcourt and who could serve as Overseas Mission Associates, but the initiative was not realized. The idea was that the teachers would earn their salary as mission teachers had done before the war.⁴⁰² They would be close enough to the church to provide assistance from time to time during this period of official rupture but not assigned primarily to it. Wilbert Shenk had observed that with growing numbers of students in Nigerian universities, MBMC missionaries with PhDs might provide both an academic service and spiritual orientation for Christian university students, as well as afford informal, periodic service to Mennonite Church Nigeria.⁴⁰³ The mission found a number of candidates, but the Nigerian university system experienced financial difficulties and was then no longer able to hire foreign staff.⁴⁰⁴

The post-Seminary schism lasted from the Seminary's closing in 1981 to the mid 1990s. Ibianga leader F. A. Udoh took the initiative to reconcile the sides, inviting

⁴⁰¹ Ronald E. Yoder to D. A. Ekerete, July 27, 1987, Ronald E. Yoder to D. A. Ekerete, November 24, 1987 and Ronald E. Yoder to I. U. Nsagak, November 24, 1987, IV-18-13-07, Box 4, Nigeria--Mennonite Church 1985-89.

⁴⁰² Wilbert R. Shenk to Ray E. Horst, May 11, 1982, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria General 1977-1984; Ray E. Horst and Ruth Horst, "Report on Trip to Nigeria" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 15, 1982), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria Menn Ch 1980-1984; "Overseas Ministries Divisional Committee Minutes," (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, November 10, 1983), IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Overseas Min Div Committee - Minutes 1981-83; Ronald E. Yoder to MBM Overseas Divisional Committee; Ronald E. Yoder, "University of Calabar File-Status," March 13, 1984, IV-18-13-06, Box 8, Nigeria - Univ. of Calabar 1984.

⁴⁰³ Wilbert R. Shenk to Ray E. Horst.

⁴⁰⁴ B. Charles Hostetter to Ronald E. Yoder; Yoder, "Overseas Ministries Division - Asia, Africa, and Middle East Regions Quarterly Program Report."

MBMC to visit, suggesting that reconciliation was a possibility.⁴⁰⁵ The mission had consistently refused to act as judge in the church conflicts but by 1987 offered to assist in peacemaking efforts if both sides endorsed them and participated.⁴⁰⁶ Missionary James Krabill, who had not previously related to the church, responded to Udoh's request, traveled from his home in Ivory Coast, and did shuttle diplomacy among the different areas, starting a process of negotiation that resulted in a unified church structure in 1995.⁴⁰⁷ MBMC then reestablished an official relationship with the church that led in the early twenty-first century to a collaborative initiative of theological and biblical training for Mennonite Church Nigeria leaders once again.⁴⁰⁸

The Nigerian civil war and the socio-political situation it engendered ended MBMC's experiment with AICs and inter-church reconciliation in southeastern Nigeria but opened up a wider West Africa ministry that took its inspiration from the Nigeria experience and spawned a novel mission approach. In contrast to MBMC's mission theory and strategy earlier in the century that depended almost exclusively on the wider Protestant missionary movement, this approach emerged out of the mission's own experience in India and then in local West African contexts. The new approach entailed

⁴⁰⁵ James Krabill to F. A. Udoh, January 4, 1993 and Don Unger to Eric Olfert, February 18, 1993, IV-18-13-08, Box 3, Nigeria Mennonite Church, 1988-93, Folder 67.

⁴⁰⁶ Ronald E. Yoder to D. A. Ekerete, July 27, 1987.

⁴⁰⁷ Don Unger to Eric Olfert; James Krabill to F. A. Udoh, I. U. Nsagak, O. E. Essiet, D. A. Ekerete, and S. M. Eka, March 10, 1993, IV-18-13-08, Box 3, Nigeria Mennonite Church, 1988-93, Folder 67; James R. Krabill to Alice Roth, December 13, 1994, Mennonite Mission Network, Elkhart IN.

⁴⁰⁸ See thirty-one trip reports from 2002 to 2009 by R. Bruce Yoder. Mennonite Mission Network, Elkhart, IN.

initiatives to improve inter-church relationships and to provide biblical and theological education for church leaders while avoiding institutional commitments that might create dependency on foreign funds. MBMC engaged Mennonite Church Nigeria, AICs, and other mission churches as it sought to embody its new approach across the region.

In their engagement with African partners, missionaries highlighted the goal of indigenization and the importance of local contexts for the expression of Christian faith. The mission sought to encourage the mobilization of local resources and hesitated to invest in institutional infrastructure that might become dependent on foreign financing. Such was a factor in the decision not to re-establish assistance to Abiriba after the war and to provide only personnel support to the Church of the Lord Seminary. The mission provided assistance to the Mennonite Theological Seminary, ending support when it became clear that the project would not be sustainable with local resources. Indigenization also meant missionaries refrained from introducing western theological systems in their teaching, preferring to provide biblical study that their students might apply to their particular African contexts.

Religious assumptions that grew out of particular historical and religious contexts created diverse opinions about the role of a Christian mission agency that sometimes frustrated fruitful collaboration between the mission and its partners. In the post-war years Mennonite Church Nigeria continued its pre-war insistence that the mission provide schools and health institutions for the church. Given its experience of mission institutions and its value of indigenization, the mission resisted but did assist the Mennonite Theological Seminary until it was clear that it too suffered the tendency to become

dependent on outside funding. The tension between the differing views of church and mission was never resolved.

The socio-political situation in different contexts conditioned missionary work. In Nigeria the war intensified medical needs at Abiriba and interrupted the move towards the self-sufficiency of the hospital. In the post-war years the after-math of the war made it impossible for MBMC missionaries to reside in southeastern Nigeria and the relationship with the church was carried by mail and periodic visits. The move from an agricultural economy to one driven by petroleum extraction decreased the buying power of Nigerian Mennonites, complicating the relationship with the mission as the tendency to compete for material assistance it provided increased. The problem of missionary access also delayed engagement in Benin until the late 1980s when the Marxist regime became more open. Benin's eventual introduction of democratic ideals created fissures in the mission's partner, the Inter-Confessional Protestant Council, complicating inter-church work and precipitating the MBMC's establishment of an autonomous foreign mission structure. In the Ivory Coast the colonial legacy of mistrust of foreign missionaries within the Harrist movement created ambivalence about MBMC's assistance in the church and eventually cut short MBMC's engagement. The differing contexts meant that the Weavers' legacy embodied in the "Vision for West Africa" played out differently across West Africa during the last three decades of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: THE EMERGENCE OF A BELIEVERS' CHURCH MISSIOLOGY OF DIALOGUE

Mennonite missionary experience with African Independent Churches (AICs), the theological and missiological reflection that such experience motivated among missionaries and mission administrators, and the recovery of an Anabaptist heritage among North American Mennonites in the post World War II decades combined to motivate the emergence of a Believers' Church missiology. Engagement with AICs in West Africa motivated Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) to change its mission approach, first in Nigeria and then across West Africa. This concluding chapter will show how the engagement stimulated missiological reflection and motivated the mission to move beyond the practice of borrowing its missiology from the larger Protestant missionary movement. MBMC drew on the North American Mennonite *Anabaptist Vision* to articulate its own Believers' Church missiology as a rationale for its new AIC mission approach. This rationale highlighted dialogue as missionary method and respect as the appropriate missionary posture. In the Anabaptist and Mennonite religious tradition, which did not produce significant missiological reflection until the latter decades of the twentieth century, the articulation of a Believers' Church missiology that engagement with AICs motivated was a innovative initiative.

Previous experience in India had convinced MBMC missionaries of the importance of indigenization and that post-colonial contexts required new mission

approaches. They had arrived in India in 1899 as novices but appropriated indigenization theory from the wider Protestant missionary movement and gained experience over five decades of mission engagement. The slow growth of the Mennonite church in India and the critique of mass movement advocates motivated the mission to move away from a heavily institutional approach typical of mission stations and to look for other mission strategies. Indian independence increased Indian Mennonites' expectation for more ownership of the church and mission institutions, and the new government's move to restrict missionary visas increased the mission's urgency to hand over control to Indian hands. The focus on indigenization provided a strategic shift away from mission controlled institutions and reinforced the move towards Indian agency.

Edwin and Irene Weaver brought to Nigeria mission experience and indigenization priorities from their India work. They had come to believe that mission institutions such as schools and hospitals were a burden for the Mennonite Church in India. Mission institutions depended on financial subsidies and drew the church's attention and energy away from its spiritual life and witness. In Nigeria they resisted establishing such church-owned institutions in an attempt to avoid creating the same kinds of difficulties. In India the Weavers had encouraged the transfer of church and mission structures to Indian management and argued for Indian agency in the development of faith doctrine and practice for the church there. In Nigeria they worked to reinforce the abilities of Mennonite Church Nigeria leaders and sought to capacitate AICs. As churches that operated outside of the authority structures of foreign missions, AICs embodied African Christian agency.

The Weavers engaged the Nigerian and wider West African contexts in the early years of independence from colonial rule when local actors were taking over control, and mission activity in the region had to adapt to this changing reality. Foreign missionaries needed to seek permission from African governments to reside in the region, and missions had to adjust their activity to the priorities and controls of those governments. In the larger social context African religious leaders too expected to exert their authority and priorities. MBMC and other foreign missions could not develop and implement mission priorities and strategies unilaterally but had to make room for African agency. A focus on capacitating African leadership and reinforcing West African AIC movements was one way for MBMC to maintain mission engagement in a post-colonial context in which African agency was on the rise and the authority of foreign actors was decreasing.

As the Weavers and their colleagues worked with AICs in the wider West Africa region after their Nigeria experience, MBMC administrator Wilbert R. Shenk led an effort to develop a missiological articulation of their new approach. Shenk had served in Indonesia with Mennonite Central Committee and became MBMC overseas secretary in 1965.¹ He would become a leading Mennonite missiologist and mission historian and was heavily involved in the American Society of Missiology from its inception in the early 1970s. Shenk identified the need to develop a theological and missiological rationale for MBMC's new approach in order to clarify its underlying assumptions and to explain it to other missions and to the North American Mennonite constituency. During the 1970s he

¹ Walter Sawatsky, "Living and Writing the Vision: The Missiological Pilgrimage of Wilbert Shenk," in *Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, ed. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 1-16; Darrell Whiteman, "Wilbert Shenk and the American Society of Missiology," in *Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation*, 235-239.

guided reflection among missionaries and was the primary author of the policy for work with AICs that the mission adopted at the end of the decade. In this process Shenk sought the assistance of John Yoder, who had left his position as administrator at the mission as Shenk was coming onboard. As a MBMC administrator Yoder had provided the Weavers with advice and feedback during their first years of work in Nigeria. He now played a similar consultant role for Shenk, helping him think through the process of applying a Believers' Church perspective to mission engagement with AICs.

The Emergence of a Believers' Church Missiology from the Encounter with African Independent Churches

The Nigerian mission experience with African Independent Churches and the subsequent ministry across West Africa generated missiological reflection among Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities missionaries and administrators. It provided new experiences and new contexts in which to continue reflection about the importance of indigenization and about mission strategy and theory. It also pushed them to articulate a missiology to explain their work with AICs. Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk penned a "Vision for West Africa" in late 1969 to guide the mission in the new West Africa initiative.² Over the next decade as he and his colleagues reflected on the Nigeria experience and sought to explain and defend their approach to others, they articulated a theological rationale from a Believers' Church perspective for their work. In January 1980 the mission formally adopted a policy for ministry among AICs that highlighted the

² Wilbert R. Shenk, "Vision for West Africa (Revised from a Developing Vision for West Africa)," December 1969, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

method of dialogue and the posture of respect towards all dialogue partners.³ The discernment that Sherk led among MBMC personnel that produced the new policy statement was itself a dialogical reflection on mission practice. The statement provided a baseline of theological understanding for the new approach and a Believers' Church missiology distinct from the Protestant mission theory and practice on which the mission had depended in the past. Engagement with AICs served as a catalyst for the development of a Mennonite missiological identity. This section will describe how MBMC workers came to articulate this new missiological commitment in the context of their engagement with AICs during the 1960s and 1970s.

Sherk identified the need to move beyond informal reflections to a formal articulation of a theology of mission to assist MBMC as it extended its AIC work to multiple West African countries after the Nigerian civil war. Meeting with missionaries in Ghana at the end of the Weavers' West African survey, he argued that the mission needed such an articulation in order to understand the roots and the criteria behind its new mission approach and to submit them to common scrutiny.⁴ Up to this point the engagement with AICs had been largely intuitive as missionaries looked for new ways to approach their work in the evolving post-colonial context. As the wider West African ministry got under way, Sherk and others repeatedly noted the need for a missiological articulation of the ministry among AICs to help guide the work and to provide a

³ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches," January 30, 1980, IV-18-16, Folder 4 West Africa Program Docs, 1974-1986. See Appendix 2.

⁴ "Summary of Dec. 1, 1969 Discussion of West Africa Strategy," HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 10, Background Material for "Among Indigenous... chapter 6."

theological framework for this new mission approach, especially to share with other mission agencies and churches who were often skeptical of AICs.⁵

Shenk asked MBMC missionary Marlin Miller to coordinate this effort of missiological discernment. Shenk was particularly concerned that the process elucidate the implications of the Believers' Church, or Free Church, tradition for mission theology.⁶ The Believers' Church referred to church groups that identified their roots in the "Radical Reformation" of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of ferment among Mennonites about the contemporary significance of that tradition.⁷ The missionaries identified with this stream of the Christian faith, and an exploration of mission theology in light of it would help them to articulate its significance for their work.

The focus on the Believers' Church tradition grew out of the mid twentieth century Mennonite reassessment of the Anabaptist faith legacy that had become known as "the recovery of the Anabaptist vision."⁸ The original essay *The Anabaptist Vision* by

⁵ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 2 Mennonites in West Africa, 1958-1981; Wilbert R. Shenk, "A Problem of Understanding," April 1970, IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1970-1971; "Continuing West Africa Agenda," June 6, 1973, HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 9, Background for "Among the ..."; Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, January 12, 1974, Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, February 13, 1974, and Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, July 6, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Miller, Marlin and Ruthann 1970-74.

⁶ "Summary of Dec. 1, 1969 Discussion of West Africa Strategy"; Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell, December 4, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 19, Hobart Campbell.

⁷ Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell; Franklin H. Littell, "The Historical Free Church Defined," *Brethren Life and Thought* 9, no. 4 (1964): 78-90; Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Believers' Church," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Believers_Church (accessed on April 18, 2016).

⁸ This phrase is taken from the Festschrift honoring Harold S. Bender, the person most responsible for this reassessment. Guy F. Hersberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957).

Harold S. Bender was a paper he read as his presidential address to the American Society of Church History in 1943.⁹ Bender identified the essence of Anabaptism as following Jesus in discipleship, voluntary church community that was an alternative to the world and that practiced mutual aid, and application of the principle of love and nonresistance to all human relationships. This formulation provided a “usable past” upon which Bender, his contemporaries, and subsequently his students would articulate a Mennonite identity and theology for post World War II North American Mennonites.¹⁰ The MBMC personnel formulating a missiology for work with AICs were part of the generation following Bender and were participating in this discernment, now from the context of their West African engagement. Consistent with the wider North American conversation about Mennonite identity during the period, they found the Believers’ Church designation and framework to be useful.

The missionaries identified with the Bender-inspired *Anabaptist Vision* for twentieth century Mennonites and sought to outline its significance for their missionary context. They sought to develop a missiology that took both this recent appropriation of their religious history and the West African AIC context seriously. While they might forego the establishment of a church that identified as Mennonite because of extreme competition between mission churches or in order to work with AICs, it was not possible

⁹ Harold S. Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision,” *Church History* 13, no. 1 (1944): 3–24.

¹⁰ Paul. Toews, “Search for a Usable Past,” in *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 84–106; Albert N. Keim, “The Anabaptist Vision,” in *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 306–31; Gerald Biesecker-Mast, “The Persistence of Anabaptism as Vision,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, 1 (2007): 21–42.

to set aside their Believers' Church core assumptions. In preparation for their discernment, the missionaries read Franklin H. Littell's *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* and Donald F. Durnbaugh's *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism*.¹¹

One theme that arose during the missiological exchange that Shenk had solicited was that Mennonites were well positioned, perhaps uniquely so, to work with AICs. John Yoder, who had left his role as MBMC mission administrator in 1965 for a position at Goshen Biblical Seminary but continued to consult for the mission periodically, voiced this view. He suggested that the mission's primary theological commitment was to the twentieth century articulation of the *Anabaptist Vision*.¹² He argued, as he had in other settings during this period, that its Mennonite constituency did not fully realize that vision and was not committed to it in every way.¹³ There was dissonance between North American Mennonite reality and the theological commitment of the mission institution. There was a strong desire to convey the essentials of the *Anabaptist Vision* but not a strong insistence that missionary activity result in churches or institutions that were Mennonite. Missionary work with AICs, which might well preclude the establishment of

¹¹ Marlin Miller to Hobart Campbell; Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1964); Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

¹² John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970; Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision;" Toews, "Search for a Usable Past."

¹³ Cf. John H. Yoder, "What Does it Mean to be a Mennonite Agency Faithful to its Constituency?," May, 14, 1969, HM 1-48, Box 12, MBMC Policy Review, 1969 Consultant; John H. Yoder, "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology: Papers Read at the 1969 Aspen Conference*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno, CA: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970).

a Mennonite mission church, was therefore within the realm of possible MBMC mission engagement.

Yoder had been supportive of the Weavers' engagement with AICs during their first months in Nigeria when he was a mission administrator and now a decade later made a case for why it made sense for Mennonites to continue such work. He argued that Mennonites and AICs were similar in a number of ways, making collaboration possible and desirable.¹⁴ For example, Mennonites rejected state support for the church and involuntary church membership. This stance, Yoder thought, intrinsically implied the rejection of colonialism as a model for church propagation. AICs too were to some extent a valid protest against colonial patterns of missionary work. Further, he suggested that AICs and Mennonites shared some characteristics: an affirmation of moral standards and group discipline, a less rigid definition of ministerial qualification than many other traditions, and the ability to maintain theological identity without a normative teaching institution. For all these reasons, Yoder argued, MBMC's work with AICs was logical and was a faithful embodiment of its missionary calling.

Wilbert Shenk highlighted the nature of the church and missionaries' theology of the church as a fundamental starting point in the articulation of a missiology for the mission's AIC work. In the new post-colonial context missionaries needed new forms and concepts of mission, and Shenk suggested that mission based on the Believers' Church model had potential to fit the bill.¹⁵ He observed that despite their roots in the

¹⁴ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970.

¹⁵ Shenk, "A Problem of Understanding."

Believers' Church tradition, Mennonites did not have a clear ecclesiology. This weakened their missionary witness.¹⁶ They tended to lean on examples and patterns from other traditions. Such a situation was problematic, Shenk suggested, because missionaries' understanding of the church affected the outcome of their work. Their lack of clarity meant that they were in a weak position to work towards faithful embodiment of the meaning of the gospel and the nature of the church in the churches they nurtured. For Shenk the means of mission, the way one went about mission, should be consistent with the result that missionaries desired.¹⁷ Too much mission method and theory was inconsistent with the end toward which missionaries hoped to work. Hence, Shenk suggested that mission ecclesiology was important for the development of the church. He wrote, "There are some concepts of church which encourage and foster integrity in the way the young church develops in contrast to other approaches which inherently demand that the new church develop within a prescribed doctrinal polity framework."¹⁸

A Believers' Church perspective would be helpful Shenk thought, but no one had yet developed a missiology consistent with Believers' Church assumptions. Faced with the need to articulate a mission theology faithful to the mission's religious heritage and that helped explain the mission's approach in the West African context, the theological

¹⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, July 4, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

¹⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Weaver, May 27, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

¹⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, July 4, 1970.

tradition of the Believers' Church seemed more useful than a denominational, or Mennonite, perspective.¹⁹

Yoder agreed with Shenk's focus on ecclesiology. He even suggested that there was something about Mennonite theology of the church, inherited from the Anabaptists, and contemporary Mennonite institutional ecumenism that made the existence of AICs and ministry among them acceptable.²⁰ MBMC should work with AICs, he suggested, because for Mennonites the indigenous congregation was the normal form of the church.²¹ Mennonites affirmed "the theological legitimacy of the distinct existence of church bodies which do not stand in any direct juridical relationship to a specific 'mother church' in Europe or North America."²²

In addition, Yoder argued that in Nigeria the mission had been able to develop good relations with both established mission churches and AICs because of a kind of distinctive, Mennonite ecumenical style. This was exemplified in the way separate Mennonite institutions collaborated and maintained good relations that was different from the conception of inter-church relations of other groups.²³ Without that experience of positive inter-agency relations, Yoder contended, the mission's affirmation of the AICs would not likely have been different from "the disorderly North American 'Faith

¹⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, April 21, 1971, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 6, Shenk, Wilbert, 1971-1972.

²⁰ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 18, 1973, IV-18-13-04, Box 4, Yoder, John Howard 1970-74.

²¹ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, February 16, 1970.

²² Ibid.

²³ John H. Yoder to Wilbert R. Shenk, December 18, 1973.

Mission' agencies."²⁴ North American missions that did not respect comity agreements in their relationships with African churches had increased competition and divisiveness in southeastern Nigeria in the post World War II decades. Likewise, without an Anabaptist concept of the church, the mission's concern for positive inter-church relations may well have resulted in a kind of "hyper-ecumenical sellout which adjusts to everybody."²⁵ For Yoder, a Mennonite tendency to see the local church as legitimate in itself instead of depending on a superstructure like a denomination for its authority, combined with a concern for peaceful relations among churches and their institutions, prepared Mennonites to engage the situation in southeastern Nigeria in a way that was largely unique. A particular theological identity and a particular experience of agency ecumenism prepared MBMC for its work with AICs.

To move towards meeting the challenge of developing a Believers' Church missiology, Sherk proposed both theological assumptions and a method. The assumptions were that the Gospel had to be applied afresh in each situation, that theological reflection takes place in a community of faith, that all members of the community participate even though some will lead the process, and that the objective of this process is discipleship.²⁶ The Believers' Church model would define the nature of the church. Both the Word and the role of the Holy Spirit in the church would be important. Sherk proposed a dialogical method. The dialogue would address the question, "What

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wilbert R. Sherk to Marlin Miller, February 13, 1974.

does it mean to be faithful to Jesus in this time and place?”²⁷ Respect among expatriate and AIC participants would be fundamental. In the dialogue expatriates might represent the witness of church history, perspectives from the wider Christian community, or the witness of scripture. African colleagues might contribute knowledge of the cultural context or a new view of the gospel. Neither would be totally adequate alone. The purpose of the dialogue would not be to convince other participants of a particular view but to provoke the church to faithfulness. To those who might question work with AICs, MBMC would point to this dialogical method as not simply a Mennonite idiosyncrasy but as an “approach that may be missiologically superior to others because it is committed to taking the ‘other’ seriously, giving him the benefit of the doubt so long as he affirms the lordship of Jesus and takes the Bible as the starting point.”²⁸

Shenk’s colleagues responded positively to his proposals but added some cautions. Edwin Weaver and Marlin Miller wanted to make sure that in committing itself to a Believers’ Church missiology, the mission would not imply that African churches should adopt the North American Believers’ Church theology of the missionaries.²⁹ It might not be appropriate in an African context. African churches needed to have the freedom to adopt theological positions for their own contexts. Miller also suggested that expatriates who would participate in the theological dialogue that Shenk proposed should

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, July 6, 1974.

²⁹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 13, 1970, Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 18, 1970, and Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 13, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Marlin E. Miller, “Further Reporting on West Africa Trip,” April/May 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 19, Miller, Marlin E.

provide a critical voice with respect to western and mission church influence on the African reality.³⁰ A nonconformist stance toward their own culture would be helpful in a dialogue in which their AIC counterparts were also working out their own stances of non-conformity or conformity within their cultures. With regard to the interpretation of Scripture, Miller warned that expatriates should not assume that they have a monopoly on biblical interpretation and should not insist on a particular exegetical method. Instead, biblical teaching should also be done in dialogue. Finally, Miller warned against making a clear division between biblical teaching and doing theology, especially any tendency to assign to expatriates exclusively the responsibility for Bible teaching and to Africans exclusively the responsibility for articulating an African theology. Africans should teach Bible and expatriates should be conversant in African theology. Both should be part of the dialogue, he argued. In this he differed from Weaver, who highlighted indigenous agency in the articulation of African theology and focused his engagement on teaching Bible with the inductive approach.

The MBMC Overseas Mission Committee outlined the Believers' Church missiology in the document "Ministry Among African Independent Churches" and adopted it as policy on January 30, 1980. As Shenk had suggested, it retained dialogue as the basic method for theological reflection and missionary engagement.³¹ It highlighted the accompanying value of respect for AICs in their culture, respect for mission churches, respect for the history of all dialogue participants, and respect for MBMC. Respect for

³⁰ Marlin Miller to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 21, 1974, IV-18-13-04, Box 3, Miller, Marlin and Ruthann 1970-74.

³¹ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches."

AICs, their cultures, and their histories emphasized the importance of affirming every culture as a context for the work of the Holy Spirit and the significance of identifying with a people and their culture for missionary engagement. Respect for mission churches was important because of their presence in the dialogue and the biblical mandate of reconciliation, which the mission sought to nurture between mission churches and AICs. Respect for MBMC was imperative because its missionaries' vocation of service and witness among AICs was a faithful response to God and held positive value in the contexts where they worked. The method of dialogue allowed for indigenous agency in the articulation of AIC theology as well as for contributions by missionaries. The importance of respect protected the value of indigenization in theological reflection.

The policy also outlined the basic tenets of the larger Christian tradition that MBMC considered to be crucial. For the mission and its missionaries these provided a statement of self-disclosure to AICs and other mission agencies and churches and a basis for dialogue.³² They were: The gospel of Jesus Christ as the focal point for ministry and what reconciles humans to God and to each other; the Bible as God's Word written that provides a starting point and common standard for dialogue; Jesus Christ as fulfillment of the Word and active Lord of history; the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the community of faith and in the promotion of new ways of acting; the centrality of the local church for discernment of God's will in the present and from which mission to the world extends; and the presence of the eschaton in today's ministry that allows the faithful to view the present in light of the consummation of all things in Christ.

³² Ibid.

Besides their utility as a basis for identification with the larger Christian community, these tenets also supported missiological values that MBMC had cultivated in its West African mission engagement. The principle of the centrality of the local church was faithful to the Believers' Church tradition, encouraged the indigenization of theology, and legitimized AICs' existence despite their lack of connection to western churches. The tenet of the gospel of Jesus Christ as that which reconciles God to humans and humans to each other provided a theological basis for the mission's focus on improving inter-church relations. The Bible as God's Word written provided the base for biblical training for church leaders.

Dialogue, Respect, and Mission Engagement in West African Post-Colonial Contexts

At the beginning of the 1970s, Mennonite missionaries had set out to test if the Nigeria experience might provide a mission paradigm for a wider West Africa mission engagement, and at the end of the decade the mission adopted its "Ministry Among African Independent Churches" that was indeed inspired by that experience. The policy statement was both the product of two decades of missionary work and a guide for the mission's West African engagement during following decades. The Weavers' approach in Nigeria had embodied dialogue with AICs and mission churches from a posture of respect, qualities that became explicit in the subsequent Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities policy.³³

³³ While the Weavers had not articulated mission theory or strategy for southeastern Nigeria that highlighted the framework of *dialogue* and *respect*, four decades after their work there Wilbert Shenk identified their "programmatic principle" to be *dialogue* based on mutual *respect*. See Wilbert R. Shenk, "'Go Slow Through Uyo': Dialogue as Missionary Method," in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for*

Mennonite missionary work in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Benin during the last decades of the twentieth century would be guided by the values that the Weavers' work had embodied. In Nigeria, missionaries had found a mission field where old comity agreements had broken down and where traditional missionary assumptions did not seem to provide answers in a highly competitive and divisive religious milieu. Neither did they seem to provide answers for a newly post-colonial context that included AICs that were anxious to find acceptance on their own terms in the larger Christian movement. While missionaries found that the countries in West Africa were distinct, they shared the general characteristics of being newly independent nations, of having increasingly strong AIC movements, and of requiring new post-colonial missionary strategies. MBMC's new mission paradigm mirrored the Nigeria experience by continuing a three-fold focus of providing assistance in Bible study and leadership training, encouraging AICs to learn to know and relate to each other, and encouraging positive relationships between AICs and mission churches.³⁴ The missionary method was dialogue characterized by respect for AICs, for their cultures, for mission churches, for peoples' histories, and for MBMC and its missionaries. This section will show how the method of dialogue carried the mission's concerns for indigenization, for training AIC leaders, for inter-church relations, and for its own Believers' Church heritage.

Mission in Early 21st Century, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen, and Hendrick Vroom (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2005), 329-340.

³⁴ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches."

Dialogue with Respect: An Affirmation of Indigenization

The choice of dialogue characterized by respect as the way to engage in mission allowed MBMC to affirm its value of indigenization. The concern went beyond the three-self focus of self-administration, self-propagation, and self-financing to a recognition of the importance and validity of local religious and cultural assumptions.³⁵ Respecting AICs and their context meant investing time, personnel, and financial resources in particular contexts, and gaining experience and cultural knowledge in order to shape program and mission strategy to each unique situation.³⁶ Dialogue reinforced African agency, providing AICs a voice in the planning and implementation of mission work. In Ghana the Inter-Church Conversation group and the Good News Training Institute were collaborative projects in which missionaries participated but that they did not own or control. In Ivory Coast and Benin, missionary collaboration with the Harrist church and the Inter-Confessional Council meant that African partners' needs and concerns were part of deliberations about, and implementation of, mission strategy. It also meant, however, that when partners' needs and concerns diverged from those of the mission, as happened in both countries, missionaries had to withdraw or significantly modify their modus operandi. The posture of respect for West African peoples, their cultures, and their histories further reinforced the value of indigenization. Missionaries pursued academic

³⁵ For the three-self focus see Wilbert R. Shenk, "Henry Venn's Legacy," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 2 (1977): 16-19; Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5, no. 4 (1981); Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983).

³⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, David Shank, and Marlin Miller, July 18, 1969 and Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, September 17, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

study of the Harrist movement that increased awareness of its history among outsiders and provided the church with valuable resources to reinforce its identity in the late twentieth century.

The mission method of dialogue also allowed MBMC to articulate and be true to its own vision and priorities but still take seriously the visions and priorities of its African partners. The mission brought experience from its India field that caused it to raise critical questions about the advisability of building church-owned institutions that were financially dependent on foreign funds and sapped the resources and energy of the local church. Missionaries considered the establishment of such infrastructure to be part of the old, colonial mission approach. As an alternative they placed personnel in existing medical and educational institutions, which often received government financing.

Despite MBMC's insistence that it did not want to build mission institutions, it found a way to assist such initiatives in the face of constant requests from African partners. Missionaries took such requests seriously given their commitment to be in dialogue with AIC partners and their commitment to affirm AIC legitimacy.³⁷ The mission sought positive ways to help African partners achieve their objectives while still respecting its own values and vision.³⁸ It provided personnel to the new Church of the Lord seminary in Lagos, provided personnel and financial assistance to the Good News

³⁷ Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 7," HM 1-696, Box 4, West Africa Reports; Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherill Hostetter, October 30, 1979 and December 27, 1979 IV-18-13-05, Box 4, Nigeria Mennonite Seminary--78-79; Wilbert R. Shenk to Darrel and Sherill Hostetter, February 19, 1980, IV-18-13-06, Box 4, Hostetter, Darrel and Sherill (King) 1979-81.

³⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin I Weaver, August 28, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Edwin and Irene Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 8" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 18, 1969), HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 36, West Africa Reports; Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, September 22, 1969, HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969.

Training Institute in Ghana and the Mennonite Theological Seminary in Nigeria, and committed itself to assist the Inter-Confessional Council in Benin with the establishment of a center for biblical study. Such assistance was conditioned, however, by the mission's caution about creating dependent institutions and its desire to dedicate resources to new mission initiatives.³⁹ The mission ended assistance to the Mennonite Theological Seminary when it became evident that the institution was becoming almost totally dependent on MBMC financing.

While it wanted to encourage and assist African initiatives, the mission refused to "become primarily a servicing agency for the young church."⁴⁰ Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk articulated clearly that the mission needed "to retain its own identity and integrity out of a continuing sense of obedience to the Commission of Christ."⁴¹ Instead of being tied to institutions, he suggested that missionaries should focus on personal interaction and relationships and be flexible and mobile, always looking for new horizons and opportunities. Hence, in addition to avoiding dependency, MBMC sought to avoid investing all of its resources in the maintenance of African partner institutions so as to be able to engage new mission opportunities and arenas.

The mission's focus on respect for the religious history and culture of West African Christians reinforced the importance of the indigenization of theology. The Weavers had raised the issue earlier in Nigeria. In the reports of their West Africa survey,

³⁹ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mr. and Mrs. Edwin I Weaver, August 28, 1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Mennonite Board of Missions West Africa Staff, May 6, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

⁴⁰ Wilbert R. Shenk to Mennonite Board of Missions West Africa Staff, May 6, 1970.

⁴¹ Ibid.

they continued to argue that Africans should embody the gospel in local cultures and not simply adapt western theological articulations of the faith.⁴² In fact they suggested that AICs already were implementing African worship patterns and articulating a specifically African theology.⁴³ Africans, they noted, developed and lived their theological convictions at the grass roots level in their local contexts.⁴⁴ By the time the mission was broadening its ministry from a focus on Nigeria to a West African approach, it recognized a priori that theology had to be articulated from within an African worldview.⁴⁵ When it came time to articulate African theology in a formal way, as in one of the mission's Good News Bible Classes called *The Bible in Africa Today: Towards a Theology for African Indigenous Churches*, African thought patterns about God, humans, sin, salvation, etc. were key components.⁴⁶ MBMC's policy about ministry among AICs highlighted the centrality of the local church in the discernment about how God speaks at a particular time "based on the Word, the living Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the continuing prompting of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷ Theology was something that the local

⁴² Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 7."

⁴³ Weaver, "West Africa Report No. 8, Part Two - Abidjan," IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

⁴⁴ Friesen and Shenk, "Background to the Church Situation in Nigeria," HM 1-696, Box 4, Shenk, Wilbert, 1969; Edwin Weaver to Werner Korte, May 13, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 2, Korte, Werner; Edwin Weaver, "A Response to Mbiti's African Religions and Philosophy," September 8, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

⁴⁵ Shenk, "Administrative Visit Report - West Africa," IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

⁴⁶ "Good News Brochure," HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 7, Background Material for "Among Indigenous Churches...."

⁴⁷ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches."

church should develop and not something that could be imported ready-made from another context.

Engagement in West Africa not only motivated reflection about the theology of AICs but also raised questions among missionaries about their own theological understandings. A posture of dialogue with respect meant that the needs and priorities that grew out of relationships with African partners and their contexts were important and might actually effect change among the missionaries. Mission administrator Wilbert Shenk reflected, “Not the least of the findings which has come to us out of these years of experience is the way the African Independent Church has made an impact on us – challenging our theological presuppositions and methods of theological education.”⁴⁸ If theology was contextual, then missionaries could no longer, if they had previously, think of Christian theology as a set of doctrines that was applicable everywhere in the same way. An articulation of Christian faith could not be transferred from one context to another in a simple fashion. The variety of diverse expressions that the Christian faith might take was limited only by the variety of local cultures and contexts in which churches existed. Dialogue with those different expressions of the faith held the potential to change the missionaries.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver and Willard Roth, January 5, 1973, HM 1-696, Box 4, Folder 7, Shenk, Wilbert, 1973.

⁴⁹ Missiologists have long recognized the reflex action of mission engagement in foreign cultures upon the home church. See for example World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission VI: The Home Base of Missions* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1910), Chapter 17, 258-268 and Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Whither Bound in Missions* (New York: Association Press, 1925), 23-45. For another Mennonite example note the influence of the East African Revival on Mennonites in North America, Richard K. MacMaster and Donald R. Jacobs *A Gentle Wind of God: The Influence of the East Africa Revival* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006).

Leadership Training: Being Taught as well as Teaching

The focus on providing biblical and leadership training for African partners started in Nigeria and continued in MBMC's larger West African engagement. "Ministry Among African Independent Churches" declared that missionaries should be ready "to be taught as well as to teach. The teacher joins the student in the quest for light and life."⁵⁰ This was the stance of dialogue that missionaries were to embody. AIC requests for biblical training were numerous.⁵¹ The Weavers' West Africa survey found that assistance to establish Bible schools and to provide leadership training were the most common appeals they received.⁵² Providing training was one way for the mission to respond to the needs AICs articulated in their multiple West African ministry sites. This included not just teaching but managing Theological Education Fund scholarship funds for AIC leaders in Ghana and Nigeria.⁵³

In order to align with the dual principles of respect for AICs and their cultures and the centrality of the local church, both the method and the content of training needed to respond to the different contexts. This was a significant challenge. Marlin Miller

⁵⁰ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches."

⁵¹ "Overseas Missions Committee Minutes," (Kidron, OH: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 2, 1968), IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969; Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, May 27, 1970, IV-18-16, Folder 3, West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

⁵² Shenk, "Resume of Edwin Weavers' West Africa Survey Assignment, May - November 1969," IV-18-13-03, Box 7, West Africa 1969.

⁵³ Wilbert R. Shenk to Edwin Weaver, J. Stanley Friesen, and B. Charles Hostetter, July 27, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970; Isaac H. Frempong, "Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Committee for the Training of Indigenous Church Leaders," September 27, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 1, Folder 40, I. H. Frempong.

researched what other African training centers were doing to meet the need for contextualized teaching methods and content.⁵⁴ He found that others were no further ahead in formulating new approaches, so MBMC workers focused on adapting their own teaching and on supporting initiatives like the Good News Training Institute that shared their values in that regard.⁵⁵

The attempt to develop teaching methods that fit indigenous contexts was, however, a persistent challenge. Mennonite missionaries participated in numerous training initiatives that attempted to be culturally relevant. Even so, AICs that collaborated with the mission did not necessarily always take advantage of these initiatives to prepare their leaders for ministry.⁵⁶ Stanley Friesen noted that in Ghana, Prophet Mills had a group of twelve whom he was training for congregational leadership roles, as did the Primate Adejobi of the Church of the Lord Aladura in Nigeria. This seemed to be a prominent practice among AIC prophets who required the future leaders of their churches to undergo spiritual training to learn about fasting, prayer, healing, prophecy, interpreting dreams, and counseling people. Even among AICs that participated in MBMC Bible training programs, such apprentice-type training was separate from Bible school initiatives. Friesen asked how these two different training programs, traditional and modern, might be integrated. How might the traditional way of

⁵⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk to Marlin Miller, May 27, 1970; Marlin Miller to David Shank, August 12, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 19, Miller, Marlin E.

⁵⁵ Marlin Miller, "Report on Visit to Theological Faculty Yaoundé, Cameroun" (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, September 25, 1970), IV-18-16, Folder 3 West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973.

⁵⁶ Stanley Friesen to Wilbert R. Shenk, January 5, 1973.

training, a form of apprenticeship, from the local context and the Bible school, a western model, be integrated into a training method that respected AICs and their cultures and also responded to the continuing request for Bible schools? The issue of how best to indigenize leadership training was, in any case, an ongoing concern.⁵⁷

Inter-Church Relations and Reconciliation

MBMC's focus on encouraging better relationships among AICs and between AICs and mission churches found support in its method of dialogue and respect. A primary motivation for the Nigeria work had been to improve inter-church relations in the region, particularly between AICs and the mission churches. Reconciliation became a theme in the mission's explanation of the experience in Nigeria and a theological justification for subsequent mission engagement in West Africa. Shenk described the mission's work in Nigeria, "A prime need and opportunity has been to help in drawing people together in order that misunderstandings might be cleared away, suspicions erased and people reconciled to each other. This we believe to be an essential of the Gospel – that man find a right relationship to God and a right relationship with other people."⁵⁸ The Weavers understood reconciliation to be a major motivation in their West Africa AIC ministry. They cited the biblical verse 2 Corinthians 5:19 to show that Jesus Christ

⁵⁷ "Continuing West Africa Agenda," HM 1-696, Box 5, Folder 9, Background for "Among the...."

⁵⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, "An Introduction to the Mennonite Board of Missions Work in Nigeria," December 19, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968.

entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the church.⁵⁹ This, they argued, should be the starting point for the mission of the church in West Africa.

MBMC's inter-church ministry highlighted reconciliation and discouraged the creation of denominational Mennonite structures. Missionaries were to respect both AICs and historic denominations, a must if they were to be a catalyst for interaction and reconciliation between the two streams of the faith.⁶⁰ Respect for the history of churches in West Africa meant acknowledging that competition between the missions of western denominations had contributed to a divisive religious milieu in which AICs and mission churches' habits and assumptions formed. Such an acknowledgement was one motivation for MBMC's decision to move its focus away from developing Mennonite churches in the region. Adding another denomination to the mix seemed like it would further splinter the Christian community. This was problematic for missionaries for whom peace was an important part of their religious heritage. Additionally, the realization that Christian faith and practice had to be embodied in indigenous realities meant that North American Mennonite faith practice and belief could not simply be transplanted in West African soil. Finally, AIC experiences of mission churches coopting their members and leaders meant letting go of aspirations to plant Mennonite churches if the mission was to gain the respect and trust of its AIC partners.

Given concerns about inter-church relations and indigenization, missionaries were willing to forego the establishment of Mennonite churches, preferring rather to root their

⁵⁹ Edwin and Irene Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, May 13, 1970 and Edwin Weaver to Wilbert R. Shenk, June 13, 1970, HM 1-696, Box 5, Shenk, Wilbert, 1970.

⁶⁰ "Ministry Among African Independent Churches."

mission theology and practice in the more general Believers' Church tradition. Such a decision was not unique to West Africa. MBMC missionaries among the Toba people in Argentina and in Israel ministered in those places without founding Mennonite churches.⁶¹ It also did not mean that the mission ceased working with churches that chose a Mennonite identity as in the case of the Mennonite churches in Ghana and Nigeria.

The goal of seeking better inter-church relations, particularly between AICs and mission churches, highlighted the theme of reconciliation in the mission's work and persisted in ministry initiatives that developed across Ghana, Ivory Coast, and finally Benin. Reconciliation as missionary task caught Wilbert Shenk's attention as the wider West Africa ministry was forming in 1968. MBMC missionaries there and in other fields were playing the role of reconciling agents, motivating Shenk to propose training missionaries specifically for that purpose.⁶² Indeed peacemaking work and the training of peacemakers would be an important part of Mennonite mission engagement in the world during the last decades of the twentieth century.⁶³

⁶¹ Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairos, 2009); Wilbert R. Shenk to James Kratz, Dorsa Mishler, Ernest Bennett, and John H. Yoder, March 4, 1968, HM 1-48, Box 12, MBMC Policy Review, 1969 Consultant; "A Draft Proposal for Specialized Training," January 9, 1969, IV-18-1, Overseas Committee Official Records, Minutes 1967-1969.

⁶² Wilbert R. Shenk to James Kratz, Dorsa Mishler, Ernest Bennett, and John H. Yoder; "A Draft Proposal for Specialized Training."

⁶³ Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994); Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

A Proprietary Believers' Church Missiology

The Believers' Church missiology that the mission developed allowed it to define its own unique missiological identity. The mission method of dialogue allowed MBMC to articulate and be true to its own vision and priorities. The mission came to the region with a religious history rooted in the Believers' Church tradition, and its dialogical method allowed it to respect that history in its missionary engagement. The missiology that emerged provides one answer to Theron Schlabach's concern in his *Gospel Versus Gospel*, a history of Mennonite Church mission engagement up to 1944.⁶⁴ Schlabach lamented the wholesale borrowing of mission approach and message from Anglo-American Protestantism and the lack of a Mennonite mission focus on a gospel of peace.

Its post-World War II initiatives, especially the West Africa AIC engagement, motivated MBMC to develop mission approaches that witnessed to the unique contribution of the Mennonite and Anabaptist legacy and to develop its own unique missiological identity. If one could add another ten years to Schlabach's study, one might include Edwin Weaver's desire to provide Mennonite church leaders in India with literature about peace and Mennonite history and doctrine.⁶⁵ The idea was that they in turn would develop literature that would articulate what of that tradition would be useful for an authentic Indian Mennonite faith. Adding twelve years to Schlabach's study would include Graber's encouragement for missionaries to find ways to embody the Mennonite

⁶⁴ Theron F. Schlabach, *Gospel Versus Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980).

⁶⁵ Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, May 20, 1954, Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, June 15, 1954, and Edwin Weaver to J. D. Graber, September 19, 1954, IV-18-10, Box 5, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1951-1955.

doctrines of nonconformity and separation from the world in cultures around the globe.⁶⁶ Adding twenty years would include MBMC's experience of inter-church reconciliation among AICs and mission churches in southeastern Nigeria, an example of a Mennonite mission approach that was unique and grounded in its religious tradition's peace concerns. Adding thirty years would discover a full-blown Believers' Church missiology in the making. It grew out of the mission's engagement in West Africa, its search for a faithful approach in the post-colonial era, and its participation in the North American Mennonite church's appropriation of Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* during the third quarter of the twentieth century.

Indeed the eighth decade of the twentieth century would signal the beginning of significant missiological reflection from a Mennonite perspective as Wilbert Shenk has insightfully shown and for which he was a key leader.⁶⁷ Engagement with AICs, one stream of the world Christian movement in the twentieth century, was a catalyst for the development of a Mennonite missiological identity.

This dissertation has shown that its engagement with AICs motivated MBMC to develop a new mission approach and eventually its own unique Believers' Church missiology. Such a change was possible because over the twentieth century missionaries

⁶⁶ J. D. Graber to Overseas Representatives of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, July 5, 1956, IV-18-03-02, Box 4, Executive Committee 1956-64; J. D. Graber to Nelson Litwiller, September 22, 1956, IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Argentina Field Secretary 1956.

⁶⁷ See Wilbert R. Shenk, "A Traditioned Theology of Mission," in *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000). Shenk initiated and edited the publication *Mission Focus* that provided Mennonites a medium with which to dialogue about an Anabaptist/Mennonite missiology during the 1970s.

like Edwin and Irene Weaver and their colleagues gave increasing importance to the particularities of the different contexts in which it worked. Indigenization became a key value. The West African post-colonial context reinforced the voices of African Christians, providing another motivation for new mission approaches that allowed for increased African agency. To address the need for a new approach MBMC adopted a method of dialogue with a missionary posture of respect that allowed for attention to the particularities of African contexts and increased African voice in mission initiatives while retaining a Believers' Church framework. West African mission engagement of AICs effected change in MBMC and its work and provided impetus for the emergence of a unique, Anabaptist missiological identity.

Appendix 1
MBMC Personnel that Served in Southeastern Nigeria, 1958-1970

Name	Arrival	Departure	Location	Work	Category
S. J. and Ida Hostetler	Nov 1958 (first visit) ¹	March 1960 (last visit) ²	Accra – 10 visits to Nigeria ³	Established MCN	OM ⁴
Edwin and Irene Weaver	Nov 14, 1959 ⁵	June and July 1967 ⁶	Uyo, Ikot Inyang	Ministry with MCN and AICs, AIC Research, Inter-church Relations	OM
John and Betty Grasse	Oct 1960	Nov 1963	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor (John)	OM
Cyril and Ruth Gingerich	Nov 1960	May 1968 ⁷	Abiriba Hospital	Business Manager (Cyril) and Nurse (Ruth)	OM
Daniel and Carrie Diener	July 1961 ⁸	July 1963 ⁹	Duke Town School and Hope Waddell Training Institution, Calabar	Teacher (Daniel)	OM
Melvin and Esther Glick	Sept 1962 ¹⁰	Oct 1962	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor (Melvin)	Short-Term Volunteers
Martha Bender	Oct 1962	Jan 1970 ¹¹	Abiriba Hospital	Nurse	OM

Glen Miller	July 1962	July 1963	Enugu	Education Advisor, OMA ¹² Director	OMA
Clifford and Lois Amstutz	Spring 1962	Aug 1967 ¹³	Macgregor Teacher Training College, Afikpo, Uyo	Teacher, Agriculturalist (Clifford)	OM
Cecil and Judy Miller	Dec 1962	Aug 1964 ¹⁴	Ikot Obio Ana, Ibiono	Agriculturalist (Cecil)	OVS ¹⁵ , AltServ ¹⁶
Nelda Rhodes	March 1963	July 1967 ¹⁷	Abiriba Hospital	Nurse, midwife	OMA
Carl Hostetler	May 1963 ¹⁸	Aug 1963	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor	Short-Term Volunteer
Lloyd and Evelyn Fisher	July 1963	July 1967 ¹⁹	Enugu	Administrator of OMA Teacher Program and MCC TAP Program (Lloyd)	OMA
Lawrence and Mary Jane Eby	July 1963	May 1966 ²⁰	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor (Lawrence)	OMA
Grace Bergey	July 1963	June 1966 ²¹	Union Girls Secondary School, Ibiaku	Teacher	OMA
Keith and Jeanette Hostetler	Sept 1963	July 1966 ²²	Duke Town Secondary School, Calabar	Teachers	OMA

Willis and Betta Lee Kauffman	Sept 1963	May 1966 ²³	Qua Iboe Mission Secondary School, Etinan	Teacher (Willis)	OMA
Darrel and Marian Hostetler	Fall 1963	Sept 1966 ²⁴	Ibiono, Uyo	Ministry with MCN and AICs	OMA
Meryl and Gladys Grasse	May 1964,	Dec 1966	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor (Meryl)	OMA
Clair and Faye Brenneman	Sept 1964	July 1967 ²⁵	Asaba Rural Training Center	Agriculturalist (Clair)	OVS
Glen Wenger	Sept 1964	Sept 1966 ²⁶	Asaba Rural Training Center	Agriculturalist	OVS
Kenneth Yoder	Sept 1964	Sept 1966 ²⁷	Asaba Rural Training Center	Agriculturalist	OVS, AltServ ²⁸
J. Robert and Evelyn Stauffer	July 1964	March 1966 ²⁹	Ibiono	Agriculturalist (Robert)	OMA
Joan Sauder	Summer 1964	June 1967 ³⁰	Francis Ibiam Secondary School, Afikpo	Principle	OMA
Wallace and Evelyn Schellenberger	Oct 1965	June 1969 ³¹	Abiriba Hospital	Medical Doctor (Wallace) and Nurse (Evelyn)	OM, AltServ ³²

George and Lena Weber	Fall 1965	July 1967 ³³	Enugu College, Abiriba and Abiriba Hospital	Teacher (George) and Rural Health Nurse (Lena)	OMA
Delbert and Lela Snyder	July 1965	June 1968 ³⁴	Etinan, Qua Iboe Secondary School, Jos	Teacher (Delbert), Hostel Administrators	OMA
Stanley and Delores Friesen	Aug 1965	July 1967 ³⁵	Uyo	Ministry with MCN and AICs	OM
Truman and Clara Miller and Ruth Ann	1965	1967	Jos, Nssarawa Hostel	House parents at Student Hostel	OMA
Larry Borotrager	1967	July 1967 ³⁶	Uyo	Agriculturalist	OVS, AltServ ³⁷
Kenneth Ropp	1967	July 1967 ³⁸	Abiriba Hospital	Maintenance	OVS, AltServ ³⁹

Sources: Edwin Weaver, "Milestones in Nigeria," April 13, 1964, IV-18-16, Folder 3, West Africa Program Docs, 1957-1973; Jeanette Hostetler, ed., "Six Years in Nigeria," 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1966; "Historical Directory of Overseas Missionaries," in *Go Where I Send You: Working Reports, February 1, 1980 to January 31, 1981* (Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1981), OHD-1-80 – OHD-12-80.

¹ S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province," November 28, 1958, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59.

² S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 17, 1960, HM 1-563, Box 3, Folder 22, Nigeria Mission, Personal, 1959-60; S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 17, 1960, IV-18-13-02, Box 4, Ghana 1959-60.

³ S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Visit of S. J. and Ida Hostetler to the Church in the Calabar Province," November 28, 1958, John R. Mumaw and S. J. Hostetler, "Report of Calabar Province Visit," December 1958, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, December 19, 1958, and S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, March 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; J. D. Graber to Edwin and Irene Weaver, April 8, 1959, HM 1-696, Box 2, Folder 3, J. D. Graber, 1958-1961; S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, June 29, 1959, S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, September 21, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 10, Nigeria 1956-59; Edwin Weaver to John H. Yoder, December 9, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 11, Nigeria - Edwin Weaver 1959; Hostetler, S. J. Hostetler to John H. Yoder, March 17, 1960.

⁴ Overseas Missionary

⁵ Edwin and Irene Weaver to MBMC, November 14, 1959, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Weaver, Edwin and Irene 1956-59.

⁶ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, June 8, 1967, Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, June 15, 1967, and Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria," July 19, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69; Overseas Missions Office to Families of Nigeria Missionaries, July 25, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968.

⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk to Vern Preheim, May 28, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mennonite Central Committee - 1968.

⁸ Edwin Weaver and Irene Weaver, "Nigeria," in *Obeying Christ in Crisis 1962* (Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1962), 235-37.

⁹ Daniel Diener to J. D. Graber, July 16, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 3, Diener, Daniel 1960-63.

¹⁰ John Grasse to Boyd Nelson, March 19, 1963, IV-18-13-02, Box 2, Annual Mission Board Meeting 1963.

¹¹ Paul Erb to M. J. Udoh, February 1970, V-18-13-04, Box 3, Nigeria - Mennonite Church 1969-74.

¹² Overseas Mission Associate

¹³ Delbert and Lela Snyder to Wilbert R. Shenk, August 14, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Snyder, Delbert and Lela 1966-68; Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, September 14, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

¹⁴ I. U. Nsagak to Edwin and Irene Weaver, August 6, 1964, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 29, Nsagak, I. U.

¹⁵ Overseas Voluntary Service

¹⁶ Alternative to Military Service Approved by Selective Service System. Milton Lehman to Local Board No. 29, Selective Service System, Harvey County, July 26, 1962, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Miller, Cecil and Judy 1961-65.

¹⁷ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria.

¹⁸ J. D. Graber, "Memo of Understanding with Dr. Carl Hostetler," March 26, 1963, IV-18-03-02, Box 10, Nigeria - Abiriba Hospital 1963; Edwin Weaver to A. G. Somerville, June 4, 1963, HM 1-696, Box 3, Folder 37 Presbyterian Church - Nigeria, 1963-65.

¹⁹ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Nigeria Missionaries, July 25, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968.

²⁰ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, May 19, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mission News Sheet 1966.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, October 7, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 9, Mission News Sheet 1964-65.

²⁵ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria.

²⁶ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, May 19, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mission News Sheet 1966.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Loren Preheim to Local Board No. 52, Selective Service System, August 18, 1964, IV-18-13-02, Box 13, Yoder, Kenneth 1961-64.

²⁹ Overseas Mission Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, March 10, 1966, IV-18-13-03, Box 5, Mission News Sheet 1966.

³⁰ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, June 8, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³¹ Overseas Missions Office to Executive, Overseas and Personnel Committees, June 12, 1969, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³² John Jones to Local Board No. 125, Selective Service System, September 22, 1965, IV-18-13-02, Box 12, Shellenberger, Wallace and Evelyn 1956-65.

³³ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Nigeria Missionaries.

³⁴ Overseas Missions Committee to Executive, Overseas, and Personnel Committees, June 27, 1968, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³⁵ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Nigeria Missionaries.

³⁶ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Missionaries in Nigeria, July 19, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 4, Mission News Sheet 1967-69.

³⁷ Martin R. Rock to Local Board No. 42, Selective Service System, March 29, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 1, Bortrager, Larry 1967-68.

³⁸ Overseas Missions Office to Families of Nigeria Missionaries, July 25, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 6, Nigeria 1967-1968.

³⁹ Martin R. Rock to Illinois State Headquarters, Selective Service System, March 29, 1967, IV-18-13-03, Box 7, Ropp, Kenneth 1966-69.

Appendix 2

MBMC Policy on Work with African Independent Churches

MINISTRY AMONG AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES*

I BACKGROUND MBM relationship with indigenous churches in Africa began with the arrival of our workers in Nigeria in 1959 at the invitation of several groups of churches which had no ties to the mainline denominations. Gradually we became aware that the dynamic religious movement evident in Southeast Nigeria was part of a continent-wide phenomenon set in motion by the encounter between Christianity and primal religion. H. W. Turner has identified several types of groups which have resulted: neo-primal, synthesist, hebraist, independent churches, and mission-founded denominations. We soon discovered that we needed to find suitable ways of working with a broad spectrum of this movement. Especially the independent churches called for recognition, fellowship, opportunity for Bible study and training. Following service in Nigeria, Edwin and Irene Weaver surveyed the state of the movement in several countries of West Africa in 1969-70 and then helped begin a ministry among AICs in Ghana in 1970. Marlin Miller visited groups in Ivory Coast, Togo, Dahomey (People's Republic of Benin) 1969-73. Later Weavers assisted the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in investigating and initiating ministries with AICs in Botswana and Lesotho. The particular style of Mennonite response to AICs, however, needs to be seen against a broader experience in the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

II STANCE Christian ministry must proceed from a readiness to receive as well as to give, to be taught as well as to teach. The teacher joins the student in the quest for light and life. Therefore, we affirm dialogue as our basic method. We will foster dialogue by:

- + Respecting people in their culture. Every culture is a context for the Holy Spirit to do his work of re-creation. We are called to identify with another people through careful study of their culture and language, learning to appreciate their folkways and wisdom, recognizing that God communicates his love to each people through their own culture. We are not called to change other peoples' cultures but to serve them as they seek to respond faithfully to the gospel in the context of their culture.
- + Respecting the churches present in a given community in their varieties. Wherever AICs are found, the historic denominations will also be found. Each group deserves to be taken seriously; each one is a part of the network of relationships.
- + Respecting history. All peoples prize their history--the story of their founder, the vision which gave rise to their movement and continues to infuse meaning into their existence. We must be prepared to travel with a people into their past if we are to understand their present and future.
- + Respecting ourselves. We too are a people with a past who witness to God's providence. If he has preserved us, it is for the purpose of serving and witnessing. In approaching another people we do so aware of who we are because of God's grace. We recognize that coming as "outsiders" to another people holds positive value which enables us to represent to the "ingroup" the witness of the church universal as well as the testimony of another minority within the Christian family. Having been a minority ought to enable us to identify with those who have little power, prestige, and privilege.

In order to serve with integrity, we need to affirm what is crucial and essential to us and what we recognize as being part of the larger Christian tradition. The following comprise the basis for dialogue:

* For convenience we retain the term "AIC" but the reader should note that the literature contains a variety of terms. Here we refer to what H. W. Turner calls New Religious Movements in Africa, which divide into four sub-groups: neo-primal, synthesist, hebraist, independent church.

ministry among aics/2

- + The gospel of Jesus Christ as the focal point for ministry. In Jesus Christ we receive the full revelation of God as loving Creator and Redeemer. We experience the power of the gospel as that which reconciles us to God and to one another, healing us and restoring wholeness (Ephesians 2, 3). We are called to share this gospel with all peoples by testifying to that which we have seen, heard, touched, and experienced (I John 1).
- + The Bible as God's Word written, the one document which we have in common with all Christian believers in all times and places and which affords a starting point and a continuing common standard for dialogue.
- + Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of that Word. We experience and remember his life, death, and resurrection with its implications for imitative discipleship, and we acknowledge him as our active Lord and the Lord of history.
- + The role of the Holy Spirit in creating community, the body of Christ, through which the work of Christ is being extended today. We believe in the importance of planning and organizing under the Spirit's direction and want to remain flexible and open to his promptings to act in fresh ways as he calls.
- + The centrality of the local church as the place in which the faithful people find nurture and support, and discern how God is speaking in the present based on the Word, the living Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the continuing prompting of the Holy Spirit. The local church is the base from which mission to the world goes forth.
- + The presence of the future in today's ministry. The eschaton already reaches into our present, reminding us that we need not be locked into the past. We want continually to view our present in the light of God's preparation of his people for the consummation of all things in Christ.

In relating to various religious movements, we have followed a three-fold approach which includes:

- + Providing assistance in Bible study and leadership training.
- + Encouraging these various indigenous movements to learn to know and relate to one another.
- + Encouraging indigenous movements and traditional denominations to discover one another through fellowship and study.

III IN RELATION TO GENERAL OBJECTIVES Our statement of general objectives as an Overseas Division includes: (1) multiplying Christian fellowships, (2) promoting leadership training, (3) encouraging literature and curriculum development, (4) assisting local churches, and (5) participating in joint ventures in mission. If we place priority on the formation of new fellowships of believers as basic to all else, how does a helping ministry among established churches fit with this priority?

First, our service among indigenous groups is based on the conviction that it augments and reinforces their mission to their people and the world. What strengthens the body of Christ and extends its witness is at the heart of mission. We go into the world without apology as Mennonites, but our object is to see the body of Christ formed. Second, training and nurture are intrinsic to our missionary goals. Third, in addition to devoting time and energy to AICs, we also continue to respond to those opportunities for primary evangelization where others are not responding, and view this as complementary to ministry among indigenous religious groups.

Adopted by
Overseas Missions Committee
Mennonite Board of Missions
30 January 1980

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