

# **‘A New Future Requires a New Past’: The Global Mennonite History Project**

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There is in all nationally defined cultures, I believe, an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance.<sup>1</sup>

This enterprise, fragile and questionable as it is, is also enormously powerful.... Historiography can ignore and thus humiliate and almost obliterate, a people, and it can also bend a medley of nomad tribes into a people. History can liberate, and history can oppress. History can create and history can destroy.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Occasion**

When the distinguished U.S. historian Eric Foner went to Russia on a lecture tour in 1990 and again in 1994, he entered an explosive moment of Russian history. He discovered that Mikhail Gorbachev was not only leading a political and economic revolution but that these changes created an atmosphere requiring new historical judgments. One leading Russian historian E.B. Chernayk observed that “the old historical science has collapsed.”<sup>3</sup> Words like “class,” “progress,” “imperialism” were rarely in use. The concept of “revolution” had to be rethought. Old heroes were discarded and new ones appeared. Foner discovered that students were “craving a new past,” a past that “encompasses successes as well as failures, the sacrifices of idealistic men and women as well as monstrous crimes.”<sup>4</sup> Foner used this occasion to reflect on the work of history, how “filtered through memory, history gives meaning to peoples experiences.”<sup>5</sup> He observed that “a new future requires a new past.”<sup>6</sup>

The 1990s also marked a new era in the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ (BIC) story. In 1994 Mennonite World Conference (MWC ) reported that for the first time in history, more Mennonites lived in the “global south” than in Europe and North America. Already in the 1970s missiologists David B. Barrett and Walbert Buehlmann had projected this dramatic shift in the balance of world Christianity

from its North Atlantic heartlands to the numerical dominance of Africa and Latin America.<sup>7</sup> Buehlmann called this development *The Coming of the Third Church* comparing this transition to the shift from a dominant Mediterranean centered church before the tenth century to the dominant northern European church which continued well into the twentieth century.

In 1994 MWC confirmed this contemporary transition among Mennonites as other churches like Roman-Catholics and Pentecostals were discovering in their own communions. Mennonites in this regard are part of a worldwide phenomenon, which Philip Jenkins labels *The Next-Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. What is certain is that “the center of gravity for the Christian world [including Mennonite] has shifted inexorably southward.”<sup>8</sup> The spring 2004 issue of the *International Review of Mission* was devoted to the “Changing Faces of Christianity.” In keeping with this new transition in the history of the Christian movement the *Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory* released at the Bulawayo Mennonite World Conference meetings in August, 2003, reported nearly 1.3 million Mennonites in the world with slightly over 500,000 in Europe and North America.<sup>9</sup> Even more startling, more Mennonites reside in Africa than in North America, nearly twice as many in the Congo as in Canada. Some caution regarding these numbers is appropriate for as Philip Jenkins says, most “churches do not actively lie about their membership, they genuinely do not know the figures.”<sup>10</sup>

Compare the first MWC assembly held in Basel in 1925 with recent ones in Calcutta (1997) and Bulawayo (2003). In 1925 there were at most 250,000 Mennonites in the world, as many in the newly formed USSR as in North America. Less than 5000 were in the emerging churches of the southern continents. The sessions of Basel attended by 100 European Mennonites were conducted in German which all participants spoke. The fifteen delegates represented five countries (the two from Russia were not admitted into Switzerland). There was one self-appointed delegate from North America. The convener was German pastor and historian Christian Neff.<sup>11</sup> At Bulawayo more than 6000 people were in attendance. The main language was English with translations into several African languages, Spanish, and French. Quite strikingly for the Mennonite past there was no translation into German. Eighty percent of those in attendance were from Africa. The host churches were the Brethren in Christ of Zimbabwe and Zambia. The BICs became part of MWC in 1948. The president of the MWC who moderated the sessions was an Indonesian pastor, Professor Mesach Krisetya. If a major theme in 1925 referenced the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mennonite movement, the major theme in 2003 emphasized the worldwide mission of the church.

In 1925 the Mennonite heartlands were in Ukraine, Russia, Prussia, South Germany, the Netherlands and growing communities in Canada and the United States. By 2003 the old heartlands in Europe were markedly smaller and new heartlands included the region surrounding Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, south-central Congo, central Ethiopia, central Java in Indonesia, Andra Pradesh in India, and the Paraguayan Chaco. Cities like Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Kinshasa in the Congo, Asuncion in Paraguay, Curitiba in Brazil and Osaka in Japan are now home to a number of large congregations. The geography of worldwide Mennonites is hence remarkably different at the beginning of the twenty-first century than it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed the geography of many if not most churches, like Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Pentecostals, noted a similar change in their own situations.

Wilbert R. Shenk, as director of the Mission Study Center at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, has pondered this new development for Mennonites. In 1994 he wrote that "by any reckoning, this [shift in population location, and numbers] represents a massive redefinition in Mennonite identity."<sup>12</sup> The title of his essay "A Global Church Requires a New History" parallels Eric Foner's discovery of what was happening in Russia at the same time. Shenk concluded that this historical shift and its manifold implications have immense importance for the future of global Mennonite church. "The urgent priority we face today," he said, "is to understand and interpret this development."<sup>13</sup>

In April 1995 he invited some twenty people to a three day working conference to discuss how historians might respond to this "urgent priority." The papers and findings/proposals from this meeting are found in a special issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review*, published with the title "Toward a Global Mennonite/Brethren in Christ Historiography." Historians and church leaders from ten different countries met at this conference. James Juhnke of Bethel College in Kansas, in an impassioned summary address explained the consensus: "The time has come for the creation of a new world Mennonite history...which will explain what this means both biblically and in our contemporary world."<sup>14</sup> He suggested that the central theme should focus on "the growth and extension of the Christian gospel, in its Anabaptist expression, from the bounded cultural communities of Europe and North America, to new communities around the world, and how that gospel took root, and was illuminated by those new communities."<sup>15</sup> Juhnke cited the paper of another participant, Costa-Rican historian Jaime Prieto, that Mennonite "history should aim to tell the truth, to enhance identity, and to foster hope."<sup>16</sup> The findings report of this consultation recommended to Mennonite World Conference the establishment of a committee that would sponsor a global history project and "foster the historical-theological vocation as a ministry to the whole church."<sup>17</sup>

At Calcutta in 1997 the General Council of the MWC acted to sponsor the Global Mennonite History Project. They insisted that the project not be overly academic but rather provide materials for identity formation and leadership training in churches around the world. They also asked the project leaders to find their own funding. I was asked to serve as the organizing coordinator.

### The Process

It has been my great privilege to serve as coordinator of the Global Mennonite History Project. The satisfactions of relating to a corps of researchers and writers as well as to the oversight committee from five continents have been enormous. At the same time trying to develop and oversee a worldwide project can have many frustrations. Obvious difficulties of communication exist even in the age of the internet. There are dilemmas finding qualified writers who carry the imprimatur of their churches. Cultural differences regarding the meaning of time and determination of quality complicate the work. Critical issues are inherent in the craft of history. What constitutes evidence particularly in the use of oral sources and how much research is enough? How does one find the proper balance of critique and appreciation? How can one encourage a distinctive local point of view with diminishing dependence on missionary sources and outlook.

The oversight or organizing committee in North and South America and Europe was strongly supportive. It worked less well in Africa and Asia. The end result is that I likely made more decisions than appropriate for a truly worldwide church project. Larry Miller, Executive Secretary of MWC, admits he has to sometimes work in a similar fashion. The amazing thing is that the process has been productive and Volume I, *Africa*, was released at Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in August 2003. The other volumes are all in process. The Latin America and Asia volumes did not meet proposed publication schedules. Europe and North America appear to be developing smoothly. Since the delay in Asia, the next book is expected to be Latin America. In October 2005 author Jaime Prieto will deliver, based on his manuscript, the Menno Simons lectures at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

Several guidelines in developing the project were specific. Writers would be from the churches of the respective continent. Further, there would be one volume per continent; each volume would stand alone but connect the continental story to the global story. As a history for the world church, we decided that each volume will be printed in three languages—English, French, and Spanish funded by the project. Local

churches are welcome and encouraged to translate and publish local editions in other languages.

Overall, the guidelines provided to the writers were quite general. We decided that the project would begin with the first overseas mission begun by Dutch Mennonites in 1847-50. We urged writers to emphasize the local church and its context rather than missionary activity in telling the story of the churches. Recognizing that none of the chapters or volumes could be comprehensive, the story is to highlight stages of church growth, the role of leadership, interaction with other local churches, noting the unique characteristics of the local churches and their contribution to the continental and global Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family. Along the way there would be references to church-government relationships, church-mission ties and tensions, economic status and employment, opportunities for mission as well as their vision for mission. We suggested an emphasis on the narrative rather than simply a chronicle of events or catalog of conflicts. Writers were encouraged to always keep in mind what they wanted the local church to know about their own history and what they wanted churches in other locations and continents to know about their church experience.

There were financial guidelines. Major writers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were provided a stipend equal to at least one year of work at local wage levels. Writers with smaller assignments receive partial stipends. North American writers received grants for research and course release purposes. European writers are contributing their time and energy. Major writers in the South were also provided with laptop computers, cameras, a tape recorder, and a travel stipend. Publication costs in the global South will be subsidized. We attempt to reduce costs too by providing an electronic copy for printing in the various regions of the world, which is innovative and "global" in approach. The first printing of *Africa* was done in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Subsequent volumes will be printed in Guatemala and India as well as North America. Pandora Press of Kitchener, Ontario is contributing considerable time for the editorial process as well as publishing all the volumes. Most of our funds have come from Mennonite Central Committee and several Mennonite or related foundations. We are only now being assured of some financial support from historical groups and individuals. The initial estimated budget of \$400,000 may not cover the considerable translation costs.

Measures have been undertaken to ensure quality. On each continent readers check the manuscripts for factual accuracy and testing the various points of view. Not all readers in Africa and beyond were fully satisfied with the manuscript but nonetheless gave their blessing as they pointed out mistakes and deficiencies. Since most

of the writers were not professional historians, we conducted two project-wide workshops, one at Fredeshliem, The Netherlands, and a second in Elkhart, Indiana, for nurturing research and writing skills. We had a third workshop for Africa writers alone in Bulawayo. These workshops resulted in global friendships and mutual affirmation. We had good intentions of reporting regularly to the organizing committee, the writers, the network of interested people and the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee, but this has turned out to be only occasional.

No process goes as first envisioned. None of the historians engaged the process exactly as the others. Each was frustrated by competing time demands and some of the expectations of the editors. All of us involved at all levels are well aware that this is simply the first step towards what sometime in the future can become a more definitive history. The most important achievement has been to mobilize and affirm voices from each continent. One of my primary satisfactions has been to watch the growing confidence in understanding the past as a means of understanding the experience of the church. Each of the writers has his or her story. Here is the testimony of Jaime Prieto the best trained of our historians who has dared to write the entire history of Caribbean and Latin American Mennonites:

I spent time in many of the Mennonite churches. There was practically no church in which I did not share my faith testimony or give the principal preaching/sermon of the worship service. I got very close to the Mennonites I met. I lived, I slept, I shared with them their joys, their struggles and their desires to serve God. Through this time together, I felt that they were my family and they filled me with much affection. In many churches I explained the importance of this historical project, and I know that many of them are praying that God will grant me wisdom and strength to conclude it. Or, to put it another way, the sisters and brothers of the congregations feel that this is their project, because they themselves, with their lives and testimonies, are the actors of this history being narrated. This has been one of the most positive aspects of this work, sharing in the socio-cultural context of the diverse faith communities.<sup>18</sup>

### **Learnings**

I have been often asked what I am learning. This is also a question for all who are connected with the project. This question should be

asked of both writers and readers. I like the attitude of Andrew Walls, one of the pre-eminent practitioners of global Christian history: "The process has much potential for mutual enrichment and self-criticism as God causes yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word."<sup>19</sup> This will happen to the degree we are open to what Charles Villa-Vicencio calls a "hermeneutical relocation whereby we see, hear, and understand in a different way."<sup>20</sup>

The first thing I learned is that language itself is problematic. At the first MWC meeting where this project was proposed, Uruguayan Milka Rundzinski, editor of *The Courier*, expressed her dislike of the word "global." The term suggested Christendom and northern domination to her. More recently Lamin Sanneh also expressed a preference for "world Christianity" which "must be interpreted by a plurality of local idioms and practices" in contrast to the "mental habits of Christendom" which presuppose a singular faith "with a corresponding global political structure as safeguard."<sup>21</sup> The Spanish editions will use the phrase "Historia Mundial Menonita" representing the concern.

The second thing I learned is that the writers do not want to be seen as bourgeoisie North Americans. Jaime Prieto insisted that I see where he was born in a broken down shack halfway up a mountain beyond the end of the road. I think he wanted me to be fully aware not only of the cultural but also of the considerable social distance between us. I.P. Asheervadam, the writer from India, is a specialist in "Dalit" Christianity. At one of our first sessions he thanked God for the missionaries who brought "gospel liberation to India." Asheervadam, in a different way, wanted us to recognize that the vast majority of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ of India come from social classes that counted for nothing in pre-Gandhi days or pre-missionary days.

The third thing I had to learn is that my way of envisioning history—no document means no history—does not fit the church in the South. Not only are there few documents, traditional cultures with their affection for story communicate essences in different ways, above all orally. Ervin Beck in his insightful *MennoFolk* demonstrates how even empirical Northerners live with narratives not always rooted in factual documents.<sup>22</sup> Historians can benefit much from the research techniques of folklorists and anthropologists. Terence Ranger's *Voices From the Rocks* represents a marvelous illustration of how oral tradition and archival research can be used in reconstructing the history of the Matopo region of Zimbabwe, home to a large Brethren in Christ church.<sup>23</sup> An additional part of my own learning has been to become comfortable with frequent expressions of devotion as part of the historical task. I have long seen my study of history as a Christian vocation striving to include the Divine in the very warf and woof of events. I was not fully prepared for researchers and writers who

prayed persistently and who readily testified that "of course by the grace of God I could be able to handle them [the tasks] well."

The fourth thing I had to learn is that the new majority Mennonites and Brethren in Christ sense of identity is strongly relational and historical in character. In every heartland these churches feel very much at home in their cultures and especially with other Christian churches. Those of us at Bulawayo will not soon forget the Catholic Archbishop Ncube's greeting to the BIC church in which his mother was born. Local churches in many places belong to ecumenical councils or evangelical fellowships. The word Anabaptist is not totally comprehended except in Latin America. We should not be surprised that Mennonite and BIC in the South are more like neighboring churches than like ourselves. That is an enculturation we should expect. The Mennonite world communion is a relationship, a history, as well as a theology.

The fifth learning is an extension of the first and second learnings. If churches have cultural and social differences, what about the social and cultural context of historians? I have continually needed to recognize my own political, cultural, and social frame of reference. I have to work at overcoming my presuppositions in order to recognize difference and appreciate alternative points of view. Patterns of domination and contempt are deeply ingrained. I am grateful for patient and persistent teaching by my global history colleagues. One anecdote from another political/cultural setting illustrates the power of our historical experience. I once asked our writers to tell one another what they wanted their neighboring churches to know about their church. I asked Adhi Dharma, the Indonesian writer, to explain to Yamade Masakazu what Japanese Mennonites ought to know about Indonesian Mennonites. Immediately Adhi said the first thing Yamade and Japanese Mennonites should know is how much Indonesians suffered from Japanese imperial militarism in World War II. Already some of our global Christian friends make a similar comment to those of us from the United States. It will no doubt take generations of painful and persistent relationships with much self-criticism if we are truly to write the history of the worldwide church in context.

A sixth learning also has to do with Mennonite diversity. Pakisa Tshimika, a member of the organizing committee from the Congo, now living in Fresno, wonders why people in the South are so eager to become Mennonites and to extol this identity while Mennonites in the North are so apologetic about their tradition? The answer is complex and would require an extended statement. Lamin Sanneh talks about the difference between newer churches who are on to new questions while those of us with a missionary past keep apologizing for past mistakes. Mennonite historian John L. Ruth has an anecdote that illustrates these differences:



A young Ethiopian Christian once challenged Paul N. Kraybill (MWC Executive Secretary, 1972-1990) to give him some spiritual history. "Now that missionary witness has made 'your' Mennonite story also ours," the African was saying, "Could you share some of it with us?" [Kraybill] was cautious about loading foreign history onto a promising new Christian. "What does history have to do with missions? Not all of our Mennonite history is good," he commented tactfully. To which the new Christian thoughtfully replied, "Bad history is better than no history."<sup>24</sup>

Pakisa's question underscores how much cultural and ecclesiastical moods are part of inter-church relations. There are differences, there will be disputes. Can we learn from them? The answer to Pakisa I believe is embodied in another question Lamin Sanneh once asked: "How do we in North America prepare ourselves for entry into the realm of world Christianity?"<sup>25</sup>

A seventh learning: the existence of the church everywhere is precarious. By focusing on the church in the South and its remarkable growth it is important to recall the pain and even disappearance of the church in other places and other times. I already noted the once flourishing Mennonite churches of Prussia, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. While these churches have disappeared, they have given our world-church rich bequests in other places. There is also decline in Western Europe as in the Netherlands. Nevertheless they too have provided a remarkable bequest in Indonesia and in their continuing ecumenical witness. Robert Kreider in a personal comment on a draft of this paper wonders whether the experience of the martyr memory and costly discipleship "speaks with eloquence and assurance to younger churches. As carriers of this memory, Europeans and Americans have that gift to share—if not experientially, then in story."

The eighth learning, the flow of "creative juices" inevitably seems to suggest new projects and extended activities. Already at Elkhart in April 1995 we envisioned the collection of materials and establishment of new archives. At our workshops in Elspeet and Elkhart we toured historical libraries, visited monuments and commemorative sites. On the way home in 2001 Asheervadam from India spelled out in a memo a proposal for the formation of a permanent MWC historical commission. We had been quite insistent that the GMHP was a single effort that would cease to exist on the completion of our work. Eric Kumedis from the Congo developed an even more elaborate proposal calling for the establishment of a museum and library in the Congo even asking for the return of documents and papers on the Mennonite movement in the Congo now housed in North Newton, Fresno, and Goshen. Minimally

he suggested having these materials copied for the new archive. These requests have been forwarded to the MWC Secretariat and the significance of these history-oriented activities will need to be weighted with reference to other requests.

Finally a ninth learning is that this history is incomplete and still in process. Five months after the *Africa* volume was completed I received a thoughtful reassessment of the life of the late Bishop Kisare in Tanzania. More clearly than any of our writers this new contribution asserts that Bishop Kisare did not try to convert Muslims—they already prayed—and after long delaying baptism for those having multiple wives also proceeded to baptize them. Other material is also surfacing. Missionaries in Burkina Faso believe the story of that church is strongly biased and does not reflect the best insight into that new community.

Perhaps the most important achievement of this series will be to demonstrate that there is a new worldwide Mennonite reality. We hope the first edition, *Africa*, will stimulate deeper and broader research. More monographs will be required for a more complete story. The project has a dynamic character. There are other learnings important to note: the interest of newer churches in traditional religion and how those practices can be incorporated into Christian practice; the provincialism or localism of most people—to think globally is perhaps a luxury of the powerful; the danger of trying to compare church experience—the variety is enormous and vitality comes in a multitude of ways.

### North America and Global Mennonite History

Finally, what does the global Mennonite reality mean for North American historians working in Mennonite history? This is a question underlying the 2004 “State of the Art of North American Mennonite History” conference. Here are several suggestions.

First, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ can no longer describe themselves with any accuracy from only a North American or Western context. We are fortunate to have been an international cross-cultural tradition from our beginnings. We have something to build on. We are blessed by having more than 100 years of inter-continental relationships through mission and service agencies and now in the cross-fertilization provided through the work of Mennonite World Conference. It is necessary to capitalize on the moment and make the world Mennonite movement and the world Christian movement intrinsic to our scholarship.

Second, North American scholars have not been oblivious to these changing tides of historical development. We have incorporated

distinct Germanic and distinct Hispanic traditions into our research and writing. Several studies provide a good base for expanding into other cultural arenas: Nancy Heisey on the role of Africa and Africans in the early Christian movement; the late Marc Nikkel, who grew up Mennonite Brethren and later became an Anglican missionary whose collection of Dinka hymns is a great gift to the ecumenical Christian movement; Jan Bender Shetler's pioneering recording of the historical memories of Luo tribal leaders in Tanzania. These are only three quite recent products. Others have worked imaginatively in the Congo, Indonesia, India and lower South America. North American Mennonite scholars have a legitimate and credible base for extending their work, but also to teach others the spirit, style, and skills required for vigorous historical exploration.

Third, North American historians not only can demonstrate and assist the development of new historical directions, they also have financial resources for training new scholars and for sharing our historical materials with scholarly communities around the world (Several Mennonite historical libraries and mission agencies have been providing books and periodicals to new libraries and study centers for several decades). Several of our writers studied in North America or Europe. North American historical societies can consider putting a tithe in their annual budgets for nurturing the continuing interest in history in the new majority churches. Perhaps collectively we could fund a historical commission should the MWC decide to form one. Our societies could also facilitate access to North American funds for particular projects in the South. Cooperation of this kind can be an enormous incentive to the inherent cooperative spirit found in Southern Christianity.

Fourth, we need to be open to new ways of viewing the Mennonite experience. We need to provide space for new scholars from heretofore less articulate churches to participate as full members in defining what our tradition is all about. I wish I knew more about the mind and attitude of European Mennonite scholars from the 1920s to the 1950s. It seems to me that they were then at a point somewhat comparable to where we are now in North America today. For at least two hundred years they were custodians of Mennonite scholarship. They defined the tradition. The world wars depleted many resources for this church work. The power of secularity weaned away a lot of enthusiasm. Whatever the causes, at the middle of the twentieth century the centers of Mennonite scholarship moved from Europe to North America. Here Cornelius Krahn and Harold Bender were chaffing to develop a North American scholarly tradition. To be sure there was tension and unhappiness. There was also a magnanimity of spirit and sometimes blessing. Today, we must consciously and creatively nurture,

encourage, bless the churches of the South as they seek to define who they are and to expect them to provide new understandings of the Mennonite tradition. We can provide space—intellectual, cultural, spiritual, organizational—for new historians and new histories. The GMHP has merely opened the door. Providing space represents a willingness to share power and prerogative. It means allowing others to help shape the global task. Scholars can also live the words of Jesus: “The greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves.” (Luke 22:26)

Fifth, North American historians can become learners and practitioners of a truly worldwide point of view. When we write our history, no matter how local, we can note the connectedness and observe the influences of a wider world. Each of our generalizations should include the fact of incredible diversity in the worldwide movement. There is no globality without intense locality and no locality without globality. When, for example, I was part of several delegations visiting Mennonites and Baptists in the USSR and asked for translation both from Russian and German, my hosts could not understand how a Mennonite could not be fluent in the mother tongue. Those Mennonites were even more astounded to meet Milion Belete of Ethiopia when he was president of MWC. This worldwide point of view will also be intensely ecumenical, removing illusions of uniqueness, revealing links and commonalities between the newer churches whose pastors are commonly trained in evangelical seminaries. The idioms of Southern Christianity reflect “far more conservative...beliefs and moral reasoning.”<sup>26</sup> Mennonites and Brethren in Christ are no exception. Thus our new history should be imbued with a generosity of spirit that is appreciative, understanding and inclusive. In the words of Gilberto Flores when he addressed our Elkhart workshop: “Write history that can serve to build a bridge to connect the new ethnic-cultural-religious ideology of the groups into the only one body of Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

Sixth, one of the tasks envisioned back in 1995 and already noted is that this project would “foster the historical-theological vocation as a ministry to the whole church.” This is a continuing task. Just as we historians need to develop and accommodate to new perspectives, so does the entire church. We are beginning to see church agencies talk about “repositioning” themselves for the new situation. This is and will be difficult and stressful. How will priorities change? How will resources be reallocated? Can organized churches built on national or North American constituencies decrease so other churches can increase? Can mission agencies see themselves as helpers of churches and not primarily as planters of churches? Can our definitions of evangelism be reformulated in light of the concerns of the new church majority?

The questions are numerous. If we as historians of the church have a ministry, it will be to highlight this new church history and to help our congregations and conferences, mission and service agencies, colleges, seminaries and even retirement communities think about their work in new ways. Dana L. Robert, a church historian, notes the demands of a new history for the global Christian movement:

What at first glance appears to be the largest world religion is in fact the ultimate local religion....The strength of world Christianity lies in its creative interweaving of the warp of a world religion with the woof of its local contexts....The days are gone when the history of Christianity could be taught as the development of Western doctrine and institutions. Being in the middle of a large-scale transformation in the nature of Christianity, we do not yet have an adequate interpretive or even descriptive framework for what is happening.<sup>28</sup>

This is the high goal that inspired and inspires the Global Mennonite History Project.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 15.
- <sup>2</sup> Justo L. Gonzales, foreword to *Telling the Churches Stories*, by Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK, 1995), ix-x.
- <sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Who Owns History?* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 78.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>7</sup> David B. Barrett, "A.D. 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa," *International Review of Missions* 59 (1970): 39-54; Walbert Buehlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 3-31.
- <sup>8</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory* (Strasbourg, France: Mennonite World Conference, 2003), 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 87.
- <sup>11</sup> John A. Lapp and Ed van Straten, "Mennonite World Conference 1925-2000: From Euro-American Conference to Worldwide Communion," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76 (January 2003): 7-45.
- <sup>12</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, "A Global Church Requires a Global History," *Conrad Grebel Review* 15 (Winter/Spring, 1997): 6.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>14</sup> James C. Juhnke, "A Vision for a Global Mennonite History," *Conrad Grebel Review* 15 (Winter/Spring, 1997):19.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

- <sup>17</sup> Alle Hoekema, Wilbert R. Shenk, and Robert J. Suderman, "Consultation Findings," *Conrad Grebel Review* 15 (Winter/Spring, 1997): 133.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in the Global Mennonite History Project Report to the Mennonite World Conference General Council, 17 July 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 15.
- <sup>20</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, "Telling One Another Stories: Toward a Theology of Reconciliation," in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, ed. Gregory Baum and Harold Wells (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 34.
- <sup>21</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003).
- <sup>22</sup> Ervin Beck, *MennoFolk: Mennonite and Amish Folk Traditions* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Terrance O. Ranger, *Voices From the Rocks: Nature, Culture, and History in the Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).
- <sup>24</sup> John L. Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference* (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press, 2001), 173.
- <sup>25</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 173.
- <sup>26</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 7.
- <sup>27</sup> Global Mennonite History Project Report # 7, July 2001.
- <sup>28</sup> Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1946," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (April 2002), 56.