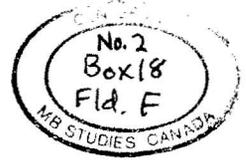


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RESPONSE TO A PAPER BY VICTOR ADRIAN"SOME STRATEGY ISSUES IN MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSION"

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INTRODUCTION:*PURPOSE OF THE PAPER:

In the printed Program the topic title is "Global Models/Strategies for Mission in Century 21." The title of Victor Adrian's paper is "Some Strategy Issues in Mennonite Brethren Mission." I am not sure if there is significance to this difference. It might have been that program planners thought of general global models whereas Victor felt it would be helpful to be specific and make applications within the context of the Mennonite Brethren Church. In any case it was good to be able to think concretely about how mission strategy is being processed within a sister denomination.

*INTERACTION WITH THE HIEBERT/KASDORF/LOEWEN PAPERS:

This paper "seeks to respond to the world trends and issues raised by Paul and Hans and their implications for Mennonite Brethren mission in the development of future strategy" (page 5).

I would have appreciated interaction with Jacob A. Loewen's paper. Loewen approaches mission strategy from the perspective of function and style rather than the identification of trends and issues as in the Kasdorf and Hiebert papers. If I can take the risk of assessing which of the three approaches to mission strategy this paper would advocate I would say it is the "Self-Replicating Strategy." There is a clear concern for evangelism resulting in personal conversion as well as for the planting of churches which are vibrant and active. I assume these would be Mennonite Brethren churches within the worldwide network of Mennonite Brethren churches.

It seems to me that the "Self-Replicating Strategy" at its best can incorporate the best of the "Catalyst Strategy" so as to yield a responsible and effective mission strategy for century 21.

I. PERSPECTIVE OF MISSION THEOLOGYA. Goal of Mission

The paper makes a strong case for a clear mission goal before any attention is given to design of strategy to reach the goal. A significant section of the paper is devoted to developing this point.

God's glory is the ultimate goal of all mission activity. One can accomplish that goal by working at the mission task of evangelism, church planting, discipleship training and eventually the maturing of churches.

I have found the Kingdom of God to be a helpful paradigm in which to speak of the goal of mission. The converted individual is not the ultimate goal of mission nor is the gathered community of believers. Both the converted individual and the gathered community bear witness to Jesus Christ as the King who is the ultimate sign of the Kingdom. Although the Kingdom of God is mentioned at several places in the paper it was not part of the concise statement of the mission goal.

B. Missions as an Eschatological Event

The paper supports its contention that global mission must be given the highest priority by appealing to its eschatological nature. Biblical evidence is cited (Matthew 24:14) to explain that the "mission of the church is an eschatological event whose task must be completed before the coming of Christ" (page 6).

The interpretation of the Matthean text has been varied in the history of the church. The paper seems to be saying that Jesus meant that global mission is a pre-condition of his second coming. That is, Christ will not come back before the global mission task is complete. If this is the case then it is important to define the task that must be completed. Does this mean "hearing" the gospel only? I have some difficulty with understanding this text to be teaching global mission as a pre-condition of Christ's return.

If completion of the task is a pre-condition of Christ's return we tend to view global mission as a human enterprise rather than God's.

Increasingly in mission journals and media releases one finds mission agencies setting goals for the year 2000. Some are modest but others want to complete the task by the year 2000! What does this mean? If the task is completed by the year 2000 is there no further mission of the church in the world? I hardly think so. In my opinion a more adequate understanding would be to see the mission task as for all the world and for all of time. It's completion occurs when Jesus Christ returns and is not determined by our efforts.

II. PERSPECTIVE OF MISSION HISTORY

A. Global Mission in Transition

At what we called a COM Major Program Review in September, 1985, we asked Wilbert R. Shenk to speak to us about the missiological context for the next decade. One of the points he made was that the Modern Missionary Movement had come to an end. That movement which began with Carey universalized the Christian movement. It was "attuned to the general dynamics of European culture...to spread its

influence worldwide." Andrew F. Walls echoed this same observation in an article in the January, 1987, International Review of Mission entitled "The Old Age of the Missionary Movement." Walls is clear that when he speaks of the old age of the missionary movement he is not speaking of the end of cross-cultural mission nor that the task of world evangelization is over. He categorically claims that the global mission task never is over! What he does mean by the title of the article is that there have been immense changes in the world context which necessitate the forging of new models of global mission for the decades ahead.

My reason for mentioning this is to suggest that while this paper reflects some creative thinking and new models of global mission there is still much that needs to be done. Mission work is in a time of transition. Spirit-directed creativity is needed to envision new models which move beyond the assumptions and patterns of activity characteristic of the past.

III. PERSPECTIVE OF MISSION STRATEGY

A. Mission To Six Continents

One of the major themes in the paper has to do with the mission task in North America and how the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions/Services will respond. No doubt one of the shifts from the old mission era to the new is that mission is no longer perceived as located only outside of North America. All three papers deal with this shift and need to focus on mission in North America as well as around the world.

Among the three largest Mennonite groups in North America the Mennonite Brethren is the only one which does not have a denomination wide program agency for implementing a home mission thrust. Perhaps this explains why the paper seems to go out of its way to show how MBM/S is responding to this increasingly important arena for mission.

Another dimension to the six continent theme is the need for North Americans to receive as much as they give and to learn as much as they teach. Perhaps the paper made this assumption. I did not find significant mention of the two-way nature of mission. In fact, I wondered at one point (pages 10-11) whether the only valid reason for MBM/S involvement in home mission was to enable overseas mission to become strengthened by international students returning to their home countries to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

B. Internationalization

I am excited at the efforts of MBM/S in terms of internationalizing their mission strategy. Early in the paper we are promised more discussion of international conferences, boards and cooperation.

I looked forward to this but found only a brief paragraph at the very end of the paper. Perhaps the author was too modest about what is being planned by MRM/S, namely, a major conference on internationalization next month in Curitiba, Brazil. I would really like to be there to observe and learn.

Both opportunity and danger are part of the challenge of internationalization of staffs, boards, and missionary strategy. The positive results of internationalizing mission program are self-evident. One dimension of internationalization which gives me some pause is the tendency for North American based agencies to become multi-national mission agencies with headquarters in North America. Creativity must be exercised to prevent this new initiative from succumbing to the older forms of paternalism and concentrations of power.

C. Resources for Global Mission

The paper argues for a continued strong involvement of North American Christians in the global mission task partially because of the nature of the Biblical goal but also because of their relative wealth. This seems to make abundant sense. Good stewardship of resources in a world of need not only makes good sense. It is the right thing to do. That is, as long as we recognize some dangers along the way.

The giver-receiver syndrome must change so that both are givers and both are receivers. The power syndrome whereby those with resources can manipulate those without must change so that all parties are enabled and empowered. Debilitating dependency must be avoided in all exchanges of funds. In addition to caution in the actual handling of resources a large dose of humility is needed in assessing the value of North American resources. One of the ironies in mission history is that God has often accomplished more significant change in people's lives and more church growth without North American funds, personnel and know-how than with these resources.

January, 1988