



## RESPONSE TO PAUL HIEBERT'S PAPER

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Introductory Comments.

Allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation for the privilege of participating in this consultation. Although I have not had direct acquaintance with Mennonite Brethren missions since serving as a missionary in Western Europe in the late sixties and the first half of the seventies, many of the issues in missions confront us all.

As one involved in Mennonite seminary and theological education, I also hope to garner some wisdom from this consultation on better integrating the training and education for both "home" and "overseas" missions. Several years ago we renamed the Overseas Mission Training Center at the Associated Mennonite Seminaries the "Mission Training Center." Given the trend toward globalization and the church's missionary vocation, we concluded that "mission" covers our calling both in this continent as well as "overseas." More recently, we have been discussing the substantive implications of this global vision for mission and mission education and training. We still tend to think of "church planting and evangelism" in terms of North America and "missions" in terms of going to other countries. How are we to integrate, appropriately transform, and combine these dimensions in "mission training?" Whatever wisdom arises in Fresno on these matters will be most welcome!

In responding to Paul Hiebert's paper, I shall not attempt to add three or to subtract four trends from those which he considers significant. Who would wish, on the campus of a Biblical seminary, to challenge the number seven?! Nor am I competent to confirm or correct Paul's suggested implications for Mennonite Brethren Missions. On the whole, we can be grateful to Paul for a helpful, lucid, and pertinent summary of world trends and for several proposals concerning Mennonite Brethren missions which would be highly desirable or imperative in response to these trends. I shall assume that those of you more intimately acquainted with Mennonite Brethren missions will test Paul's proposals in the course of the consultation. I shall attempt rather to extend Paul's analysis and some of his almost marginal suggestions by first making a modest proposal, which may help us grapple with the seven trends and their implications. Secondly I shall raise one additional question about the future of Mennonite Brethren missions, which may deserve some attention in addition to the issues Paul focuses explicitly.

Seven Separate Trends or Several Dimensions of a Common Orientation?

Paul lists seven world trends which have implications for mission. Although he hints that some of these trends may be related to each other, he does not explicitly suggest that any of them may be organically related to each other or that many of

them may share a common frame of reference. I would like to suggest that at least several of the seven trends share a common orientation.

Since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Western culture and society have made an increasingly strong distinction between the public and the private spheres of life. The public sphere is largely mono-cultural, and has been fundamentally shaped by empiricism, science, and technology. Moreover, the public sphere ostensibly remains neutral to religious and moral values which arise from particular commitments and faiths. In effect however, the public sphere is either agnostic or implicitly atheistic. The private sphere of life, in contrast, has become the home of cultural, religious, and moral commitments, and of individual preferences and behaviors. Within this realm, each person or each group may make their own choices, articulate their own commitments, and follow their own way of life. My "modest proposal" is therefore that awareness of this dichotomy between the private and the public spheres of life, which we have inherited from the Enlightenment and which accompanies that legacy as it extends its influence throughout the world, may help us sharpen our understanding of Hiebert's seven trends as well as help us respond more adequately to them in Christian mission.

In Hiebert's list, modernization constitutes the second world trend. Seen in the framework of the dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life, modernization is not simply one of several trends. Rather, it dominates the public sphere and fundamentally shapes the public common culture and society. For this reason, Hiebert's third trend, globalization, amounts to more than simply a world-wide network or a global village. Globalization extends modernization to global proportions. As Hiebert rightly points out, globalization is shattering western domination in the world. For example, the Japanese are exercising major economic and technological influence in the contemporary international scene. But part of the reason that western political and economic influence is being shattered is because the Japanese have become effective promoters and brokers of modernization. Thus the trend of globalization constitutes a globalization of modernity in the public sphere of contemporary world civilization.

The dichotomy between the public and the private spheres also puts several other world trends in a different light. Hiebert suggests a growing awareness of culture as the fourth trend. This trend may also need to be qualified as in effect having both public and private dimensions. In the public arena, the trend is toward a mono-cultural orientation. The particularities of different cultures are relegated to the private sphere. To return to the Japanese: Most of them have adopted western dress for business and public life, but slip into traditional kimonos and costumes at home and for ceremonial functions. This distinction between public and private culture

would also have implications for mission strategy. Much of the discussion on "contextualization" in contemporary missiology focuses on the framework and particularities of a given cultural context without recognizing that it is referring primarily to issues that are frequently being relegated to the private sphere. Similarly Hiebert's fifth trend would be qualified by the differentiation between the public and the private spheres. Pluralism constitutes a challenge for Christian missions not only because people speaking different languages and practicing different religions live next door, but because religion, including Christianity, is also relegated to the private sphere of life.

According to Hiebert, the seventh world trend with implications for Christian mission is the fundamentalist reaction. Interestingly, Hiebert refers only to other than Christian fundamentalist reactions. But whether Islamic or Christian, the fundamentalist reaction constitutes an attempt to reintegrate the public and the private spheres of life. For that reason, fundamentalism reacts against the acids of modernity and related trends. We might even go further and suggest that the Christian fundamentalist reaction seeks to reinstitute a constantinian form of Christianity. And Islamic fundamentalism amounts to something of the same pattern in a different social, cultural, and religious context.

What difference does it make to see an organic relation between at least several of the seven trends? Part of the difference resides in developing a "canonical" rather than a "scatter-shot" response to world trends for mission strategy. Again, Hiebert's paper makes several promising suggestions along the way. I would first like to refer to these suggestions, then propose a broader framework within which they may fit and the way in which they provide a biblical (and Anabaptist) integration of the public and private spheres.

Hiebert notes that we should add an understanding of biblical prophecy and the movement of history to a social sciences projection of world trends in developing mission strategies. He also asserts that the Gospel addresses material, social, and psychological needs, rather than being limited only to narrowly spiritual ones. Hiebert further points out that oneness in Christ transcends national boundaries and therefore provides a Christian orientation in the response to globalization. Finally he both assumes and explicitly states that Mennonite Brethren would best return to an understanding of the church as a counter-culture, as an outpost of the Kingdom of God. I would suggest that putting all these clues together can provide a comprehensive vision which integrates the public and the private spheres in a way which differs from the traditional constantinian patterns or their revival in contemporary fundamentalist reactions.

A "canonical" statement of the vision is provided in

Ephesians 2, 11ff. " We may even think of this passage as summarizing the legacy of the great missionary apostle. At the beginning of Ephesians 3, we are told that this vision represents the "mystery of Christ" and that it was given to Paul by revelation. This mystery is described in the previous verses, namely the last half of chapter 2. It is the vision of a new corporate reality, a new humanity, a new people of God. This new humanity has been brought into being by the blood of Christ. In the body of Christ, people are brought into a new relation of peace with God and peace with each other, especially with those who were formerly enemies. Although we have frequently tried to separate public and private peace, peace as a public and social reality and peace as a personal relation with God, the vision of Ephesians 2 links both directly with the cross of Jesus Christ. Here is the vision of the people of God, the new humanity in the body of Christ as a counter-culture which overcomes the dichotomy between the public and private spheres. It is a vision represented by the early Christian church, by the Anabaptists, and by others like the Harrist movement early in this century in the Ivory Coast.

Unlike the fundamentalist reaction, this way of integrating the public and the private spheres represents no new constantinianism, primarily because it does not strive to impose its synthesis upon an entire society regardless of whether people do or do not confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Just as Jesus Christ followed the way of the cross in the public as well as the private spheres, the church as the body of Christ rejects coercion and violence and accepts suffering in both the private and the public spheres in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. In other words, the "peace witness" traditionally related to Anabaptist and Mennonite views belongs at the heart of the Gospel and at the center of what it means to be a missionary and reconciling body in the world. It is not simply a secondary matter restricted to conscientious objection to military service. It is not a dangling earring for cosmetic purposes. It helps give shape to the body itself.

This may also speak to the first trend in Hiebert's list. He points out that the combination of increasing population and decreasing world resources will multiply conflicts and violence. If that is the case, peace and reconciliation will be (or are) specific needs which the Gospel addresses. And the comprehensive vision of Ephesians calls us back to grounding peace and reconciliation in the atonement itself rather than relegating it to a subsequent peculiarity of particular denominations. That also makes it part of evangelism and mission, not only of Christian moral discernment and instruction.

So much for the modest proposal. The seven trends reflect a broader common frame of reference, which may be described as a foundational distinction between the public and the private spheres of life. The fundamentalist reaction, whether Christian or Islamic seeks to integrate them in one way; the Biblical and

Anabaptist model in another way. If this proposal proves helpful, we may then wish to spin out some of the implications for mission strategies in the coming years.

An Additional Question.

In closing, I would like to raise a question which will have implications for Mennonite Brethren missions, but which the Hiebert paper does not address. Put most simply, what are the trends, not only in the broader world, but among Mennonite Brethren around the world? Do they simply reproduce on a smaller scale the world trends? Are they somewhat similar? Or are there trends among Mennonite Brethren which, if not changed, will seriously hinder their missionary vocation in the coming decades? Are there trends which should be strengthened in order to support that missionary vocation?

I do not have any answers to these questions. It has however been my observation that missionaries tend to reproduce themselves and the churches from which they come, at least for the first decade of their missionary service (if not longer). If that is also the case for Mennonite Brethren missionaries, the current trends among Mennonite Brethren will also have far-reaching implications for the coming decades of Mennonite Brethren missions.

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