The Dissolution of Nam Cum in Perspective: Global Contexts of the Mennonite Mission in the Chaco, Argentina

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(trans. Laura Miller)

Abstract: The dissolution of the Mennonite Nam Cum mission in the province of Chaco has been approached by anthropological studies of religious change as a fundamental milestone in shaping the contemporary dynamics of the region. This literature has considered the episode in a strongly local setting. Using various archival sources such as personal diaries, letters, publications, administrative reports, and ethnographic work, this essay reintegrates the episode into the global context of paradigm shift in Mennonite missions in the mid-twentieth century. One of the central factors in this analysis is the profound influence of the discipline of anthropology on the indigenization of Mennonite missions, which was inscribed in the context of the "anthropological turn" of Christian missions and the growing awareness of the relevance of contextualization and the understanding of local cultures for a true evangelical mission. This essay argues that the decision to close the Nam Cum mission invites an exploration of how Mennonite missionaries experienced this new model of incarnating the gospel in local culture, while also permitting a fresh look at its significance for the constitution of anthropological studies in the Chaco region.

INTRODUCTION

Various anthropological studies of religious change have identified the dissolution of the Nam Cum Mennonite mission in the province of Chaco in 1954 as a significant milestone in the contemporary history of the region.[1] This literature, however, has largely framed the episode within a

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1. Cf. Elmer Miller, *Los tobas argentinos. Armonía y disonancia en una sociedad* (México City: Siglo XXX Editories, 1979); César Ceriani Cernadas and Silvia Citro, "El movimiento del *evangelio* entre los tobas del Chaco argentino Una revisión histórica y etnográfica," in *De indio a hermano. Pentecostalismo indígena en América Latina*, ed. B. Guerrero Jiménez (Iquique, Chile:

local context. This article seeks to reintegrate the closing of the Nam Cum mission within the context of a larger, global paradigm shift in Mennonite missions worldwide.

After first analyzing a missiological change that took place in the Mennonite church in the mid-twentieth century—a change strongly influenced by decolonization—the essay considers how this process of change, dominated by the principle of "indigenization," affected the Mennonite missions in the Chaco, highlighting especially the interplay between local, regional, and global groups. A key factor in this analysis was the profound influence exerted by the discipline of anthropology on the "indigenization" of Mennonite missions. That influence unfolded within the context of the "anthropological turn" of Christian missions worldwide and a growing awareness of the relevance of understanding the local culture for a true evangelical mission.

Using diverse archival sources—including personal journals, letters, publications, and administrative reports—this essay analyzes the story of Nam Cum as a specific example of how Mennonite missionaries experienced this new model of incarnating the gospel in a local culture. This shift was of great relevance for religious life in the Chaco because of the influence of Mennonites on evangelical outreach to indigenous groups and the subsequent establishment of the first autonomous aboriginal church in the country: the United Evangelical Church (Iglesia Evangélica Unida). At the same time, the episode held special significance for the emergence of Argentina's own anthropological studies in the Chaco.

The Mennonite Church

Mennonites are part of a broader Anabaptist renewal movement that emerged in the sixteenth century within the framework of the Radical Reformation as a result of the preaching of Ulrich Zwingli in the Swiss city of Zurich. Although Mennonites are contemporaries of the Protestant Reformation and share some of its characteristics, they also embraced certain distinctive convictions such as the importance of a personal and voluntary commitment to follow Christ; a concept of the church as a community of faith; the need to separate from all that was worldly and sinful; and a radical separation of church and state. These characteristics—especially the rejection of ties between church and state—resulted in persecution from both Catholics and Protestants. The Mennonites, whose name derives from the Dutch reformer Menno Simons, belong to a branch of Anabaptists known as "pacifist trinitarians," characterized especially

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Ediciones Campus, Universidad Arturo Prat y Ediciones El Jote Errante, 2005), 111-170; Silvia Citro, *Cuerpos significantes. Travesías de una etnografía dialéctica* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2009).

by their rejection of violence and active preaching against participation in military service. Persecution forced them to move—some to eastern Europe (1530s); others from Switzerland and South Germany to the United States, settling in Pennsylvania (1683); and still others from Poland to South Russia (1788).

The Mennonite presence in Argentina began with missionaries from the United States who arrived in 1911. Of the various Mennonite organizations that were active at the time, the "Old" Mennonite Church carried out this particular missionary outreach program. The denomination was known as the "Old" Mennonite Church to distinguish it from other groups, including the General Conference, that had separated from this church.[2]

Comprised largely of members of Swiss and South German origin, the "Old" Mennonite Church was roughly divided into two ecclesial traditions: Mennonites and Amish-Mennonites. The first Mennonite and Amish settlements were concentrated in two regions: the districts of Franconia and Lancaster, north of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. In 1725, delegates from these two Mennonite regions met to adopt the Dordrecht Confession of Faith of 1632, which they published in English. This confession had already been adopted by the Amish in Europe. The Dordrecht Confession became the common denominator among all groups affiliated with the Mennonite Church.[3]

Between 1783 and 1860 a wave of westward expansion took place, as groups of Mennonites relocated to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. The migrants were largely rural and farming families, motivated by the scarcity of farmland in the eastern U.S. and by government offers of cheap land in the West. Newcomers to the Western frontier grew accustomed to a "freer" style of life, an attitude that contributed to a more open and flexible approach to church life. For this reason, among others, the churches in Ohio and Indiana began to develop new ecclesial practices in the early twentieth century, including an interest in foreign missions.[4]

The key characteristics of the Mennonite missionary paradigm through the middle of the twentieth century can be understood best through the

2. In the early twentieth century, those groups were the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Amish-Mennonites, and the Old Order Amish.

3. "Dordrecht Confession of Faith (Mennonite, 1632)." Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. 1632. Web. May 3, 2020.—https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Dordrecht_Confession_of_Faith_(Mennonite,_1632)&oldid=146406.

4. For helpful overviews see Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-century America* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988); and Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1996).

lens of two foundational ventures of Mennonite missions outside of the United States—in India (1899) and Argentina (1917).

"Soap, soup, and salvation": Mennonite Missions in India and Argentina

As a result of various studies and interaction with missionaries from other denominations who were already serving abroad, Mennonite Church leaders chose India and South America as their initial fields of foreign mission. India was regarded as a pagan territory dominated by the darkness of Hinduism, a land where the people were thought to be spiritually ignorant and under the dominion of Satan.[5] South America appeared to be dominated by a "Catholic-pagan syncretism" that had received little attention from other Protestant missionaries.[6] The Mennonite Board of Mission and Charities (MBCM) oversaw the initial expansion into these new territories.[7]

Mennonites established the missions in India and South America with very similar strategies. In the case of India, Jacob Andrews Ressler[8]—along with William B. Page, his wife, Alice Thut Page,[9] and their

5. James Pankratz, "Ghandi and Mennonites in India," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 30 (Spring 2012), 136-161.

6. Ernesto Suarez Vilela, *50° Aniversario de la Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina (1919-1969)* (Buenos Aires: Comisión de publicaciones de la Iglesia Menonita Argentina, 1969), 12.

7. The origin of the Mennonite Board of Mission and Charities (MBMC) goes back to 1882 when leaders of the Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana, established the Mennonite Evangelizing Committee, their first organization dedicated to evangelical outreach and mission. In 1892, the name of the mission organization was changed to the Mennonite Evangelizing Board of America. Two years later, following a merger with another board of missions, the name was changed to the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board. In 1906, the name was changed once again to become the Mennonite Board of Mission and Charities. In 1971, the group became simply the Mennonite Board of Missions. Following the merger of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church in 2001, the successor to the MBMC became the Mennonite Mission Network.

8. Jacob Andrews Ressler (1867-1936) was a pioneer missionary of the Mennonite Church. A public-school teacher, Ressler was ordained a minister in 1895. In 1898, during a missionary meeting held in Elkhart, he was unanimously elected to lead the first mission in India. In December 1908, following the death of his wife, he retired from the mission field and returned to the United States.—Pyarelal Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India* (Nagpur: National Council of Churches in India, 1981), and John L. Horst, "Ressler, Jacob Andrews (1867-1936)," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. 1959. Web. May 3, 2020. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ressler,_Jacob_Andrews_(1867-1936)&oldid=146133.

9. William B. Page and his wife, Alice Thut Page, were the first missionary doctors sent to India. Due to illness, both had to return to the United States in 1900. There they continued with medical work until William Page died in 1945. His wife died in 1951.— Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 29, and John A. "Page, Alice Thut (1872-1951) and William B. (1871-1945)," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. 1987. Web. May 3, 2020. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Page,_Alice_Thut_(1872-1951)_and_William_B._(1871-1945)&oldid=113577.

children—departed for India on November 4, 1889. They arrived in Bombay on March 24, 1899, and undertook a series of exploratory tours in the north and central parts of the country with the goal of locating an "appropriate field" that would meet the requirements of the Mennonite Board. These requirements stipulated that a new mission "was not to be located within the vicinity of thirty to forty miles of the neighboring missions, thus safeguarding the territorial integrity of other missionary societies and observing the rules of comity of missions."[10] MBMC also required that the chosen location have a stable population and access to transportation. The search for a location that met all these conditions required significant time and travel, which was facilitated by the collaboration of missionaries from different denominations already established in India.[11] Finally, on November 22, 1899, J. A. Ressler and William Page decided to establish the first Mennonite mission in the village of Dhamtari, now known as Madhya Pradesh, located approximately fifty miles from Raipur. The location met all the requirements. It had a large population—indeed, over time it would become an active political center—and it was close to a station of a major railway line that ran through much of the country and connected Raipur to Bombay.[12]

The Mennonite mission in Dhamtari was established among marginalized people—outcasts, or those occupying the lowest categories of the caste system. Most of these people lived on the outskirts of the village because they could not drink from the common wells, share food, or pray in the same temples as the members of the other castes. For the most part, those who attended the Mennonite mission were illiterate. They performed tasks considered degrading—like working with animal hides—or they were residents of orphanages and hospitals for lepers.[13] As the historian James Pankratz has observed, the conversion to the Mennonite faith gave rise to a paradoxical outcome.[14] On the one hand, belonging to a Christian church provided new believers with material goods and symbols that they never would have been able to access otherwise, as well as the possibility of identifying socially with the missionaries, who occupied a privileged place in the local culture. On the other hand, the original stigma associated with their position as outcasts

10. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India,* 27-28.

11. When the missionaries from the Mennonite Church arrived in India, other Mennonite denominations such as the Mennonite Brethren Church (arrived in 1889) and the General Conference Mennonite Church (arrived in 1889-1900) were already carrying out work in the country.—Pankratz, "Gandhi and Mennonites in India," 137.

12. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India,* 34.

13. Ibid., 68; Pankratz "Gandhi and Mennonites in India," 139.

14. Pankratz "Gandhi and Mennonites in India," 139-140.

was now compounded by the Hindu perception of them as cultural and religious traitors because of their new identity as Christians, adding to their marginalization.[15]

Because the task of evangelizing in India was very difficult, and many missionaries became ill, Christian missions of different denominations frequently collaborated with each other. At the same time, the MBMC also continued to send young married missionary couples.

The missionary experience in South America began in 1911, when the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities charged Josephus W. Shank with the task of locating possible areas for mission work. Initially, Shank concluded that Chile was an ideal country to start a mission. With the beginning of World War I, however, the activities of the MBMC were paralyzed. When the project resumed after the war, MBMC leaders decided that the mission work should be established in Argentina rather than Chile. At the end of the war, various Protestant missionary societies in Chile had reached an agreement, dividing the territory of the country among themselves. Under these circumstances, the Mennonites decided not to interfere with the action of the Protestant denominations already established in Chile.[16]

In 1917, the Shank[17] and Tobias K. Hershey[18] families landed in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As in India, they conducted several exploratory trips throughout the country with the aim of gathering impressions of the social, political, and religious life, and to identify places to settle that did not already have active evangelical missionary work under way. These trips were carried out with the help of various Protestant pastors. In

15. Although not the primary focus of this essay, it is interesting to note certain similarities between the Mennonite missions in India and missions to the indigenous of the Chaco with regard to the impact of access of local church members to positions of leadership and to economic and symbolic goods.—Cf. Agustina Altman, "Historia y conversion: el evangelio entre los mocoví del Chaco Austral," *RUNA. Archivo para las Ciencias del Hombre*, 32:2 (2011), 127-143; César Ceriani Cernadas, "Dilemas étnicos y políticos en la experiencia religosa toba (qom)," *VIII Reunión de Antropología del MERCO-SUR* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de San Martin, 2009), 8; Alejandro López, "La Virgen, el Árbol y la Serpiente. Cielos e Identidades en comunidades mocovíes del Chaco," (PhD thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009); Pablo Wright, *Ser-en-el-sueño. Crónicas de historia y vida toba* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008), 140.

16. For further information on this kind of "non-overlapping pact" as in the case of Mennonite missions in Argentina, see Alejandro López and Agustina Altman, "No hay necesidad de que nos coloquemos uno cerca del otro," Territorio e identidad religiosa durante el establecimiento de los menonitas en las Argentina, *Actas de las Segundas Jornadas de Religión y Sociedad en la Argentina Contemporánea y países del Cono Sur* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2011).

17. Josephus Wenger Shank was born on Oct. 10, 1881, in Versailles, Missouri. He was the first Mennonite missionary to arrive in South America in 1917 and remained there with his family until 1950. Shank died on May 10, 1970, in Kansas.

18. Tobias K. Hershey was born on March 14, 1879, in Intercourse, Pa.

October of 1919, at the end of this extensive tour of the country, Shank and Hershey decided to establish the first Mennonite congregation in South America in Pehuajó.[19] Over time, Mennonites would expand the mission work throughout the province of Buenos Aires, following especially the main line of the Western Railroad.

In 1942, Calvin Holderman held a meeting in Cosquín, in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, that would change the direction of Mennonite work. In this meeting, he shared his experiences with the Norwegian missionary Berger Johnsen.[20] At the time, Johnsen was in Córdoba for medical care, with signs of advanced tuberculosis. While he received treatment, he preached to Holderman about the profound needs of the "Indians in the north of the country."[21] The words of Johnsen, who had more than thirty years of experience heading the Scandinavian Pentecostal mission in the city of Embarcación (a province of Salta, Argentina), had a strong impact on Holderman. In an article Holderman published in *The Gospel Herald*[22] in 1943, he asked "why we didn't start a mission work among the Indians where the Gospel and medical needs are so great. . ."[23] According to Holderman, Johnsen's preaching prompted him, along with missionaries Amos Swartzentruber and W. G. Lauver, to visit the northern part of the country in November 1942, a trip that extended into Bolivia and Paraguay.[24] According to the men, the report they prepared after their visit was received by MBMC with great excitement. Indeed, the enthusiasm for possibilities was so great that MBMC decided to postpone

19. Alejandro López and Agustina Altman,*"No hay necesidad de que nos coloquemos uno cerca del otro"*; Humberto Coria, *La presencia anabautista en las pampas argentinas. Los menonitas de Pehuajó (1919-1940)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Dunken, 2004).

20. Berger Johnsen, a member of the Evangelical Free Church, was born on Feb. 13, 1888, in the town of Ekeland, Norway. In 1910 he met Alice Wood, who encouraged Johnsen to travel to Argentina with the aim of spreading Pentecostal Christianity. In 1914, Berger Johnsen settled with his family in the town of Embarcación (Salta), where he founded a missionary enterprise that remains active today. In 1945, Johnsen died as a result of tuberculosis. For more on this Scandinavian mission effort and its social impact, see Ceriani Cernadas (2011a, 2014) and Ceriani Cernadas and Lavazza (2013).

21. Josephus Shank, *We enter the Chaco Indian Work* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951); Josephus Shank, "My Chaco Diary," Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, Josephus Wenger Shank collection (HMI-208). Box 4, Chaco Diary Notes 1942-1950, 17; Calvin Holderman, "Around the World in Argentina," *The Gospel Herald*, 36 (Oct. 21, 1943), 612.

22. *The Gospel Herald* was the official periodical of the Mennonite Church. First published on April 4, 1908, it was a weekly periodical that included editorials and articles on news, missions, education, and church history, among other topics. In 1998, *Gospel Herald* merged with *The Mennonite* of the General Conference Mennonite Church to form a new magazine, *The Mennonite*.—Paul Erb and Samuel J. Steiner, "Gospel Herald (Periodical)," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, Sept. 2011. Web. May 3, 2020. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Gospel_Herald_(Periodical)&oldid=165653.

23. Holderman, "Around the World in Argentina," 612.

24. Ibid.; Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work*, 17-19.

the expansion of Mennonite work to other countries such as Uruguay and, instead, focus all resources on indigenous groups in the north.[25]

In March 1943, the Shank and Holderman families were sent to Berger Johnsen's mission because it was, in their opinion, the "best evangelistic center in Argentina."[26] Shank had become acquainted with the Norwegian missionary already in 1912, when Johnsen was working with missionary Alice Wood[27] to prepare for "work among the Indians" in Gualeguaychú, in the province of Entre Rios, Argentina.[28] According to Holderman, Shank wondered at the time what "such a visionary man [like Johnsen} could do among the heathen Indians."[29]

The archival sources present a clear picture of the Mennonite perception of Berger Johnsen. Mennonites regarded him as a pioneer—an exemplary missionary among the indigenous people of the Chaco and an authority on the subject.[30] Johnsen's obituary, published by Calvin and Francis Holderman in *The Gospel Herald*, described him as the person who "was largely responsible for our interest in Indian work here in Argentina," and emphasized that Johnsen's mission was considered the best in the country.[31]

It is also noteworthy that Mennonites recognized Johnsen's global view of the Chaco region. During the first meeting between Johnsen and Shank, the Norwegian showed Shank a map with the location of the indigenous groups in the northern part of the country. Many years later, when the

25. J. D. Graber, "The Kingdom to the South. Part II," *The Gospel Herald* 45 (Jan. 29, 1952), 114.

26. Calvin Holderman, "A Pioneer Independent Worker Dies," *The Gospel Herald* 38 (Oct. 26, 1945), 579.

27. Born on Nov. 2, 1870, Alice Wood lived on a farm near Belleville, Ontario, Canada. She was the seventh daughter of a Christian family; her father was a farmer and preacher of the Methodist church. In 1895, she entered the school of Training of the Friend in Cleveland, Ohio. From that experience she began her missionary ministry to different nations where the gospel had not yet been preached. After traveling through Venezuela and Puerto Rico, she arrived in Argentina, in 1910. Wood settled in Gualeguaychú, a province of Entre Ríos, and until 1917 she headed the Evangelical Pentecostal Mission in that locality. In 1959 she returned to the United States and retired. She died one year later at the age of 90 years.—Kathleen Griffen, "Luz en Sudamérica: Los primeros pentecostales en Gualeguaychú, Entre Ríos" (PhD diss., Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos, 2014).

28. César Ceriani Cernadas, "La Misión Pentecostal Escandinava en el Chaco Argentino. Etapa formativa, 1914-1945," *Memoria Americana*, 19:1-2 (2011), 126; Griffin "Luz en Sudamérica"; Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work*.

29. Holderman, "Around the World in Argentina," 612.

30. On the death of Berger Johnsen in 1945 and until the departure of Josephus Shank of the Chaco on Feb. 6, 1950.—Josephus Shank, "Supplement to My Chaco Diary," Mennonite Church USA Archives - Goshen, Josephus Wenger Shank collection (HM1-208), Box 4, Chaco Diary Notes 1942-1950, 14. Shank played a similar role in terms of being a benchmark for the missionaries in the Chaco, as can be seen in the Alejandro Lopez chapter of this volume.

31. Holderman, "A Pioneer Independent Worker Dies," 579.

Mennonites were staying in Embarcación, he gave them suggestions and recommendations regarding field possibilities among those groups.[32] In this way, the Mennonite policy of avoiding overlap with other mission groups was strongly influenced by Johnsen's arguments. And, significantly, Johnsen also influenced the ways in which they carried out research and evangelism.[33]

The Shank and Holderman families traveled to Embarcación separately. From there each couple organized a series of exploratory trips and visits to missions established in the Argentine provinces of Salta and Jujuy, and in what are now the Argentine provinces of Chaco and Formosa.[34] On various occasions both couples met to exchange their impressions. During a meeting of the Mission Council in 1943,[35] the Shank and Holderman families were approved to begin a new work in these regions. A special worship service was held to honor those in charge of carrying out this new enterprise. Shank had been initially reluctant to take charge of this new task, considering himself too old to start a new mission, especially in a region with a "hostile" climate and "frontier-like conditions."[36] According to Holdeman, during this worship service the strong presence of the Holy Spirit renewed a conviction that Shank had felt during his first exploratory journeys in 1912, in which he noted that the "most attractive" prospects of working in South America would be with "the Indians."[37]

On November 1, 1943, the Nam Cum mission[38] was founded among the Toba aborigines in Pampa Aguará (the current province of Chaco in Argentina).[39] Parallel to this initiative, Mennonites also assumed

32. Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work,* 27-30.

33. Ibid., 27. Note: The influence of Berger Johnsen for the Mennonite mission has been signaled by Ceriani Cernadas, "La Misión Pentecostal Escandinava en el Chaco Argentino."

34. Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work*, 26-29; Ernesto Suárez Vilela, *50° Aniversario de la Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina (1919-1969)* (Buenos Aires: Comisión de publicaciones de la Iglesia Menonita Argentina, 1969), 85.

35. The Mission Council was an organization that met in order to bring together the missionaries sent by the MBMC— therefore its members were foreigners. This collective body met annually and during the meetings decisions were made regarding the fate of the missions.—Josephus Shank, *The Gospel Under the Southern Cross* (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1943), 163.

36. Holderman, "Around the World in Argentina," 612.

37. Ibid.; Josephus Shank, "Notes taken during travels in northern Argentina, March, April and May, 1943," Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, HistMss 1-208, Box 4, Chaco Diary Notes, 1943-1950, 9.

38. In addition to Nam Cum, Mennonite missionaries carried out evangelistic tasks in Legua 15 and Legua 17. Both were small rural settlements located between the current Provincial Routes 9 and 16.—Josephus Shank and Selena Shank, "League 15, 9, and 17," *The Gospel Herald* 38 (Aug. 1945), 362-363.

39. Lois Buckwalter and Alberto Buckwalter, "Misión a las comunidades autóctonas. Un testimonio personal," in *Misión sin Conquista. Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas*

responsibility for the "El Espinillo" mission for one year. Located some sixty miles away from Juan Jose Castelli, El Espinillo was founded by the English missionary society Emmanuel. The mission was going through a series of economic problems, as the war in Europe made it difficult for the society to send funds. For the Mennonites, the incorporation of this endeavor and a partnership with the Tuck couple, who had been working at El Espinillo for seven years, was extremely attractive, since it allowed them to work with an established mission that could function as a training space for new missionaries.[40]

As in India, the central characteristics of the missionary undertaking among the indigenous people in the Chaco revolved around the ideal of "civilization." To this end, a school, clinic, farm, grocery store, and church were established for indigenous groups with the aim of morally redeeming the inhabitants through disciplinary practices, proper hygiene, and integration into the labor market.[41] We can see this illustrated, for example, in various sources that refer to the importance of indigenous people purchasing goods exclusively from the mission, so they would not fall into the temptation of buying tobacco and alcohol.[42] Likewise, Mennonites emphasized the importance of acquiring "nice clothes" for the indigenous people, since changes in clothing habits were considered to be a mark of progress.[43]

The missionary initiatives that the Mennonite Church would pursue in both India and Argentina had similarities beyond the way in which the specific field of each mission was chosen. These included analogous dynamics of work, organization, and finances, all responding to a specific paradigm that shaped Mennonite missions through the middle of the twentieth century.

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autóctonas como practice misionera alternativa, ed. W. Horst, U. Mueller-Eckhardt and F. Paul (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2009), 193-194; Josephus W. Shank, "Among the Chaco Indians," *The Gospel Herald* 36 (Aug. 1943), 407.

40. Frances Holderman and Calvin Holderman, "News Letters from Argentina," *The Gospel Herald* 37 (July 1944) (Christian Missions, supplement for July 1944), 285-286; Shank, *The Gospel Under the Southern Cross.*

41. Joseph Shank, "Our Chaco Indian Church," *The Gospel Herald* 41 (1947), 815; Joseph Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work* (Elkhart, Ind., Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1951); Joseph Shank, "My Chaco Diary," Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, Josephus Wenger Shank collection. HistMs 208, Box 4, Chaco Diary Notes 1942-1950, 42-56.

42. Shank, *We Enter the Chaco Indian Work,* 48.

43. J. W. Shank, "Work Among the Chaco Indians," *The Gospel Herald* 41 (June 8, 1948), 542.

This way of conceiving missionary work was framed by what Tina Block Ediger has called the "colonial era" of the Mennonite churches.[44] Its expansion was closely linked to modernity projects, which were as much for the sending churches themselves as they were for those who were the focus of missions. The objective of these first ventures was to "civilize" the population—or, in the words of the Mennonite missionary Peter Pender, to bring them "soup, soap, and salvation."[45] To carry out this task, the missionaries acted as civilizing agents. Thanks to the financial support of their parent churches, they were in charge of founding churches, schools, orphanages, clinics, and hospitals. From the perspective of the missionaries, these institutions would allow them to teach the locals rational and critical thinking, concepts of progress, and norms of hygiene and sanitation. Likewise, these establishments were to be a central space for introducing elements of Christian morality and carrying out practices consistent with the Gospel message.

By 1940, global events would begin to have a strong impact on Mennonite missions worldwide. On the one hand, the outbreak of World War II made it difficult for missionaries to travel to certain parts of the globe, to send money for the various undertakings, or to obtain permits to reside in other countries.[46] In India, the situation was more complicated than in the Chaco, since the country was going through a series of internal conflicts that would culminate in its independence in 1947.[47] These tensions, which were part of a larger powerful process of decolonization after World War II, triggered a series of discussions within the Mennonite mission in India regarding whether or not mission institutions should be transferred to local hands. Some foreign missionaries opposed this idea, arguing that local workers were not yet ready; others demanded that more control be given to locals and that the Indian Mennonite mission become a self-governing church.[48]

In the case of Argentina, and specifically in the Chaco region, the effect of these global conflicts would be compounded by the growing obstacles

44. Tina Block Ediger, *Window to the World. Extraordinary Stories from a Century of Overseas Mission, 1900-2000* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1999).

45. Pankratz, "Gandhi and Mennonites in India," 139.

46. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India*.

47. It is important to note the influence of Gandhi's strong opposition to the presence of foreign missionaries who were Christianizing the population and Europeanizing it with their traditions of clothing, food, and other customs and habits.—Pankratz, "Gandhi and Mennonites in India."

48. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India,* 44-46; 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* 37:3 (2013), 140.

posed by the national government and the Catholic Church to the evangelizing activity of Protestant churches among indigenous groups.[49]

It was in this context that the Mennonite missionary Joseph Daniel (J. D.) Graber, who had served in India from 1925 to 1942, would come to assume a central role. Based on his prior experience, Graber proposed a new paradigm for Mennonite missions which, under his mandate as general secretary of the MBMC, would be implemented in Mennonite missions worldwide in the middle of the twentieth century.

JOSEPH GRABER AND THE PARADIGM OF INDIGENIZATION

Joseph Daniel Graber was born October 18, 1900, in Noble, Iowa. In 1925, following graduation from Goshen College, he married Minnie Swartzendruber. From 1925 to 1942, they were sent by MBMC to serve in India, and then to China for a year. During that period Graber was elected as secretary general of the MBMC, becoming the first general secretary of the mission board to have a long experience in overseas missions.[50]

In 2000, the MBMC celebrated the 100th anniversary of Graber's birth—a testament to his importance in the institution.[51] During the celebration, Graber was remembered as a leader in the expansion of mission initiatives, a pioneer in missiology, and the person responsible for "changing the face of missions in the Mennonite Church."[52] In particular, the event highlighted the growth of international missions during Graber's time with MBMC. When Graber took office in 1944, the Mennonite Church had fifty-five missionaries, all working in India and Argentina. Less than a decade later, the mission had expanded to China, Japan, and Belgium, with ninety-seven full-time missionaries and thirty part-time missionaries. By 1967, the year in which Graber retired, missions were operating in fifteen countries, with a total of 216 missionaries.[53]

Graber's experience in India was central to the development of his thinking. During his time serving in a leper colony and working to improve the literacy of the population, Graber witnessed the relationships between foreign missionaries and local workers. He observed tensions

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49. For further information on these conflicts, see Lopez's work in *Los evangelios chaqueños: Misiones y estrategias indígenas en el Siglo XX*, ed. César Ceriani Cernadas (Buenos Aires: Asociación Civil Rumbo Sur, 2017), 41-69.

50. Graber received a BD from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1943. Cf. Gary Kauffman, "Celebrants commemorate mission pioneer's life," (2000).—http://archive.wfn.org/2000/12/msg00129.html.; Wilbert Shenk, "Graber, Joseph Daniel (1900-1978)," http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Graber,_Joseph_Daniel_(1900-1978)&oldid=122507.

51. Graber died in 1978 in Goshen, Ind.

52. Kauffman, "Celebrants commemorate mission pioneer's life."

53. Ibid.

between the two groups caused by persistent inequalities—foreign missionaries were in charge of the local churches and the institutions linked to the mission, while the local members acted as "obedient companions."[54] In the case of India, local conflicts between the two groups first came to a head at the Third World Missions Conference held in 1938 in Tambaram, India. The meeting had strong repercussions—including, for the first time, a recognition that the voices of local workers needed to be heard by the foreign missionaries and that they needed to be incorporated as personnel in institutions run by MBMC.[55] Aware of these concerns, which were framed as part of a process of decolonization, Graber took the lead in dismantling the colonial structures of the mission and creating local churches administered by local workers.

At the time, most of the overseas missionaries were opposed to the unification of the various Mennonite missionary institutions in India, and even more resistant to their nationalization. Nevertheless, when Graber took over as general secretary of MBMC, he dedicated himself to writing a new constitution for the Mennonite Mission in India (1945). In 1952, after nearly ten years of effort, all the Mennonite missionary institutions in India were amalgamated and left in local hands, giving rise to the Mennonite Church of India.[56]

Graber's work in the transformation process of the Mennonite mission in India impacted him deeply—so much so, that by 1960 he would write a book called *The Church Apostolic: A Discussion of Modern Mission*, which changed the way Mennonites conceptualized global missions. In it, Graber proposed a new Mennonite model of church, and a fundamental change in the relationships between foreign and local missionaries. Throughout the book, Graber described Mennonite missions of the colonial era as projects that had been administered by foreign missionaries who directed programs and exercised authority over various institutions, all the while convinced that they were conducting indispensable work. In his view, missions supported by foreign groups gave a sense of security to missionaries, allowing them to feel as if they were "at home" even though they were actually in a very distant place.[57] This approach to missions, Graber argued, corresponded to the era of empires; as the world was changing and these empires were gradually disintegrating, imperialist missions should undergo the same fate. He also pointed out that the nature of missions were changing—with the global expansion of the

54. Malagar, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 42.

55. Ibid., 71.

56. Ibid., 72.

57. J. D. Graber, *The Church Apostolic. A Discussion of Modern Missions* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1960), 42.

welfare state, nation-states were taking on the responsibility of providing education, healthcare, and social welfare, which meant that missions no longer needed to be carrying out these tasks.[58]

In this context, Graber proposed a new paradigm that was no longer focused on the mission, but on a church—a church with strong roots in the local soil that could grow in its natural environment.[59] To illustrate how the new Mennonite Church should develop, Graber used a parable about planting trees, noting that one must consider the type of soil and climate when choosing a tree. If a species is chosen that was not suited to a certain environment, it will never develop roots in that soil, even if it is well cared for.[60] He argued that churches should think in the same way, proposing that they be "indigenized."[61] From his perspective, a true indigenous church is one that becomes native to the land where it was planted. Therefore, the missionaries, guided by the Holy Spirit, should take up the task of "planting" churches, not "transplanting" them according to pre-established patterns.[62]

This approach, Graber argued, represented a new challenge for the missionaries, since the powerful foreign mission machine that accompanied them would no longer be present to provide security; instead, they would have to rely on a small local organization, and come up with strategies and solutions specific to each situation and place they worked.[63] Although Graber clearly recognized that this could add a great deal of pressure for the missionaries, he believed that with better training

58. Ibid., 60-67.

59. Ibid, 33.

60. Ibid.

61. Graber's proposal on "indigenization" responded to a debate unfolding in nearly all Protestant churches, both in Europe and North America, and especially among theologians in interdenominational institutions such as the Princeton seminary where Graber was formed. These ideas were not new. The debate over an autonomous model of mission—in which the missionaries adapted to the language, living conditions, and local culture to create self-sustaining and self-organized missions with exclusively local leadership (known as The Three Self formula: self-governing, self-expanding, and self-supporting churches)—was present in American evangelism at least since the mid-nineteenth century.—Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church and the Missionary* (Springfield, Ill.: Gospel Publishing House, 1973); Wilbert Shenk, "The Contribution of Henry Venn to Mission Thought," *Anvil* 2 (1985), 25-42; David Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011), 257-272. At the turn of the century, the debate was temporarily buried by a resurgence of colonialist thought, which held that missionary endeavors had not yet reached the maturity necessary to become independent from their founding churches. The scarcity of funds for missions as a result of the global economic crisis in the 1930s prompted a renewed conversation around "indigenization." These ideas were reinforced after World War II by the independence processes of several countries in which missionary ventures had been implemented.

62. Graber, *The Church Apostolic*, 38.

63. Yoder, "Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria," 141.

and with spiritual maturity, they could carry out the work. He also pointed out that the new perspective would have some important advantages.[64] For example, they would be able to reduce the scale of the mission ventures; each missionary would be forced to connect with the local population and forge stronger relationships; the strategy would help ensure that the church remained the central priority; and it would also allow for the redistribution of resources so that smaller groups of missionaries could be working in more places at once.[65]

For this new mission strategy, Graber took up the proposal of the anthropologist Harold Lindsell on anthropology and mission.[66] In his work, Lindsell referred to the problem missionaries had with determining the type of "packaging" in which they should present the gospel. According to Graber, the "package" should be as familiar as possible to the locals. The missionaries should adapt to the environment—to local perspectives and ways of thinking—instead of trying to impose their own. They should try to capture people's interest and make the message of the gospel attractive so that the people want to accept it. In Graber's view, the greatest difficulty was rooted in the problem of ethnocentrism. In general, people try to impose their own ideas on others, and consider their own cultural patterns to be superior to those of others.[67] According to Graber, missionaries should discard the Western lenses that distorted their ways of seeing, with the objective of valuing the culture of those whom they went to serve in mission—while questioning their own.[68] Finally, Graber highlighted not only the importance of the new Mennonite church being "indigenous"—i.e., administered by local workers—but also that it be self-sustained by the local congregation.

Graber's emphasis on the role of local cultures, the ethnocentrism of the missionaries, and the relevance of anthropology when thinking about missions did not emerge in isolation. It was linked to a growing interest in anthropology on the part of Christian missionary institutions around the world. Indeed, the discipline of anthropology would soon be incorporated into the training of new missionaries as a tool for understanding on the complexities that could arise in the establishment of churches in diverse cultural contexts and the most effective ways of transmitting the gospel message.

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64. Graber, *The Church Apostolic,* 43.

65. Ibid.

66. Harold Lindsell, *Missionary Principles and Practices* (Fleming, N.J.: H. Revell Co., 1955). Lindsell, born in 1913, was an important evangelical writer. In 1971 he became president of the Evangelical Theological Society.

67. Graber, *The Church Apostolic,* 111.

68. Ibid., 111-112.

The influence of anthropology on missions would become so important that a journal called *Practical Anthropology*—a name that refers to the work of the famous anthropologist Bronislaw Malinoski—was founded in 1953.[69] The publication was aimed principally at missionaries and biblical translators who needed access to anthropological tools and a setting to share their ethnographic experiences.[70] The main promoters of this project would become some of the most prolific contributors to the journal: William Smalley; William Reyburn and his wife, Marie Fetzer Reyburn; Eugene Nida; James O. Buswell III; and Jacob Loewen.[71]

Clearly, Graber played a key role in how Mennonite missions would develop. His ideals combined the traditional model of mission in India with the conviction that indigenization was essential for the move toward the emergence of autonomous churches. His ideas were also linked to the anthropological shift in global missions and to a steadily growing awareness of the relevance of contextualizing the Christian message and understanding the local cultures for an authentic evangelical mission. These ideals compelled Graber to create a new paradigm of Mennonite mission, in which "the local" occupied a central place. However, Graber's pioneering impact did not end with the changes in India. As general secretary of the MBMC, he would remain in charge of implementing this new model to Mennonite Church missions in the rest of the world as well. Thus, once the new era of the Mennonite Church in India was established Graber shifted his attention to the other great center of Mennonite missions: Argentina.

A Yankee in the Pampas

Graber arrived in Argentina in January, 1952. His visit had been announced several months in advance with the aim of carefully planning both the itinerary of his visit and to ensure his participation in the annual meeting of the Mission Council. Documents suggest that the missionaries in Argentina were unaware of the reasons for Graber's trip, or the extent of the changes that had been implemented in India. They regarded the arrival of the general secretary as a matter of great importance, and

69. The magazine published six issues a year for nineteen consecutive years. In 1973, it merged with *Missiology*, the magazine of the American Association of Missiology. At that time, the magazine had more than 3,000 subscribers. — Darrell Whiteman, "Anthropology and Mission: The Incarnational Connection," *Missiology: An International Review* 31:4 (2003), 404.

70. William Smalley, *Readings in Missionary Anthropology* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Practical Anthropology, 1967); Whiteman, "Anthropology and Mission," 397-415.

71. We will return later to the role of the Reyburns in the context of the Mennonite mission of Nam Cum.

understood that the visit might be evaluative in nature.[72] But the missionaries never imagined that Graber's goal was to make the gospel "go native." "The Gospel here," Graber announced shortly after his arrival, "needs to be told in a new language and needs to find out how to express itself in terms of a culture that is not Anglo-Saxon or German."[73] From Graber's perspective, implementing these changes would allow the gospel to "strike deep root and grow in this new soil."[74]

Graber presented his program of "indigenization"[75] during the Mission Council held on February 29-March 1, 1952, in Monte Retiro, in the province of Córdoba.[76] During the five days of the assembly, Graber presented his plan for the church to be nationalized and organized at a congregational level. In minutes taken by Nelson Litwiller, a longtime missionary in Argentina, Graber "suggested" that the missionaries be replaced by local pastors or laymen, and that foreigners should take a role that was more fluid.[77] In addition, "it was explained'' that the administration of the mission should pass into Argentine hands, and that the financing that came from the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities should not be used to pay the wages of local workers.[78]

The minutes also highlighted "Graber's explanation" that the new tendency in missions was to organize small groups in a greater number of places, and that the purpose of these small groups should be to establish local churches as had been done in Japan, Belgium, Sicily, and London.[79] According to the minutes, Graber stated further that the main objective of

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72. Dan Miller, "Carta a Hermanos y Hermanas, 5 de Noviembre de 1951, America," Archivo de la Iglesia Anabautista Menonita de Buenos Aires, Floresta, Buenos Aires, Fichero 6, 1 Cajón Junta de Misiones, D-Mission Council, 1-Mis Coun act 1945, -54, Carta Miller *prepara visita de Graber 1951*.

73. J. D. Graber, "The Kingdom to the South. Part 1," *The Gospel Herald*, 45 (Jan. 22, 1952), 90.

74. Ibid.

75. In the case of Argentina, Graber worked carefully to translate the terminology of "indigenization" to "nationalization." Essentially, he understood that Mennonite converts of gringo and creole origin in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and other cities or towns could interpret that "indigenizing" the church would make it aboriginal rather than "local."— J. D. Graber "The Kingdom to the South. Part 1," *The Gospel Herald* 45 (Jan. 22, 1952), 90. In the note from *The Gospel Herald* where he comments on this (for a predominantly American Mennonite audience) he compares the impression that this would have on the non-Aboriginal Argentine converts as similar to what American Mennonites might have if they were told to "indigenize" the Mennonite Church in the United States. The comparison is very revealing of the Mennonite ideas about the character of their work in Argentina.

76. Nelson Litwiller, "Minutes of the Mission Council held in 'Monte Retiro;," Jan. 28 to Feb. 1, 1952, Archivo de la Iglesia Anabautista Menonita de Buenos Aires, Floresta, Buenos Aires, Fichero 6, 1 Cajón Junta de Misiones, D-Mission Council, I-Mis. Coun. Act, 1945-1954.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., 3.

79. Ibid.

MBMC was that the Argentine Church reach maturity and that foreign missionaries assume the role of "guest servants" for the locals. He also explained that while this transition process was being carried out, MBMC would be in charge of supervision and would collaborate with the financing until the work was completely nationalized.[80] [81]

Initially, the process of nationalizing the Mennonite work in Argentina did not include the missionary undertaking of Nam Cum in Chaco. On the contrary, a deliberate decision was made to continue with the policy that had transferred control of the Chaco mission to MBMC. Shank had requested this transfer at the Mission Council of 1947[82] and it was approved two years later.[83] This can be inferred by an analysis of an MBMC annual report from June 1950. There, reference was made to the organization of the Argentine mission in various zones (west, east, and center), while the Chaco appeared as a separate area. The distinction could also be seen in the breakdown of the budget, where the Nam Cum mission appeared separate from the rest of the Mennonite work in Argentina.[84]

The transfer of Nam Cum to the direct oversight of MBMC was due to a perception of the effort as "frontier work," being carried out among a population too "immature" for autonomy. Since the indigenous church was still in its infancy, it was believed necessary to continue to regard it as a missionary commitment—not as a "native" church. For the parent church in the United States—i.e., the Mennonite Church—to maintain control of this exotic frontier space also had a powerful symbolic weight in that it carried forward the expansion of Christianity into a region far from the urban centers of "civilization." This is why the administrative

80. Ibid., 4.

81. The implementation of this process of nationalization of the Mennonite Church in Argentina began with Graber's departure. Some missionaries resisted, strongly enough that informal meetings were held—with their corresponding minutes neatly filed—with the aim of discussing locally the changes promoted by MBMC. The tension and resistance delayed the process of nationalization and the founding of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Argentina (IEMA) until the end of the 1950s.—Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration, Global Mennonite History: Latin America* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2010), 26.

82. Nelson Litwiller, "Minutes of the Mission Council held in the Mennonite . . . Trenque Lauquen," FCO-Dec. 2-5, 1947.—Archivo de la Iglesia Anabautista Menonita de Buenos Aires, Floresta, Buenos Aires, Fichero 6, 1 Cajón Junta de Misiones, D-Mission Council, I-Mis Coun Act 1945-54, 5.

83. This was the start of the Chaco Mission Council, made up of the missionaries in Nam Cum. The council was administratively and financially dependent on MBMC. Missionaries working in other parts of the country were not to have any influence over the mission in the Chaco, which led to some discontent.—Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration*, 22.

84. Mennonite Board of Missions Charities (1950), 38-39, 15.

status of the Chaco mission was so relevant—for the missionaries, Nam Cum became the horizon of a Christian utopia.[85]

Graber was well aware of Nam Cum's status as "frontier work." His first official business upon arriving in the country was a visit to the indigenous mission and a meeting with the Chaco Mission Council. Mennonite perceptions of the Chaco at the time can be inferred from an article Graber published in *The Gospel Herald* regarding his visit.[86] There he described a series of difficulties (e.g., the environment, climate, insects, distance, etc.) that the missionaries in the Chaco had to endure in order to carry out their tasks. The Chaco, he stressed, was not a vacation site—living conditions were extremely difficult, which he signaled by referring to the "primitive" conditions in which the aborigines lived.[87] Despite these difficulties, Graber wrote, indigenous groups had responded spiritually to the Christian message. At the same time, however, he noted that one of the greatest hindrances to this process was the language barrier,[88] a concern of great importance. Even though Graber clearly understood that Nam Cum was to remain a missionary undertaking and not be nationalized like the rest of the work in Argentina, he also recognized the need to make certain modifications to their method of evangelism—one of which was the barrier regarding language.

As Graber noted in his article, because few aborigines spoke Spanish the missionaries had begun to question "whether more efforts should be made to reach the indigenous in their own language."[89] He also noted that the Toba did not have a single written word in their own language, nor did they have a developed grammar. Toward the end of the article, Graber wrote that the missionaries believe that the "heart of the Toba could be reached more effectively if [the missionaries] learned the language."[90] Graber agreed with them, arguing that "it is a universally known fact that the inner citadel of the soul cannot be reached through a second language. A man must speak to God in his own mother tongue or else his religious experience will remain shallow."[91]

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85. So much so that even after the dissolution of the mission of Nam Cum in 1954, an event which we will address later, the Mennonites who worked in the area would continue to be sent and financed exclusively by the United States.—Willis Horst, personal communication.

86. J. D. Graber, "The Kingdom to the South. Part 3," *The Gospel Herald* 45 (Feb. 5, 1952), 138.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., 138.

91. Ibid.

Graber would not be the only one to emphasize the relevance of language in the process of evangelization. Albert and Lois Buckwalter, a Mennonite couple who had been working in the Chaco, had been insisting on this point since their arrival in October of 1950.[92]

THE POWER OF THE WORD

From the beginning of his work at Nam Cum, Albert Buckwalter published numerous articles in *The Gospel Herald* that frequently referred to the difficulty the missionaries had in communicating with the aborigines and the importance of learning the native language. Buckwalter noted repeatedly that they had to use Spanish/Toba interpreters during their sermons, and that the missionaries had no way of knowing what the aborigines understood because they could not speak to each other directly. To reinforce his argument, Buckwalter quoted the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike, who argued that the mother tongue can always capture deeper meanings than an acquired language. In short, in order to achieve more efficient and permanent evangelization work it would be necessary to translate the Bible into Toba.[93]

Buckwalter's preoccupation with opening the "iron curtain of language"[94] was to become the key that would energize his interventions in the public arena of the Mennonite debate on missions. He even asked explicitly for prayer to find collaborators to produce biblical materials in the Toba language.[95]

Buckwalter's requests were well-received by MBMC.[96] According to Shenk, it was Graber himself who arranged to send a married couple, both linguists, to the Chaco to carry out a series of anthropological and linguistic studies with the goal of providing technical assistance to the Mennonite mission.[97] Graber's intervention was likely due to the fact that the pursuit of a better understanding of local cultures was part of the process of "indigenization." As already noted, Graber considered it

92. Albert Buckwalter was born on April 19, 1922, in Newton, Kansas. He studied at the Goshen Biblical Seminary, and graduated in 1949. While attending seminary, he married Lois Litwiller. The couple served in the Chaco for forty-three years, from 1950 until 1993. During this period, they directed the translation of the New Testament and parts of Old Testament into the Toba language, as well as the Pilagá and Mocoví languages.

93. Albert Buckwalter, "As You Might Have Been," *The Gospel Herald* 45 (Feb. 5, 1952), 137; Albert Buckwalter, "God Bless You, Brother," *The Gospel Herald* 47 (Sept. 14, 1954), 884.

94. Albert Buckwalter, "La' Yacaya ('Hello, Brother' in Toba)," *The Gospel Herald* 46 (April 28, 1953), 399.

95. Ibid.

96. Albert Buckwalter, "Let's Give Them Toba Bibles," *The Gospel Herald* 47 (Feb. 23, 1954), 182-184.

97. 2000.

crucial to determine the "packaging" with which the Christian message should be presented in each local area.

In light of these efforts, Nam Cum clearly did not escape the emphasis on indigenization, despite the fact that it remained outside the efforts to nationalize the administration of missions being implemented among the other Mennonite endeavors in Argentina. Indeed, the paradigm that emerged at Nam Cum was understood as a new model for the incarnation of the gospel in the local culture—this was why MBMC sent the anthropologists.

By April 1954, William and Marie Reyburn, the linguistic and anthropology experts Graber had contacted, arrived at Nam Cum.[98] They had been contacted by Eugene Nida, a highly respected American linguist, while they were conducting linguistic studies in Ecuador, with the goal of traveling to the Chaco to collaborate with the Mennonite mission.[99] According to William Reyburn, the first objective of his work at Nam Cum was to carry out an analysis of the Toba language.[100] This would allow him to develop pedagogical materials to help the missionaries learn to speak Toba and to create materials for the missionaries to read during the evangelical campaigns. It would also enable the missionaries to teach the aborigines themselves to read in their own language as well as in Spanish. In addition, Reyburn sought to determine "the major dialect areas of Toba, required as groundwork for Bible translation."[101] The second phase of the work was focused on providing anthropological tools to the missionaries along with methodological suggestions for making the mission more effective.

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98. William Reyburn was born in 1922 in Loveland, Colorado. According to his autobiography, from an early age he had an interest in languages and their metaphors and imagery. During various military tours as a member of the US Army, he began to teach himself several languages. Then, in the early 1950s, he studied linguistics and anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. While studying at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Oklahoma, he met anthropologist Marie Fetzer, whom he would later marry. The couple began to work in the American Bible Society, directed by Eugene Nida, providing linguistic and anthropological help around the world.—William Reyburn, *Marching Through Babel* (Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris Corporation, 2002). William Reyburn died in 2008 and Marie in 2009.

99. Eugene Nida (1914-2011) was an American linguist who developed the theory of dynamic and formal equivalence in the translation of the Bible. This theory emphasized the importance of seeking a balance between understanding the context of the original language and its correlation in the translated language, always taking into account the cultural parameters of the reader. In order to accomplish this difficult task, he proposed that translators work in the field with the collaboration of native speakers. Nida, as secretary of translations for the American Bible Society, promoted this new approach to the Holy Scriptures.—Reyburn, *Marching Through Babel*.

100. William Reyburn, "Some Problems in Providing Toba Bibles," *The Gospel Herald*, 47 (June 29, 1954), 614-615.

101. Ibid.

In the same article, Reyburn explained to readers that evangelical Christianity was broadly accepted by the Toba, noting that several churches with indigenous pastors were functioning without the help of the missionaries. According to Reyburn, this was due to the fact that the churches allowed the reinforcement of significant understandings of community in a context of cultural changes. He also commented that the Toba liked to gather and sing together, and that carrying the Bible as if it were a piece of clothing had become an essential practice. He emphasized that although the Bible was read and used during the preaching, the Toba did not understand it, since they did not speak Spanish.[102] For these reasons, Reyburn proposed that instead of bringing new souls to the church—since they were already there—missionaries should focus on helping believers understand the Christian faith, which they were sure to do in any case. In order to accomplish this, he strongly urged them to translate the Bible so that the Toba church could move from its infancy into something more mature and solid.[103]

In November 1954, Reyburn published his much-cited report, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco*, with these issues in mind. The conclusions set forth in this report were of great importance. First, the publication helped to initiate modern ethnolinguistic studies of Toba grammar and anthropological studies of religious change among the aborigines of the Chaco. Second, his suggestions about the future of the mission would change the direction of the mission.[104] Indeed, Reyburn seemed to suggest that the Mennonites should dissolve the Nam Cum mission. It is interesting to note that although Reyburn's position was unmistakably

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102. Ibid.

103. Translating the Bible so that it could be used for preaching in local languages has been common practice of European and North American Protestant denominations since the nineteenth century, when groups such as the American Bible Society or the British and Foreign Bible Society were founded. In Argentina, for example, the missionaries of the South American Missionary Society (SAMS) who worked in Tierra del Fuego compiled a Yamana dictionary. For the missions of the same denomination in the Chaco, the linguist Richard Hunt played a key role in the elaboration of the Wichí and Toba grammars in 1911. The Mennonite sources on the change in their work in the Chaco do not make any reference to this work, or the central place of professional linguists in pre-existing non-Mennonite missions. This leads us to ask questions about the intention of these texts: who were the recipients, and where were they circulated? This is something to explore in future works.

104. It is interesting to note that Reyburn highlighted the fundamental role played by the Argentine Mennonite John Litwiller in the development of his thought. According to Reyburn, it was Litwiller's questions during his stay in Argentina that allowed Reyburn to reflect on his own theological prejudices. We believe that this is relevant because it underscores that Reyburn's influence in the Chaco was not a one-way street, as it was for Litwiller—who would later be the first director of the Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (ISEDET). Reyburn helped him to see the scope of a process of deep local incarnation of the Gospel message.—Reyburn, *Marching Through Babel*, 98; John Sinclair, *La vida y ministerio de Juan T. N. Litwiller: The Life and Ministry of John T. N. Litwiller* (Madison, Wis.: M. A. Litwiller, 1994), 74-76.

clear, he did not explicitly name this conclusion in this report. He did, however, make it clear to the Mennonites how the report should be interpreted: "I believe that my position was made explicit over the course of months in the many discussions held in Nam Cum. It is in the light of that position that I trust those to whom the report is addressed will interpret it."[105]

Also in the report, Reyburn asked why the Toba received Pentecostalism with open arms while rejecting outreaches by other religious groups, from Jesuits to Mennonites. He responded by arguing that Pentecostalism had emerged during a crisis situation and that it gave "life itself a new meaning."[106] Furthermore, he said that "Pentecostalism answered questions that the Tobas had to put to themselves, questions that would be largely meaningless to the missionaries."[107] The anthropologist emphasized that Mennonites had certain tacit assumptions of a "Christian cultural heritage" that did not allow them to consider the social or cultural implications of conversion for "non-Christian" societies.[108]

Toward the end of the report, Reyburn urged Mennonites to "accept Toba Christianity and to work with them as brethren in the church."[109] In addition, he suggested cooperating with indigenous churches in the training of leaders, providing Christian education in the churches, translating the Bible, and encouraging the search for "responsible Christianity."[110] It is crucial to note that prior to the publication of Reyburn's report, there are no references to a concern or perception of Nam Cum as a missionary failure. To the contrary, Mennonite missionaries in Argentina perceived it as a relatively successful mission, albeit one that required more attention to local understanding and the native language. That is why Buckwalter publicly raised the need to incorporate new methodological tools to allow for an even more effective embodiment of the Christian message. In this sense, the objective of Reyburn's work was initially understood in those same terms.

However, by March 1955—that is to say, in a relatively short time after their arrival in the Chaco—the Mennonite mission at Nam Cum, based on the traditional model, was dissolved. In the aftermath, Mennonites began

105. William Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco. An Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954), 43.

106. Ibid., 46.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., 55.

109. Ibid., 46.

110. Ibid., 77.

to focus primarily on the translation of the Bible and on literacy campaigns among the Toba.

The enthusiasm for the new goal of Bible translation was clearly expressed in the first article Buckwalter published in *The Gospel Herald* following the dissolution of Nam Cum. In it, Buckwalter celebrated the baptism of several Toba individuals from League 15 and League 17 and pointed out that this is "the direct corollary of the recent organization of the Toba church."[111] He also emphasized that this is "the indirect result of something we too did. As a result of Reyburn's anthropological study of our missions, we decided to have faith in God, get out of the Toba Christian's way, and allow the Holy Spirit to direct our work."[112] Referring only indirectly to the dissolution of the mission, Buckwalter emphasized the primacy of the Holy Spirit, with his own subordinate role "to teach them the Word."[113]

Similarly, John Litwiller noted in an article on the beginnings of evangelical Christianity among the indigenous that it was the Pentecostals who began to preach among the Toba and that although "preaching the Word was effective," they "were not prepared nor had the intentions of strengthening the work begun."[114] When the Mennonites established the mission, he continued, there was already a truly indigenous church (according to Graber's definition), though its members were illiterate and did not have a Bible in their own language. According to Litwiller, this missing element led the Mennonites to rethink their program and the objective of the mission. For Litwiller, the resolution of this dilemma was "difficult to overcome," since the missionaries did not have key linguistic and anthropological tools and lacked financial resources. The arrival of the Reyburns had established a new course for the mission.[115] He emphasized that the creation of a Toba alphabet and grammar was to be the new responsibility of the Mennonites since "God has called this mission to a unique place of leadership in terms of strengthening the young Toba church by making the Word available to them and making its message clear."[116]

Una Cressman, also a Mennonite missionary in the Chaco, referred in another article to a new literacy program being introduced among

111. Albert Buckwalter, "New Christians in the Chaco," *The Gospel Herald* 48 (March 8, 1955), 231.

112. Ibid. Buckwalter continued, "From personal experience I can testify to the fact that a North American does more harm than good in trying to run the Toba church."

113. Ibid.

114. John Litwiller, "Our New Responsibility: The Toba Church," *The Gospel Herald* 48 (March 1, 1955), 206-207.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

indigenous groups in the region as a result of Reyburn's work. There, Cressman commented on the important progress being made and the number of Toba people who were participating in the workshops.[117]

It was not until April 1956 that Cressman explicitly mentioned the change of direction in the task of evangelization of the Toba. In that article, Cressman noted that "many changes have taken place in the administration and in the directorship," implying that the leadership of the Toba churches had become exclusively native.[118] Cressman also pointed out that the new structure began in 1955. The results were extremely positive, since both the number of believers and the number of baptisms increased considerably. Despite these achievements, however, Cressman further noted that there were weaknesses associated with the lack of leadership training and highlighted the need for Toba leaders to be able to read, understand, and teach. This missing piece, according to Cressman, was the spiritual food that the Toba churches and their members needed if they were to grow and become stronger. For this, Cressman believed that some external help was still necessary.[119]

The articles published in *The Gospel Herald* following Reyburn's report and the subsequent dissolution of the mission make it clear that, on the one hand, the focus of the missionaries had begun to shift toward Bible translation. On the other hand, even though the articles mentioned various successes following this change of direction in the Chaco, there was no explicit public mention of the dissolution of the mission, likely because missionaries continued to regard the change with ambivalence. The strength of this ambivalence was such that even in 1967, more than a decade after the events, Buckwalter himself said that he still was not certain that he could be overly "pleased" with the Toba expressions of Christianity.[120] Buckwalter's uncertainty about the new paradigm was also noted in a 2010 interview with Willis Horst, a Mennonite who served for many years as a missionary in the Chaco. "In the 1970s," Horst recalled, Buckwalter still felt "opposition to the project and it gave him doubts—they feared that when they gave up autonomy, they would lose control." According to Horst, Buckwalter used to say: "the Holy Spirit took away the church." Horst mentioned that several workers even left because they did not agree with the decision.

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117. Una Cressman, "Strengthening the Toba Church," *The Gospel Herald* 49 (April 3, 1956), 327.

118. Ibid., 327.

119. Ibid.

120. William Smalley, *Readings in Missionary Anthropology* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Practical Anthropology, 1967), 295.

Yet despite the contradictory and ambivalent feelings that the Mennonites had about the dissolution of Nam Cum, the gospel movement among the indigenous continued.[121] The missionaries sought to contribute not only with the translation of Scripture, but also with an effort to help the movement achieve some kind of unity. To this end, on September 29, 1958, a first meeting, strongly promoted by the Mennonites, was held in League 17 to discuss a new form of organization for the Toba churches.[122] During this meeting, a provisional commission was elected, consisting of Aurelio Lopez, Antonio Leiva, Eugenio Martin, José Duran, Julio Duran, and Julio Escalante. A second convention, held on November 30, 1958, resolved to call the new organization the Iglesia Evangélica Unida (United Evangelical Church).[123]

The Mennonites would collaborate with the Iglesia Evangélica Unida to obtain legal recognition from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship.[124] In their new role, that of "fraternal workers,"[125] the Mennonites were able to provide useful legal assistance. Their efforts bore fruit on February 6, 1959, when the Iglesia Evangélica Unida was registered for the first time in the official list of religious groups.[126]

"As it was in the beginning. . ."

According to the philosopher and historian of religion Mircea Eliade, a myth "tells a sacred story; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabulous time of the 'beginnings.'"[127] A myth is a story that tells how something began to be for the first time. In the course of writing this article, Eliade's words became a mantra: "myth is always the story of a creation." The more I repeated the phrase, the more it took root in my thoughts until I finally understood—in writing about the dissolution of

121. "Gospel" is a polysemous native category that refers to all the evangelical denominations that Guaycurú aborigines contracted. It refers to indigenous churches such as the United Evangelical Church or other non-indigenous churches such as the Foursquare Church. The term indicates the ontological condition of the believer (Wright 2008).

122. Alberto Buckwalter and Lois Buckwalter, "La Iglesia Evangélica Unida. Las primeras reuniones y convenciones, los primeros documentos, los primeros dirigentes 1955-1982.—Archivos menonitas Floresta, Caja gde obre frater contempo, sobre comienzos mision menonita IEU, breve reseña, 4.

123. Ibid., 5.

124. The National Law N Decree 21.745/ 78 established the "obligatory nature of inscription in the National Registry of Religious Organizations for non-Catholic religious confessions as a prior condition for public activity in the territory of the Argentine nation."

125. Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Paul Frank, *Misión sin Conquista. Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2009).

126. Buckwalter and Buckwalter, *La Iglesia Evangélica Unida,* 6.

127. Mircea Eliade, *Mito y Realidad* (Madrid: Editorial Labor S.A., 1991), 7.

Nam Cum, I was writing about an origin myth. But the origin myth of what? As an anthropologist dedicated to the study of the Christian experience among indigenous groups in the Chaco, my first answer to that question is that it was the founding myth of a new and important stage of Mennonite missions in Argentina. And given the relevance of this mission for religious life in the Chaco as a whole, it was even possible to think of it as the origin of a new stage of the gospel movement among the indigenous people of that region.

However, reflecting on the trajectories of the anthropological study of religion in the Chaco, I realized something more was also at work here—I was looking at the founding myth of studies on religious change in the Chaco region. It is a known fact that from the beginning of anthropological research in the Chaco, scholars working in this region—as well as in other places internationally—collaborated closely with missionaries, often relying on their networks of connections.[128] For example, an important part of Robert Lehmann-Nitsche's work on the Chaco aborigines relied on assistance provided by the Anglican mission of the South American Missionary Society (SAMS) that operated out of the La Esperanza sugar mill, owned by the Leach brothers.[129] Since laborers from different ethnic groups—such as Chorotes, Chiriguanos, Matacos, Mocoví, and Toba—gathered there to work, Lehmann-Nitsche took advantage not only of the logistical setting provided by the missionaries, but also the network of contacts that they had developed in the aboriginal communities as well as their authority over the converts.

Though the relationship between missionaries and anthropologists who worked in the Chaco did not begin with him, it was a fact that the work of the anthropologist Samuel Lafone Quevedo was also facilitated by his personal relationship with the Leaches through that family's connection to Lehmann-Nitsche.[130] Something similar happened in the case of the anthropologist Enrique Palavecino, who lived in the home of the Norwegian Pentecostal missionary Berger Johnsen in Embarcación

128. Alejandra Siffredi and Ana Maria Spadafora, "De misioneros y etnógrafos: equivocos, supersticiones y dilemas frente a la diferencia cultural," *Revista de Ciencias Humanas,*16:24 (1988), 9-27; Smalley, *Readings in Missionary Anthropology*; Marcus Tomalin, "'No connection or cooperation'? Missionaries and anthropologists on the Pacific Northwest Coast," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 15:4 (2009), 833-852; Sjaak van der Geest, "Anthropologists and Missionaries: Brothers Under the Skin," *Man* 25:4 (1990), 588-601; Whiteman, "Anthropology and Mission."

129. Mariana Espinosa, "Indígenas y misioneros: Génesis y representaciones de una misión evangélica en el ingenio La Esperanza," *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões*, 22:8 (2015), 125-143; César Ceriani Cernadas, "Campanas del evangelio. La dinámica religiosa indígena en los ingenios azucareros del Noroeste Argentino," in *Capitalismo en las selvas: Enclaves industriales en el Chaco y Amazonía indígenas (1850-1950),* ed. L. Córdoba, F. Bossert and N. Richard (San Pedro de Atacama: Ediciones del Desierto, 2015), 45-64.

130. Lena Dávila, personal communication.

while doing his studies among the aborigines of the Gran Chaco in the 1930s.[131] In the case of the Mennonites, the progressive anthropological turn of their global missions since the 1950s made the relevance of the connection between anthropologists and missionaries even greater.

This shift in mission strategy was important because of the role Mennonites played within the aboriginal evangelical field and in the foundation of the United Evangelical Church; but it was even more significant in the emergence of anthropological studies of the Chaco region. Thus, this change in missionary paradigm was not only crucial to socio-religious dynamics among the indigenous peoples of the Chaco, but would also become a central part of the academic dynamics of anthropological studies of these people.

If we consider that the dissolution of the traditional Mennonite mission in Nam Cum had an impact beyond the mission itself, it is vital to reread those narratives of anthropological discourse that addressed this event. Reviewing this *sermo mythicus*—the language of the mythical age—will allow us to trace its genealogy and reflect on its foundational character.

Reyburn's report[132]—halfway between a confessional text and an academic study—became one of the starting points of this origin myth. His work opened the door to thinking of "Toba Christianity" not simply as a process of acculturation, but as a cultural creation. The studies by William and Marie Reyburn were taken up by Elmer Miller, a Mennonite missionary whose progressive interest in anthropology led him to a personal transformation. Miller went from being a missionary with anthropological interests to becoming an ex-missionary anthropologist with a harsh critique of mission work.[133] In one of his most important books, Miller[134] mentioned Reyburn[135] in reference to the links between the Toba leader Pedro Martinez and the Pentecostal Church of God. According to Miller, after Martinez's death in the mid-1950s, several Toba leaders were "disappointed" by the lack of "assistance" from the mother church. As a result, local congregations began to join other churches and denominations, or to operate independently.[136] For this reason, wrote Miller, "in an effort to minimize this kind of competition, and to

131. Ceriani Cernadas, "Campanas del evangelio," 52; Shank, "Supplement to My Chaco Diary," 2.

132. Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco.*

133. Elmer Miller, *Nurturing Doubt: From Mennonite Missionary to Anthropologist in the Argentine Chaco* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

134. Elmer Miller, *Los tobas argentinos. Armonía y disonancia en una sociedad* (México City Siglo. XXX Editores, 1979).

135. William Reyburn, *The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco. An Interpretive Report* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1954), 48.

136. Ibid., 140.

strengthen Toba leadership and autonomy,"[137] Mennonite missionaries decided to eliminate inter-denominational ties and instead collaborate in the founding of the United Evangelical Church.

Miller's version of the story regarding the Mennonite gesture of "sacrifice" that led to the dissolution of Nam Cum is especially noteworthy when compared to what we read in other sources. Those sources—including documents already discussed in this article—cite various incidents as the reason for closing the mission. Furthermore, if we look at the references Reyburn made in his report, we find that Reyburn does not note Pedro Martinez as having a central role.[138] Reyburn's perspective was reinforced by articles published on the "Pentecostal outbreak" in the Annual Report of the MBMC, which referred to the "infiltration of a fanatical Pentecostalism brought by propagandist Tobas" with "extravagant" ideas about manifestations of the Holy Spirit.[139] Nevertheless, Reyburn's report characterized the episode with the Pentecostals as properly managed and overcome. In no instance did it suggest that the episode was a mortal wound for the Mennonite mission in the Chaco.

Miller's perspective on the "failure" of the traditional Mennonite mission strongly influenced the growing anthropological studies of religion in the Chaco. The early work of Pablo Wright, who was a student of Miller at Temple University, attempted to synthesize these questions. Thus, for example, Wright challenged the idea of a "failure," by referring to Reyburn's report as a tool to "channel the work" of the missionaries.[140] In addition, he pointed out that this "failure" made it possible for "the Mennonite church to avoid clashing with the areas of interest of other missionary congregations in the region."[141] As we can see, once again the idea of the Mennonite "sacrifice" appears linked to the growth of Pentecostalism. Wright even reinforced this theory by noting that it was the Mennonites themselves who urged the aborigines to form the United Evangelical Church and thus to overcome the pressure of the Pentecostal churches that sought to impose an institutionalized model.[142]

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137. Ibid.

138. Ibid., 48.

139. *MBMC Annual Report 1950*, 145-146.

140. Pablo Wright. "Tradición y aculturación en una organización socio-religiosa Toba contemporánea," *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 95 (1988), 4.

141. Ibid., 6.

142. Pablo Wright, "Iglesia Evangélica Unida: nacimiento y principales fundamentos teológicos". Segundo informe de beca de iniciaciones Cientificas y Tecnicas (CONICET), 1982; Pablo Wright, "Tradición y aculturación en una organización socio-religiosa Toba contempáranea," *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 95 (1988), 71-87; Pablo Wright, "Toba Pentecostalism Revisited," *Social Compass*, 39:3 (1992), 355-375.

The research of Silvia Citro and César Ceriani Cernadas advanced Wright's contributions. Both scholars, following Wright, addressed the story of the dissolution of Nam Cum by focusing on similar keys points: the relevance of Pentecostalism; the conflicts among aboriginal leaders; and the change of strategy of the Mennonite mission as a way of responding to these struggles and to the failure of their own work.[143] Although their analysis included the "important changes in mission policy and methodology" experienced by MBMC,[144] the reasons for the dissolution of Nam Cum will be circumscribed by an interpretation of Reyburn's report that framed events in the Chaco without taking into account the broader context of the anthropological turn of Christian missions—and Mennonites missions in particular—around the world. It would seem that after Reyburn's report, the Mennonites surrendered to the resistance of the "Toba spirit" and decided to "abandon the traditional type mission and to accompany the Toba in their own elaboration of Christianity."[145] However, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, Reyburn's intervention and conclusions were highly relevant to broader dynamics of the missionary field.

For these reasons, the various interpretations of the dissolution of Nam Cum constitute a foundational "myth," both for the evangelical mission field in the Chaco and for the anthropological studies of religion in the region. This specific case provides a concrete example of the complex relationships between academia and mission work, and the way in which they have influenced each other. Anthropological studies had a strong impact on the objectives and methods of the missionaries; and mission projects, in turn, were crucial to the emerging anthropological understandings of religious change in the Chaco. In addition, this case invites reflection on the importance of reviewing sources that allow us to access the enormous complexity of situations like this, helping us to understand the multiple dimensions in a process that was more uncertain and polyvalent than it initially appears.

FINAL WORDS

The dissolution of the Nam Cum Mennonite Mission in the Chaco province has been cited by anthropological studies on religious change as

143. César Ceriani Cernadas, *Nuestros hermano Lamanitas. Indios y fronteras en la imaginación mormona* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008); César Ceriani Cernadas and Silvia Citro, "El movimiento del *evangelio* entre los tobas del Chaco argentino. Una revisión histórica y etnográfica," in *De indio a hermano. Pentecostalismo indígena en América Latina*, ed. B. Guerrero Jiménez (Iquique: Ediciones El Jote Errante, 2005), 111-170; Silvia Citro, *Cuerpos significantes. Travesías de una etnografía dialéctica* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2009).

144. Ceriani Cernadas and Citro, "El movimiento del *evangelio*," 130.

145. Ibid., 131.

a fundamental milestone in shaping contemporary dynamics in the region. This literature considered the episode in a highly local context. Our goal has been to reintegrate the event within the global context of a paradigm shift of Mennonite missions worldwide. This perspective allowed us to more adequately assess the events that took place in the Chaco with regard to their larger significance. To accomplish this goal, we set out, in the first place, to describe Mennonite missions worldwide from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, with particular attention to early initiatives in India and Argentina. The driving force for both of these mission efforts was the moral redemption of the populations they went to convert. By establishing a set of disciplinary practices, hygienic guidelines, and ways of integrating locals into the labor market, the missionaries sought to "civilize" the new converts.

With the beginning of the worldwide decolonization process, Mennonite missions began a process of radical transformation. In that context, the role of J. D. Graber began to take on a central relevance. His experiences as a missionary in India helped to change the church's ideas of mission, joined with a process of empowering local workers and the growing awareness of the relevance of contextualization and understanding of local cultures for the development of a true evangelical mission. These observations, and the church's subsequent actions, were enhanced by the growing relevance that anthropology began to have in the world mission field. On the basis of these influences, Graber designed a new mission program—framed around the concept of "indigenization"—with the objective of implementing it in different missionary fields in his role as secretary general of the MBMC.

This new paradigm of mission began to be implemented in Argentina after Graber's visit in 1952. From that moment, Mennonite initiatives in the country began a process of nationalization. Although the mission of Nam Cum followed a different path from the rest of the Mennonite efforts in Argentina due to its nature as "frontier work," its dissolution in 1954 must also be framed in the context of a global reform in the paradigm of Mennonite missions, in which the anthropological turn was central. In a similar way, Reyburn's report must be included as an essential piece of this new global panorama, and not as the simple result of an isolated encounter within the Mennonite mission in the Chaco.

The incorporation of diverse sources and documents in our research has allowed us to sketch a much more complex picture. In contrast to what other anthropologists have argued, on the basis of this work we have demonstrated that the Reyburns' intervention process was not motivated by denominational conflicts or an alleged general sense of the mission's failure in the face of growing Pentecostalism among indigenous in the Chaco. On the contrary, their arrival in Nam Cum reflected the

anthropological turn that the Mennonite mission had already begun to undergo and the growing interest on the part of the Mennonites to acquire the tools they needed to achieve a true incarnation of evangelical Christianity within Toba culture. From the Mennonite perspective, the incorporation of this discipline allowed them to advance their understanding of the Toba language and subsequently to translate the Bible.

The conclusions in Reyburn's report focused on the importance of accepting Toba Christianity and working together as brothers and sisters. For this, Reyburn suggested that the missionaries accompany the development of the indigenous churches and dedicate themselves to the training of leaders and the translation of the Bible. This last point was central for the Mennonites, since their focus on language became their primary work instead of merely serving as a tool to enhance the mission effort. In this sense, concerns around language and literacy were the central axis which led to the dissolution of Nam Cum.

Although this issue has not traditionally been addressed in the standard accounts, the abrupt dissolution of Nam Cum was accompanied by great ambivalence and contradictory attitudes. As we have seen, some Mennonite missionaries abandoned their work in the Chaco out of a disagreement with this reformulation of missions as Christian utopias. Others continued to maintain serious doubts and mixed feelings about what this change meant for their original ideas about a Mennonite mission on the Chaco frontier, even while recognizing the advantages of this new approach.

Throughout this work we have not only addressed the discussions around the changes in the Mennonite mission paradigm worldwide, the dissolution of Nam Cum, and how it was perceived by the broader Mennonite church. We have also explored a point that we believe to be extremely relevant: the fact that this episode had serious repercussions for the development of anthropological research in the Chaco region. We have noted the deep relationships between anthropologists and missionaries that existed from the beginning of the anthropological study in the area. In the case of anthropology in the Chaco, we have highlighted the intense logistical, personal, and often ideological links between anthropologists and missionaries, especially Protestants, in the region. We have shown how the dissolution of Nam Cum had a profound impact on studies of the processes of religious change among aboriginal groups in the Chaco.

Not only did anthropology influence the paradigm shift of the missionaries, but the missionaries and the dissolution of Nam Cum helped alter the fundamental character of anthropological work in Chaco, deeply

influencing the formation of those whose work would later become standard references in the development of this field of study. Since then, the dissolution of Nam Cum has become a true myth of origin for missionaries, aboriginal believers, and anthropologists.

RESEARCH GRANTS

The Mennonite Historical Society announces an "Open Research Grant" of $2,000 to promote research and publication in Anabaptist-Mennonite studies. To apply, send the following materials by March 1, 2021, to Leonard Gross, Secretary, Mennonite Historical Society, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526: a two- or three-page summary of the project stating its significance to the field of Anabaptist-Mennonite history, a budget of anticipated expenses, a vitae, and one letter of recommendation. All applicants must be members of the Mennonite Historical Society. Recipients of the award will be announced at the May meeting of the MHS. Board of Directors. Disbursements will be made by June 1. The Prize Selection Committee may choose not to award the grant if none of the applications is deemed acceptable. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* has the "right of first refusal" for scholarly articles that result from research funded by the grant.

The Schafer-Friesen Research Fellowship is awarded annually by the Mennonite Historical Library (MHL) at Goshen College to support scholarship in Reformation and Anabaptist History. First priority for the award is to individuals doing advanced research using the resources of the Mennonite Historical Library. The award will support travel costs to the Mennonite Historical Library, and up to three weeks of room and board. The Fellowship may also be used, secondarily, to support publications on Reformation and Anabaptist topics. To apply, please send a letter of interest, along with a one-page research plan and budget, by March 1, 2021, to John D. Roth at johndr@goshen.edu.