

Review of Mission without Conquest

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Vulnerable Intercultural Mission

This volume edited by Willis Horst and Frank and Ute Paul contains contributions from various key contributors to Mennonite mission amongst the Indians of the Argentinean Chaco. Much of the contents have already been available in Spanish and German. This book makes it available in English. Mennonite mission in the Argentine Chaco has become renowned for a switch in policy they made in the 1950s turning them from conquering to accompaniment.

Horst gives us a theoretical foundation for much that comes later. Drawing on 39 years of experience and extensive reading, he works through foundational principles for encouraging the growth of an autochthonous church. He describes Christ as "the completion and perfection of traditional spirituality" (p136).

It is rare for me to find an account that speaks directly to my own practical experience on reaching indigenous African churches. The Paul's long chapter however is exactly that. Frank uses fascinating snippets from his diary to illustrate the actuality of a missionary life that reaches and engages at grassroots level. The church has become the only refuge in which the Toba Oom can nowadays feel at home, he tells us. Mennonite missionaries refuse to make decisions on behalf of national Christians. Learning the indigenous language is necessary and proves fruitful. Use of the same should be encouraged and is being encouraged in local schools. Mission should not be in any way conquest. It should be encouraging people who are already setting their own course, Paul tells us.

Buckwalter takes us back to the beginnings. Mennonite missionaries to the Chaco initially considered that learning local languages would be a waste of time given the priority of Westernising Indian people as quickly and effectively as possible. Realising that indigenous people will respond to God in their own way brought a sea-change to this approach. The Gospel had to find a place in lives pre-occupied with engaging with ancestors. The Toba Qom people's response to the Gospel included much emotion and lively dancing; these were responses that they initially concealed fearing missionary rejection. The same people had acquired an urge to get outside funds – if missionaries complain that people are always begging from them, they should be blamed for their pre-occupation with offering goods and resources to them.

Kingsley is one of the other authors to contribute to this volume. He gives an intriguing response to the question of whether Mennonite missionary policy is 'succeeding'

This book offers a real-life case study into 'Mission without Conquest' as engaged for decades by Mennonite missionaries in the Argentinian Chaco. Its earthy flavour describes what happened in practice. Missionaries responses have been taken well beyond the 'it's a good idea let's try it out' stage, into decades of implementation. Pictures illustrate who the fraternal workers are (people like you and me) what they did, and some of the outcomes of the same.