

# Mennonite Mission Theorists and Practitioners in Southeastern Nigeria: Changing Contexts and Strategy at the Dawn of the Postcolonial Era

R. Bruce Yoder

During the twentieth century, Western understanding of both Christianity and Christian mission underwent significant change. Participants in the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh shared the assumption that Christianity was something that Western missionaries introduced and cultivated in lands where it was not yet present. The conference sought to enhance missionary collaboration for the completion of that task and encouraged them in use of “rigorous methods of modern social science.”<sup>1</sup> By the time of that conference’s centennial celebration in 2010, mission and the context in which it is practiced had changed dramatically. Mission no longer happens in the context of colonialism, but of globalization.<sup>2</sup> Religiously, Christianity has ceased to be a Western religion. African, Asian, and Latin American theologians have long proposed theologies that they consider to be more appropriate for their contexts than those offered by Western missionaries. Demographically, Southern Christians had, by the early 1980s, surpassed their Northern counterparts and are predicted by the year 2100 to do so by a ratio of more than three to one.<sup>3</sup> Post-World War II migrations have brought an influx of Southern Christians, who have introduced North Atlantic populations to an increasing diversity of the faith.<sup>4</sup>

By 2010 new centers for the study of world, or global, Christianity had been established, but decades earlier Western missionaries working in the Global South were among the first to call attention to these religious shifts. This article analyzes the conversation between Mennonite missionaries, mission administrators, and members of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in southeastern Nigeria from 1958 to 1967, highlighting the shifting conceptions of Christianity and of mission evident there. Use of a comparative approach demonstrates the importance local political and religious contexts have for illuminating such shifts, as well as showing the contribution missionaries made to the process. As they encountered new expressions of the faith, the missionaries sought to forge appropriate mission strategies, grappling with theories about mass movements to Christ, the indigenous nature of the church, and ecumenism.

## Sylvan Jay (S.J.) and Ida Hostetler

During the 1940s and 1950s North American Mennonites received numerous requests from Christians in southeastern Nigeria for missionaries and assistance. The first Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) missionaries to visit the area were Sylvan Jay (S.J.) and Ida Hostetler, who had served with MBMC in India before moving to Ghana in 1957. In November 1958 they



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traveled to southeastern Nigeria to investigate congregations that, although they were AICs operating outside the control of Western missions, had declared themselves to be Mennonite.<sup>5</sup> As a couple, the Hostetlers were often pioneers, being the first MBMC missionaries assigned to a new field in Bihar State, India, the first (along with two others) to serve in Ghana, and the first on the scene in Nigeria. In India their labor to plant the first congregations had been slow and arduous. Success came a few converts at a time, not by large groups, as had been the experience of some other missionaries there.<sup>6</sup> In Nigeria the group S. J. Hostetler visited provided a list of sixty congregations. He found the prospect of immediately taking in nearly 3,000 members—and the schools and medical work he envisioned as associated with this “bigger church than any we have on any mission field”—to be “thrilling.”<sup>7</sup>

## Mass Movements

In India the slow process of conversions and church growth had been frustrating for the Hostetlers and their fellow missionaries. There, early twentieth-century group conversion of castes or villages had become a significant part of missionary expectation and strategy.<sup>8</sup> The Mennonite missionaries working during the century’s second quarter were severely disappointed not to experience similar mass movements toward Christianity in their districts.<sup>9</sup> A 1938 survey, called by John Lapp “one of the most sober, penetrating critiques of the American Mennonite Mission ever produced,” outlined the meager results of their efforts.<sup>10</sup> One response to the missionaries’ sense of failure was to open a new field in Bihar with the hope of doing better there, and the Hostetlers were assigned as the new field’s first missionaries. Alas, the rate of conversions and the establishment of new congregations in Bihar were not remarkably better.<sup>11</sup> But in Nigeria, the large influx of new Mennonites that had eluded the missionaries in India would, it seemed, finally occur. An exciting prospect indeed!

## The Indigenous Nature of the Church

When the Hostetlers arrived in Ghana, they planned to collaborate with Ghanaian George Thomson, who had learned of the Mennonite Church while traveling in Europe. Upon returning to his homeland, he had organized a Ghanaian Mennonite Church. In order to encourage indigenous agency, Hostetler and his colleagues intended to enter an unoccupied field in the north of Ghana, leaving the southern work in Thomson’s hands. Finding, however, no unoccupied fields in the north, they settled in the south and attached themselves to a number of Thomson’s projects: a girls’ hostel, a school, and a program of Bible study by correspondence.<sup>12</sup> But they still desired to minimize missionary control and foreign subsidy in order to ensure indigeneity.<sup>13</sup>

Close proximity brought disagreements. Thomson’s hostel and school, envisioned by him as self-sustaining, were not, and conflicts with coworkers and creditors ensued. When a creditor

sued for nonpayment, the Ghana Mennonite Church was named as codefendant. Hostetler eventually took control of the church in order to protect its good name, and Thomson soon left.<sup>14</sup> Rather than collaborating with the church, the missionaries were now in charge.

In Nigeria similar concerns about maintaining the indigenous nature of the church were foremost in Hostetler's mind. His plan was to encourage local leadership and to assist with schools, medical facilities, workers, and other needs that might arise. How to do so was not immediately clear; it was a matter, he wrote, "to be found by counsel and trial and error." He nevertheless recommended formalization of an agreement between

been formally received into MCN and that many more were waiting to join.<sup>18</sup>

## Ecumenism

Although Hostetler strove to maintain good relations with other denominations, he recognized that by 1958, churches in southeastern Nigeria no longer followed the strict comity agreements of earlier days. The major Protestant mission churches in the region had a legacy of comity agreements, but new churches and missions, both foreign and local, were active. Competition was rife; Hostetler saw things as "quite evidently a free-for-all."<sup>19</sup> For him that meant that MBMC should feel free to establish a Mennonite Church alongside the others already present.

The main strands of Hostetler's approach to mission are clear. His experience in India and his awareness of mass movements to Christianity there had primed him for the possibility that Nigerians might enter the Mennonite Church en masse. His concern for the indigenous nature of the church is evident. He sought to keep subsidies at a minimum and preferred to allow indigenous leaders to control the church. He was ready, however, to intervene when it seemed that the integrity of the church was at stake. Finally, he seems to have been largely unconcerned about mission comity agreements and the ecumenical impulses upon which they rested.

## Edwin and Irene Weaver

Hostetler's work forms a backdrop for appreciating the sharp changes in outlook and direction taken by Edwin and Irene Weaver. Like the Hostetlers, they had previously served as MBMC missionaries in India, arriving in Nigeria in November 1959. Over the course of that year Hostetler had been forming some of the AIC congregations that had invited MBMC to Nigeria into the new Mennonite Church Nigeria by accepting them one by one into the church. The Weavers were expected to continue that process and to facilitate the establishment of needed educational and health-care institutions for the church. Instead, they stopped the process of accepting new congregations into MCN, assisted with the development of a Presbyterian affiliated hospital, worked with and studied the multitude of AICs in the area, and placed North American Mennonite personnel in Presbyterian and government schools, hospitals, and agricultural projects. While their relationship with MCN was at first ambiguous, a constructive rapport evolved over time as they balanced attention to AICs with MCN's desire to appropriate a Mennonite identity.<sup>20</sup>

## Mass Movements

Although expectation of mass movements to Christianity had been significant for MBMC missionaries in India, the Weavers, who served three terms there, seem to have been largely unaffected by those concerns. Hostetler expressed exasperation about their lack of concern for the growth of MCN, writing to MBMC administrator John Howard Yoder that the Weavers were ambivalent about the existence of MCN and that they had expressed the view that if MBMC "'must have a church,' then let it be 'a small one!'"<sup>21</sup>

J. D. Graber, who as executive secretary of MBMC supervised both the Weavers and Hostetler, followed the work of Donald McGavran closely and consulted with him about strategy for MBMC's work in Ghana. Graber sought to base the mission's approach there on what he described as McGavran's opinion that "in Africa we should be able to Christianize whole tribes of



**Apostle Kalesanwu (seated at right) welcoming Edwin and Irene Weaver to the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Monrovia, Liberia**

MBMC and the Nigerian group that would incorporate "policies of indigenous church building."<sup>15</sup> When Hostetler received permission from MBMC in December 1958 to start accepting the Nigerian AIC congregations into a new Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN), the Nigerians had already preempted him, having a month earlier identified themselves as such without waiting for MBMC's approval.

The new year of 1959 brought cause for caution. Wendell Broom, a Church of Christ missionary serving in Nigeria, wrote to Hostetler questioning the character of A. A. Dick, the Nigerian leader of MCN. Broom claimed that Dick was already affiliated with another denomination and that he often made promises of material assistance to congregations so that they would join his group. This information caused Hostetler to raise the possibility of, as in Ghana seven months earlier, taking "the church much more in our own control than we had expected."<sup>16</sup> While he mulled over the question of whether to intervene to safeguard the integrity of MCN and MBMC or to take a hands-off approach to protect the church's indigenous nature, MCN acted on its own initiative, ousting Dick for fraud and naming a new leader.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next months Hostetler traveled periodically to Nigeria, visiting congregations and accepting them into MCN. He would preach and explain Mennonite doctrine during a worship service. If the congregation was in agreement, he would officially receive it into the denomination via a form outlining twenty doctrinal beliefs that he and the local leader would sign. In June 1959 he reported that twenty-seven congregations had

people."<sup>22</sup> McGavran drew on his own experience as a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) missionary in India and the work of J. Waskom Pickett to advocate reorienting missionary resources from a centralized mission station approach to one that focused on identifying the likelihood of people movements and quickly bringing them into the church. There would be time later to assist converts in deepening their faith, a process McGavran called "perfecting."<sup>23</sup>

In May 1960 Graber suggested to the Weavers that McGavran had written *Bridges of God* with the African situation in mind. He surmised that the independent churches in southeastern Nigeria were in McGavran's "first stage" and needed the assistance of missionaries to progress to the next stages of "perfection." He recommended McGavran's *How Churches Grow* to the Weavers as "a very up-to-date philosophy of mission and church growth."<sup>24</sup> With respect to *Bridges of God*, Edwin responded, "It is my impression that Uyo does not quite fit what [McGavran] is trying to say in that book, the thesis of which I would wholeheartedly accept. . . . In any case principles good in themselves must not be taken per se to fit into and apply exactly the same in every situation. The hist[ory], the background, the culture, and so many things must be taken into consideration in applying principles to any given situation."<sup>25</sup> In India the Weavers had felt limited by supervisors who did not understand the situation they faced in the field. In Nigeria, however, MBMC gave them more freedom to work as they wished, and they resisted centralized and deductive approaches.<sup>26</sup>

Graber did not belabor the mass movement point. After he visited Nigeria the following December, his report to MBMC was upbeat. It lauded the Weavers' work with MCN, applauded their involvement in the Presbyterian hospital ministry, and recommended sending additional North American personnel to work in Presbyterian medical and educational institutions. He did propose the establishment of an MBMC secondary school but was silent with respect to McGavran's mass movement theories.<sup>27</sup> In January 1961 Yoder reported to Edwin that he had spoken to McGavran about the strategy of assigning teachers to mission schools. McGavran cautioned against that approach, making a connection between a similar practice by mission agencies in the Congo and the lack of growth in the churches there.<sup>28</sup> Again, the Weavers chose not to be diverted from the path that seemed to fit best with the needs they observed in Nigeria. With so many denominations already present in the region, the addition of another one and its subsequent growth, even if it was Mennonite, was not a priority for them. MBMC appointed a total of fifty-four people to the Nigeria field between 1959 and 1967, the majority assigned to work in schools and medical institutions affiliated with other missions.<sup>29</sup>

## Working with Indigenous Churches

Like Hostetler, the Weavers were concerned to protect the indigenous character of the church, seeing indigenous ownership as an important priority. Early in their service in India they came to question mission structures that allowed missionaries to maintain control of the church. At first hesitant to express their views, with experience they felt freer to voice their opinions.<sup>30</sup>

On furlough in 1943, Edwin finished a degree at Biblical Seminary in New York City. Invited by MBMC to India for a second term, he wrote:

Personally I am not sure but that a temporary decrease in personnel in the Indian field is not a good thing. It will force the

mission to relegate certain types of work more and more to the Indians. . . . Native Christians and churches want missionaries to come back, provided they come without a feeling of superiority, etc., etc. They more and more want greater recognition and greater responsibilities. Perhaps the present crisis has helped to bring about some of these adjustments in a more natural way without strain on either side. In regard to India the problem of our relation to our churches is going to become more real.<sup>31</sup>

Edwin's observations were to prove prophetic. In 1946 he became bishop of the Mennonite Church of India and argued for transfer of control from missionary structures and personnel to Indian hands, as well as for increased Indian self-support. The idea was not new; discussions about transferring control had been ongoing in the previous decades. Although some missionaries argued that the Indian believers were not yet ready, everyone agreed that ownership must eventually pass to Indian hands. Significantly, in the same period the country achieved political independence in 1947. While Edwin was bishop, these questions caused such serious conflict that collaboration between the missionaries and Indian church leaders broke down.<sup>32</sup> Eventually Graber visited India, December 1950 to March 1951, and worked with a unification commission to outline the structure of an amalgamated mission and church that allowed for greater Indian control of the work. MBMC agreed to assign its missionaries to the service of the Mennonite Church in India, and on July 1, 1952, the American Mennonite Mission ceased to exist as a separate entity.<sup>33</sup>

When the Weavers arrived in Nigeria at the end of 1959, they found similar impulses for greater independence, both in the national political realm and in the churches. Formal Nigerian independence would not take effect until October 1960, but the process toward independence was already under way. The AICs that had joined MCN were themselves a manifestation of the desire for increased Nigerian agency in ecclesial structures. The experience of the Qua Iboe Mission, which from the late nineteenth century had been the primary mission in the area and which had collaborated with the colonial government, provides a revealing instance. A spiritual revival started at the Qua Iboe mission station north of Uyo in 1927, but the revival overflowed the bounds of the mission-established churches and resulted in large numbers of converts and the establishment of AICs outside of Qua Iboe structures. Given the collaboration between the mission and the government, resistance to the mission and the establishment of competing AIC structures were ways that a repressed people could embody resistance to political and religious authorities.<sup>34</sup>

Within the Qua Iboe Mission itself friction arose between missionaries and indigenous Christians. Some church members resented what they considered to be rigid moral codes that missionaries imposed, including monogamy and a ban on mission-employed teachers living with their sisters and other female relatives. Although they were few and were often absent on leave, European missionaries monopolized leadership positions. Habitually short of funds, the mission required its churches to buy kerosene from its supply, even when it was cheaper elsewhere. This friction, along with a feeling that the missionaries were holding back information and not sharing their secrets of success with the Africans, could not but increase resentment.<sup>35</sup> Such resentment on the part of the Qua Iboe church members made it more likely that they would initiate or join new AICs.

Antagonistic relationships between mission churches and the multitude of AICs in the region become sharper as the years progressed. Early in 1960 Edwin described the relationship between the two camps as one of "deep friction, jealousy, com-

petition, [and] resentment."<sup>36</sup> In December 1959, just weeks after the Weavers' arrival, Qua Iboe missionaries advised them that adding the presence of MBMC in the region would only increase the confusion.<sup>37</sup> The AICs that had taken on a Mennonite identity had other ideas. Earlier in the year they had communicated their opinion of missionaries from the mission churches, warning,

Beware of the dogs that bark and bite. . . . By these dogs we mean certain missionaries from other denominations who will volunteer to backbite, ensnare, ill-advise and discourage you in whatever plans you have for our country. . . . These are hypocrites who twist the Bible teachings . . . in order to intimidate the people and exploit them; these are the brand of missionaries who fear any new church establishing in this country, . . . these are the brand of missionaries who make a thousand and one promises but fulfill none, these are the brand of imperialists and their stooges who find it impossible to adapt themselves to the changing conditions of Nigeria.<sup>38</sup>

Adamant in their rejection of the current ecclesial structures, the African Christians sought for the churches the same move toward independence as they saw happening in the wider Nigerian political context. Members of the newly formed MCN wrote: "It will be difficult for you [missionaries] to work in our midst if you will not be able to appreciate our efforts and difficulties, and be prepared to stand firm by us, and support us in every way possible, to retain our independence on a balance as we have already marched to its threshold."<sup>39</sup> Having experienced the move toward increased Indian agency in the Mennonite Church of India, the Weavers accepted that the AICs in the region would not return to the Qua Iboe Mission. While they continued to work with the already established MCN, they did not use their authority as MBMC missionaries to add congregations to it. Instead they developed a mission program that sought both to strengthen all AICs and to encourage constructive relationships between them and the mission churches. The movement toward a more indigenous church meant recognizing AICs as legitimate, autonomous expressions of African Christianity.

A second concern for the Weavers related to the creation of institutions. In India, missionary schools and hospitals had sometimes become a financial burden for churches with insufficient means to support them. The Mennonite Church in India could not easily find the resources to continue such structures, which retarded indigenous agency and perpetuated dependency on foreign funds.<sup>40</sup> Determined not to repeat the mistakes of India, the Weavers did not establish traditional mission compounds, buy property for the mission, or give significant subsidies to the church. Although they established a scholarship fund for school students and arranged for regular, symbolic financial contributions to MCN, no subsidies were made to establish traditional educational or medical institutions.<sup>41</sup> An added incentive not to embark on the creation of mission schools and hospitals was that many such institutions were already present in the region.<sup>42</sup>

Not that the Weavers did not see the value of medical and educational institutions; they supported them when they were convinced that there was good reason to do so. When MBMC missionary involvement in southeastern Nigeria ended because of the Biafra War (July 1967–January 1970), the Weavers were seeking to purchase land upon which to build a permanent home for the Bible college they had helped create for AIC leaders. They organized the placement of many North American teachers and medical personnel in existing mission institutions during their eight years in Nigeria. For the Weavers this strategy was both an expression of Christian mission and a way to build trust with the

established missions that had at first resented their entrance into the Nigerian field.<sup>43</sup> The institutions MBMC workers did support were connected with established missions and received significant ongoing government support. Hence, the dangers of dependency and lack of sustainability were thought to be minimized.

A third concern was the need for culturally appropriate expression of the Gospel in the Nigerian context. For the church to be truly indigenous, it needed to find locally meaningful expressions of the faith; its theology had to speak to its particular context. Referring to MCN, the Weavers wrote to Hostetler, "We cannot give them our Mennonite Faith and say: Here is what you are to believe. This is what we do. This is what we believe. You must follow us."<sup>44</sup> The need for younger churches around the world to interpret the Gospel message for their own time and culture was for them a basic indigenous principle.<sup>45</sup> Edwin argued that Nigerians' use of dance in worship was as appropriate for that context as was the singing of hymns in North America. He expressed on film his convictions with respect to mission, culture, and theology: "Isn't it too bad that we as Western Christians can't present the Gospel to other cultures so that they can fit it into life as they understand it? . . . In any country the religious life is a part of the culture of the people. . . . This has been the problem in Nigeria. . . . We missionaries have tried to squeeze our converts into a mold rather than give them freedom to express Christ in their own way of life."<sup>46</sup>

In February 1964, in order to facilitate theological reflection on the part of AICs, the Weavers initiated, along with fellow MBMC missionaries and a group of four AICs, the Uyo United Independent Churches Bible College. There AIC leaders could increase their biblical and theological literacy without affiliating with a Western denomination. From 1964 until 1967, when the Weavers evacuated because of the war, ten different AICs sent leaders to be trained. This experience convinced the Weavers that collaborating with AICs in initiatives of theological education was a fruitful missionary strategy.<sup>47</sup> In the larger twentieth-century missionary movement, theological education was a priority, as evidenced by formation of the Fund for Theological Education by the International Missionary Council in 1958.<sup>48</sup> The important step the Weavers took was to provide such training for groups outside the umbrella of Western denominations, not just for mission churches.<sup>49</sup>

## Ecumenism

As shown by Mennonite mission administrator and historian Wilbert Shenk, the confused, competitive, and divisive ecclesial situation in southeastern Nigeria led the Weavers to identify ecumenical reconciliation between mission churches and AICs as a primary missionary duty. They took the initiative, in consultation with Yoder and AIC observer Harold Turner, to foster dialogue characterized by respect, openness, and collaboration within the divided church community.<sup>50</sup> Other people in MBMC, notably Hostetler, gave less priority to ecumenism. He suggested that the Weavers should have concentrated on building up MCN instead and seemingly found their lack of concern for the growth of MCN a source of frustration.<sup>51</sup>

At first Graber also appeared to be sympathetic to a more denominational and less ecumenical approach.<sup>52</sup> But as in the case of McGavran's mass movement theories, Graber was willing to allow missionaries to interpret the situations in which they found themselves and to configure their missionary strategies accordingly. By the time of his visit in December 1960, he was supportive, even enthusiastic, about the Weavers' ecumenical

focus.<sup>53</sup> Their ecumenical endeavors did not mean that they ignored MCN. As they gained the trust of the mission churches, they planned to give more attention to nurturing development of MCN, seeking balance between identification with Mennonite churches and work with AICs.<sup>54</sup>

Though a major step for MBMC, the Weavers' ecumenical approach was not without precursors. Indeed, the comity arrangements that grew out of calls for collaboration voiced by the 1910 World Missionary Conference, the International Continuation Committee that succeeded it, the International Missionary Council formed in 1921, and eventually the World Council of Churches (WCC, 1948) can be seen as such. These arrangements, however, were largely limited to Western Protestant denominations and the mission churches they had created. What was significant about the Weavers' approach was their inclusion of AICs as partners in ecumenical conversations. Until he left Nigeria, the Inter-Church Study Group Edwin initiated in 1962 provided representatives from mission churches and AICs a setting in which to meet, exchange perspectives on Christian faith, and dialogue. Slowly the AICs began to take their place as authentic Christian churches in conversation with both the Western missions and the mission churches they had birthed.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Both McGavran and the Weavers sought an alternative to the mission-station approach that they associated with colonialism,

both took the local social and cultural context seriously, and both sought to shift focus from traditional mission structures to indigenous groups. But in other respects they diverged sharply. In the India experience of mass movements, McGavran sought a framework that could be applied in other fields. The Weavers demurred, preferring open-ended engagement that tailored missional approaches to specific contexts. MBMC as a mission agency moved in the latter direction of flexibility, an inductive approach, a dialogical method, a multilateral stance, and a grass-roots orientation.<sup>56</sup> Subsequent work in West Africa by MBMC focused largely on collaboration with AICs.

On the larger scene of world Christianity, the shifts visible in this case study did not happen systematically or uniformly, but irregularly in different places and to different degrees over extended periods of time. This larger story includes the shift from conceiving of Christianity as a Western religion to seeing it as a religion at home in multiple cultures and with particular vitality among its adherents in the Global South. Although MBMC missionaries in southeastern Nigeria were not the first to encounter and adapt to changing contexts, the compatibility of the outlook they espoused with the continuing evolution of the postcolonial context allows their experience to serve in some degree as a microcosm of these wider developments. On the smaller stage of Mennonites in mission, the Weavers' story highlights the importance of local actors and contexts for missiology in general; more specifically, their experience set the course for MBMC work in West Africa for decades to follow.

## Notes

1. Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 277–78, 4. The photograph on p. 139 is from Edwin and Irene Weaver, *From Kuku Hill* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1975), 11.
2. Dana L. Robert, "Plenary 1: Mission in Long Perspective, Thursday, 3 June 2010, Keynote Address," in *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, ed. Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 67.
3. Todd M. Johnson and Sun Young Chung, "Christianity's Centre of Gravity, AD 33–2100," in *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010*, ed. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009), 50–51.
4. See Mark R. Gornik, *World Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), and Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).
5. Welcome Address of Mennonite Church Nigeria (MCN) to S. J. and Ida Hostetler, Nov. 23, 1958, and S. J. and Ida Hostetler Report to MBM, Nov. 28, 1958, Box 10, Folder 24. MBM Overseas Ministries Division Data Files, Part 2: 1956–1965, IV-18-13-02, Mennonite Church USA Archives—Goshen, Goshen, Indiana. All archival material is from the Goshen archives.
6. S. Jay Hostetler, *We Enter Bihar, India* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1951), 6–7.
7. Welcome Address to Hostetlers, Nov. 23, 1958; Letter from S. J. Hostetler to J. D. Graber, Nov. 28, 1958, Box 10, Folder 24, IV-18-13-02.
8. J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), and *Christ's Way to India's Heart* (Lucknow: C. O. Forsgren, 1938).
9. John Allan Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India: 1897–1962* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1972), 213–14; J. W. Pickett, D. A. McGavran, and G. H. Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India* (Jubbulpore: Mission Press, 1938), 2.
10. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 214; Pickett, McGavran, and Singh, *Christian Missions in Mid India*, 24–33.
11. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 216–18.
12. Letter from J. D. Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, Box 3, Folder 28. S. J. and Ida Hostetler Papers, Hist. Mss. 1-563; J. D. Graber Report on Administrative Trip to Ghana, West Africa, Aug. 8–Sept. 11, 1957, Box 3, Folder 31, Hostetler Papers.
13. Letter from Hostetler to Ernest Bennett, Oct. 16, 1957, letter from Hostetler to Graber and Bennett, Sept. 28, 1957, and letter from Graber to Hostetler, Jan. 15, 1958, Box 3, Folder 27, Hostetler Papers.
14. Letter from Hostetler to Graber, June 6, 1958, Box 3, Folder 27, Hostetler Papers.
15. Report from Hostetler to MBMC, Nov. 28, 1958, and report from John R. Mumaw and Hostetler to MBMC, Dec. 1958, Box 10, Folder 24, IV-18-13-02. See also letter from Hostetler to A. A. Dick and M. Ekereke, MCN, Dec. 30, 1958, Box 3, Folder 21, Hostetler Papers; letter from Hostetler to Graber, Dec. 19, 1958, Box 10, Folder 24, IV-18-13-02.
16. Letter from Wendell Broom to Hostetler, Jan. 8, 1959, and letter from Hostetler to Broom, Jan. 15, 1959, Box 3, Folder 21, Hostetler Papers.
17. Letter from M. Ekereke, Daniel Esiet, Umoh Ekanem, and I. U. Nsarak to Hostetler, Feb. 14, 1959, Box 3, Folder 21, Hostetler Papers.
18. J. D. Graber, "We Reach Out from Ghana: Why Nigeria?" in *God Led Us to West Africa*, ed. James R. Bomberger (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions & Charities, 1959), 38–39.
19. E. A. Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-eastern Nigeria, 1900–52," in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, ed. O. U. Kalu (London: Longman, 1980), 159–81; letter from Edwin Weaver to John Yoder, Admin. Assistant, MBMC, Feb. 19, 1960, Box 10, Folder 22, IV-18-13-02; report from Hostetler to MBMC, Nov. 28, 1958, Box 10, Folder 24, IV-18-13-02.
20. See Wilbert R. Shenk, "'Go Slow through Uyo': A Case Study of Dialogue as Missionary Method," in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early Twenty-First Century*, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen, and Hendrik Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 329–40, and "Mission Agency and African Independent Churches," *International Review of Mission* 63, no. 252 (1974): 475–91. Shenk identifies John Howard Yoder and AIC observer Harold Turner as the Weavers' primary interlocutors. I augment Shenk's work with additional data and further explication of the choices the missionaries made.

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21. Letter from Hostetler to Yoder, March 21, 1960, Box 3, Folder 22, Hostetler Papers.
22. Letters from Graber to McGavran, Nov. 13, 1956, and Jan. 2, 1957; McGavran to Graber, Nov. 3, 1956, and letter with no date, Box 8, Folder 35, IV-18-13-02; letter from Graber to Quintus Leatherman, March 30, 1957, Box 4, Folder 47, IV-18-13-02.
23. Donald Anderson McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study of the Strategy of Mission* (World Dominion Press, 1955; repr. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005).
24. Letter from Graber to Weavers, May 3, 1960, Box 10, Folder 22, IV-18-13-02; letter from Graber to Weavers, July 13, 1960, Box 10, Folder 21, IV-18-13-02. Graber had used McGavran's *How Churches Grow* in teaching a seminary class and in missionary orientation.
25. Letter from Weavers to Graber, July 21, 1960, Box 10, Folder 21, IV-18-13-02.
26. Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, transcript of a recording made by Irene Weaver (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1983), 20, 36; Irene Weaver, interview by Bruce Yoder, March 14, 2011, Hesston, Kans.; letter from Weavers to Graber, Jan. 16, 1962, Box 2, Folder 4, Edwin and Irene Weaver Papers, Hist. Mss. 1-696.
27. Report of Nigeria Visit by Graber to MBMC, Dec. 31, 1960, Box 10, Folder 21, IV-18-13-02.
28. Letter from Yoder to Edwin Weaver, Jan. 24, 1961, Box 10, Folder 20, IV-18-13-02.
29. Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story* (Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970), 103.
30. Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, 7, 9, 18–20, 25–26, 28; Irene Weaver, interview by Bruce Yoder, March 14, 2011, Hesston, Kans.
31. Letter from Edwin Weaver to S. C. Yoder, April 25, 1943, Box 30, folder entitled "Weaver, Edwin I. 1928–1943," MBM Executive Office, Correspondence 1900, 1908–1943, IV-7-1.
32. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, chap. 18, "The Struggle to Indianize the Church," 182–83.
33. *Ibid.*, 187–88.
34. David Pratten, "Conversion, Conquest, and the Qua Iboe Mission," in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J. D. Y. Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 429–38; Pratten, "Mystics and Missionaries: Narratives of the Spirit Movement in Eastern Nigeria," *Social Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 52–66; Monday B. Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission: Towards a History of an Ibibio Independent Church," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 59, no. 4 (1989): 499–501.
35. Abasiattai, "The Oberi Okaiame Christian Mission," 499–501; Udo, "The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence," 175–76; J. W. Westgarth, *The Holy Spirit and the Primitive Mind: A Remarkable Account of a Spiritual Awakening in Darkest Africa* (London: Victory Press, 1946), 16–17.
36. Letter from Edwin Weaver to Yoder, Feb. 19, 1960, Box 10, Folder 22, IV-18-13-02.
37. Letter from Weavers to Yoder, Dec. 24, 1959, Box 4, Folder 39, Weaver Papers.
38. Welcome Address from "The People of Ibibio to Mr. and Mrs. Hostetler," Feb. 15, 1959, Box 3, Folder 21, Hostetler Papers.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Lapp, *The Mennonite Church in India*, 173–75; Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, 26, 28; Irene Weaver, interview by Bruce Yoder, March 14–15, 2011, Hesston, Kans.
41. Irene Weaver, *Reminiscing for MBM*, 44; Irene Weaver, interview by Bruce Yoder, March 15, 2011; Letter from Weavers to Yoder, Dec. 24, 1959, Box 4, Folder 39, Weaver Papers.
42. Letters from Weavers to Yoder, Dec. 9 and Dec. 24, 1959, Box 4, Folder 39, Weaver Papers.
43. Letter from Weavers to Graber, Jan. 16, 1962, Box 2, Folder 4, Weaver Papers.
44. Letter from Weavers to Hostetler, Dec. 1959. The date is missing but the Hostetler letter of response is dated Jan. 4, 1960, and refers to the Weavers' letter which had arrived "a couple of days ago." Box 3, Folder 22, Hostetler Papers.
45. Letters from Weavers to Yoder, Dec. 24, 1959, and Jan. 5, 1960, Box 4, Folder 39, Weaver Papers.
46. Edwin Weaver, *Africa in Three Dimensions*, DVD (converted from 16mm film), written and directed by Ken Anderson (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1967).
47. Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 73–74, 89–90.
48. Christine Lienemann-Perrin, *Training for a Relevant Ministry: A Study of the Work of the Theological Education Fund* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1981), 15–29.
49. The Weavers were not the first MBMC missionaries to set aside a traditional denominational approach for one that supported indigenous churches. In 1954, after ten years of labor, missionaries in the Argentine Chaco decided to forgo the establishment of a Mennonite Church in order to avoid dependency and reinforce an autonomous Christian movement among the Toba people. The Weavers seem to have been unaware of that initiative during their time in Nigeria, only learning of it and visiting the Chaco field years later. See Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2009), 41, 65, 84, 193–97; and Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 59–68. Graber, as MBMC general secretary, did know about the Chaco work. For his and Hostetler's observations, see letters from Albert Buckwalter to Graber, Nov. 13, 1958, and from Graber to Buckwalter, Dec. 19, 1958, Box 2, Folder 30, IV-18-13-02; letters from Graber to Hostetler, Dec. 19, 1958, and from Hostetler to Graber, Dec. 30, 1958, Box 4, Folder 46, IV-18-13-02.
50. Shenk, "Go Slow through Uyo."
51. Letter from Hostetler to Yoder, Jan. 9, 1960, Box 10, Folder 25, IV-18-13-02; Letters from Hostetler to Yoder, March 17 and 21, 1960, Box 4, Folder 45, IV-18-13-02. Hostetler's notes report a conversation in Ghana with Christian G. Baëta: "He also said that the old time ideas of strict geographical comity can hardly continue to hold any longer, because people are moving and churches are perforce becoming interspersed, and anyway there is more evangelism to do than the present forces can get done, and so there is no reason that others should be kept out" ("V. Mission Philosophy Ghana 8, Feb. 6 1960 Jay to JHY," Box 2, Box of index cards, Hostetler Papers).
52. A similar dilemma of denominational versus ecumenical approach arose in 1961 in Brazil, where missionaries were likewise questioning the advisability of planting a Mennonite church. Frustrated by the indecision this caused, the MBMC South American field secretary asked Graber for a "very clear word" from the mission administration on the issue. In response the MBMC Overseas Mission Committee approved on Jan. 23, 1962, Action XI, calling for the missionaries in Brazil to develop a Mennonite Church in Brazil "as a Church in its own right." For Graber, however, the issue seems to have been a matter of ongoing reflection. In 1966 he wrote to the missionaries in Brazil regarding Action XI, asking "how far the ideas of January 1962 have materialized and to what extent the philosophy expressed then is still valid," letter from Graber to MBM Missionaries in Southern Brazil, Jan. 27, 1962, Box 2, Folder 4, Weaver Papers; letter from Graber to Missionaries in South Brazil and Argentina, Nov. 11, 1966, Box 5, Folder 75, IV-18-13-03. See also letters from Graber to Weavers, Dec. 25, 1959, and Jan. 26, 1960, Box 2, Folder 3, Weaver Papers.
53. Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 35–36; letter from Weavers to Graber, July 21, 1960; Report of Nigeria Visit by Graber to MBMC, Dec. 31, 1960, Box 10, Folder 21, IV-18-13-02.
54. Letter from Weaver to Graber, Oct. 11, 1966, Box 2, Folder 5, Weaver Papers.
55. The Inter-Church Study Group and other initiatives that sought to bring reconciliation between AICs and mission churches were possible because some missionaries of the older missions agreed that such work was necessary. For example, Robert McDonald, secretary of the Eastern Region Committee of the Christian Council of Nigeria and a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, lent his support to the Weavers' work (Edwin and Irene Weaver, *The Uyo Story*, 29, 51).
56. Shenk, "Mission Agency and African Independent Churches," 488.