

The Historic Peace Churches and the Reformations

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Abstract

This contribution considers the broad historical and theological category of Reformation and Reformations in relation to the Historic Peace Churches before turning to a more detailed consideration of recent and contemporary meaning of Reformation(s) in selected settings and needs: Mennonites in Taiwan; Friends in East Africa, especially Tanzania; and the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. Reformation insights of the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries continue to inform, inspire, and sustain Mennonite, Quaker, and Brethren communities in contexts quite different from those in which our communities arose and from one another.

The Historic Peace Churches (HPC) as an ecclesial family developed within the context of the same impulses toward greater connectivity and unity among Christians that gave rise to the World Council of Churches (WCC).¹ The three communities have differing historical origins. Mennonite churches and the Church of the Brethren have their

¹ Melvin Gingerich and Paul Peachey, "Historic Peace Churches," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online website, 1989, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Historic_peace_churches&oldid=88064.

earliest roots in the Anabaptist Radical Reformation of the 1520s and 1530s in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, and the Holy Roman Empire.² The Church of the Brethren and other communities in the same Christian World Communion trace their founding to 1708,³ when the Church of the Brethren was founded through an intersection of Anabaptist and Radical Pietist ideas and practices in Schwarzenau, Germany, under the leadership of Alexander Mack. The Religious Society of Friends, nicknamed Quakers, arose from within the Church of England and the religious and social turmoil of the English Civil Wars and Commonwealth period (1640–1660). It uses 1652 as a date of formal initiation.⁴

Early in the 21st century, the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace created a fruitful context for drawing the HPC into closer relationship and non-member HPC jurisdictions into dialogue with one another and the WCC.⁵ A global series of meetings was held in Bienenberg, Switzerland (2001); Limuru, Kenya (2004); Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2010); and Solo, Indonesia (2011).⁶

In this contribution, we consider first the broad historical and theological category of Reformation and Reformations in relation to the Historic Peace Churches.⁷ Then we

² Harold S. Bender, Robert Friedmann, and Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptism," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online website, 1990, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Anabaptism&oldid=143474>.

³ "History of the Church of the Brethren," Church of the Brethren website, <http://www.brethren.org/about/history.html>.

⁴ "How Quakerism Began," Friends General Conference website, <https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/how-quakerism-began>.

⁵ The three bodies are each made up of multiple branches, and only some jurisdictions of their Christian World Communions have membership in the WCC: Religious Society of Friends: Friends General Conference; Religious Society of Friends: Friends United Meeting; Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); Church of the Brethren; Church of the Brethren in Nigeria; Church of Christ in Congo – Mennonite Community in Congo; Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany; Mennonite Church in the Netherlands. Two bodies of the United and Uniting Churches family included members from HPCs in their formation: the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) (Friends) and the Church of North India (Brethren). The African Church of the Holy Spirit, a WCC church in the African Instituted Churches family, arose as a Pentecostal offshoot of Friends missions in Kenya in 1927.

⁶ These meetings resulted in a series of publications: Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, Ann K. Riggs, eds, *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia/Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004); Donald E. Miller et al., eds, *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories from African Peacemakers* (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia/Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007); Donald Eugene Miller, Gerard Guiton, and Paulus S. Widjaja, eds, *Overcoming Violence in Asia: The Role of the Church in Seeking Cultures of Peace* (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia/Geneva: WCC Publications, 2011).

⁷ Widespread influence of North American authors and teachers such as Mennonites Ronald J. Sider and John Howard Yoder, German Baptist Glen Stassen, and Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist deeply influenced by Yoder has led to a group of younger thinkers who might be called neo-Mennonite or neo-Anabaptist. For instance,

turn to more detailed consideration of recent and contemporary meaning of Reformation(s) in selected settings and needs: Mennonites in Taiwan (Pan); Friends in East Africa, especially Tanzania (Riggs); and the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (Mambula). A final section brings the essay to conclusion.

Reformation(s)

Often Mennonites, Brethren, and Friends are understood to be radical expressions of departure from the medieval Western Christian Church, the Radical Reformation. The rejection of previously recognized baptisms of children by Anabaptists; the departure from existing Protestant churches in the Radical Pietism of the Schwarzenau Brethren; the celebration of “communion in the manner of Friend,” without bread or wine, seen as a radical extension from the words of administration in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, “feed on him in thy heart by faith” – all of these display sharp breaks from the institutional church of the West.

Yet, there are also ways in which the Historic Peace Churches show marked continuity with the pre-Reformation church, as it would have been experienced day-to-day by ordinary believers. The motto of the Church of the Brethren is suggestive of the HPC family more broadly: “Continuing the work of Jesus peacefully, simply, together.” Although the HPCs have theological commitments, they are at base ecclesial spiritualities. That is, they are participatory milieus through which in distinctive ways members may live out their “experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives,” to use the influential definition of spirituality articulated by Sandra Schneiders, IHM.⁸

In general, Mennonites and Brethren use the specific word “Reformation” more frequently than Friends do. This may be more a function of the way church history is often recounted. In general periodization of the development of the Christian community over time, early Anabaptists are typically presented as part of the Reformation era, delineated as beginning in 1517 and ending in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia. The emergence of Friends so soon afterward is usually associated with later developments such as Methodism.

Singaporean Timothy Lim Teck Nger’s background is in the Brethren Church in Singapore, part of the Plymouth Brethren who emerged from the Evangelical wing of the Church of England in the 19th century, but has embraced Radical Reformation perspectives within his personal constructive theology. Such ecumenically intriguing developments are beyond the scope of this essay.

⁸ Sandra Marie Schneiders, IHM, “Christian Spirituality: Definition, Methods and Types,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1–6.

Mennonite Radical Christianity in Taiwan

Paulus Chiou-Lang Pan

It was more than 10 years ago that I proposed that the Fellowship of Mennonite Churches in Taiwan (FOMCIT) should follow the examples of Anabaptist forefathers in the 16th century to establish the church as the biblical church in the Taiwanese context.⁹ As Taiwanese society moved into an urbanized, individualistic, and business-oriented modernization in the late 20th century, the small Taiwanese Mennonite church became less able to attract and retain new members. At the same time, significant and needed social care institutions – a hospital, a centre for care of people with disabilities, and a centre for ministries to former child prostitutes and victims of sexual assault and domestic violence – met important needs but drew church energy away from establishing new local congregations. Political forces were at work as well in drawing cultural attention to the diverse indigenous and Chinese strands of Taiwanese social make-up and identity. Finally, Mennonites had been recruited to Taiwan by Presbyterians who were well established there. What specifically did the Mennonite Taiwanese churches offer in this context?

A focus on the distinctive profile of Reformation-era Anabaptist theological and spiritual commitments was proposed as a response, with the following conclusions: the Taiwanese Mennonite churches are intentionally radical followers of the directives of Jesus Christ; are a visible missional community of brotherly love; exemplify true humanity in Christ in social and economic sharing; are marked by suffering; and are focused away from the Taiwanese versus Chinese questions of Taiwanese national identity.

This proposal did not bear much fruit, likely because colleagues, especially those in FOMCIT leadership, showed more interest in practical matters, such as technical methods and strategies that were thought to make churches grow faster, while FOMCIT encountered leadership problems and difficulties over several decades, undercutting the church's ability to carry out its vision for the future.

The churches in Taiwan in general have tried methods and models of growth from South Korea and the United States since the 1970s. As a result, the numbers of churches increased; yet the percentage of Christians in the entire population in Taiwan continues at 5 percent. The church leaders, anxious about these numbers, looked for new strategies and motivated church members to participate in various revival movements. Unfortunately, the Mennonites in Taiwan took the same stance.

⁹ Paulus Chiou-Lang Pan, "Rediscovering Mennonite Identity in Taiwan: Reflections on Mennonite Missions from an Insider's Perspective," *Mission Focus* 13 (2005), 155–65.

The interlocking of church and state – Constantinian Christendom – that characterized both the pre-Reformation church and the Magisterial Reformation of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican churches never existed in Taiwan. But the Constantinian ideology spread within the churches. The discourse and practices of the mainstream churches equate prosperity of the state with the realization of the kingdom of God, and they distance the church from the specifics of everyday lives. The result is disastrous: the privatization of faith, the gospel understood to only address meeting the felt needs of individuals, and churches turning into mere clubs.

In celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, some theologians are calling for fresh reflections on the meaning of the Reformation: “What does the Bible alone, grace alone, faith alone, and Christ alone mean in the Taiwanese contexts?” The Catholic and the Lutheran churches together held a seminar on this as a celebration for their 50 years of dialogue. This seminar successfully attracted participants from the younger generation.

Yet Reformation did not appear to be the focus of many church leaders. Perhaps, on the one hand, the Reformation and church history are more or less foreign to Taiwanese Christians. To my colleagues of European ancestry, church histories are their own family stories. Their family names bear these traditions. On the other hand, many of the Taiwanese Christians do not know what to do with their own traditions. They suffer from a “spiritual amnesia” of their own heritage, yet they are not aware of it.

Therefore, from my perspective, the problems of the Taiwanese churches are much deeper than issues of membership and/or church building. They are crucial issues concerning the nature and “the soul” of the church.

The disciples of the first century were those who took up their own crosses and followed after Jesus. The Anabaptists in the 16th century also demonstrated that the cost of faith was one’s own life. The Taiwanese in the 21st century should be as radical in their commitment as the Christians in the 1st and 16th centuries. I believe radicalization is a very plausible solution for the future of the Christian churches in Taiwan.

Christianity, as its name reveals, is a faith that focuses on Jesus Christ. Christians’ royalty and loyalty is primary to the King, Jesus. Therefore, the churches must have something completely different from the world. This way, the churches become the alternative community in the world. The churches will inevitably be seen as a threat to the established order because their presence exposes the evil nature of the established order. Therefore, one outcome of the radical Christian faith is understandable: suffering. Nevertheless, Christians always follow Jesus, overcoming evil with good.

Radicalization of Christian faith will also broaden our understanding of the meaning of salvation. Salvation is itself socially meaningful. When someone is in Christ, they no longer belong to the old world order, but live in a new world. Baptism marks the transferring of the new identity and new belonging. The commitment to Jesus Christ means the commitment to the community of faith at the same time. Therefore, those who confess “Jesus is the Lord” during the baptismal ceremony renounce Caesar’s lordship. Religious baptism is actually a political disobedience.

Since Taiwanese Christians have confessed Jesus as the Lord over all, they share some characteristics with the disciples throughout history. First, they share biblical imagination: they no longer view anything from the perspective of an earthly empire, but from the perspective of the kingdom of God. Their vision is thus furthered and enhanced. Then, their faith must be public because the truth is open truth. However, they will pay full attention to the biblical warning of “the powers of this world,” which are not only outside but also “in the body,” when they participate in the public domain. Accordingly, they will carefully deal with the relationship between the state and the church. They will not confuse the roles and tasks of the state and those of the church. Therefore, they will never try to “conquer the mountains” by secular power. Because of their own peculiar identity as Christians, they will carefully maintain the tension: the church in the world but not of the world. Thus, they will be “strange” to the eyes of the world. They are ready for any inconvenience of life, even the loss of social and economic capital caused by the conflict of their faith and secular values. Their ultimate hope is God’s shalom: they have deeply understood that the purpose of life and the end of the world do not rely on economic development, but on the return of Christ. The mission of the church is to proclaim God’s cosmic transitional justice. The whole world can be reconciled to God and with each other. Transitional justice is also needed within the church.

In this process, we constantly trust in God’s providence. We know that the whole creation has been groaning, but God works in all things for the good of those who have been called.

Friends

Ann K. Riggs

In the mid-1980s, two historical works on American Quakerism appeared using the term “Reformation”: *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783* by Jack D. Marietta,

and *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* by H. Larry Ingle.¹⁰ But in general, Friends do not focus on the term “Reformation.” They speak more often of Early Friends who created the Religious Society of Friends in the second half of the 17th century, and later influential members who have become associated with these forebears.

Although Early Friends claimed to be true heirs to primitive Christianity, their stronger focus was a realized or realizing eschatology. “Christ was come to teach people Himself, by His power and Spirit in their hearts,” wrote George Fox in his *Journal* in 1652.¹¹ “The Kingdom of heaven did gather us, and catch us all, as in a net . . . the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch that we often said to one another, with great joy of heart, ‘What? is the Kingdom of God come to be with men? And will He take up His tabernacle among the sons of men, as He did of old?’” wrote Francis Howgill soon after his encounter with Fox in 1652.¹²

Later Quakers continued to appropriate the understanding of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Peaceable Kingdom (see Is. 9:2–7 and 11:1–10) of Early Friends. In some parts of the world this is associated with the distinctive concept of “testimonies,” appropriating the term from a public statement of a group of Early Friends 1660: “And this is our testimony to the whole world.”¹³ These behaviours of the kingdom of heaven cannot be definitely listed, but are frequently identified with simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship of creation (SPICES). These may be pursued in social actions that require the steadfast commitment of Early Friends, persecuted for their differences from the surrounding religious culture. Anyone familiar with such literature of the Early Friends as George Fox’s *Journal*, in reading accounts of non-violent direct action by African-American Friend Bayard Rustin in service to civil rights of African-Americans in the mid-20th century, will recognize his utilization of the precedence of Early Friends in their experiences of being beaten and jailed for their Quaker evangelization.

¹⁰ Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) and H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1986).

¹¹ George Fox, *Journal of George Fox* (1694) Rufus Jones edition, 1908, is available on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library website, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox_g/autobio.i.html.

¹² “‘Outcasts of Israel’: The Apocalyptic Theology of Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill,” in *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought: 1647–1723*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 127.

¹³ Rachel Muers, *Testimony: Quakerism and Theological Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 2015), Kindle edition.

Outside North America and Europe, the Peaceable Kingdom of Early Friends is less frequently associated with the “testimonies” form but addresses the same concern for holistic human flourishing the testimonies address. The characteristics of the kingdom of God among Tanzanian Friends might be described by the following elements:

God’s nearness

In African Traditional Religion, while the ancestors or recently deceased loved ones may be near, God is often understood to be distant from the creation and human community.¹⁴ The experience of Early Friends was of the exciting and disorienting nearness of Christ.

Agency

In Africa, fatalism is a recurring element in African worldviews. Fatalism can be a challenging hurdle in prevention and care of HIV infection. The heritage of Early Friends is one of agency, of capacity to act effectively in the world toward the fulfilment of God’s intentions for wellbeing.

Trustworthiness/integrity

The African countries in which Quakers are most prevalent score low on the Transparency International corruption perception index 2016:¹⁵ Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo each score in the lowest third of countries. Corruption distorts public and private institutions and private companies. In Tanzania, the current Quaker community is rebuilding itself after near collapse from corruption. Early Friends provide role models for integrity, trustworthiness within local Friends institutions and in relationship with the wider body of Friends and civil society.

Sustainable harmony/peace

Across Africa, corruption is often linked with violence as ethnic, religious, or ideological groups compete for what are perceived to be limited resources and for social power. After a bloody revolution, Tanzania has avoided the high levels of ethnic conflict of some other countries in the region. But other forms of violence, some embedded in traditional tribal practices, concern Friends. Tanzanian Friends seek ways to support community life that is experienced as harmoniously consistent with tribal tradition without carrying traditional forms of gender or domestic violence forward into the future.

¹⁴ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1991).

¹⁵ “Corruption Perceptions Index 2016,” Transparency International website, 25 January 2017, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016#table.

Equal worthiness

All are worthy of access to what is needed for their flourishing: food, water, personal security, health and medical care, education, respect for their distinctive culture

Western ways of understanding the heritage of Early Friends can be disjunctively alien to African cultural settings. Tanzanian Friends seek the full flourishing of each, in which Early Friends saw the kingdom of heaven to be present, in forms and through means that are culturally specific to them, rather than culturally hegemonic importations from either the West or other African regions. Tanzanian Friends' eagerness for making better medical care, educational institutions, and income methods available to their people as expressions of the Quakerism of Early Friends can seem unfamiliar to Friends from parts of the world where health care, schools, and sufficient income are taken for granted. But Early Friends in Europe and North America were less secure than later Friends would come to be, and had concerns for human wellbeing that were in many ways more similar to contemporary African concerns than those of more comfortable Western Friends today.

Tanzanian and other Friends in eastern Africa have responded with energy to the Early Friends vision of the kingdom of God come to surprising fruition in their midst. It continues to give shape and direction to their holistic religious and human aspirations for full flourishing in their quite different time and place.

Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN's) Struggles and the Anabaptist Reformation of the 16th Century and the Schwarzenau Brethren**Musa A. Mambula**

Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN), Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, was founded by H. Stover Kulp from Coventry Church of the Brethren, Chester County in Pennsylvania, and Albert Helser from Olivet Church of the Brethren, Ohio, in 1923 under a tamarind tree in Garkida of Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria. It has for many years suffered tremendous persecution from Islamic Jihadists known as Boko Haram. EYN, a Peace Church, is in an extremely difficult situation due to the magnitude of the violence and fanatical persecution experienced in Northern Nigeria, coupled with gross injustice, poverty, unemployment, human rights abuses, intimidation, ethnicity, and the Nigerian government's insensitivity on issues that affect the citizenry.

EYN members, like the 16th-century Anabaptists, are mostly poor and powerless peasant farmers, with very few who are wealthy. There are some few moderately influential academic members. Not many EYN members are politically or economically

motivated. This is because some of the early Church of the Brethren missionaries discouraged the people from participating in politics or involvement in businesses, as these were then considered to be “unchristian.” EYN has, however, continued to grow spiritually and numerically from strength to strength with such faith and resilience in the face of persecutions and challenges.

I wish to affirm that EYN has found useful resources from the Anabaptist reformations of the 16th century and of the Schwarzenau Brethren in its current struggles and challenges. I strongly believe that EYN has indeed benefited and found the 16th-century Anabaptist resources useful in encouraging its members to face persecutions and other challenges without fear and with resilience.

EYN agrees with the Anabaptists and the reformers on the Bible’s authority. EYN receives members through confession of faith and baptism by triune immersion as taught in the scriptures and as practised by the Schwarzenau founders of the Church of the Brethren. EYN does not believe in infant baptism.

We believe that the Bible is the word of God and believe particularly in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His death and resurrection means that he paid the sacrifice for us sinners once and for all. For EYN, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Having been justified by faith, we have new birth and power to live as the disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

EYN is not surprised by persecution, despite being frightened and oppressed as a church by Boko Haram and other Jihadists. We are certainly frustrated because the government has neglected our people and our rights to exist. EYN trembles with fear and anger because we feel that our governments both at state and federal levels seemed to have compromised with our haters and persecutors who torture, beat, maim, kill, and kidnap our innocent believing brothers and sisters.

Despite the persecutions, and the challenges faced, EYN is growing fast and spreading to almost all the states in the country and to other West African countries, such as Togo, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Ghana. EYN has increased membership through energetic evangelism. A healthy competition in evangelism is taking place across the entire denomination. This has emerged and developed between Local Church Councils (LCCs) or congregations; this is a deliberate attempt, method, and strategy to increase growth numerically and spiritually with a view to becoming or forming new districts. Another healthy competition takes place between the various church groups within the congregation by trying to bring new members from outside to join their groups or from within the church. Such groups include the youth; women’s fellowship; sisters’ fellowship; the gospel team; youth band; boys’ brigade; men’s fellowship; and young girls’ fellowship.

EYN has organized and developed a robust discipleship training programme for members, and supports the Child-Evangelism Ministry to help ground children in faith and maturity. The public influence of EYN in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern States in the areas of pacifism, Christian–Muslim dialogue, inter-faith programme, community peace and service has been great and helpful to both Muslims and Christians. EYN, having experienced anarchy, lawlessness, and violence, still has the belief, faith, and resilience to continue to identify with difficulties and pains, and some reservations, as pacifists, nonresistant, and a peace Church. EYN believes strongly that no matter what the circumstances, nonresistance/nonviolence shows the way to peace. EYN sees non-violence as the method, the means, and the road to achieving the peace the world needs for development and progress. I can say, with some sense of nostalgia as I write now far from home, that despite extreme trials, oppression, and hardship, through the church's zeal, fearlessness, and selflessness, along with simple faith and steadfastness, EYN gives heart-warming encouragement to those who hear their story. The church's faith and resilience could not be shattered no matter the persecution. In this, EYN has certainly received inspiration from the 16th century and Schwarzenau Brethren Reformations and from the Church of the Brethren in America, the founders of the EYN.

God has been our comforter, our refuge, our strength, and a helper close at hand in times of our distress.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:8-12)

Conclusion

For our three communities, the venue of the WCC has been a valued stimulant not only to engagement with other ecclesial families but within our HPC family. Mennonites are sometimes said to have produced a disproportionately large amount of written theology. The same cannot be said of Brethren and Friends. Engagement with the WCC has been an important stimulant to theological reflection on other questions and among different speakers and writers than might otherwise have been engaged. We are grateful for the many new self-discoveries elicited.

Reformation insights of the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries continue to provide resources, inspire, and sustain Mennonite, Quaker, and Brethren communities in

contexts quite different from those in which our communities arose, and quite different from one another. The rapidly urbanizing and Westernizing setting of Taiwan, the still highly traditional setting of Tanzania, and the setting of violent clashes of Boko Haram with non-Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria generate differing pastoral and theological needs to which our Reformation heritages continue to provide compelling response.

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