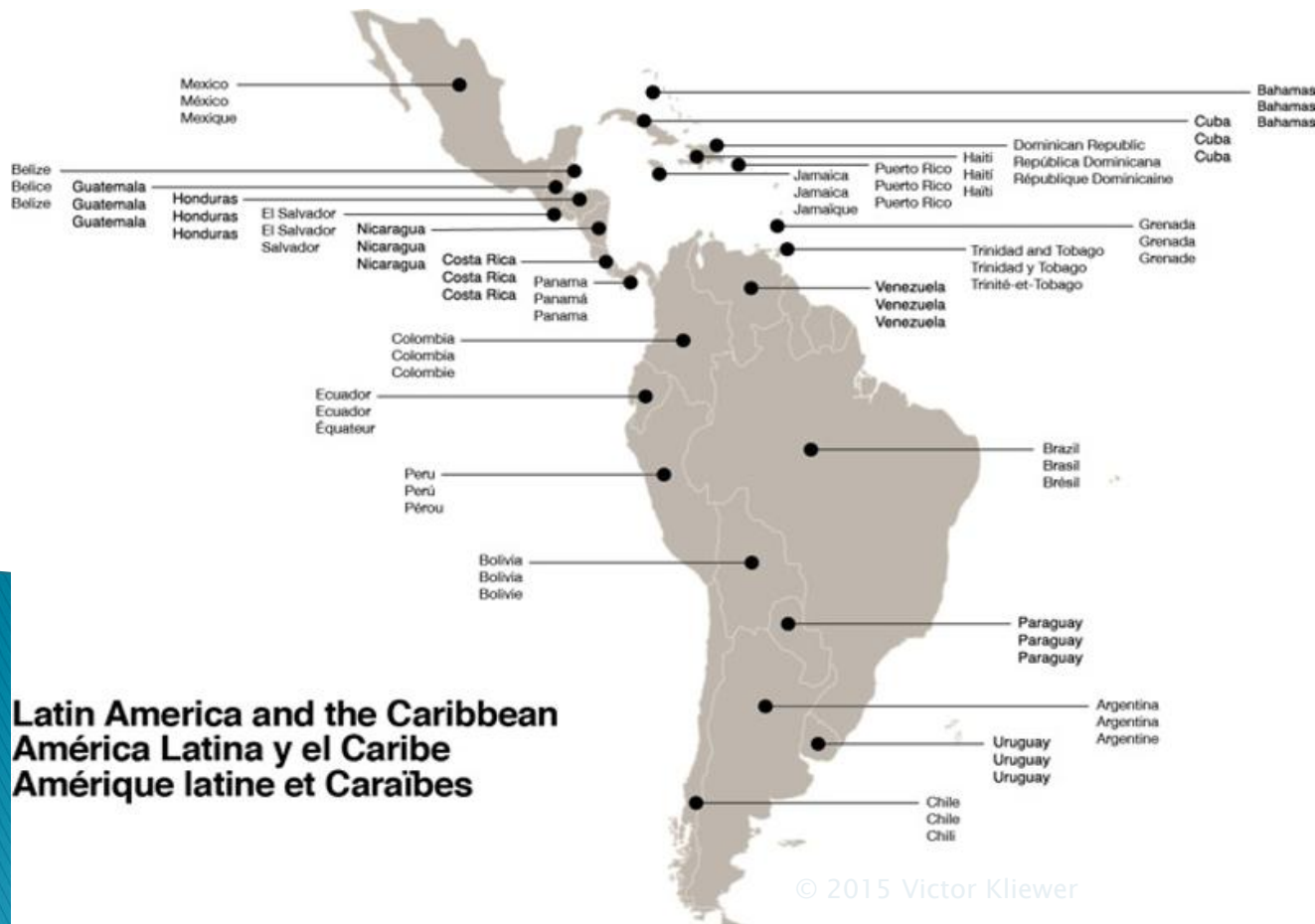


# Mennonite Studies 101, Session 2

(Victor Kliever, March 8, 2015)

## The Mennonites in Latin America

([www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org))



## MS 101, 2-2a

### Global Mennonite Population (MWC 2012 statistics)

Total Mennonites, in 83 countries	1,774,720
<b>North America</b> —29.8% ( <i>523,969 in 2009</i> ) (USA 391,900; Canada 137,208)	529,108
<b>Latin America</b> —10.5% ( <i>169,864 in 2009</i> ) (Par. 33,251; Mex. 32,036; Bol. 24,988)	186,339
<b>Africa</b> —38.3% ( <i>592,106</i> ) (Congo 235,202; Ethiopia 224,407)	679,053
<b>Asia</b> —17.8% ( <i>265,447 in 2009</i> ) (India 149,849; Indonesia 108,528)	315,645
<b>Europe</b> —3.6% ( <i>64,740 in 2009</i> ) (Ger. 46,757; NL 8,030; Switz. 2,500)	64,575

# MS 101, 2-2b The Mennonites in Latin America

## Some statistics:

- ❖ Baptized members in Latin America: 186,339  
(169,864 in 2009)
- ❖ Total of 110 conference bodies in 26 countries
- ❖ Of these, 54.2% are members of MWC
- ❖ Latin American Mennonites make up 10.5% of MWC
  
- ❖ Focus here: Mexico and Paraguay
  - ❖ Mennonites in Mexico: 32,036
  - ❖ Mennonites in Paraguay: 33,251

## MS 101, 2-3

### One part of the story begins with missions . . .

- ❑ American missionaries started a church in Argentina ca. 1919  
(mysterious earlier report of Mennonite villages in Argentina in 1877, but no further information--Dyck, *Intro.*, 321)
- ❑ In 1942 missionary work started in Buenos Aires
- ❑ Gen. Conf. Menn. Church began work in Colombia in 1943, and the Menn. Brethren in 1946
  - ❑ R.C. opposition until Vatican II (1960s), then more tolerance
- ❑ “A veritable explosion of Mennonite missionary activity began in Latin America about 1950” (Dyck, *Intro.*, 338)
- ❑ *Global Menn. Hist.* divides L.A. into **Southern Cone, Andean Region, Caribbean, and Mesoamerica**

## MS 101, 2-4

### Another part of the story begins in Canada . . .

- ❑ About 8,000 Mennonites came to Canada from Russia during 1874-1880, settling in the East and West Reserves, Manitoba
- ❑ They had received incentives and some special rights, including freedom of religion and education
- ❑ They were later called “*Kanadier*”—to distinguish them from a subsequent wave of immigrants, the “*Russländer*,” who came in the 1920s
- ❑ All were “Russian” Mennonites, i.e., from Russia, even though they were ethnically Dutch/German

## MS 101, 2-5

### Canadian and Manitoba governments had own agendas:

- To populate the prairies with “good settlers”
- To develop loyal and patriotic Canadian (British) citizens
  - Schools’ flag-raising recital: “One king, one flag, one fleet, one Empire” (*All-Briton’s Day Catechism*, 1907)
- The “**Manitoba Schools Question**” became a major issue
  - Only one (English) public school system for all
  - Hotly disputed between English and French
  - Other ethnic groups also affected (Icelanders, Ukrainians)
  - Mennonites felt betrayed, reacted very negatively

## MS 101, 2-6

### Other encroachments followed:

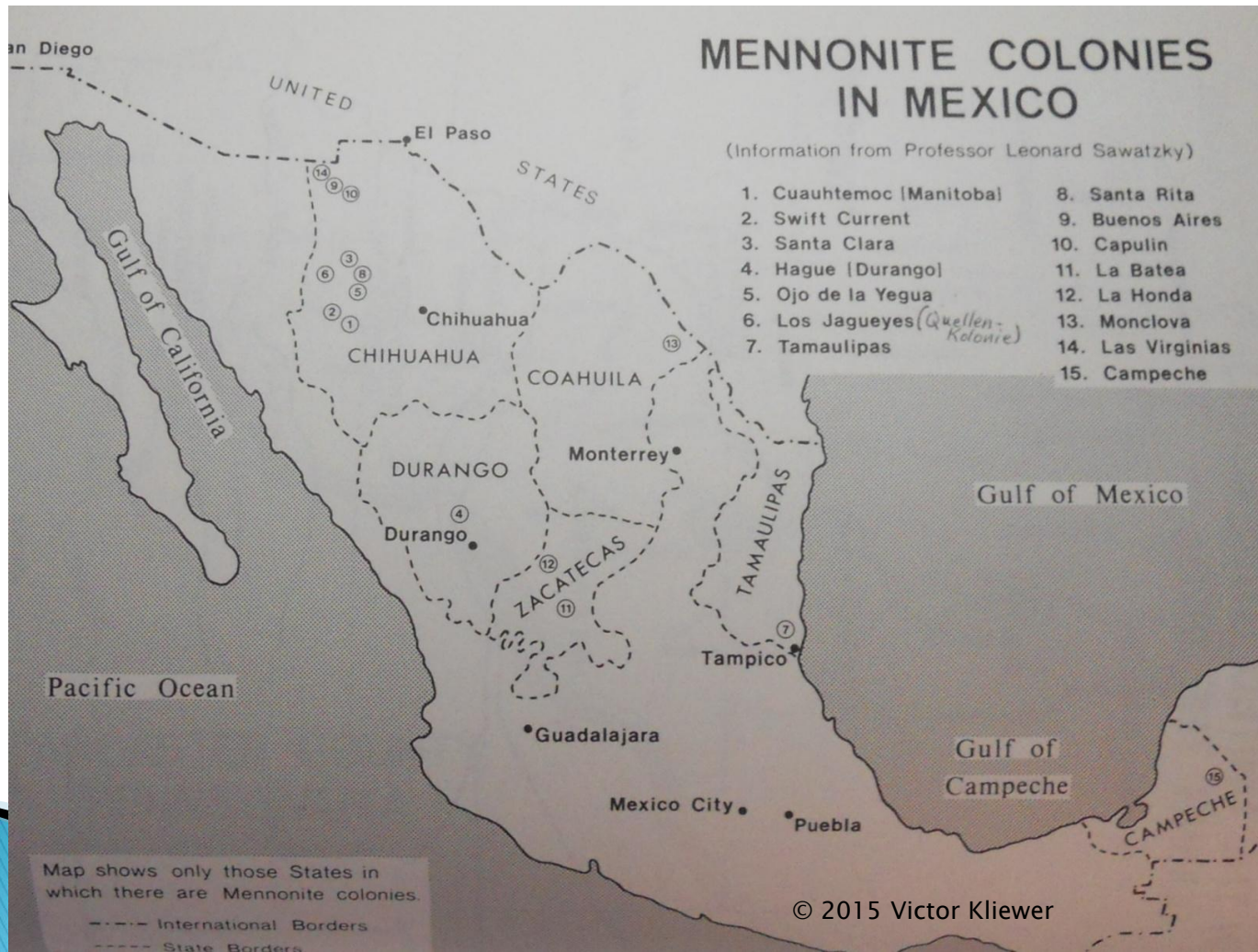
- Municipal government, pressure to accept English
- Until WW I, the Mennonites were still largely isolated
- **World War I** had major impact:
  - Anti-German sentiments (government, society)
  - Pacifist convictions, feared losing religious freedom
  - Continuing educational and other restrictions
  - Shortage of blocks of land also becoming a problem
- Some Mennonites were willing to compromise, others not
- The stage was set for **a major conflict**

## Some conservative Mennonites decided to emigrate

- ❑ **Major emigrations to Mexico, 1922-1925**
  - ❑ Old Colony Mennonites from Manitoba West Reserve moved to Mexico (established the **Manitoba Colony**)
  - ❑ Saskatchewan Mennonites settled in **Swift Current Colony**
  - ❑ 7,000 Mennonites emigrated to Mexico in 1920s, settling in the state of Chihuahua (south of El Paso, Texas)
  - ❑ 13 “daughter colonies” founded in Mexico, 1922-1983
    - ❑ Land shortages, once again
    - ❑ Also religious and social disagreements

# MS 101, 2-8

## Mennonite Colonies in Mexico (Menn. Hist. Atlas, 68)



## MS 101, 2-9

- ❑ Many subsequent moves within Mexico
  - ❑ 20 different groups (80% are Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and Sommerfelder)
  - ❑ 15 colonies scattered through all of Mexico
  - ❑ each colony may have 2 or 3 to 60 villages (Swift Current)
  
- ❑ Numbers of Mennonites in Mexico are hard to establish:
  - ❑ about 40,000 (*Menn. Hist. Atlas*, 1990)
  - ❑ about 30,000 (*Concise Encycl.*, 2010)
  - ❑ 32,167 in 2012 (*MWC*)—German and Spanish Mennonites

### Meanwhile, there were other migrations: Paraguay

- ❑ **1926-27** conservative *Kanadier* moved from Canada to the Gran Chaco
  - ❑ Similar concerns to those of the Mexican emigrants
  - ❑ Established **Menno Colony** with 1,300 people
  - ❑ *Samuel McRoberts*
  - ❑ Very difficult beginning
  - ❑ Waiting time, suffering, illness, death in Porto Casado
  - ❑ Lack of preparation in the Chaco
  - ❑ 1932-35—Chaco War between PY and Bolivia (“frontier”!)

## MS 101, 2-11

### Another immigration to Paraguay from Europe:

- ❑ **1930** about 1,700 Mennonites from Russia migrated to the Chaco (**Fernheim Colony**, adjacent to Menno Colony)
  - ❑ Different background from Menno Colony, also hard start
- ❑ **1937** about 750 moved to East Paraguay (**Friesland Colony**)

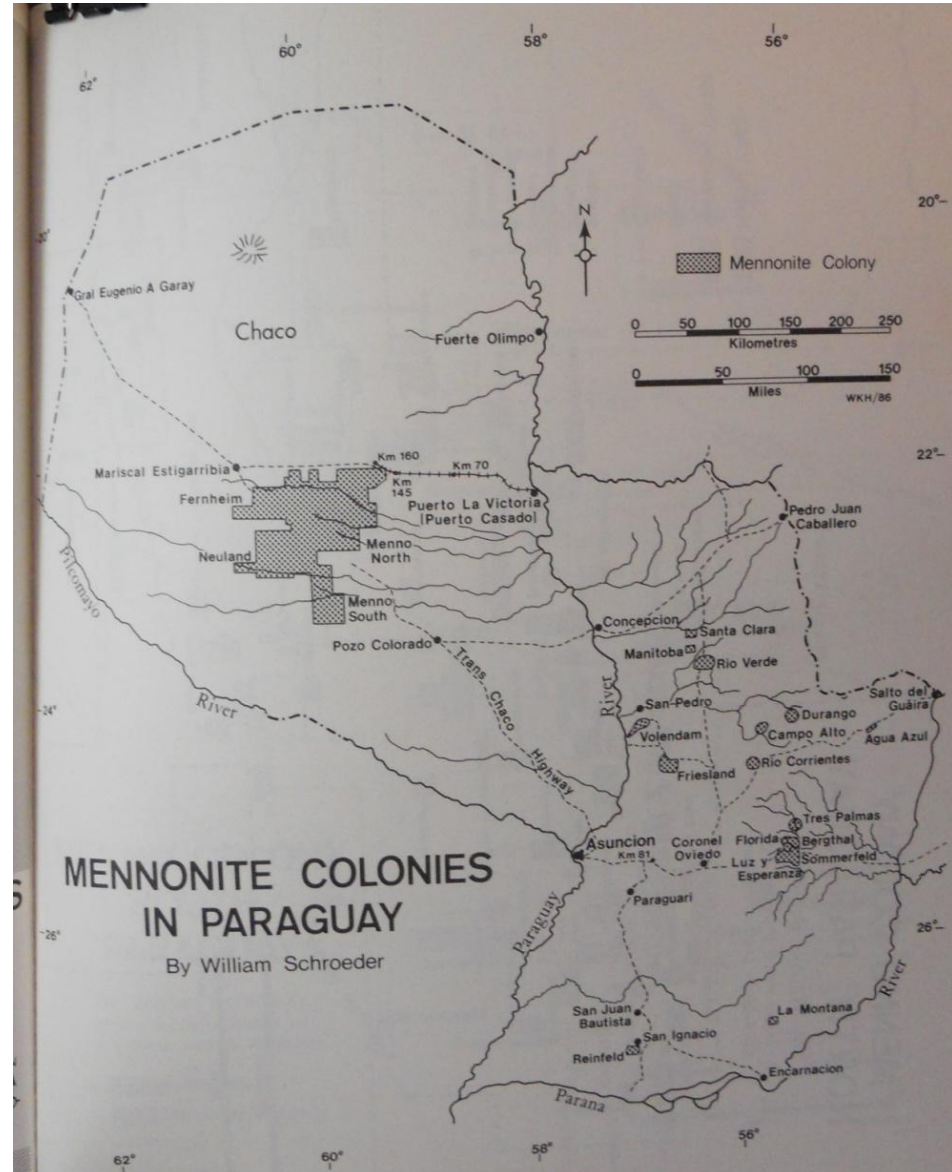
## And more migrations to Paraguay!

- ❑ **1947** ca. 2,500 refugees from Europe (**Neuland Colony**, next to Fernheim and Menno, and **Volendam Colony**, east of Paraguay River, near Friesland)
- ❑ **1948** conservative Mennonites from Canada moved to East Paraguay, 200 k east of Asuncion (**Bergthal** and **Sommerfeld Colonies**)
- ❑ **1970s** about 2,500 conservative emigrants from Mexico came to Paraguay , est. **Rio Verde Colony**
- ❑ Other conservative colonies: **Tres Palmas, Santa Clara**, etc.
- ❑ **1990**—ca. 23,000 Mennonites, 19 colonies + many in Asuncion (*Menn. Hist. Atlas*, 115)
- ❑ **2012**—ca. 34,000 Mennonites in Paraguay (*MWC stats*)

# MS 101, 2-13

## Mennonite colonies, Paraguay

(*Menn. Hist. Atlas*, 75;  
also see Dyck, *Intro.*, 326)



## Continual migrations/reverse migrations

- ❑ Migrations have continued throughout Latin America
- ❑ Reverse migrations by the **conservative Mennonites** between Latin America and Canada, 1960s- present
- ❑ Issues: Limited land, unemployment, dry climate, political and social instability, economic hardships, rigid colony controls
- ❑ Also: Canadian citizenships and benefits
- ❑ Settlements in Ontario and prairies
- ❑ Numbers very hard to estimate
- ❑ Many difficult and tragic experiences behind the statistics

### Travel and migrations have also continued among the progressive Mennonites

- ❑ 1950s many from Neuland and Volendam went to Canada
- ❑ Many young people from Fernheim, Neuland, and Volendam study in Asuncion, Canada, Germany, Switzerland
- ❑ Numerous family relations between Canada and Paraguay

Gradually, increasing numbers of Mennonites live in **Asuncion**

- ❑ Many involved in business, education, professions, politics
- ❑ In 2009, MWC was held in Asuncion
- ❑ Many changes occurring among all Mennonites (distinctions between “conservatives” and “progressives” less clear)

## Questions facing Mennonites in South America:

- How to understand the Bible?
- Do the Mennonites still have a “mission” in Paraguay?
- How to deal with economic success and wealth?
- How to live in a capitalistic, technological, global society?
- How to relate to other social groups (Paraguayans, Brazilians)?
- How to interact justly with Aboriginal people (e.g., ASCIM)?
- How to interact with other religious groups?
- What holds the Mennonite community together (e.g., family, community, congregation, religious faith)?
- Is the traditional Mennonite peace witness still valid?

## References

- ❖ ***GAMEO***
- ❖ **C.J. Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History* , 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1993**
- ❖ ***Mission and Migration* (A Global Mennonite History: Latin America), 2010**

## Focus of next session:

- ❖ **Mennonites in Europe**
- ❖ ***Testing Faith and Tradition* (A Global Mennonite History: Europe), 2006**