

Anabaptist Witness

*A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on
Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission*

VOLUME 4

APRIL 2017

ISSUE 1

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A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission

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Editorial

On my first visit home from seminary, I told my pastor that I had been reading and enjoying Mennonite theology. My pastor, a former Assemblies of God missionary turned nondenominational church planter, affirmed my interest but also observed that Mennonites belonged to the “obedience stream” of Christianity while we belonged to the “Holy Spirit stream.” Given his frequent juxtapositions between deadening legalism and life in the Spirit, this comment served as a clear warning not to get too caught up in the Mennonite focus on obeying Christ’s commands.

Nevertheless, I did (thankfully) get caught up in becoming a Mennonite—I converted in 2006—and soon learned of the lively debate among Anabaptists and Mennonites over the relationship between Christ-centered discipleship and serious attention to the Holy Spirit. Many Anabaptists and Mennonites have their own versions of my pastor’s warning, and they hope to encourage their coreligionists to see obedience as a gracious gift of the Spirit. Oftentimes this encouragement is phrased as a need to learn from Spirit-oriented traditions, especially Pentecostals and charismatics. Occasionally the encouragement is to recognize the traces of the Spirit in the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition itself, to see the tradition as not only a part of the “obedience stream” but also at least potentially a part of the “Holy Spirit stream.”

Recent research strengthens this claim that life in the Spirit is an essential component of the tradition. Work by Neal Blough, Charles Byrd, and others demonstrates how life in the Spirit—including, perhaps, the charismatic gifts of the Spirit—was a central theme for the first generations of Anabaptists in sixteenth-century Europe.¹ My own survey of the place of the Holy Spirit in early Anabaptist and later Mennonite life and thought indicates the existence of a rich pneumatological seam spanning from the sixteenth century to the present.² This seam draws from classical Christian teachings on the Spirit as

1 Neal Blough, “The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994); Charles Byrd, “Pentecostalism’s Anabaptist Heritage: The Zofingen Disputation, 1532,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 28, no. 1 (2008): 49–62; Charles Byrd, “Sixteenth Century Anabaptism and the Manifestation of Glossolalia” (conference paper, Society of Pentecostal Studies, Evangel University, 2014).

2 Jamie Pitts, “The Spirit in Mennonite History” (paper for the Mennonite Church USA-Church of God (Cleveland) ecumenical dialogue, 2016). “Pneumatology” con-

well as from renewal movements—such as Pietism, Revivalism, and Pentecostalism—and centers on the relationship between the Spirit and the disciplined community of disciples.

That said, there has been considerable reticence throughout this history to speak of the Spirit, and there has been a tendency to pit Word and Spirit against each other—with advocates for the Word (Scripture, Jesus) often gaining the upper hand. The caricature of Anabaptists and Mennonites as belonging to Christianity’s “obedience stream” takes root in this reality. If that caricature is to be overturned and life in the Spirit is to be integrated into the heart of the tradition, we may need to imitate those forebears who learned from the past (including but not limited to their Anabaptist and Mennonite past) and engaged the Spirit-led movements of their own days regardless of the tradition or denominational affiliation of those movements.

This need for broad receptivity to past and present witness to the Spirit becomes especially apparent when the question of the Spirit’s relation to mission arises. In recent years, missiologists have emphasized that Christian mission is fundamentally a response to what the Spirit is doing in the world. According to British missiologist Kirsteen Kim, the standard missiological focus on “the Spirit of mission”—which examines what the Spirit is doing in the church’s missionary work—needs to be supplemented by consideration of “the mission of the Spirit.”³ In other words, we are called to follow the Spirit in mission, not to expect the Spirit to follow us. Kim and Pentecostal missiologists Amos Yong and Andrew Lord suggest that this reorientation has significant implications for Christian understanding of religious and cultural pluralism.⁴ Christians in mission are led by the Spirit to learn from others about what the Spirit is doing among them. “Discerning the spirits” (1 Cor 12:10; 1 John 4:1–6) is a core mission task.

The articles in the present issue of *Anabaptist Witness* help us in this task by showing how Anabaptists and Mennonites, as well as others, have followed and might follow the Spirit in mission. American Pentecostal missiologist Jody

cerns the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Several of the essays in this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* reinforce my thesis.

3 Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007). See also John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972).

4 Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World*, chapters 5–7; Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), chapter 6; Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003).

Fleming argues that putting Anabaptist and Pentecostal-charismatic traditions into conversation may help us have a wider view of the Spirit's work and therefore a wider, more holistic sense of our mission. Johannes Reimer, a German Mennonite Brethren missiologist who teaches in South Africa, describes how the Mennonite Brethren church was born of a Spirit movement that issued directly in mission. Reimer challenges his fellow German MBs to recover this missional vision of the Spirit even as they guard against excesses.

Former Mennonite Church Canada Witness worker Andrew Suderman—whose service included directing the Anabaptist Network in South Africa—addresses questions of mission and power in his essay. After tracing a post-apartheid drift by South African churches toward a “Constantinian” alliance with state power, Suderman details how the Spirit promised by Jesus empowers the church for kenotic witness and enables the renewal of prophetic, liberating elements of South African church history. Writing in “postmodern, post-Christendom” Britain, Assemblies of God pastor Chris Horton finds the sixteenth-century Anabaptist coordination of Spirit and discipleship particularly helpful for mission in his context. Spirit-motivated mission meets skeptics by prioritizing relationship-building and the integrity of the discipleship community.

Andrew Mashas works with Eastern Mennonite Missions in Pennsylvania. His contribution tells the story of the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia as a work of the Spirit—from the MKC's founding, then through a long period of persecution, and finally into its present flourishing. Carol Tobin, of Virginia Mennonite Missions, poetically meditates on the Spirit's healing yet sometimes bewildering presence.

Together with the book reviews, the articles and poems in this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* invite us to discern where the Spirit has been, is, and will be moving. They invite us into the “Holy Spirit stream,” to follow the Spirit in mission.

Jamie Pitts, co-editor

Holistic Pneumatology in Mission

Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

JODY B. FLEMING*

Introduction

At first glance, Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement¹ may seem very different. One seems to reflect a peaceful and quietly pious approach to life and worship while the other is known for outward expressions of praise and exuberant worship, especially in Majority world contexts such as Africa and Latin America. However, a closer look reveals many similarities between the two, especially in the area of spirituality and mission. Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement both developed as renewal movements within Christianity—in the sixteenth and the early twentieth centuries, respectively—and common themes on pneumatology and mission are found in the histories of both. This article compares these two movements and the similarities found in their understandings of the work of the Holy Spirit and how those understandings relate to missional engagement.

To begin, I will first discuss Anabaptist mission history and theory, including some basic understanding of the role and work of the Holy Spirit

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1 I use the term “Pentecostal-charismatic” as a generalization of both organized Pentecostal denominations and movements within existing traditions such as mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches, and other non-denominational movements that developed during the twentieth century. It is understood that there are many historical forerunners and streams that led up to this particular time period, including Anabaptism. However, the focus for this discussion will remain in the context of current discussions on pneumatology and the general understanding of the importance of spiritual gifts and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that empowers believers for ministry and mission. For further information see footnote 45 below.

(pneumatology). I will then use this material in dialogue with the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, which places strong emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. Once these comparisons are made, my discussion will shift to the role of pneumatology and how that relates to a holistic approach in mission theory and praxis that brings together the spiritual world and material realities. Two other themes within this holistic pneumatology include the importance of lay participation and ecumenical unity through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This discussion is intended to add to a growing body of work that considers pneumatology as an integral part of mission theory and praxis. This is especially true for sharing the Christian faith in the Majority world, as the center of Christianity has shifted away from Northern and Western domination to the Global South and East.² As holistic pneumatology is examined for similarities within Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, a renewed sense of Christian spirituality will begin to emerge. My intent here is to renew awareness of pneumatology that exists in these traditions so that there is a deeper understanding of how to engage with spirituality that is more prevalent in the Majority world and often in our own cultural contexts.

Anabaptists and Mission Theory

To understand the relationship between pneumatology and holistic mission theory, it is important to begin with a brief overview of the Anabaptist tradition and its mission practices. The term *Anabaptist* includes several denominations,³ and much of the information to be considered here comes from the Mennonite tradition. However, Wilbert Shenk contends that historical

Anabaptism and contemporary Mennonitism are not synonymous.⁴ For this reason, we will begin by examining the roots of the Anabaptist tradition. Anabaptism developed out of the sixteenth-century Reformation with followers who “had broken away from Roman Catholicism but were also out of step

2 For additional discussions, see Albert W. Hickman, “Christianity’s Shift from the Global North to the Global South,” *Review and Expositor* 111, no. 1 (February 2014): 41–47; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). This is a small representation of works that are discussing the changes taking place in global Christianity.

3 These include Amish, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Brethren, and others that find their origins in the Anabaptist tradition.

4 Wilbert R. Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850–1999* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), 111.

with the main Reformers.”⁵ The early development of the movement included “more rigorous application of the teachings of Jesus by [the Anabaptists’] emphasis on discipleship”⁶ and understanding of “the church as a voluntary community”⁷ based in love in human relations rather than being linked to the state church. Anabaptists chose to meet together with like-minded believers instead of being tethered to the confines of a specific state-ordained church or a reformed model of the same.

David Bosch notes this growing tension between Anabaptists, the Reformation movement, and the Roman Catholic Church not only within the church and state relationship but also in the area of mission. In the sixteenth century, the Reformation movement was more concerned with renewing the Roman Catholic Church than replacing it. The focus was reforming the existing church rather than pursuing a Pauline view of missionary activity outside of Western Europe.⁸ For this reason, Anabaptists “pushed aside with consistent logic every other manifestation of Christianity to date: the entire world, including Catholic and Protestant church leaders and rulers, consisted exclusively of pagans. All Christianity was apostate; all had rejected God’s truth.”⁹ As part of the Reformation movement as a whole, Anabaptists agreed with standing in protest against corruption, clergy abuses, and self-serving theology. However, this became more about changing church structure rather than dealing with “heart” issues such as believers baptism instead of infant baptism, separation from rather than submission to the state, and the importance of acknowledging the inner working of the Spirit in the priesthood of all believers rather than believing it to be limited to the professional clergy.¹⁰

The early Anabaptists rejected the canon law, or the scholarly interpretation of scripture all enforced by the sword of the state, in favor of the authority found in biblical interpretation within a gathered community.¹¹ Doug Heidebrecht argues that one of the significant contributions early Anabaptists made to the development of Mennonite traditions was a model of biblical study

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 246–47.

9 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 247.

10 Conrad L. Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit: A profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2012), 155.

11 Doug Heidebrecht, “Toward a Mennonite Brethren Peace Theology: Reading the Bible through an Anabaptist Lens,” *Direction* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 230.

and theological reflection that anticipated “the active involvement of the Spirit within the community when it gathers around the Scriptures.”¹² This suggests several things about pneumatology within the foundations of the Anabaptist movement. As Anabaptists focused on the involvement of the Spirit, they saw a holistic need to reform both the practice of Christianity in the church and its relationship to the state. Additionally, the early Anabaptists’ holistic pneumatology moved the interpretation of scripture beyond the exclusive right of educated clergy, to include the laity as they gathered together to understand the Bible. Charles H. Byrd argues that Swiss Anabaptists “insisted that the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit be present in any true Christian church,” and Pentecostal practices appeared very early in the Swiss Reformation.¹³ This focus on the Spirit provides a link between sixteenth-century Anabaptism and twentieth-century Pentecostalism.¹⁴

In the midst of turmoil in sixteenth-century Europe, caused by the upheaval of the church-state relationship breaking down within medieval Christendom and the threat of a Turkish invasion of Europe, “Anabaptists were forced to develop their theology in an openly hostile environment that denied them political legitimacy.” This adds to the theory that they developed their holistic pneumatology as they “confronted and challenged the social, religious and political” standards of their day. Because of their decisions, Anabaptists were “sought out, persecuted, jailed, dispossessed, exiled, and put to death by Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic cities and rulers.”¹⁵ The marginalization they experienced allowed them to think outside the traditional framework of the established church and seek the active working of the Spirit within both the individual and the gathered community.¹⁶ Heidebrecht refers to the Anabaptists’ understanding of the active presence of the Spirit in both individual

12 Heidebrecht, “Toward a Mennonite Brethren Peace Theology,” 230.

13 Charles H. Byrd, “Pentecostalism’s Anabaptist Heritage: The Zofingen Disputation of 1532,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 28, no. 1 (2008): 50. Byrd makes connections between the early Swiss Brethren as part of the sixteenth-century European Reformation and the term Pentecostalism that typically refers to the spiritual phenomenon that took place in the early twentieth century. He argues that the Swiss Anabaptist emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of spiritual gifts among Christians “reflect[s] Pentecostalism in the modern sense of the term” (50), even though it took place five hundred years before the modern movement came into existence.

14 *Ibid.*, 49.

15 Heidebrecht, “Toward a Mennonite Brethren Peace Theology,” 229–30.

16 *Ibid.*, 231.

and community as a reunification of the work of the Spirit and the interpretation of scripture.¹⁷ This “lively pneumatology” allowed for the interpretation of the scripture to be mediated by the Spirit; the relationship of word and Spirit together provided divine illumination for proper understanding for “outward public proclamation.”¹⁸ Inner transformation and connection to community provided a “necessary connection between the outward proclamation of the Gospel and the inward illumination and conviction of the Spirit as he [invited] people to respond to God.”¹⁹ Some have argued that there is evidence of Unitarianism and an Antitrinitarian stream within the early Anabaptists.²⁰ Howard Bender contends this was due to the lack of a well-defined theology of the Trinity, the result of untrained writers who relied on a simple interpretation of the biblical text.²¹ Of course this was not true for all Anabaptists, as many were theologically trained and decidedly non-Trinitarian in their doctrine. Robert Friedman contends that “Antitrinitarians were (and still are) intellectually ambitious” as they rely on their own reason for theological discourse.²² Although there was some theological diversity, Anabaptists were strongly Trinitarian and remain so in the present age.²³

Forced marginalization—a result of persecution mentioned above—and response to the work of the Spirit led Anabaptist Christians to “regard all of Germany as well as the surrounding countries as mission fields.”²⁴ No longer bound by territories and specific parish assignments, the Anabaptists’ “wandering[s]

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Harold S. Bender, “Unitarianism,” 1959, *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Unitarianism&oldid=143778>.

21 Ibid.

22 Robert Friedmann, “Antitrinitarianism,” 1953, *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Antitrinitarianism&oldid=144727>. Friedmann provides a brief historical overview on Antitrinitarianism, citing persons such as the former Catholic priest Adam Pastor, who took an early stance against Trinitarianism within the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century. Although this article was written in the 1950s, I use it here to show the variant views held within Anabaptism, where both “Unitarian” and Trinitarian theologies existed.

23 A. James Reimer, “God (Trinity), Doctrine of,” 1989, *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, accessed February 4, 2017, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=God_\(Trinity\),_Doctrine_of&oldid=143584](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=God_(Trinity),_Doctrine_of&oldid=143584).

24 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 246.

. . . infuriated the Reformers.”²⁵ In contrast to the Reformers, Anabaptists considered the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) to be a central and binding command, including it in their confessions of faith and reciting it in their court testimonies more than any other biblical text. Bosch states that “they were among the first to make the commission mandatory for all believers.”²⁶ The early Anabaptists had a “strong missionary consciousness,”²⁷ and their call was to live in this tension with the world, submitted to the reign of Jesus Christ as spiritual and human reality.²⁸

The historical background of the Anabaptist movement provides the basis for what can be seen in the current understanding of missional practice of denominations such as the Mennonite Church USA and the Mennonite Brethren. Shenk makes a distinct separation between Anabaptism and the early Mennonites on several points. He argues that while founded in the Anabaptist movement, early Mennonites withdrew from society as a means of preserving their own culture, standing in fierce contrast to the Catholic Church and its sacramentalism.²⁹ Because of their preoccupation with conservation, they became ambivalent toward mission,³⁰ in stark contrast to the early Anabaptist movement. This began to change during the nineteenth century as Mennonites experienced a spiritual quickening that would move them out of isolation and into the influence of the wider Protestant missionary movement.³¹

Mennonite mission theory retained its Anabaptist roots that focused on nonviolence and the importance of social justice. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it has moved from isolation to a more actively engaged mission theory described as “Holistic Christian Witness”:

The church exists for the task of bearing witness to the coming of Christ’s kingdom in the world. Mennonite Mission Network seeks to hold together evangelism, witness and personal transformation with peace, justice and social transformation—believing that each of these values has an important place within the kingdom of God.³²

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 111.

28 Ibid., 112.

29 Ibid., 113.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 114.

32 James R. Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission: Following God’s Call to Reconciliation: Missio Dei*, no. 22 (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2013), 26.

The trend toward a renewal in mission theory began in the mid-nineteenth century, renewing the basic principles from scripture that “God’s ultimate purpose is ‘to unite all things under Christ,’ that is, to liberate men and women from the power of death, their mortal enemy.”³³ This holistic view that “God’s mission is to set things right in a broken world, to redeem it and restore it to its intended purpose”³⁴ permeates mission theory as noted above and is the first of three themes to be identified here.

A second theme within the Anabaptist tradition’s mission theory is the importance of lay people. As shown above, the Anabaptist movement, from its foundation during the Reformation, has placed high value on the laity and its interpretation of scripture within the gathered community. Women and men, ordinary lay people, have participated in spreading the message of salvation “through personal conversations and invitations to meetings.”³⁵ The Spirit has been deeply connected to the Christian life experienced in community as it convicts of sin and leads to repentance.³⁶ Spirit baptism preceded water baptism and then led to the “common life in the church.”³⁷ This emphasis on lay involvement continues to be key in contemporary Anabaptist mission theory in the holistic method of spreading the gospel. Anabaptist emphasis on the “practical realization of the priesthood of believers and its lay activity”³⁸ has developed into the idea that “mission is rooted in God’s love, focused on Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.” As the Holy Spirit is poured out on all believers, it “move[s], transform[s], inspire[s] and empower[s] the church in mission.”³⁹

The third theme to be identified here is ecumenical influence and cooperation. Mennonites experienced a period of social withdrawal, but as their mission theory developed they became more influenced by other Christian traditions and society as a whole. As they learned from the modern missionary movement, Mennonites became ecumenical borrowers as a result of “increased contact with and cooperation in various venues.”⁴⁰ The Protestant missionary movement’s methodology and rationale were largely accepted in the mid-twen-

33 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 124.

34 Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission*, 12.

35 Wolfgang Schäufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of Anabaptist Laity,” *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 85.

36 Jamie Pitts, “The Spirit in Mennonite History” (paper for the Mennonite Church USA-Church of God [Cleveland] ecumenical dialogue, 2016), 33.

37 Ibid.

38 Schäufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of Anabaptist Laity,” 87.

39 Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission*, 12.

40 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 116.

tieth century. This has led to an environment of collaboration that seeks to “[build] partnerships and networks among complementary groups and agencies,”⁴¹ both within the tradition and around the world. As Anabaptists cross the divide and join with other traditions in the mission of God, it is the power of the Spirit that unifies people to witness to the One Triune God.⁴² The ecumenical nature of Anabaptist mission theory may not be one of its stronger points, but it does show a connection with other traditions through a realization of the work of the Spirit.

Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

We’ve seen from what has been discussed so far that understanding the movement of the Holy Spirit has been part of the Anabaptist tradition from its beginning in the sixteenth century. Anabaptism’s holistic, lay-led, and ecumenical nature is seen as inspired and led by the Holy Spirit, who empowers all believers to accomplish the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. Conrad Kanagy notes the decline of Christianity in westernized cultures of North America and Europe in contrast to growing expansion in the Majority world, or as he refers to it, the Global South including Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁴³ The growth of Christianity in the Majority world is due in large part to the spread of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement,⁴⁴ which adapts easily into the highly spiritualized cultures that exist there. This is an important consideration in thinking about parallels between the two theological positions; as the involvement of the Spirit is considered in Anabaptist mission theory, what similarities might be found with the Pentecostal-charismatic⁴⁵ movement and mission theory?

41 Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission*, 22.

42 Erin Dufault-Hunter, “Extending to Fellow Christians an Invitation to the Anabaptist Stream of God’s Story,” *New Anabaptist Voices: Missio Dei*, no. 20, eds. Matthew Krabill and David Stutzman (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2012), 14.

43 Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit*, 28–29.

44 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 8–9.

45 The term “Pentecostal-charismatic movement” includes Classic Pentecostalism traditionally thought of as organized Pentecostal denominations that believe initial evidence of Spirit baptism is speaking in tongues. Pentecostal-charismatic movements within existing traditions such as mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches believe in the gifts of the Spirit manifested through tongues, healing, prophecy, etc. within their own context. Other movements have emerged that claim no association with denominational structures but place high importance on the gifts of the Spirit and spiritual baptism. See Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of*

To begin with, both the Anabaptist tradition and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement emerged as an alternative for renewal within the Christian faith. With historical roots in the Reformation, Anabaptism developed a theological stance self-identified as a “third way” that was neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic, and had a strong missionary call and consciousness.⁴⁶ Likewise, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has historical roots in Protestantism, renewed its theology through awareness of the Holy Spirit, and saw itself as an alternative to the existing traditions.⁴⁷ Vinson Synan identifies Pentecostalism as one of three streams within the larger “river” of Christianity: (1) Catholicism, for its focus on orthodoxy and liturgy; (2) Protestantism, for the centrality of the scripture and the proclamation of the word; and (3) Pentecostalism, for its emphasis on the Spirit-filled life and empowerment for ministry and mission.⁴⁸ Like the early Anabaptists, early Pentecostals suffered persecution, ridicule, and marginalization from established churches, which led them to isolate themselves from the “old and corrupt churches,” resulting in an “anti-ecumenical attitude.”⁴⁹

Both Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement also began with a desire for a deeper spiritual connection within the Christian faith, which eventually led to the organization of denominational structures. Pentecostal-charismatics understand this as three “waves” of renewal. First was the development of Classic Pentecostals, who emphasized baptism of the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of that experience. This spawned many Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland, TN), and Church of God in Christ.⁵⁰ The second wave came through the “charismatic renewal” movement aimed at renewing mainline Catholic and Protestant churches⁵¹ through emphasis on spiritual gifts, healing, and prophecy, with less stress on speaking in tongues as the

Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901–2001 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 395–98 and P. D. Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 477–519.

46 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 111.

47 Alan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62.

48 Vinson Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 291–93.

49 Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 62.

50 Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 8.

51 *Ibid.*

initial evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit. The “third wave” or Neo-charismatic movement consisted of predominantly “mainline evangelicals who experienced signs and wonders but who disdained labels such as ‘Pentecostal’ or ‘charismatic.’”⁵² The Pentecostal-charismatic movement is multi-faceted⁵³ and has progressed from a segregated group to one affecting other Christian traditions and beyond.

Although Mennonites rejected Pentecostalism in the early years of its development, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement did influence Anabaptism in the twentieth century. By the 1970s, Anabaptists were more accepting of the charismatic movement, and a report approved by the Lancaster Conference of the Mennonite Church called for the “unhindered manifestation of the Spirit’s presence through the vibrant expression of praise and the fearless spreading of the good news of the mighty works of God taking place in our time.”⁵⁴ In the late 1970s, Anabaptist groups such as Mennonite Renewal Services and Brethren Renewal Services, a parallel movement in the Church of the Brethren, promoted the charismatic movement and engaged in ecumenical conferences on the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ As Spirit-filled expressions of faith gained acceptance, lay members began to embrace the charismatic movement while remaining within their own Mennonite or Brethren tradition. This was confirmed by a sociological study from the late 1990s that found almost half of all Mennonites “claim the baptism of the Spirit.”⁵⁶ Again, this indicates that the charismatic movement within the Anabaptist tradition has deeply influenced the laity and encouraged ecumenical involvement as the Spirit crosses all denominational lines. Some would argue that the Pentecostal-charismatic influence in the Mennonite tradition simply returned it to its sixteenth-century roots, providing

52 Ibid., 9.

53 Not all Pentecostal groups hold to the Trinitarian concept of many Christian traditions. This includes groups such as Oneness Pentecostals, who believe in the outward evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit but baptize only in the name of Jesus, as they believe in one God without any “distinction of persons . . . Jesus Christ is the fullness of the Godhead incarnate.” Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 205. See also Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 141–47 and D. D. Bundy, “Oneness Pentecostalism,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 936–45.

54 Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 196.

55 Ibid., 197.

56 C. Bender, “Mennonite Charismatics,” *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 870.

for a clear-cut connection between the two such as “communal living, nonhierarchical church authority, and other Anabaptist principles.”⁵⁷ Yet, as noted above, the difference is that the early Anabaptists understood the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit as having a “supportive and confirming and inspirational role under Christ and the Scriptures”⁵⁸ rather than being the central focus for their theology as found in Pentecostal-charismatic circles.

Both Anabaptists and Pentecostal-charismatics have a strong missional call, something that has been in place since the early days of both traditions. Much of the phenomenal growth that has been taking place in the Pentecostal-charismatic movement stems from this strong missionary zeal and call to share a more holistic understanding of the gospel message as essential for both salvation and a Spirit-empowered life, similar to what is known from the beginnings of Anabaptism. The early Anabaptist movement believed “Christian ministry was charismatic by nature, raised up directly by the Holy Spirit and unable to be restricted by any institutional parameters.”⁵⁹ However, the signs and wonders possible through the Holy Spirit’s working were thought to “have a relatively minor role in theory and practice of evangelical Anabaptism.”⁶⁰ This may look somewhat different from the Pentecostal-charismatic movement’s interpretation of the same; however, it does show an affinity toward charismatic practice and willingness to recognize the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and the resulting transformation of heart and life.

The Pentecostal-charismatic movement had its origins among the poor and marginalized groups of society, often as the result of lay people’s willingness to share the gospel outside of the mainstream churches of their day. Pentecostals took their newfound form of Christianity with them as speaking in tongues led many to believe they were called to share the gospel in a particular part of the world. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as seen in Acts 2, was understood by Pentecostals as a missionary spirit and seen as the incentive for world evangelization and Pentecostal expansion.⁶¹ Synan refers to this as “missionaries of the one-way ticket.”⁶² So adamant were these lay people about their call that they believed God was sending them out across the globe to share the

57 Bender, “Mennonite Charismatics,” 870.

58 Kenneth R. Davis, “Anabaptism as a Charismatic Movement,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53, no. 3 (July 1979): 226.

59 *Ibid.*, 231.

60 *Ibid.*, 226.

61 Julie Ma, “The Holy Spirit in Mission,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 54, no. 2 (June, 2015): 172.

62 Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*, 129.

Pentecostal experience without assurance of returning home. As a result, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement became a worldwide phenomenon. Allan Anderson states:

Pentecostalism has always been a [global] missionary movement in foundation and essence. It emerged with a firm conviction that the Spirit had been poured out in “signs and wonders” in order for the nations of the world to be reached for Christ before the end of the age. Its missionaries proclaimed a “full gospel” that included individual salvation, physical healing, personal holiness, baptism with the Spirit, and a life on the edge lived in expectation of the imminent return of Christ.⁶³

Again we see the holistic nature of the involvement of the Spirit in the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, where mind, body, and spirit were touched by the good news of the gospel. Lay people rather than trained missionaries or clergy often took up the missionary task in both their local communities and around the world. As the Pentecostal-charismatic movement grew and developed, people from all different denominational backgrounds were affected by the ecumenical work of unity in the Holy Spirit.

Both traditions struggled to some extent with truly ecumenical involvement outside of their commonly held beliefs about Spirit-empowered lives and transformation of heart and life. For the Anabaptists, transformation included “proclaim[ing] the holistic good news of peace with God” and reconciliation between people and God’s creation.⁶⁴ In addition, holistic pneumatology included missions that sought “to address the imbalance of relationships within a community to honor each person’s participation and maintain equity between people.”⁶⁵ This was “recognized as God’s concern for the poor, the oppressed, and marginalized,”⁶⁶ the impartiality of God that must be reflected in the church. The Pentecostal-charismatic movement also recognized the need to serve the oppressed and marginalized but struggled with paternalism and an air of superiority over “heathen” and “idolaters.”⁶⁷ Yet the empowerment found

63 Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 294.

64 Heidebrecht, “Toward a Mennonite Peace Theology,” 237. Heidebrecht is drawing upon his analysis of biblical texts such as 2 Cor 5:14, 18–20 in developing his point about the “ministry of reconciliation.” His argument for the holistic reconciliation of the world through Christ is connected with the larger picture of Anabaptism I have described. I am using his points to portray an Anabaptist theological perspective.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 233.

through the baptism of the Holy Spirit allowed Pentecostal missionaries to confront spiritual power on the mission field, which “was absolutely basic to the popular understanding of the universe”⁶⁸ for the people they felt called to serve and evangelize. Their cultural missteps were no doubt a result of inherited mission theory and a lack of training, but as the movement continued to grow, the low classes of society and disenfranchised were the most receptive to the message and care of the missionaries. In both the Anabaptist and Pentecostal-charismatic movements, the missionaries’ understanding of the indwelling Holy Spirit empowered them to confront evil spirits, heal the sick and injured, and champion the cause of the poorest and most oppressed of society.

Pneumatology in Mission

In what has been discussed so far, the Holy Spirit has been important for both Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition and their understandings of mission. This point leads to the question of what it means to have a Spirit-centered concept of mission and how Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement help to define a pneumatological view of mission. As has been discussed, three themes can be identified in relation to pneumatology in mission. Since both movements originated from places of renewal in Christian thought, with their followers often suffering persecution for their beliefs, they shared some common ideas about how they might be empowered to make disciples as Christ commanded. While differences in some ideologies and doctrinal stances exist between the two, places of agreement do exist—including the holistic work of the Holy Spirit in all areas of life; the empowerment of lay people to share the good news of the gospel and provide assistance to the poor and disenfranchised of society; and the ecumenical work of the Spirit, which is not limited by denominational boundaries.

The first theme for discussion is holistic pneumatology, because it provides an overall understanding that includes the other two themes that will be discussed later. Julie Ma refers to “holistic evangelism” that brings people to the saving knowledge of Christ and then transforms their everyday lives through social ministries,⁶⁹ which is often the focus of missionary work. In addition to the essential nature of the good news of the gospel in relation to eternal salvation brought through the conviction and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a holistic spirituality sees the broader implications of transformation that include

68 Ibid., 240.

69 Julie Ma, “Touching Lives of People through the Holistic Mission Work of the Buntains in Calcutta, India,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 1 (2016): 81.

mind, body, and social surroundings. The “lived pneumatology,” as mentioned above, suggests the Anabaptist understanding that the agreement of inner and outer lives of believers is an “essential and necessary unity.”⁷⁰ The Spirit’s work in an individual through faith and regeneration must be expressed outwardly through a “life of discipleship and obedience.”⁷¹ The holistic unity of the physical and spiritual being incorporates peace with God’s creation and community, including the promotion of justice. Heidebrecht contends spiritual transformation is necessary for all believers as the inward change connects theological convictions with personal conduct and social responsibility; this intersection of the church and the needs of the world is found in the heart of every Christian.⁷² Kanagy et al. also see spiritual transformation as an essential piece of pneumatology in ministry, especially in the Global South, that is holistic in practice “without distinction between word, deed, and being.”⁷³ Mennonite “mission is rooted in God’s love, focused on Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁴ While the church may face persecution, it “stands in solidarity with poor and oppressed people,”⁷⁵ trusting that through the work of the Spirit “people and communities can be reconciled to God and to one another.”⁷⁶

Amid these inferences to the work of the Holy Spirit, Kanagy et al. critique twentieth-century European and North American Anabaptists for the absence of a thorough treatment of the Holy Spirit and its transformative presence.⁷⁷ They suggest that it is the Pentecostal-charismatic “movement in the Global South [that] has created a pathway for the continued development of an evolution of historic Anabaptism.”⁷⁸ The Pentecostal-charismatic movement expresses as well a holistic approach to mission theory that is seen through the lens of the indwelling empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Amos Yong stresses the importance of a “sturdy pneumatological foundation that understands *missio Spiritus*” as essential for a holistic Trinitarian understanding of the entirety

70 Heidebrecht, “Toward a Mennonite Peace Theology,” 231.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 239.

73 Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit*, 170.

74 Krabill, ed., “Walking Together in Mission,” 12.

75 Ibid., 14.

76 Ibid.

77 Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit*, 236.

78 Ibid., 187.

of God's redemptive work.⁷⁹ Andrew Lord contends for a holistic charismatic missiology that holds the spiritual and material worlds together to assist faith communities in crossing boundaries that often exist between church and culture.⁸⁰

Although the work of the Holy Spirit is often seen through its Christocentric nature, as it should be, the more spiritualized contexts of the Majority world suggest a need to address spiritual forces that are embedded in many cultures there. Paul Pomerville argues that missionary growth in the world needs the outward charismatic ministries of the Spirit. It is the supernatural witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart and the outward signs of the Spirit that show the present rule of God.⁸¹ Lord understands these outward signs—such as healing, prophecy, and power over the demonic—as mission of the Spirit within the framework of the eschatological kingdom of God. He calls for a broadening of Pentecostal-charismatic mission to include holistic mission, experience, context, community, and spirituality.⁸² Julie Ma and Wonsuk Ma add to this, acknowledging the importance of missionary work in baptizing believers and planting churches, and specifying that disciple making is to be carried out through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.⁸³ This illustrates a holistic understanding of the Spirit as it applies to missions in both Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. Kanagy et al. suggest that conversations about the spiritual nature of Pentecostal-charismatic pneumatology may in fact “rub off”⁸⁴ on the Anabaptist tradition and return its followers to their original fervor for life in the Spirit.

The holistic approach to mission, the focus of this article, includes some additional themes in keeping with a pneumatological understanding of mission. The empowerment of lay participation in mission, which is holistic in nature, involves all believers—men and women, young and old, indigenous and foreign born, et cetera. As has been noted above, early Anabaptism stood against a

79 Amos Yong, “Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Missio Spiritus,” *Evangelical Journal* 33, no. 1 (2015): 9.

80 Andrew Lord, “Pentecostal Mission through Contextualization,” *PentecoStudies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 108.

81 Paul Pomerville, *Third Force in Missions: A Pentecostal Contribution to Contemporary Mission Theory* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 126–27.

82 Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), 51.

83 Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal Charismatic Missiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 43.

84 Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit*, 158.

hierarchical system in which the priest was the main source of interpretation for Christian faith and life. Instead of this “CEO leadership model,”⁸⁵ Anabaptists believed “that all God’s children are called to mission and ministry at the moment of their freely-chosen baptism.”⁸⁶ Anabaptist mission theory includes the belief “that the church most faithfully participates in God’s mission when it calls forth leaders as prompted by the Holy Spirit to inspire the congregation for its ministries in the world.”⁸⁷ From the beginning, Anabaptist faith spread through the work of lay missionaries. “Women as well as men participated on the basis of their own independent religious convictions” shared outside of the church building “in the workshop, in the house, in the field, [and] on a journey.”⁸⁸ Ordinary members carried out the missionary commitment no doubt in response to the spiritual energy and vision of the Anabaptist congregations. Wilbert Shenk seeks to clarify a Mennonite theology of mission: “Through the community of the Spirit, Christ’s authority and saving presence is being extended . . . in every part of the world.”⁸⁹ Holistic pneumatology includes the priesthood of all believers through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to spread the good news of the gospel worldwide.

The same idea holds true within the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 is directly connected with the prophecy from Joel 2:28–29. The holistic pneumatology here includes the pouring out of God’s Spirit on all people regardless of age, gender, race, national origin, et cetera. Like the early Anabaptists, Pentecostal-charismatics relied heavily on the missional engagement of lay people. As Pomerville says, “Pentecostalism testifies to, and exemplifies, the fact that the continuing activity of the Spirit is not limited to His inward work with the written Word. His activity also involves His outward charismatic work in the lives of believers.”⁹⁰ Lord supports this idea adding, “Christian communities are central to the mission of the Spirit.”⁹¹ It is the interconnectedness of the various spiritual gifts within the church that enables missional engagement to

85 Tommy Airey, “The Creative Alternative Many Christians Are Looking For,” *New Anabaptist Voices: Missio Dei, Exploring God’s Work in the World*, no. 20, eds. Matthew Krabill and David Stutzman (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network, 2012), 10.

86 Airey, “The Creative Alternative Many Christians Are Looking For,” 10.

87 Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission*, 26.

88 Schäufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity,” 85.

89 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 133.

90 Pomerville, *Third Force in Mission*, 103.

91 Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission*, 105.

take place. It is the unity of the Spirit that allows the community to “work together for God’s kingdom.”⁹² For the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition as well as the Anabaptist tradition, “mission is the domain of every believer, i.e., not limited to a particular class of person, e.g., clergy, religious”⁹³ and “flows from communities rather than individuals.”⁹⁴ Holistic pneumatology in mission includes the work of the Spirit within the lay community, which “brings together those ‘on the margins’ as well as the prosperous and powerful.”⁹⁵ This leads to “the formation of indigenous Christian communities, rather than communities characterized by foreign cultural practices.”⁹⁶ Because we are Christ’s faithful witnesses empowered by his Spirit, his example stands as “the hallmark of every believer called to his mission.”⁹⁷ Of course, not every individual within the Christian community will be called to foreign mission. However, the unity in the Holy Spirit of various individuals, lay and clergy alike, provides a holistic picture of the kingdom of God that includes all believers.

The final theme for considering holistic pneumatology in mission is the ecumenical work of the Spirit. Oftentimes denominational guidelines lead to restriction of missional cooperation, whereupon focusing on our differences takes the place of unity though Christ and his Spirit with other brothers and sisters in the faith. As Shenk states, however, “Mennonites have also learned much from the modern missionary movements,” indicating they have been ecumenical borrowers as their participation in the missionary movement has brought them into contact and cooperation with other groups and endeavors.⁹⁸ He goes on to say that although various mission theologies have influenced Mennonite missions, none of them can “speak out of the historical Mennonite experience.”⁹⁹ Retaining the foundational principles of the Anabaptist tradition while working with other Christian traditions does create some tension. However, contemporary Mennonites see the value in collaboration and interdependence. They “seek to foster an approach to mission in which every partner is an equal at the table . . . demonstrat[ing] mutuality by . . . building partnerships and networks among complementary groups and agencies, within [their] con-

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 108.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 112.

96 Ibid.

97 Ma, “The Holy Spirit in Mission,” 178.

98 Shenk, *By Faith They Went Out*, 116.

99 Ibid., 117.

stituency and with partners around the world.”¹⁰⁰ Jon M. Isaak suggests a Spirit-led way forward for Mennonite Brethren and engagement with Charismatic Renewal movements, citing the end of Christendom as an empire in the West. He contends that “the church will look different in the Holy Spirit era—less denominationally driven, more loose associations or networks of churches, a mix of small faith communities and mega churches”—but will remain grounded in the promise of Christ to remain with us.¹⁰¹

Isaak’s contention for a Spirit-led way forward also applies to developments within the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, as an ecumenical theme in holistic pneumatology in mission can also be seen within the tradition. Some Classic Pentecostals will hold to the idea of speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, thus retaining their theological stance in relation to missional cooperation. Yet, as mentioned above, Synan identifies the Pentecostal-charismatic movement as one of the streams in the river of Christianity. This river includes the charismatic renewal that took place within many other Christian traditions, including the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement and renewals in the Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Mennonite, United Church of Christ, and other churches.¹⁰² It is the ecumenical nature of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that brings unity within the Christian community—but unity does not mean uniformity.

Yong notes that it is the Spirit who brings “unity amidst diversity, plurality, and difference.”¹⁰³ It is “the Spirit’s unifying power [that] enables the integrity of each one amidst the many.”¹⁰⁴ Lord argues that life in the Spirit—the Christian spirituality of individuals and communities—is naturally linked to mission and transforms us into the likeness of Christ. “Without spirituality, mission can revert to activism that is somehow separate from everyday life, yet without mission, spirituality can become a personal pursuit with no impact on the world.”¹⁰⁵ The unifying nature of the Spirit as seen in the Pentecostal-charismatic movement allows for ecumenical dialogue and mission to take

100 Krabill, ed., *Walking Together in Mission*, 22.

101 Jon M. Isaak, “Mennonite Brethren and Charismatic Renewal Movements,” *Direction* 44, no. 2 (2015): 204.

102 Details on the twentieth-century charismatic renewals that took place in these various traditions can be found in Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, chapters 7 through 9.

103 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 135.

104 Ibid.

105 Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission*, 122.

place. The Pentecostal-charismatic renewal movement allows for the focus to remain “on the core beliefs and practices of Christianity [since the movement is] less tethered by doctrines, dress codes, and historical contexts than religious traditions that are closely tied to European and North American cultural identities.”¹⁰⁶ Ecumenical cooperation grounded in the work of the Holy Spirit is an important part of engaging the spiritual realities present in the Majority world.

Conclusion

This study has drawn comparisons between Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, emphasizing missional theory and praxis in each tradition. Both movements originated out of a desire to renew Christianity through deeper engagement with the Scriptures and experiences with the Holy Spirit. Christians in both movements were persecuted; however, both movements grew among the poor and marginalized groups of society as they found comfort and acceptance there. The pneumatologies of the two movements may look different, but the holistic nature contained in them is an essential element of mission theory and praxis moving forward. This is especially important as we engage in an increasingly global society that is often far more spiritually sensitive than European and North American Christianity. As we seek to engage the spirituality that exists in our own culture and that of the Majority world, we will need a pneumatology that is holistic in nature—concerned with the mind, body, sociopolitical environment, and the spirit. Laypersons and clergy, women and men, young and old have spiritual gifts to be used in ministry and mission. The unity of the Holy Spirit will help us find more in common than focusing on our differences as we seek to live out the kingdom of God on earth. Anabaptists and Pentecostal-charismatics have rich histories that are invaluable to the missionary task of making disciples of all nations. The Spirit has been poured out on all people so that we may “see the wonders in the heavens and on earth” (Joel 2:30). Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and empower us for your mission!

106 Kanagy et al., *Winds of the Spirit*, 210.

The Spirit Says Go!

Mission and Early Charismatic Expressions among Russian Mennonite Brethren

JOHANNES REIMER*

Does Spirituality Foster Mission?

Mission is first and foremost God's mission. And the prime agent of the *missio Dei* is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Lord of mission, the *dominus missionis* (2 Cor 3:17).¹ With his coming to earth, the mission of the church became reality. Jesus even commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait until the Spirit came, because this would make them witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Personal experience of the Spirit fosters mission. This is what the New Testament claims, and this is what most of us Christians believe. Hans Kasdorf puts it correctly when he states, "Wo Gottes Geist Erweckung wirkt, da wird der Ansporn zum missionarischem Wirken geben."²

But what about the history of the Mennonite Brethren churches? Were our churches born in times of spiritual revival? Is our mission motivated by the Spirit of God? What is the correlation between spirituality and mission in our story? By turning to the early history of the Mennonite Brethren church, which claims to have been born in spiritual revival,³ I will try to give answers to these questions in this essay. The revival in South Russia was in all regards the turning point for German Protestants in Russia.⁴ This was especially true for the Mennonite churches in the region.

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1 See the discussion in Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen: Theologie des gesellschaftsrelevanten Gemeindebaus*, Transformationsstudien Bd. 1. 2. Auflage. (Marburg: Francke, 2013), 185–90.

2 "Where the Spirit of God initiates revival, missionary engagement will follow." Hans Kasdorf, *Flammen unauflöslich: Mission der Mennoniten unter Zaren und Sowjets 1789–1989* (Bielefeld: Logos, 1991), 73.

3 Ibid.

4 Johannes Reimer, "Zwischen Tradition und Auftrag: Historische Wurzeln russlanddeutscher Glaubensüberzeugungen," *Freikirchenforschung* 16 (2007): 15.

It All Started in Dark Times

Mennonite churches in Russia in the early nineteenth century strayed away from the spiritual vitality of the early Anabaptists. “This house of Menno, says [P. M.] Friesen, became ‘nearly empty, cold, and barren.’”⁵ He blames this on “the confines of the inherited, one-sided Prussian system,” which he calls the “unwholesome system of the Dutch Mennonites.”⁶ Hans Kasdorf reads Friesen as referring here to “the exclusive orthodoxy and narrowness of Mennonite traditionalism on the one hand and the inclusive broad mindedness of theological liberalism on the other.”⁷ The church’s identity at this point was based less on theological convictions than traditional lifestyle. The system “reduced” the majority of “the Mennonite church in Russia to a mere sociocultural institution based on ethnic identity and historical privileges rather than on the dynamic Christian faith and a vital relationship to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”⁸ Spiritually dry, the church had lost her missionary vision.

It is undoubtedly the contribution of German Pietisms that changed the spiritual condition in Russian Mennonite circles in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁹ Friesen refers to Philipp Hiller, Gerhard Tersteegen, Ludwig Hofacker, Friedrich W. Krummacher, Eduard Wüst, and others, who brought “new light, new warmth and new food” into the church.¹⁰ The rediscovery of both life in the Spirit¹¹ and the missionary calling¹² of the church is due to these Pietists. “Jacob P. Bekker speaks of ‘great spiritual awakenings [that] were taking place’ in the 1850s, particularly in the village of Gnadenfeld.”¹³ Copying

5 Hans Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots of Early Mennonite Brethren Spirituality,” *Direction* 13, no. 3 (July 1984): 48, quoting P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789–1910)*, trans. and ed. J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1978), 47.

6 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 37–38.

7 Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots,” 49.

8 Ibid. See also Jakob P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, trans. D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), 32.

9 See the discussion in Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots,” 44–55.

10 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 47.

11 J. B. Toews, “The Significance of P. M. Friesen’s History for Mennonite Brethren Self-Understanding,” in *P. M. Friesen and His History*, ed. Abraham Friesen (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), 158, 231.

12 Victor Adrian, “The Mennonite Brethren Church: Born of Anabaptism and Pietism,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (March 26, 1965): 9; Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots,” 51–53.

13 Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots,” 50, quoting Bekker, *Origin*, 25.

the Pietists, Mennonites met in *Stunden* (house meetings) during the week for edification and prayer, Bible study, and spiritual fellowship. As Bekker points out, it is precisely here where their interest for mission grew,¹⁴ and so Kasdorf concludes that “the Pietists restored both the missionary dimension and the missionary intention to the Mennonite Brethren in Russia.”¹⁵

Eduard Wüst: The Second Reformer

Of the Pietist leaders who influenced the Russian Mennonites, none was as influential as Eduard Wüst (1818–1859).¹⁶ Friesen calls Wüst the “second reformer” of the Mennonite Brethren and compares his historic role with Menno Simons.¹⁷ The Russian Baptist official history calls him an “apostle of the revival in the South of Russia.”¹⁸

Wüst arrived in Russia in 1845. The independent Lutheran Church in Neuhoffnung, Berdiansk, had invited him to serve as their pastor. It seems to be mostly Wüst’s vivid preaching, devoted to radical discipleship, that attracted the minds of the Mennonites there.¹⁹ Abraham Kroeker calls him a “spirit filled, like minded, proficient preacher.”²⁰ At the center of his sermons was the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, with whom a relationship could be established. Wüst described this relationship as life in the Spirit: a powerful, joyful, dedicated, and missionary existence.²¹

Soon after Wüst’s arrival in Neuhoffnung, a spiritual revival spread among the younger Lutheran Pietists in Berdiansk.²² A year later, many Mennonites were spiritually aflame.²³ In his foundational work, P. M. Friesen includes a number of testimonies from Mennonites who were touched by the preaching

14 Bekker, *Origin*, 25.

15 Kasdorf, “Pietist Roots,” 52.

16 See, among others, Hans-Christian Diedrich, *Entstehung des russischen Freikirchentums* (Erlangen: Martin Luther, 1985), 25–30.

17 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 211–12.

18 All-Union Congress of Evangelical-Christian Baptists, *Istoria evangel’skich christian-baptistov v SSSR* (Moskva: VSECHB, 1989), 41.

19 *Ibid.*, 55.

20 Abraham Kröker, *Pfarrer Eduard Wiist: Der grosse Erweckungsprediger in den deutschen Kolonien Südrusslands* (Leipzig: H. G. Wallmann, 1903), 37.

21 See, for instance, Wüst’s commencement sermon in Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 174–75.

22 Kröker, *Pfarrer Eduard Wüst*, 60, says the revival began three months after Wüst’s arrival.

23 *Ibid.*, 77.

of Wüst.²⁴ The high acceptance of Wüst's preaching among Mennonites was not accidental. Viktor Doerksen states correctly, "Wüst proclaimed a radical gospel of decision, boldly formulated and dynamically preached. To mid-century Mennonites used to hearing traditional sermons read in their services, this approach to religious proclamation with its Methodist fervor was new and convincing, and they soon became a part of the revival movement which swept the colonies."²⁵

Wüst preached with divine power. Mennonites listening to him sensed the power of the Holy Spirit. Kröker reports that it was this dynamic spiritual appearance that raised a desire for more and deeper spirituality and a personal experience of the Spirit in their own lives.²⁶ Here lies the main source of the intensive search for charismatic expressions that characterizes the early history of the Mennonite Brethren.

Wüst preached personal piety combined with vivid missionary involvement. The "mission festivals" where he preached soon became places of renewal and inspiration for many. Kasdorf summarizes his ministry with the following words: "Wenn er auf Missionsfesten predigte, rief er zur Bekehrung auf; wenn er evangelisierte, forderte er seine Zuhörer zu missionarischem Einsatz heraus."²⁷ Missionary motivation consequently followed evangelism; spiritual renewal moved into missionary engagement. Bekker reports that as a result, revival spread through Mennonite homes, and heartfelt prayers were offered for and financial support was given to the first missionaries despite harsh critique by Mennonite elders.²⁸

The Mennonite Brethren Church: Born in Revival, Sent to the Nations

The revival among Mennonites led to the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860. She is a firstfruit of this revival.²⁹ All attempts of Menno-

24 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 169–75.

25 Viktor G. Doerksen, "Eduard Wüst and Jerusalem," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56, no. 2 (April 1982): 169.

26 Kröker, *Pfarrer Eduard Wüst*, 60–61; Reimer, *Zwischen Tradition und Auftrag*, 17.

27 "He preached in mission festivals and called people to conversion, and he evangelized and motivated his listeners to engage in missions." Hans Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 68.

28 Bekker, *Origin*, 35–39.

29 Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 72.

nite historians to write “Wüst out of Mennonite history altogether”³⁰ represent misinterpretations of historical facts. Sure enough, revivals do not come overnight—there is always more to history—but there is also what we may call the initiating factor. The Wüst revival must be seen as such. The revival reinforced both the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of mission to the Mennonite brotherhood.

The newly founded Mennonite Brethren Church was keen to discover the work of the Holy Spirit. Its new relationship to the Spirit is portrayed in the Mennonites’ accusations—reported by P. M. Friesen—that the new church claimed to have the same gifts of the Spirit as the apostles did. Agreeing with the Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren leaders responded positively and referred to 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 28–30, and Ephesians 4:7 as their theological point of departure. Every believer, they pronounced, has received some gifts of grace. Further accused of naming preachers and leaders as apostles and prophets, as well as claiming to be in personal relationship with God himself, the Brethren referred to Ephesians 4:11, stating that God had indeed granted all those gifts to the church, adding, however, that the gift of prophecy had not been given to them yet. Moreover, they emphasized their enjoyment of their fellowship with God as having been granted by the Lord himself (1 Cor 2:10–12). Finally, accused of rejecting science as guide for life, they proudly responded that they build their life upon the lessons of the Spirit of God, who enlightens their mind.³¹ The centrality of God’s Spirit in these statements is clearly evident.

The work of the Spirit in the newly founded Mennonite Brethren Church was best expressed in its missionary actions. Mission became one of the primary themes discussed early on among the believers. At the first Mennonite Brethren General Conference, in Andreasfeld, Chortitza, in May 1872, the question of evangelism and mission was central. As a result, the conference appointed an itinerant preaching committee, selected five itinerant evangelists, and decided to support them financially. The committee was commissioned to publish a motivational newsletter in order “that the congregations become aware of the labors of the brethren and that interest for missions be awakened more.” In addition, the committee was assigned to “consider the foreign missions in India, which is relatively large and demanding in personnel and mon-

30 Viktor G. Doerksen, “A Second Menno? Eduard Wüst and Mennonite Brethren Beginnings,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 2 (April 2000): 312.

31 P. M. Friesen, *Die Alt Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789–1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt, Taurien: Raduga), 282–87.

ey.”³² Thus, the ministry of these preachers, as J. J. Toews notes, “stimulated soul-winning and a growing missionary spirit in the churches.”³³

It is fascinating to see how rapidly the mission work developed. Members of the young and tiny Mennonite Brethren Church began by leading Mennonites themselves to a fresh experience of faith. Soon, they crossed over to other German and Russian neighbors and abroad. As early as 1860, Heinrich Bartel and Benjamin Becker, members of the newly founded Mennonite Brethren Church in the Molotschna, evangelized German colonists of Lutheran background in the Volga region.³⁴ Becker then went on to work as missionary alongside Gerhard Wieler among German colonists in Neu- and Alt-Danzig.³⁵ Moreover, we read about missionary attempts among the Russian-speaking population, consequently leading to what is known today as *Stundism*, the first expression of East-Slavic Protestantism.³⁶ Only twenty-nine years later, in 1889, the young Mennonite Brethren sent their first missionary couple, Abraham and Maria Friesen, to India.³⁷

All in all, we can see an amazing movement of a missionary-minded church. Others have carefully documented this story, so it is not my intention here to unveil the many missionary actions of the early Mennonite Brethren Church. This brief overview should suffice, however, to illustrate how mission and a Holy Spirit-led spirituality played a decisive role in its early development.

But Wasn't There Also

Critics will point to the fact that most of the missionaries mentioned above, including Eduard Wüst himself, were also involved in dangerous heresies. The revival in South Russia was closely connected to the so-called Joyful Movement (*Bewegung der Fröhlichen*). In early Mennonite Brethren history, this movement created many problems, including church splits. A. H. Unruh called the move-

32 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 475–76.

33 Jacob J. Toews, “The Missionary Spirit of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia,” in *The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), 144.

34 Heinrich Löwen, *In Vergessenheit geratene Beziehungen: Frühe Begegnungen der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde mit dem Baptismus in Rußland—ein Überblick* (Bielefeld: Logos, 1989), 51–52; Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 78.

35 Löwen, *In Vergessenheit geratene Beziehungen*, 54.

36 Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 79–84; Löwen, *In Vergessenheit geratene Beziehungen*, 61f.; Diedrich, *Entstehung des russischen Freikirchentums*, 55–56.

37 Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 109–11.

ment *falsche Richtung* (wrong direction).³⁸ Hans Christian Diedrich blames the movement for having stopped the revival altogether.³⁹

The Joyful Movement represented a new discovery of God's presence among the people. The worship services, which included elements of witness, testimony, clapping hands, dancing, and joyful singing, differed radically from what Mennonites were used to.⁴⁰ Both the newly discovered freedom in the Spirit and the claim of authority to act in the power of the Spirit came out of personal convictions seemingly granted by the Spirit. Some of the leaders even named themselves *Die Starke* (The Strong), developing a spiritual dictatorship in their congregations. Among them were Gerhard Wieler, Benjamin Becker, and Bernhard Penner, who excommunicated a number of members—even those who had participated in the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church, such as Jakob Reimer and Heinrich Hübert, the first elder of the church.⁴¹ The Joyful claimed total freedom from sin, and personal strength in the Spirit in all matters.⁴² This led to a number of cases of sexual misbehavior. They burned books, rejected theological advice, and claimed to rely only on God's Spirit, who was promised to lead the believers in all truth (John 16:8). Whoever refused to follow them was considered disobedient and subject to punishment and excommunication. The movement became the most dangerous threat to the young church.

The Mennonite Brethren Church battled against the teaching of the Joyful until 1865 when a number of brothers under the leadership of Johann Classen formulated what has become known as the "June Protocol,"⁴³ in which the "wrong beliefs and doings" of the early years in the church were named and rejected. In regard to the questions discussed in this article, there are a number of issues of importance.

- The June Protocol addressed the question of leadership authority. Apostolic authority as it was exercised by the Strong was rejected. In the future, all executive authority was to be given to the congregation.⁴⁴ No individual leader, whatever calling or office they claimed, was allowed to

38 A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1954), 122, 109.

39 Diedrich, *Entstehung des russischen Freikirchentums*, 116.

40 Ibid., 110–12.

41 Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 233.

42 Ibid., 230, 237.

43 See the original full text in Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 362–65.

44 Ibid., 364.

exercise spiritual authority over the church. Mennonite Brethren congregationalism was born. The opinion of the majority became a point of departure for life and mission of the church.

- Edward Wüst's so-called *Freiheitslehre* (teaching on freedom), based on the reformed understanding of *sola gratia*, was theologically questioned and exchanged for the Arminian teaching of the need to live in obedience and be sanctified. Accordingly, the freedom of direct communication with God became a questionable concept. Questioning the voice of the Spirit, who tells our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:16), led to an uncertainty about salvation that is typical in Mennonite Brethren circles.
- The joyful worship with its expressive elements of music, dance, and shouting was challenged because it brought so many divisions among believers. These elements were not prohibited, but warnings were issued not to create any offense among churchgoers.⁴⁵ Charismatic expressions were thereby equated with spiritual pride and blamed for all kinds of misbehavior.⁴⁶

It seems that the decisions of the authors of the June Protocol followed a clear line: less spirit, more reason. The document established order in the Mennonite Brethren churches, and the majority of Mennonites welcomed it.⁴⁷ But, as Friesen states, it also turned the Mennonite Brethren Church in years to come into a puritan and formulaic Pietist—rather than vividly charismatic—reality.⁴⁸ And even A. H. Unruh, who in principle welcomed the decisions of the June Protocol, warned that formalism can never be a substitute for the joy in the Lord.⁴⁹

Reform Is Good but Not at the Expense of the Spirit

The June Protocol brought order to the church, but did it intensify mission? Some of those Brothers who risked their freedom going to Russian neighbors, evangelizing and baptizing them, for instance, belonged to the party of the Joyful. Gerhard Wieler, who is often praised for his work among Russians,⁵⁰

45 Unruh, *Die Geschichte*, 122.

46 Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 361; Unruh, *Die Geschichte*, 125.

47 Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 375.

48 Ibid., 366–67.

49 Unruh, *Die Geschichte*, 134.

50 Gerhard Lohrenz, “The Mennonites of Russia and the Great Commission,” in *A Legacy of Faith: The Heritage of Menno Simons: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Cornelius*

was even one of the movement's leaders.⁵¹ He and others with him did not sign the June Protocol. Most of the Joyful left the church. The loss of such men after 1865 can be seen as a clear decelerating factor for mission work. Historians point to the fact that evangelical mission to the Slavs started with the Mennonite Brethren, who may have been the "midwife" for the Russian Evangelical church, as A. N. Ipatov puts it,⁵² although they obviously reached only a few individuals with the gospel.⁵³ Even the famous baptism of the first Russian, Efim Zymbal, in 1869 by Abram Unger, the elder of the Mennonite Brethren Church, did not take place in a Mennonite Brethren Church but rather among converted Lutherans in the Baptist Church of Alt-Danzig. Unger baptized Zymbal without recognizing him as a Russian person. Would he have done it anyway?⁵⁴ There is no historical evidence that Unger was interested in evangelizing Russians. We do not know for sure how motivated Unger was to baptize a Russian convert, and it is therefore historically problematic to praise the Mennonite Brethren for their Slavic mission where sources are rare and evidence missing.

The majority of Mennonite Brethren steadily lost their missionary interest after 1865. In 1882, the church's mission work came to a low point. That year, Johann Wieler, who was actively involved in planting churches among Russians and Ukrainians, invited all evangelical churches to a conference in Rückenau, with an invitation to form a joint Evangelical Movement in Russia. Wieler proposed to his fellow Mennonite Brethren to concentrate on evangelism to Russians and Ukrainians as the foremost task of the church.⁵⁵ His proposal was rejected, and Mennonite Brethren churches have never again attempted to plant a Russian Mennonite Brethren church. The churches instead concentrated their energy on internal development and supported mission work outside Russia.

Krahn, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Newton, KS: Faith and Life), 178–79; Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 80; Löwen, *In Vergessenheit geratene Beziehungen*, 62–66.

51 Cornelius Krahn and Richard D. Thiessen, "Wieler, Gerhard (1833–1911)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (December 2007), accessed September 13, 2016, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Wieler,_Gerhard_\(1833-1911\)&oldid=123790](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Wieler,_Gerhard_(1833-1911)&oldid=123790).

52 A. N. Ipatov, *Kto takie Mennonity?* (Kazachstan: Alma-Ata, 1977), 63–64.

53 Diedrich, *Siedler*, 56.

54 See the discussion about the baptism of Zymbal in Löwen, *In Vergessenheit geratene Beziehungen*, 66–67.

55 Waldemar Gutsche, *Westliche Quellen des Russischen Stundismus* (Kassel: J. G. Oncken Verlag, 1957), 65; Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 82.

Kasdorf is surprised about the 1882 decision and additionally notes that until 1906 there was little Mennonite Brethren missionary activity in Russia itself.⁵⁶ Where did this inactivity come from? Was it due to a fear of losing the state privileges granted to Mennonites by the Russian Czar upon their promise not to proselytize Russian citizens? Did the Mennonite Brethren value their societal status more than God's call? There is much evidence for such an interpretation. Only after the Russian government lifted the ban on proselytism, with the Edict of Tolerance in 1905, did the Mennonite Brethren Conference reenter evangelism and mission in Russia.⁵⁷ Given the preceding accounts, it may also be asked if fear of the new charismatic expressions robbed the Mennonite Brethren of their missionary passion. Or, to put it in even stronger terms, it might have been a fear of the Holy Spirit as such.

The following arguments can be made to support such a claim. First, early Mennonite Brethren missionary activity was motivated by personal reception of a call by the Spirit of God. People made decisions by listening to God. This dependence on people individually hearing God led to deep commitment to mission but also to some misbehavior and heresy. A critical instrument of control was needed. The June Protocol introduced congregational authority as the final decisive voice in all matters of faith and life. The Spirit was no longer understood to lead Christians directly, but rather the church led by the Spirit determined the way to go. But how does the Spirit lead the church? The documents produced after 1865 by Mennonite Brethren say almost nothing to this issue. What is left is the common sense of the discerning community trying to orient her own decisions according to what the Bible and church tradition say. And tradition protected first and foremost the Mennonite identity and status in Russia. Tradition did not encourage mission since mission endangered the special status given to the Mennonites.

Second, missionary activity prior to 1865 was done by individuals. The June Protocol, however, limited individual calling by advocating congregational control over all matters of faith and life. Claims of personal experience with the Holy Spirit became rare and were viewed as potentially heretical. Even after the 1917 to 1929 revolution—with its unprecedented freedom for evangelical evangelism, a period we call “the golden years” of evangelism in Russia⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 82.

⁵⁷ See, among others, Unruh, *Die Geschichte*, 258; Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 83; Wilhelm Kahle, *Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion* (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1987), 56.

⁵⁸ Johannes Reimer, “Ostslavischer Protestantismus: Quellen, Wege, Prägungen.” Unpublished Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit (Hamburg-Horn: Theologisches Seminar

and Kasdorf calls the “missionary heyday,”⁵⁹ with many Mennonite Brethren involved in active evangelism and mission⁶⁰—it was less the church that initiated projects than Mennonite Brethren individuals, often against their church’s advice. Kasdorf points, for instance, to the Russian Tent Mission, initiated and led by Jacob J. Dyck (1890–1919), as one of the most exiting missionary projects of the time.⁶¹ There is no question that this missionary project leaves us speechless—and, of course, many Mennonites then supported the venture. But the church as such? There were many warnings instead of support.⁶² In the end, most of the team was killed, most probably by former Mennonites now engaged in the army of Nestor Machno.⁶³ Another initiative Kasdorf praises is the mission to the Osiaks in Western Siberia led by Johann Peters from the Orenburg Colony.⁶⁴ It deserves much praise, along with Martin Thielmann’s work in Central Asia among the Muslim Kyrgyz. But as research shows, here again both of these great Mennonite missionary ventures were less motivated and initiated by Mennonite Brethren churches than by individual actions.⁶⁵ Martin Thielmann was so deeply disappointed in his fellow Mennonites who refused to integrate converted Muslims into their church that he finally founded an Evangelical Christian church.⁶⁶ The fear of being ethnically polluted by Kyrgyz was much deeper than Mennonite passion for mission.

The June reform was obviously needed, but the Mennonite Brethren went too far in their search for order—with the reform they formalized spirituality and ethnocentricity followed. The new spirituality was less charismatic, less unpredictable, less disordered, and obviously less missionary. The reform was needed but could have followed other criteria.

des Bundes Evangelisch Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, 1983), 120.

59 Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 113.

60 See an overview in Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 115, 156.

61 Ibid., 124–31.

62 For more information on the tent mission, see my book Johannes Reimer, *Evangelisation im Angesicht des Todes: Jakob J. Dyck und die Russische Zeltmission* (Lage: Logos Verlag, 2000), 55–86.

63 Ibid., 100.

64 Kasdorf, *Flammen unauslöschlich*, 145–56.

65 See in detail: Johannes Reimer, *Bis an die Enden Sibiriens: Aus dem Leben und Wirken des Osjaken Missionars Johann Peters* (Lage: Logos Verlag, 1998); Johannes Reimer, *Seine letzten Worte waren ein Lied: Martin Thielmann; Leben und Wirken des Kirgisen Missionars* (Lage: Logos Verlag, 1997).

66 Reimer, *Seine letzten Worte*, 89–92.

Here We Are: Baptomennonites between the Chairs

Most Mennonite Brethren left the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century. The majority of them settled in Germany. Here they established a great number of churches divided into different conferences,⁶⁷ and mingled and mixed with Baptists, representing what has been named “Baptomennonitism.”⁶⁸ There are many issues these churches battle with. Among the most prominent are (1) relationship to God’s Spirit and charismatic expressions in the world today and (2) cross-cultural mission.

The issue of the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and her mission has hardly ever left the church agenda among the Russian Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren. Particularly after World War II, there was a renewed search for a deeper spirituality. Openly raising the issue in the church, however, has normally led to splits. Given this, it’s surprising that the newest studies on Russian Pentecostalism identify a relatively high number of Mennonite names among leading Pentecostals in the former USSR.⁶⁹ Of the fourteen Pentecostal bishops installed among Russian Germans in the USSR, five carry Mennonite names,⁷⁰ and the pastors in 24 of 95 Pentecostal churches with German members seem to be of Mennonite origin.⁷¹ Obviously, there was a substantial group of Mennonites deeply interested in spiritual matters who did finally find their way to live out their Spirit-motivated passion. In Baptist and Mennonite literature, this phenomenon has largely been overlooked and unnoticed.

Only now, with a rapid spread of the Charismatic movement among Mennonites, have the issues become virulent. The reaction to charismatic phenomena among Mennonite Brethren in Germany has been harsh and strict. Charismatic expressions are banned from churches, and those who raise questions about this are isolated and even excommunicated. Nevertheless, hundreds of young people are leaving the churches and joining the ranks of Charismatics and Pentecostals, as can be seen in the growing *Evangeliums Kirche Glaubens-*

67 See an excellent overview in John N. Klassen, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2007).

68 Johannes Reimer, *Auf der Suche nach Identität: Russlanddeutsche zwischen Baptisten und Mennoniten nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg* (Lage: Logos Verlag, 1996), 99.

69 See, for instance, Leonard Frank, *Gemeindegewachstum der Pfingstgemeinden im 20ten Jahrhundert* (MTh dissertation, University of South Africa, 2012) and the literature discussed here. See also Leonhard Frank, “Die Russlanddeutschen Pfingstgemeinden” (unpublished paper, 2016).

70 Frank, “Die Russlanddeutschen,” 20.

71 *Ibid.*, 25–28.

generation in Duisburg under the leadership of Pastor Alexander Epp⁷² or the Pentecostal *Lebensquelle* in Osnabrück led by Pastor Jakob Neufeld.⁷³ The old questions are back more than 150 years after the June Protocol, and they are hitting the church with more strength than ever.

At the same time, mission in those churches is stuck.⁷⁴ The churches prove unable to reach out to the German population at large, staying ethnoconfessional in spirit and growing to a large extent only by childbirth. And even their own children are leaving the church in large proportion.

It seems to me that, without forcing the issue, it might be high time to return to the correlation of Spirit and mission if the Mennonite Brethren Church, which started as a revival, does not want to lose ground in countries like Germany and Russia. For too long, voices from inside and outside the movement have problematized the issue. The famous Evangelical Christian Pastor William Fetler (1883–1957) of Riga, Latvia, wrote to his fellow Christians in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century: “The teaching of the Holy Spirit is the dynamic which is lost by the church today.”⁷⁵ Similarly, Ivan V. Kargel (1849–1937), the prominent Evangelical Christian theologian in St. Petersburg and a great friend of Mennonites, complained about the notorious inability of Evangelicals to assign the most important role to the Spirit of God.⁷⁶ The German historian Wilhelm Kahle, reflecting on the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches in the former USSR, noticed that it was precisely the search for the gifts of the Spirit that led people to join Pentecostals.⁷⁷ Even atheist authors notice that the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the USSR directly correlates with the role of the Holy Spirit in these churches.⁷⁸ It should be of paramount interest that even modern-day Ukrainian historians specifi-

72 [Http://www.glaubensgeneration.de/about.php?sprache=de](http://www.glaubensgeneration.de/about.php?sprache=de), accessed September 9, 2016.

73 [Http://www.lebensquelle-os.de](http://www.lebensquelle-os.de), accessed September 9, 2016.

74 See my article, Johannes Reimer, “Mission der Aussiedlergemeinden in Deutschland—was bremst den Aufbruch?” *Evangelikale Missiologie* 25 (Giessen: AfeM, 2009), 154–62.

75 Vladimir Frančuk, *Prosila Rossia dozdia u Gospoda*, Tom 1. (Kiev: Svitankova Zoria, 2001), 317.

76 Frančuk, *Prosila Rossia*, 269–74.

77 Kahle, *Evangelische Christen*, 255.

78 Aleksei Moskalkenko, *Piatidesiatniki* (Moskva: Politiceskaia literatura, 1973), 69; Aleksandr Klibanov, *Religioznoie sektantstvo i sovremennost'* (Moskva: Nauka, 1969), 149; Anatoli Belov, *Sekty, sektantstvo, sektanty* (Moskva: Nauka, 1978), 88; Valeri Graždan, *Kto takie piatidesiatniki* (Alma-Ata: Kasachstan, 1965), 29–30.

cally point to the revival in South Russia in the nineteenth century as one of the foundations these churches build on.⁷⁹

Spirit and mission go together. It is dangerous to neglect the work of the Spirit, just as it is, of course, highly problematic to misinterpret spiritualistic phenomena as the Spirit's work. Critical reflection is needed. But such a reflection requires more than reasoning; it requires a spiritual gift to discern Spirits. Not an established function- and image-preserving order, but rather a life in obedience and mission seems to be the imperative of the day. We can do better today, as our brothers did in 1865.

79 Frančuk, *Prosila Rossia*, 224–27.

Peddling Flame

CAROL TOBIN*

While men amend the world with cages
You come dancing down the ages
peddling sparks to blaze, set fire
when we—all box-bent—build yet higher

With wondrous ware of flashing flame
oh mountain melter, human smelter
You tame what naught befits Your name

With sword of flame and pillared fire
You best what men with might conspire—
might fix with some more clumsy mix
of creedal concrete heavy hard

Oh Spirit bard and humble tinker
You pour that pan of sparkling ember
on clueless takers

making thus a body burning
carrying forward all Your yearning
that ash on wind be blown away
leaving only on that day what holy ought remain

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“Who’ll Be a Witness for My Lord?”

Exploring the Power to Be a Witness

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The Christian church’s expansive zeal has often, throughout its history, walked hand in hand with the colonial pursuits of empires and nation-states. This cooperative approach between church and empire, which is most apparent in Christendom, has implicated the church, and the Christian faith in general, with the oppressive and violent exploitation that has come through colonialism and its painful history. This Christendom legacy and its corresponding Constantinian imagination¹ have left their mark on how the church and its role are understood in the South African context.

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1 Although terms such as “Christendom” and “Constantinianism” have become common and mostly synonymous, it may still be useful to offer a definition of the way these terms will be used in this paper. Both Christendom and Constantinianism refer to the impulse to synthesize the purposes of the church and state into a reconciled and compatible partnership. This synthesis was energized over a period of time that included the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 CE; the legalization of the Christian faith within the Empire declared in the Edict of Milan in 313 CE; Theodosius I making Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380 CE; and the declaration of the illegality of pagan religions in the Empire in 392 CE, which in effect made the Christian faith mandatory and compulsory for all citizens of the Empire. This intentional integration (“marriage”) of the church with the Empire resulted in a basic division of labor based on the joint assumptions that (1) the state was primarily responsible for the social conditions within the state (or Empire), determining the way in which society would be structured and the way those within its geographic boundaries would relate to one another (i.e., the political), and (2) the church would focus primarily on the inner, spiritual health of the state’s (or Empire’s) citizens. In this paper, “Constantinianism” is used to describe the logic that undergirds the historic example of Christendom.

For more on these concepts see John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135–47;

One of the main issues of the “Constantinian shift,” I argue, is the way the church adopted the empire’s understanding of power. The post-Constantinian church (i.e., the church after Constantine) has largely come to accept power defined as the ability to cause something to happen by exerting force or influencing something or someone toward a desired end. Given this understanding of power, the church in its desire to bring about social change has accepted the mentality that it must become an ally of that which wields power—namely, the empire or state. This alliance has been, and indeed continues to be, the common assumption in the South African context.

In this paper, I argue that Jesus’s promise to the apostles of the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the power that would accompany its arrival, as told in Acts 1, offers an alternative understanding of power. Jesus’s promise offers, I argue, a useful perspective whereby the church in South Africa and beyond can reclaim its prophetic stance as it embodies an alternative politic that this alternative form of power requires.

The Church in the South African Context

South Africa’s complex history since the seventeenth century can be summarized as a history of colonization. Apartheid, an Afrikaans word that means “aparthood” or “apartness,” grew out of a long history of complex relations between Europeans who landed at the Cape—the southern tip of Africa—and those who were native to the land. Although the official policy of apartheid was not introduced until 1948, the history of colonialism and white privilege in South Africa dates back to the arrival of the first European colonists in 1652. A mindset of “European” and “white” superiority, along with common practices that emerged from this mindset, existed from the outset.

John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2003), 65–84; John Howard Yoder, “The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1998), 242–61; Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 74–78; Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*, expanded 25th anniversary edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 30–48; John D. Roth, *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); John W. De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 219–20; Emmanuel Katongole and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009); and Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

Thus, segregated practices were firmly in place long before the introduction of apartheid as an official governing policy in 1948. What was new in 1948 was the National Party’s implementation of racial separation and segregation into law. These policies and laws, based on an ideologically rigid character of “separate development,” affected all of life—where one could live; how one was educated; what kind of education one received; with whom one could associate; who one could marry; what church one could attend; and so forth. These policies and the ideological character that supported them determined race relations for the rest of the twentieth century,² firmly entrenching white privilege within the legal and social structure of South Africa.³

These developments also ensured the complexity of the Christian church’s story in South Africa. In large part, the white church in South Africa joined hand in hand with the colonizing powers upon their arrival, detaching the reality of white privilege from the social implications of the gospel. From the moment of initial contact, the Europeans and the Christian churches they established nurtured an understanding of white superiority and identity. The church either actively supported—or stood silently by—the colonizing powers structuring a society that assumed white dominance, authority, and superiority, which formed the basis of “separate development.” The church at its worst became a tool that would help transform African society to align with European assumptions and customs. This was true not only of the Afrikaner churches—the Dutch Reformed Church, specifically—but also of the so-called English-speaking churches that emerged (Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, and Presbyterian) with the introduction of British rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴ These so-called English-speaking churches followed the already established pattern of their Afrikaner or Dutch counterparts.⁵ As John de Gruchy, one of South Africa’s eminent theologians, has noted, the church and its life were determined by “social pressure and pragmatism, custom and culture, rather than theology and scripture.”⁶ Put simply,

2 John W. de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 25th anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 51.

3 For a more thorough and comprehensive examination of the rise of apartheid and the church’s role and responses to it, see De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*.

4 See James Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English-Speaking Churches 1903–1930* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan, 1987).

5 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 13.

6 *Ibid.*, 9.

the church was a tool that embedded a notion of European white superiority in South Africa.

Although the pattern of the established churches was to assume a mindset based on white dominance and privilege, missionaries, largely due to their close contact with marginalized and oppressed communities, became openly critical and often opposed the colonialism being established.⁷ “Mission churches,” comprised primarily of people who were considered “non-white,” developed a significantly different identity than “settler churches,” which were comprised primarily of white settlers. The former inevitably engaged in issues of justice and inequality as they continuously faced issues of oppression and dehumanization. Indeed, as Richard Elphick has asserted in his book *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa*, the seed of South African egalitarianism was the theological proclamation of the early missionaries.⁸ “White settlers,” Elphick writes, “understood the message of evangelical missionaries to promise the Khoisan salvation in the next life, but, more threateningly, social equality in this one.”⁹ Eventually this would develop into a tradition of what can be described as “prophetic theology.”¹⁰ Such “prophetic theology” continued to sow seeds of equality and justice, offering another embodied politic that challenged the injustices of colonialism and apartheid.

Thus, the complexity of South Africa’s history is also found within the church, a church that nurtured both the colonizing European powers, which justified racial segregation and separation, as well as an alternative imagination that called such colonization into question. Those who would later be described as “prophetic” found ways of forming and belonging to communities that proved to offer an alternative politic in the face of the dehumanizing, colonial power exerted over them. It was an embodiment of an alternative under-

⁷ See, for example the distinction made in de Gruchy’s *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 1–18, as well as Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ The 1985 *Kairos Document: A Challenge to the Church* described such a theology that challenged the status quo of oppression and injustice as “Prophetic Theology.” See “The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (First Edition, Braamfontein, 1985),” in *The Kairos Documents*, ed. Gary S. D. Leonard (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, 2010).

standing of power that was most apparent through the people’s cry, “*Amandla; awethu!*” (Power is ours!).

Exploring the Nature of Power

Unfortunately, as South Africa has been moving into its new liberal, or neo-liberal, political dispensation after the official demise of apartheid in 1994, the church, even in its “prophetic” form, has been falling back into the ever-present Constantinian, or neo-Constantinian, temptation in the way power is understood and embodied. It has been falling into the trap whereby, as William Cavanaugh describes it, the country is viewed as an organic whole—the state being responsible for the bodies, the church for the souls.¹¹ As such, the church in South Africa has also been releasing the alternative perspective of power it once embodied. It has been moving away from the “*Amandla; awethu*” understanding to an understanding based on influence and force to order society; an understanding commonly accepted as the role in “civil society.”¹²

The insidious temptation to possess “power over”—power that is based on the pursuit of directing or influencing the behavior of others or the course of events—is confronted and challenged by the biblical narrative and depiction of the form of power that it portrays as “godly.” For example, a small and seemingly insignificant nation becomes the chosen people of God; a child defeats a notorious warrior with pebbles and a slingshot; a savior is born in a barn and becomes the son of a carpenter; death, ironically, overcomes death and provides the possibility for life. All of these examples demonstrate the radically alternative way in which God works. They also, I think, demonstrate what we often miss—the paradoxical nature of God’s power. God’s work demonstrates an alternative imagination as to what is possible, challenging us to align our lives according to such an imagination. The difficulty, it seems, is not only aligning our lives and the way we participate in God’s mission, but also *believing* and *trusting* in this seemingly illogical character of power embodied throughout the story of God’s active presence in the world.

11 William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 16.

12 For a very good and interesting portrayal regarding the way “civil society” plays into state politics, see Michael Neocosmos, “Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today,” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 1, no. 2 (2009): 263–334.

The promise Jesus makes to his disciples in the beginning of Acts helps us, I think, grapple with and better understand this alternative form and understanding of power.¹³

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4–8)¹⁴

The book of Acts begins with Jesus reminding his disciples of the promise he has made about the arrival of the Holy Spirit. This is the fulfillment of Jesus’s promise that, once he departs, another helper will come to walk with, accompany, and strengthen the disciples in their journey of being like their teacher. This promise, the fire that the author already foretells in Luke 3:16,¹⁵ is fulfilled in Acts 2 with the arrival of the Holy Spirit—namely, the Pentecost event. We are led, in other words, to assume that with the fiery arrival of the Holy Spirit, the promise that Jesus makes in Acts 1:4–8 is fulfilled: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

The rest of Acts goes on to demonstrate the way in which the Holy Spirit works in and through this newly formed community—the church, a community that was itself formed by the Holy Spirit. The Pentecost event marks a moment in which the power of God is bestowed upon Jesus’s disciples. It also marks the moment in which the disciples received the power to follow the example of their teacher. The promise made in Luke 6:40—“a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher”—is fulfilled through the lives of Jesus’s disciples who, like Jesus, act and suffer because of the ways of Christ.

13 Besides a few minor changes, the remainder of this paper was first published as “‘Who’ll Be a Witness for My Lord?’: Witnessing as an Ecclesiological and Missiological Paradigm,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology* 44, no. 1 (2016): 68–84.

14 All scriptural references in this paper come from the NKJV.

15 “John answered, saying to them all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’” (Luke 3:16).

The key to understanding the ability of the disciples to behave according to the example Jesus provided lies in understanding the purpose of the power they received from the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, we find Jesus promising that the disciples “shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The power that the disciples were to receive, in other words, would allow them to be witnesses to Jesus.

In order to better understand the significance of Jesus’s promise as well as the apostle’s actions after Pentecost, we must understand the meaning and significance of the words power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*), especially as they are used in both Luke and Acts, the two biblical volumes written by the same author. These two words, *dunamis* and *exousia*, are commonly used in reference to power. But the two are not synonymous. Indeed, there are some significant and interesting differences in how these two terms are used.

Dunamis is used fifteen times in Luke and ten times in the book of Acts. The author uses *dunamis* to refer to the ability to act. More than this, the word refers to an activity that transforms things. In every instance except for one (Luke 10:19 uses it to describe “the power of the enemy”), this term is used to describe either the characteristic and ability of God (e.g., “power of the most High”; “power of the Holy Spirit”; “power of the Lord”; “power of God”; etc.) or the extension of what is possible because of this godly power (e.g., power to heal, power to cast out demons, power to do mighty works, power to do signs and miracles, etc.). *Dunamis* is almost exclusively used to describe the ability of God or those committed to acting in the ways of God—in a way that transforms something.

Exousia is often used to describe power in relation to authority. The author of Luke-Acts uses this term to talk more about possessing the authority to act than the ability to act itself. This term is used sixteen times in Luke and seven times in the book of Acts. Whereas *dunamis* is used in a largely positive sense (except for the one instance in Luke 10:19), *exousia* is more complex. *Exousia* is used positively when it refers to authority belonging to God or Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Yet seventeen of the twenty-three times the author uses *exousia*, it is used in a more negative way. It is often used in an almost derogatory way in referring to those who are in positions that rule over others and possess “worldly,” as

16 For example, in Luke 4:32 and 4:36, Jesus has authority over spirits; 5:24 Jesus has authority/power to forgive sins; 9:1 Jesus gives authority to the disciples to cast out demons and to heal; 10:19 Jesus gives authority to the disciples to trample serpents and scorpions, and the power of the enemy; Acts 1:7 God has authority; 8:19 Simon requests authority so that people can receive the Holy Spirit.

opposed to godly, authority.¹⁷ Indeed, there are several instances where the author's use of *exousia* as authority to rule over others is the opposite of godly power.¹⁸

In exploring the ways in which these two terms are used to describe power in Luke-Acts, it becomes apparent that the form of power associated with possessing authority *over* others is not, it seems, the way of Jesus or the desire of God.¹⁹ God is the rightful possessor of authority (Acts 1:7), but authority *over*

17 E.g., Luke 4:6 refers to the authority that the devil possesses and provides; 7:8 refers to the authority the Centurion possesses over others; 12:11 refers to those who rule society—leaders in the synagogues, the magistrates, and the authorities; 19:17 refers to the authority a servant receives over cities; 20:2 the chief priests and scribes ask Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things?”; 20:8 Jesus does not respond to the question regarding authority; 20:20 notes that authority is possessed by the governor (particularly interesting, considering the rest of the dialogue in the chapter that leads to this statement); 22:53 refers to the power of darkness; 23:7 refers to what is in Herod's jurisdiction; Acts 5:4 refers to the power/control that Ananias had over his own land and possessions; 9:14, 26:10, and 26:12 authority is in reference to the chief priests; and 26:18 refers to the power of Satan.

18 Three examples will suffice in demonstrating this point: (1) In the temptations of Jesus, the devil speaks about the authority (*exousia*) he possesses and with which he tempts Jesus: “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this *has* been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). Here *exousia* is a possession and a tool of the devil. (2) A second example can be found when Jesus's authority is questioned (Luke 20:1–8). Jesus is asked, “By what authority are You doing these things [miracles, healing, driving out unclean spirits, etc.]?” Rather than getting into a battle about who has authority (*exousia*), Jesus—in a similar move to that of the temptations where he failed to participate in the quest for the same type of authority that the devil possesses—sidesteps the question and refuses to participate in the system of ruling over, or having authority over, others. Interestingly, however, the author throws into the same chapter another reference that highlights that authority—the type of authority Jesus sidesteps—is something that the governor possesses. *Exousia*, in other words, when portrayed as having authority *over* others, is again distinguished as a feature of worldly kingdoms or rulership, not a feature in the ways of God's kingdom and God's form of authority (which again brings into perspective the second temptation of Jesus regarding the nature of the kingdoms of this world—Luke 4:5–8). (3) Lastly, in Acts 26 there is an interesting interplay in the way *exousia* is used. In the three times *exousia* is used in this chapter, the first two times it describes the authority of the chief priests, a reference made to Paul's old life when he was persecuting the church (26:10, 12). The last time, in 26:18, it is used to describe the power of Satan. Although there are more examples that can be given, these three serve to demonstrate the point that *exousia*, when not referring to God's authority, is often used with a more negative connotation.

19 Note that I am not making a generalized conclusion about the nature of *exousia* in the whole New Testament. To do this, we would need to look beyond Luke and

others is not the way in which power is to be embodied among Jesus’s followers. Indeed, immediately after the author notes that God is the rightful possessor of authority (*exousia*), he specifies that the apostles shall receive power (*dunamis*) when the Holy Spirit descends upon them. The power (*dunamis*) or ability to act referred to in this verse is the ability to be witnesses to Jesus. The word translated as “witnesses” here is the Greek word (*martus*). It is noteworthy that this same word would later be used to describe those who would die because of their faith—martyrs. Out of all of the derivatives of *martyrion*, *martus* is the form most often used in the book of Acts (thirteen times). Although *martus* at first meant “to give witness to” or “to testify” and was not necessarily connected to death, it is significant that in a very short period of time *martus* would become associated with death and martyrdom.²⁰ Already in the book of Acts, for example, we are told about Stephen who becomes the first martyr. Peter, Paul, and countless others in the early church soon meet the same fate. Christian faith and being a “witness” to Jesus Christ, in other words, became closely associated with martyrdom in the early years of the church. The bodies of the early Christians were, in a very literal way, given as a living sacrifice and testimony to God. Martyrdom became but one species of a larger narrative genre. This genre comprehends the death of believers at the hands of hostile authorities within a wide range of other faithful practices. Through these practices, martyrdom became a bodily witness to God’s drama of salvation in the world.²¹

Acts. I am here drawing this conclusion from the way this term is used specifically in Luke and Acts. For a broader perspective on how such terms are used throughout the New Testament, see Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984). What is noteworthy in Wink’s book is that 85 percent of the time that *exousia* is used in the New Testament, it refers to a “structural dimension of existence” (*Naming the Powers*, 15–16) that is often depicted as fallen. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 134–61.

²⁰ We can already see the connection between *martus* and death in several instances in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev 1:5, 2:13, 6:9, 12:11, 17:6). Scholars suggest that Revelation was written in the 90s CE. There is ongoing debate as to when the book of Acts was written. Some argue it was written in the 80s, whereas others argue it was written in the early 60s. Either way, we can see how the meaning of *martus* began to shift from simply meaning “testifying” to an understanding that intimately connected testifying with death and martyrdom.

²¹ Stephen Fowl, “The Primacy of the Witness of the Body to Martyrdom in Paul,” in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 44.

Thus, the power Jesus promises through the arrival of the Holy Spirit points to a vastly different understanding of power. Whereas power in the post-Constantinian church has largely embraced the way empire has defined power—a top-down, hierarchically based form of power and authority that seeks to affect the way society is ruled, which has meant bringing about change through force, domination, conquest, and control—the power that Jesus promises is one that allows those who receive it to mimic the ways of Jesus and the desire of God. It is a promise of receiving *dunamis* that invites followers of Jesus to challenge injustice and violence; to heal; and to participate in mighty works in a way that is based on love, invitation, servanthood, and care for the other. The form of power that Jesus promises is one that allows those who receive it from the Holy Spirit to live in ways that imitate the life and kenotic example of Jesus, even if, like their teacher, it also leads to one's own death.²² The power of the Holy Spirit promised in Acts 1:8, in other words, is the power to live a life of self-sacrificial love—an *agape*, *kenotic* love that was exemplified in the life *and death* of Jesus Christ.

Implications of Being a Witness

If we embrace and seek to embody this alternative form of power that Jesus promises when the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles, it will change the way we live and the way we understand and participate in God's mission. It will cause us to re-imagine the way in which we embody our ecclesial and missiological practices. Allow me to highlight three implications of such an understanding.

(1) The first implication is that we recognize the power that exists in vulnerability and incarnation. This recognition challenges us to acknowledge the social location of power, learning to see the power that exists away from the centers of social hegemony. This acknowledgment may, initially, seem foolish. And yet Jesus models such an approach to power. Possessing the power to be “witnesses” to Jesus Christ means that we will not mimic forms of power that dominate, oppress, conquer, or force—that are violent in their very nature—even if such power may lead to “Christianizing” those who are conquered. We must step away from the all-too-common Christendom-based ecclesiologies

²² The World Council of Church's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism describes this as receiving the inspiration from the Holy Spirit “to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style” as we bear witness “to the love of God in word and deed.” See Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), 37.

and missiologies that operate according to a post-Constantinian understanding of power and structure their practices accordingly.²³

The World Council of Church’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, for example, in its “New Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism” recognizes the need to shift our missional understanding from “mission to the margins” to “mission from the margins.”²⁴ It notes how mission has often been an activity that has gone from the center to the periphery, from the privileged to the marginalized of society.²⁵ However, “mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural, and political systems which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex.”²⁶

The power to be a “witness” therefore embraces a confessional foundation—a foundation that cannot be forced. Such a confessional foundation was so clear in the life of the early church that a theology of two baptisms emerged: the first by water, and the second by blood. The early church recognized that the act of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord—a politically loaded confession—could very well lead to their death. And yet, it was precisely this act of confession, even in the face of death, that demonstrated a different allegiance and a different understanding of power. Joerg Rieger, in looking at Philippians 2, notes that the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus provides a different sort of power that Jesus embodies—a power that is in diametrical opposition to the power of the emperor.²⁷ And it was this diametrically alternative form of

23 J. Kameron Carter, for example, introduces what he describes as the “color of Constantinianism” in his description of how, with the advent of modernity, Christianity became a vehicle for white European conquest. Constantinian Christianity could adopt this form of racialized colonialism because of its oppressive understanding of power and because of how it became severed from “the other” (i.e., by severing its Jewish roots) who was foreign to European Christendom. “Remade into cultural and political property and converted into an ideological instrument to aid and abet colonial conquest, Christianity became a vehicle for the religious articulation of whiteness, though increasingly masked to the point of near invisibility.” Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

24 World Council of Churches, *Together towards Life*, 14–17.

25 *Ibid.*, 5.

26 *Ibid.*, 16.

27 Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 43.

power that led to Jesus's own death as well as the death of many confessors in the early church.

And yet, it is in this way that martyrdom was (and is) missiological. Tripp York, in referring to Maximilian's example, notes that

though the empire killed [Maximilian] for his refusal to worship their gods, his act, as any act of martyrdom, was not against the empire—as if Christian witness is merely reactionary or defined by what it is against. Rather, his martyrdom and early Christian martyrdom in general was *for* the empire. Any act of witness is always a testimony to the good news that is the resurrected Christ, which gives those watching the ability to see the world as it really is: redeemed.²⁸

One's confessional stance causes him or her to be a witness of an alternative body politic, which puts into practice different ways of being that seek to live rightly with one another. Such an alternative way of being may lead to the same consequence that befell Jesus, the one who inaugurated it.²⁹

(2) The second implication, which logically follows from the first, is that ecclesial and missiological practices that have as their foundation this alternative form of power—the power to be witnesses—are guided by the ability and the willingness to die for the other. Jesus's life *and* death offer the ultimate example. Throughout Jesus's life and teachings, we can see his ongoing concern for people to live justly and in peace with one another, to live in right relationships. This tireless concern became embodied in a life and lifestyle whereby the cross became a politically motivated, legally to-be-expected result of a moral clash with the principalities and powers. Jesus's example demonstrated—witnessed—the embodiment of a different form of power, one based on self-sacrificial love rather than violence and a willingness to kill.

Thus, a paradigm of being witnesses will be concerned not only with participating in God's great *shalom* project—that is, seeking peace and justice so that we may live rightly with one another, with creation, and with God—but also with the *way* this project is pursued: imitating the ways of Jesus, even unto death. Both embodying right relationships and dying in that pursuit provide a witness to Jesus and the kingdom he envisioned and inaugurated.

(3) The final implication I will mention, although there are many more, is the confidence we can now have because of the resurrection. The power to be a

²⁸ Tripp York, "Early Church Martyrdom: Witnessing for or against the Empire?," in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 23–24.

²⁹ Note, for example, paragraphs 89 and 92 in World Council of Churches, *Together towards Life*.

witness, which led to the cross, provided the opportunity for the resurrection. Thus, because of the resurrection we no longer need to live in fear of living lives based on the example and teaching of Jesus and the allegiance we pledge to him. The Spirit received at Pentecost, and the power promised upon the Spirit’s reception (Acts 1:8), “gives Christians courage to live out their convictions, even in the face of persecution and martyrdom.”³⁰

Fear of death brings about more death. Yet Jesus demonstrates that death is defeated, ironically, through willingness to die for the other. Through Jesus’s death, we have learned that death no longer has the final word. Thus, even though witnessing to Jesus will cause us to live a life or embody a lifestyle that may result in our own deaths, we can live in confidence knowing that death has been defeated.

Conclusion

To be a “witness” to Jesus Christ is to embrace and live according to an alternative understanding of power. The power that the Holy Spirit bestows is that which allows followers of Jesus to live in ways that demonstrate the same kind of self-sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated through his life *and* death. Unlike the power that empires and states embody, the power that the Holy Spirit provides is the ability to live and potentially die for the other.

The desire for everyone to belong and be treated equally and justly was the vision that led the struggle against apartheid. But it was recognizing the power that existed on the margins, in those whom the apartheid system believed did not count, and accepting the willingness to suffer and even die in pursuit of that vision of justice and true peace that provided the foundation for the practices and the politic of a “prophetic theology” in the South African context. Thus, if the desire is to find and reclaim a “prophetic theology,” then the South African church—indeed the worldwide church—must begin once again to embrace a form of power that is rooted in self-sacrificial, vulnerable love for the other. It behooves us to embrace the power to be a “witness.”

³⁰ Ibid., 14.

Following the Holy Spirit

Sixteenth-Century Anabaptist Inspiration for Twenty-First-Century Mission in Postmodern Britain

CHRIS HORTON*

Introduction

The early Anabaptists of the sixteenth century focused on living as disciples. This meant aiming to be salt and light and sharing their faith, while avoiding capture by persecutors. Most of their leaders were martyred, yet the movement grew dramatically. Their approach has much to say to twenty-first-century disciples seeking to go where the Spirit leads, and thus it is helpful to discern the key elements of the theology implicit in their actions. In particular, their approach emphasized discipleship and humility, both of which are very appropriate for demonstrating and communicating the gospel authentically in a postmodern and post-Christendom culture.

At the opening of the twenty-first century, there is a continuing need to re-conceptualize mission in changing circumstances. While the experience of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century may seem remote from the pressures of postmodernism, pluralism, globalization, and reactions against the traditional alliance of church and state in the West, this study seeks to identify some elements of an Anabaptist perspective that are of great assistance for Christians today.

After reviewing some key questions regarding mission for the contemporary British church—which is my own context—I propose examining a limited but, I believe, representative range of Anabaptist writings, to identify three inspirational features from Anabaptism. Each of the three is dependent on the Holy Spirit's work both in individual believers and in the congregation, the corporate embodiment of the Spirit in the world. First is the motivation for mission, which is relevant but not unique to an Anabaptist understanding.

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Second, we can apply today the Anabaptists' relational evangelism among their social networks. Third and most significant, however, are the theological implications of Anabaptist discipleship. Their emphasis on separation from the world and their approach to truth provide a philosophical and theological foundation for Christian proclamation in a postmodern environment that is generally hostile to Christianity. For considerations of space, this study is limited to the contemporary twenty-first-century British church and the theology of the Anabaptists in the early years—1525 to 1575.

The Contemporary British Context

I begin with a brief survey of the contemporary British context, where the dominant approach is postmodern and is influenced by the number and variety of other religions as well as society's rejection of Christendom. Though spirituality runs through much of it, British contemporary society is a context where making truth claims in words alone fails to communicate truth.

There is no such thing as *the* contemporary British culture; rather, there are many overlapping cultures. Among them, certain key themes—challenges for Christian mission—can be identified. It is often said (sometimes with some wistfulness or lament) that we live in a postmodern culture where the guiding principle is that there are no guiding principles, all truth claims are suspect, and the only absolute is that all things are relative. Postmodernity is more than a philosophical approach: Derrida's deconstruction of all motives, and the philosophies of existentialists and other twentieth-century schools, provided a theoretical justification for extraordinary innovations in the arts and other fields. Postmodernity is often characterized as a reaction to modernity, the intellectual framework resulting from the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, based on a scientific worldview and an assumption that reason will lead to such truth as can be found.¹

Whatever its precise meaning, "postmodern" describes the approach of most younger people in our mission field—the neighbors, colleagues, and family members on our doorstep—to life and truth. In avoiding giving a definition of "postmodern," I am conscious that, in Kraus's words, "each analyst has his or

1 J. Andrew Kirk argues, after a careful analysis of the inadequacy of the postmodern theory, that all beliefs are equally valid, that "the unpalatable truth is that postmodernity, if consistent to its own ideals, is pure escapism. Its deconstruction is reaction (and reactionary), for it has no grounds for reconstruction." "Christian Mission and the Epistemological Crisis of the West," in *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge*, eds. J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 171.

her own definition.”² The challenge to the church’s mission can be summed up in the words of art critic John Berger: “Never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one.”³ The church’s voice is only one amid a cacophony, and continuing to address the old rationalist arguments with the same modernist proclamation will not cross the boundary or frontier.⁴

Linked with this challenge is the inescapable fact of pluralism: the church is one of many religions and philosophies. In my home town of Wolverhampton, Hindu and Sikh temples stand near mosques and Buddhist centers as well as church buildings. So we cannot avoid the need for theological understanding of the nature of divine revelation in the context of other religions. The pioneering missionaries in India were surprised there was no speedy response to proclamation of the gospel and that elements of it were received in very different ways than the verbal transmission (e.g., the resurrection was unremarkable when understood as reincarnation by Hindus).⁵ Similar responses are experienced in Britain, where many neighbors follow other religions or may seem “a-religious” because they do not practice any particular, easily recognized religion but nevertheless have a postmodernist approach that is spiritual and able to encompass any form of spirituality or belief. Sometimes even the consumerism that dominates so many has a driving spiritual imperative that Christians might condemn as “idolatrous” but should still be recognized as spiritual.⁶ Though David Smith has many valuable insights in his book *Mission after Christendom*, he seems to minimize the spirituality inherent in postmodernism, even as expressed by academics and philosophers. Increasingly, British Christians find devoted and “spiritual” people among their neighbors and contacts, and so proclaiming truth in words alone will not suffice.

As a consequence of “Christendom”—the mutual reliance of church and state—the church promoted the gospel with ungodly state power and lost its

2 C. Norman Kraus, *An Intrusive Gospel? Christian Mission in a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 22.

3 Quoted in David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 63.

4 Anabaptist missiologist Wilbert Shenk uses the phrase “crossing frontiers” to describe mission. See Wilbert Shenk, “Crossing Frontiers,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, eds. Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2007), 41.

5 Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 54–56.

6 This is a huge field worthy of detailed study, as is the related question of businesses increasingly using Eastern meditation techniques or other apparently neutral, but essentially spiritual, practices to help well-being and productivity among the workforce.

focus on mission, devoting most of its energies to maintenance.⁷ As a modern-day Anabaptist, I am disappointed that it was the general public rather than the church that rejected Christendom, but in any event, the collapse of Christendom in Britain since the Second World War has provided the opportunity to rely on the Holy Spirit rather than on human power. It has also presented the challenge of redefining a role in society. This is all the more difficult as many Christians regard the loss of “influence”—a polite way of describing power or control while avoiding the negative connotations—as a cause for regret rather than relief. Many neighbors or onlookers either identify the church with its past use of human power or scorn it as a pale shadow of its former strength. Now that Christendom is unacceptable to the vast majority in Britain and numerical decline threatens the very existence of some churches and denominations, uncertainty about the church’s role in society, and its past association with worldly power, adds to the difficulties of crossing the boundary at the mission frontier.

Contemporary Mission Thinking

How has missiology responded to this context? I will briefly trace a renewed concept of mission as discipleship, which I believe is the most fruitful understanding of Holy Spirit-inspired mission.

During the twentieth century, much debate ensued from a reduction of mission—by the more “conservative” elements of the church—to evangelism (with a limited view of the content of the gospel), while many “liberals” focused on improving the condition of society. David Bosch argued persuasively for a more holistic view of mission, pointing out that “there is, in Jesus’ ministry, no tension between saving from sin and saving from physical ailment, between the spiritual and the social.”⁸ This wider understanding of mission is attractive to those who identify with Anabaptism. It also resonates with many others, particularly those who look to Wesley for inspiration. He wrote, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. ‘Faith working by love’ is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”⁹

7 Alan Kreider, “Beyond Bosch,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 66.

8 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 33.

9 John Wesley, *Preface to 1739 Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868), xxii.

By focusing on discipleship rather than a narrow understanding of the gospel, the apparently alternative emphases on conversion or societal change can be held together in a coherent understanding of mission. Conversion is far more than an intellectual agreement with certain basic doctrines. Neal Blough, a modern Anabaptist missiologist, argues that “a messianic ethic of discipleship can provide a holistic framework which avoids many of the false dichotomies that have been set up in relation to word and deed.”¹⁰

Mission implies movement and change, crossing a frontier. It is often movement out of a Christian church environment into contact with communities that are geographically close rather than to another country in the traditional mission fields (e.g., in Africa, Asia, or Latin America). Andrew Kirk writes that the Good News—a message of reconciliation that overcomes cultural divides—“can only be expressed in terms of culture, and therefore has to be transposed from one culture to another in a rich variety of ways.”¹¹ We have to cross barriers that are cultural, mental, philosophical, or psychological—rather than merely geographical—with the Good News of reconciliation, the news that each individual or distinct group can be reconciled to God and to one another.

Any definition of mission must encompass the kingdom Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated, and it must relate back to the nature and mission of God. Kirk summarizes mission *as discipleship* as

communicating the good news of Jesus and the kingdom (Acts 28:30) (evangelism), insisting on the full participation of all people in God’s gifts of life and well-being (justice), providing the resources to meet people’s needs (compassion) and never using lethal violence as a means of doing God’s will (the practice of non-violence as a means of change).

The church’s mission “in the way of Jesus Christ” is thus to be an instrument of God’s righteousness and compassionate governance in the world.¹²

10 Neal Blough, “Messianic Mission and Ethics: Discipleship and the Good News,” in *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993), 179.

11 J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 75.

12 *Ibid.*, 53. An expanded definition can be derived from Bosch’s work, of course, but Kirk deals with elements missing from *Transforming Mission* and approaches the task of definition in the sort of holistic way that can be characterized as “Anabaptist,” though he would not describe himself as such.

I suggest this as a working definition of mission today, with the caveat that mission theology itself is shaped by the dominant cultural forces in each historical period.¹³ However, there is yet another distinctive element in mission as discipleship that is seen in Anabaptism (as well as in early Methodism and many other movements characterized by a revivalist emphasis on the Holy Spirit, though these are beyond the scope of this study). The corporate life of the church is the place where discipleship is learned and practiced. Holiness matters, and there is “no holiness but social holiness.” Mission as the outflow of *corporate* discipleship has the potential to cross frontiers and transform communities in a way that individual discipleship cannot.

Inspiration from the Sixteenth Century: The Spirit’s Work

As we look ahead to consider how the church should address these barriers to the communication of the gospel, it is helpful to look back and analyze how the Anabaptists faced the challenge of fulfilling the Great Commission. I will first consider how they evangelized successfully—typically with revivalist enthusiasm—in a nominally Christian society. The Spirit’s work of transforming the lifestyle of a disciple was internal, but its external visibility was crucially enabled by the activity of the church. The succeeding three sections will then explore three inspirational features of the Anabaptists’ missional lifestyles.

The context of the early Anabaptists was very different from our present-day context. Most people born in Western Europe considered themselves to be Christians, and there was a certain understanding of the biblical narratives among them. A Christian narrative, however superficially it may have been comprehended in some cases, provided the framework for self-understanding, whereas in the current fragmented, postmodern context there are many alternative narratives. However, the Anabaptists were conscious of being a minority, like Christians in contemporary Britain. Unless converts experienced the grace of God and were baptized, they were still part of the “world” and at risk of eternal damnation. Menno Simons wrote in 1537 a typically passionate appeal to conversion: “He will not save you nor forgive your sins nor show you His mercy and grace except according to His Word; namely, if you repent and if you believe, if you are born of Him, if you do what He has commanded and walk as He walks.”¹⁴ The Anabaptists’ point of departure was “evangelical,” though

13 Wilbert Shenk, “Transforming Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, eds. Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2007), 10.

14 Simons, “The New Birth,” in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 92.

there was much in their soteriology that differed greatly from the Protestant mainstream.¹⁵

They met with surprising success given the fierce persecution and the general suspicion of sedition. Claus-Peter Clasen estimates that three thousand new Anabaptists arose in south and central Germany, Switzerland, and Austria every ten years from 1525 to 1618. Though this was significant growth, it was only a modest proportion of the total population of several million—less than 0.5 percent in most places where Anabaptism can be traced. Even in Augsburg, where there was a particular concentration, only 1.2 percent were Anabaptists between 1526 and 1528.¹⁶ During those same years, Anabaptists appeared in 1,821 towns, which Clasen, generally a skeptical if not unsympathetic social historian, describes as “an enormous number indeed.” Yet the significance of the movement is not measured simply in numerical advance—particularly as the call to a radical and genuine commitment is never likely to be popular—but in the example of revivalist “enthusiasm” through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Prayer was fervent and often emotional.¹⁷ There was an eschatological excitement, though this was certainly not limited to the Anabaptists. Clasen describes somewhat critically the ecstatic experiences of some Anabaptists who “placed a stronger emphasis on the workings of the spirit than either the Lutherans or the Zwinglians did.”¹⁸ His criticism is perhaps due to his drawing on the examples of strange excesses among Spiritualists, who were not typical of all early Anabaptists: there was a wide spectrum of belief and practice.

Pilgram Marpeck’s key argument with the magisterial reformers was that “in His command to baptize (Mt. 28), Jesus had in mind not only His present disciples but also all future disciples throughout the time until the end of the world, a fact which is evident when He says: ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”¹⁹

This is taken from Marpeck’s “A Clear Refutation,” the main target of which is the Spiritualists rather than Reformers, though it is a key to Marpeck’s thought generally. The Spiritualists opposed evangelism, saying it was unneces-

15 C. Arnold Synder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1995), 87. Snyder makes this claim about Balthasar Hubmaier’s confession of faith but says that it is typical of most Anabaptists.

16 Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 26–27.

17 *Ibid.*, 92.

18 *Ibid.*, 121.

19 William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 1978), 47.

sary because the inner light is available to all. Marpeck countered that scripture also requires an external witness to the truth.²⁰

The relation of the inner and outer has been identified as a key contribution of Anabaptist-implied theology.²¹ There can be no true discipleship without both the inner and outer aspects, nor true evangelism without external witness to the truth linking with an internal work of the Holy Spirit. In his 1545 letter “On the Inner Church,” Marpeck explains:

Those who are born anew in Christ, according to the inner working of the Holy Spirit, are those who are baptized with fire, who are aglow with love. Moreover, these children, born of the Spirit, see what the Father, working through Christ, does for the inner man; they, too, by co-witnessing in the Holy Spirit, immediately do likewise for the external man. Thus, the body of Christ is also built inwardly through the Holy Spirit, and externally through the co-witness of works. . . . But this church is separated from the world, for it is a witness over it. Similarly through word and work, the gospel must be preached before the coming of the Son of Man.²²

In “Five Fruits of Repentance,” a letter written five years later, Marpeck proclaims the gospel of forgiveness in terms broadly similar to that of Lutherans and Calvinists but with a crucial Anabaptist distinctive.²³ He locates salvation in the church: “Such forgiveness, however, takes place only in the fellowship of saints, which alone received such power from Christ.” The church, Christ’s body filled with the Spirit, is the expression of Christ’s humanity in a way that an individual disciple’s life cannot be.²⁴ Marpeck continues to expound his gospel, outlining the need to recognize one’s guilt and need of grace, to be sorrowful for one’s sin (not merely for the consequences), and then to determine to cease from sin and finally accept full responsibility.²⁵

Conversion is both individual and in the context of the body of Christ—the true church made up of voluntary believers, not the state church of nominal Christians. Marpeck explains the work of the Holy Spirit in “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” as follows: “Therefore, all external service of Christ . . . serves and prepares the way for the Holy Spirit. [This external service consists]

20 Ibid., 56–57, 60.

21 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 384.

22 Klassen and Klaassen, eds., *Pilgram Marpeck*, 423.

23 Ibid., 486.

24 Blough, “Messianic Mission and Ethics,” 189.

25 Klassen and Klaassen, eds., *Pilgram Marpeck*, 486–97.

of the external preaching, teaching, miracles, baptism, foot washing, the Lord's Supper, discipline, chastisement, and admonition."²⁶

So the church in doing what can be seen and touched—the externals—enables the Spirit to work. However, Marpeck emphasizes that it is the Spirit's work, and “even if all service is done according to the commands of Christ, the earthly Man, the Spirit still moves in glorious liberty wherever he will.”²⁷ He refutes both the Spiritualists who claimed the Spirit would move apart from the church and the traditionalists who argued that the Spirit is at work wherever the proper forms of “apostolic service” are observed. The inner and outer are brought together when believers follow the Spirit in faith, and “if the inner, through the Holy Spirit, does not witness to the external, through faith, everything is in vain.” He then adds that Christ is “living on earth, as in heaven, in the power and clarity of the Spirit in the heart of each faithful believer.”²⁸ This kind of holism is a helpful way of resolving the unnecessary distinction noted above between evangelism and social action.

On this foundation of dependence on the Holy Spirit's work in individual believers and in congregations, I will now consider each of the three inspirational features of the Anabaptists' perspective: (1) the motivation for mission, (2) their relational style of evangelism among their social networks, and (3) the implications of discipleship.

Inspiration from the Sixteenth Century: Motivation for Mission

I will review in this section some of the early Anabaptists' stated motivations for mission, from which two key elements emerge. First is the emphasis on the Great Commission as having continuing importance, providing a framework for mission, and second is the “enthusiasm” or inspiration of the Spirit.

In his letter “Concerning the Humanity of Christ,” Marpeck cites the examples of some of the apostles of New Testament times and then applies the same to contemporary apostles:

So also they are driven even today through the Holy Spirit as children and not as servants, who with good and true knowledge, know what their Father and Lord has in mind, viz. in such a way that they always know and are certain of the basic reason of their compulsion through the Holy Spirit.²⁹

²⁶ Excerpted in *Anabaptism in Outline*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1981), 78.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ Klassen and Klaassen, eds., *Pilgram Marpeck*, 512–13.

He then explains the four aspects of compulsion by the Spirit: (1) love for God; (2) giving oneself up to suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel; (3) realizing when God opens the door so that one may go in with the teaching of the gospel only where God has opened the way; and (4) speaking only as Christ did, working through the Holy Spirit.

Though there is a spiritual compulsion driving apostles, in his “Confession” Marpeck emphasizes that there must be no human compulsion in the gospel: “Here there is no coercion, but rather a voluntary spirit in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whoever does not desire this spirit let him remain outside; whoever desires it let him come and drink freely, without price.”³⁰ The good news is so good that it needs no compulsion. This is linked to the Anabaptist insistence that obedience to Christ includes abandoning any thought of using force or compulsion. The Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed teachers could allow no such liberty. They enjoyed Christendom’s symbiotic relationship with the state for mutual support: the church would validate the governing power, and the government would enforce religious orthodoxy.

The Anabaptists were also motivated by obedience to Jesus’s command. There were a number of scripture books or concordances in circulation among them that set out key passages in a thematic way so the texts could be memorized for use in exhortation or perhaps as an encouragement under interrogation. One of the most quoted scriptures was the Great Commission at the end of Matthew’s Gospel.³¹ While many other Christians have understood it to have been relevant only to the initial audience—Jesus’s twelve disciples—the Anabaptists read this as the mandate and guiding instruction to all Christians, a command they had to obey. Hubmaier quotes Mark 16:15–16 and Matthew 28:19–20 and argues,

From these words one understands clearly and certainly that this sending of the apostles consists of three points or commands: first, preaching; second, faith; and third, outward baptism. . . . Christ sent out his disciples as God his father had sent him. . . . Likewise his disciples should now represent him henceforth during the time of his bodily absence and guarantee to all believers a sure and certain remission of their sin through him.³²

30 Ibid., 112–13.

31 Hans Kasdorf, “Anabaptists and the Great Commission,” *Direction* 4, no. 2 (1975): 305.

32 Hubmaier, “On the Christian Baptism of Believers,” *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, eds. and trans. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1989), 115–16.

Hubmaier presents the Commission as a continuing task of disciples. By contrast, “even Calvin, who did not deny the validity of the Great Commission, maintained that the propagation of the Christian faith was not under the jurisdiction of the Church, but was the duty of the ‘Christian’ government.”³³ Littell also points to the evidence of the court records, particularly the series of questions prepared for interrogations, as evidence of the significance to the Anabaptists of the Great Commission. He summarizes the basic Anabaptist perspective: “*The Master meant it to apply to all believers at all times.*”³⁴

Their motivation, however, was not purely intellectual, a matter of obedience to this text. Without a sense of empowering by the Spirit, it is unlikely they would have pursued the very dangerous task of evangelism as they did. Schaufele notes that Anabaptists were commonly encouraged to “confess the Lord” but that “in many cases such an appeal was not necessary since the religious dynamic dominating the Anabaptist revival movement, which pressed for expression, automatically led the individual believers to lay missionary activity.”³⁵ The Anabaptists on the whole were passionate in their efforts to explain the truth and experiential peace and joy of their discipleship. When prevented by imprisonment from preaching, Sattler wrote to the church at Horb, “Pray that reapers may be driven out into the harvest.”³⁶ The Hutterite Peter Riedemann similarly wrote,

Since, however, Christ would not send out his disciples before they had received the grace of the Holy Spirit, it is clear and manifest that he will not have this order, that is his word and signs, treated lightly and carelessly, but that they should be observed as the Spirit of Christ inspireth, and not simply as the human spirit thinketh.³⁷

So it seems that two elements of their spirituality motivated the Anabaptists’ sacrificial efforts in mission. First, the Great Commission was a key biblical text that was “imbibed” by frequent repetition and reference,³⁸ providing a

33 Kasdorf, “Anabaptists and the Great Commission,” 304.

34 Franklin H. Littell, “The Anabaptist Theology of Missions,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1947): 12. Emphasis original.

35 Wolfgang Schaufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36, no. 2 (April 1962): 101.

36 Sattler, “Letter to Horb,” in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, ed. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 61. Yoder’s footnote points out that “the verb ‘drive’ is a striking statement of the Anabaptist sense of mission” (65n30).

37 Peter Riedemann, *Confession of our Faith* (Rifton, NY: Plough, 1970), 41.

38 “When asked what compelled them to go, they answered without hesitation: the Great Commission.” Hans Kasdorf, “The Anabaptist Approach to Mission,” in

justification and theological framework. Second, the enthusiasm common to revival or renewal movements came from a vital personal experience of God the Holy Spirit.

Both aspects of their motivation are relevant to the contemporary church, and the Anabaptists' example is undoubtedly stirring, though the importance of baptism as part of the believer's response in the Great Commission is uncomfortable to some. However, we must recognize that neither aspect is unique to the Anabaptists.

Inspiration from the Sixteenth Century: Network Evangelism

Among the practical methods employed in mission, network or friendship evangelism has a very contemporary resonance. John Finney, for example, emphasizes the importance of friendships as the context for genuine evangelism as well as a successful method.³⁹ As Kraus comments, "Communication of truth is impossible apart from mutually respectful and deferential relationships."⁴⁰

Informal evangelism seemed radically new in the sixteenth century. Unable to use the official channels of communication through the pulpit and press to any great degree, the Anabaptists relied on informal, oral communication, starting with family, colleagues, and friends.⁴¹ Those who carried on a trade were able to contact potential converts in the normal course of business among customers, suppliers, or colleagues. Hans Hut, for example, was a bookseller who had many opportunities for travel and conversation without undue suspicion. Hans Nadler was even more typical as an illiterate evangelist, and his technique of using the Lord's Prayer as a basis for expounding the gospel was both a helpful way of communicating at the mission frontier—because of his audience's familiarity with it—and a useful mnemonic. His court testimony sets out the usual pattern of his teaching.⁴² Snyder-Penner comments, "The most consistent theme running through Nadler's instruction of the Lord's Prayer is that in the past the student had prayed the prayer insincerely and

Anabaptism and Mission, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 62.

39 John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), 36–49.

40 Kraus, *An Intrusive Gospel?*, 28.

41 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 104–7.

42 Hans Nadler, "Declaration of the Needle Merchant Hans at Erlangen and the Refutation of the Articles of the Needle Merchant Hans (1529)," in *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2001), 139–49.

without an understanding of the demands the prayer makes on the daily life of the Christian.⁴³

This emphasis continued in the Hutterite missions also: the communities that might at first have seemed to be the most closed were in fact the most organized in sending teams to work among family, trade, and friendship networks back in the localities from which they had fled to Moravia.⁴⁴

Of particular note is the role of Anabaptist women in evangelism, which has often been overlooked by historians.⁴⁵ It is natural that the gospel, the most important good news, should be shared with those with whom we have close family or friendship bonds, and equally natural that the women (whose role was historically as homemakers) should play a significant role in such sharing. It is also easier and truer to the nature of the gospel as new creation—rather than intellectual assent to certain doctrines—to use natural day-to-day contact as the context for informal conversations, rather than trying to use formal techniques such as special evangelistic events at which the gospel is “explained.” Sharing meals and gathering communities around the table were of vital importance to the Anabaptists. These communal activities remain of great significance to outreach and evangelistic activity as well as caring for practical needs (as noted above, it is best to see mission comprising both evangelism and social action). However, the Anabaptists emphasized the sharing among a separated, gathered community of believers rather than a more open, “gathering community.” This phrase is used by Michael Frost to emphasize his conception of church as dynamic not static if it is to be genuinely missional. He draws on Emerging Church writers to argue that developing community through shared experience does not have to be static and inward looking as traditional concepts of “building” community imply.⁴⁶

Though Anabaptists did not articulate the theology of network evangelism, it is clear from the evidence of interrogations that they were motivated by the Spirit in this activity and felt their work was effective only because of the Spirit within.

43 Russell Snyder-Penner, “Hans Nadler’s Oral Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65, no. 4 (October 1991): 398.

44 Leonard Gross, “Sixteenth-Century Hutterian Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 100–104.

45 Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (London: Routledge, 1996), 115–16.

46 Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 111.

Inspiration from the Sixteenth Century: Discipleship

The aspect of the Anabaptists' approach that is of most significance for the twenty-first-century church is discipleship. In this section, I trace briefly some understandings of Anabaptist discipleship and suggest that separation from the world through inclusion in the new creation in Christ was the core of sixteenth-century Anabaptist teaching. My conclusion is that this teaching provides a foundation for attractive holy living among postmoderns, which in turn enables the communication of unchanging biblical truths.

Whether considered a pragmatic method or a theological underpinning of their activities, discipleship was the essence of Anabaptist life.⁴⁷ If the gospel of new creation is meaningful, it will be evidenced by changed lives rather than theoretical explanation. As Menno Simons wrote,

We do not seek salvation by works . . . for the power of faith quickens and changes them into newness of life, and they walk by the gift of grace in the Holy Spirit in the power of their new faith, according to the measure of their faith, in obedience to their God who has shown such great love.⁴⁸

In a seminal essay, Bender identified the emphasis on discipleship as the first distinctive element of the Anabaptists' vision, followed by the nature of church as a voluntary brotherhood and an ethic of love and nonviolence.⁴⁹ There have been alternative characterizations of the defining themes of the implicit theology of Anabaptism, however, that may fit the historical evidence better. Bender's associate Robert Friedmann considered the eschatological presence of God's kingdom as an existential reality to be the underlying influence that led to their emphasis on discipleship and separation of the church from the world.⁵⁰ The so-called "Polygenesis school" identified a number of sources and diverse expressions of Anabaptism. Snyder has identified soteriology as a distinctive and defining theme.⁵¹ Thomas Finger, in setting out his contemporary Anabaptist theology, considers discipleship inadequate because it is in danger of reducing the contribution of Anabaptism to social ethics alone. Instead, he organizes

47 Schaufele, "Missionary Vision," 109.

48 Simons, "Confession of the Distressed Christians," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 504–5.

49 Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18, no. 2 (April 1944): 67.

50 Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1973), 41.

51 Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 384.

“historic and contemporary Anabaptist thought around an interpretative center: the coming of the new creation in three inseparable dimensions—personal, communal and missional.”⁵² My own preference is to view Anabaptist theology similarly but more simply. Anabaptism was directed by a strong sense of the new birth as part of the new creation begun in Jesus’s resurrection. This is arguably closer to recorded sixteenth-century Anabaptist thought. But whichever orientation is preferred, it is clear that discipleship and separation from the world are essential to the faith of the Anabaptists and implicit in teaching and baptizing disciples so they become part of a gathered church.

Even at the height of modernism, religious lectures or evangelistic crusades were only a part of the reason individuals came to faith. In a more skeptical and relativist age, the practical outworking of a faith or philosophy is far more important. “Does it work?” is a significant pointer to whether it is true, and to many postmoderns, is a more important question than whether it is true. Sixteenth-century Anabaptists believed it was important to live as new people, part of the new creation. In the Holy Spirit, they had a different life-source from the world’s, demonstrating the same holiness of life seen in Jesus. As well as individual piety and acts of charity, holiness encompassed a commitment to peacemaking and a nonviolent response to the worldly powers. Thus they emulated Jesus, restoring to mission a holistic witness to the coming kingdom. The Anabaptists emphasized not words but actions demonstrating the truth of the words, and criticized the Reformers for the gulf between their words and deeds.

It is misleading, however, to understand the Anabaptists’ example merely on a pragmatic level. Behind their emphasis on actions and on obedience to the literal teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels (i.e., discipleship) was an implied (and sometimes expressed) theology of separation from the world through incorporation into Christ and his new creation. This can usefully direct a contemporary mission theology into engaging with postmodern neighbors on the contemporary mission frontier, using not words alone but also actions explained in words.

Increasingly in a postmodern environment, words can be used only after the context has been established by discipleship. Andrew Lord describes Christians as “people of attractive holiness” and points out that “as people transformed by the Spirit, we cannot but be part of the mission of the Spirit.”⁵³ The holy life

⁵² Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 105–6.

⁵³ Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005; quotation from the 2012 self-published revision), 130.

needs to be visible of course, and much contemporary writing on missionary engagement urges Christians to be visible in the places where people meet and interact. Frost refers to these contexts as “third places” (first and second places being home and work).⁵⁴ It is a small further step to explore the possibilities of developing “Fresh Expressions” of church in such places.⁵⁵ Stuart Murray Williams notes that social activities in such third places were, in the past, “seen as bridges into ‘proper church,’ but increasingly in post-Christendom the cultural gap cannot be bridged. Groups are emerging in various places that cannot be perceived as bridges into inherited church: they are becoming church in diverse contexts.”⁵⁶ In this context of attractive holy living in third places, there is either a requirement for explanation or at least a sympathetic hearing because of the Spirit’s work made visible in a life of discipleship.

Christians may be misled, however, into accommodation or syncretism by this emphasis on actions for connecting with postmodern neighbors skeptical of all absolute truth claims. Worship may be so “seeker-friendly” as to be lacking in substance or passion, lest the seeker be offended. The Anabaptist corrective is twofold: first, Christocentric theology and spirituality, and second, the theological theme underlying discipleship—that new birth in Christ implies separation from the world.⁵⁷ Blough summarizes the Anabaptist approach as “missionary confrontation,” or living as Jesus lived:

Mission can and should be seen as a continuation of that which God began in the incarnation. Disciples are sent as Jesus was sent. In the power of the Holy Spirit and in the context of the new community of the church, they are sent into the world to follow the Messiah in the way of the cross.⁵⁸

Calling for disciples to be baptized voluntarily as adults challenged the concept of the state church. Identified as dangerous rebels, the Anabaptists learned to suffer and even to embrace persecution as an inevitable consequence of godly

⁵⁴ Frost, *Exiles*, 56–63.

⁵⁵ “Fresh Expressions” is a phrase developed by the Church of England and Methodist churches in the UK to describe their creative missional initiative launched in 2004: please see www.freshexpressions.org.uk. The concept of a fresh expression is a helpful shorthand for finding new ways of being church.

⁵⁶ Stuart Murray, *Changing Mission: Learning from the Newer Churches* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2006), 67.

⁵⁷ Separation from the world is identified by Goertz (*The Anabaptists*, 13) as giving the Schleithem Articles—the first Anabaptist confession of faith—their “profound meaning and inner strength.”

⁵⁸ Blough, “Messianic Mission and Ethics,” 180.

living (2 Tim 3:12). If the issue of separation from the world is settled in the heart of the believer, then it is possible to engage with skeptics as fellow pilgrims or learners without feeling the need to persuade them purely with words as a modernist Evangelical might. But there will be a prophetic challenge to the skeptics' lifestyle and beliefs. Above all, there will be a challenge to the dogmatic belief that there can be no absolute truth.

Anabaptists bore the pressures of persecution and often martyrdom because they believed they embodied the truth of the gospel. They considered themselves to be returning to the practice and beliefs of the early church. Yet there was humility in their approach, resulting from their spirituality and the experience of the Holy Spirit. They spoke not of "mission" but of "bearing witness" to the truth and to their own experience of Christ.⁵⁹ This work of bearing witness contrasts with the strident and confident way that the truth of Christianity has often been proclaimed at the mission frontier when Christianity was the dominant religion in the West. The contemporary context is one where "at the same time that the religious options have increased dramatically, the climate has become more hostile than ever to giving reasons for one's particular set of beliefs."⁶⁰ However, if mission is to have any meaning, the church cannot abdicate all responsibilities to proclaim truth as such.

Postmodernists may be reacting to the excesses of scientism and its consequences, but postmodernism's philosophical underpinning lies in exposing the inherent contradictions of whatever statement or work of art is considered. This in itself demonstrates that consistency of thinking seems to be a universal methodological goal. Even postmodernists "act on the basis of fundamental beliefs. . . .Of course, such knowledge may be accepted as a working hypothesis and, therefore, be corrigible; but, at the point of action, it is decisive."⁶¹ Further, there is an implicit fundamental or universal truth in postmodernism: that there is no such thing as universal truth. Deconstruction is reactive and applied to everything except its basic premise.

How then can truth be proclaimed in the contemporary context? In the period dominated by Enlightenment rationality, Christian missions proceeded

59 Michael Sattler set a common approach during his interrogation: "I am not sent to judge the Word of God; we are sent to bear witness of it." Quoted in John A. Wagner, *Voices of the Reformation: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 117.

60 Philip Clayton, "Missiology between Monologue and Cacophany," in *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge*, eds. J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 79.

61 Kirk, "Christian Mission and the Epistemological Crisis of the West," 168.

on the positivist basis that truth could be definitively known and expressed in words. The experience of missions soon demonstrated the need for cultural sensitivity and translation from one culture to another. Working in an alien culture can help us see the essence of the gospel in sharper relief. Mission theory later advocated contextualization—that the gospel needs to be expressed in forms arising from the cultural context; this is a helpful development though risks losing the essential challenge of the gospel to each and every human culture, a challenge that results from understanding the church as separate from the world—a major distinctive of Anabaptism. The contemporary church now faces a culture that disparages absolute truth claims and presents all alternative belief systems as equally valid (or invalid). Its own missionary experience also suggests that its former reliance on words to express absolute truth is inadequate to communicate across cultures. A viable alternative to positivism and relativism as a basis for understanding truth is critical realism, which acknowledges both an objective truth and the inadequacies of one's subjective perceptions or expressions of it.

Paul Hiebert argues that “critical realism is a biblical approach to knowledge,” quoting 1 Corinthians 13:12.⁶² He identifies the Anabaptists as critical realists:

They affirmed that there is objective reality and objective truth (reality as God sees it—as it really is). They recognized, however, that all truth as perceived by humans is partial and has a subjective element within it. Human knowledge exists in people. Therefore it must be understood in terms of the social, cultural and historical contexts in which people live.⁶³

Although they did not formulate systematic theologies, the Anabaptists had strong convictions, which they saw as applying unchanging, biblical truth to everyday situations. Their faith was not mere intellectual assent to a series of propositions but discipleship based on their experience of the Spirit of truth, who enabled them to understand and apply scripture. This made it possible to adopt a humble attitude in bearing witness to their experience of the new creation, in which “they readily admitted that their understanding of truth was partial, biased and possibly wrong.”⁶⁴

As a corrective to the danger of individualistic or even wild interpretations of scripture, Anabaptists read scripture in a Christocentric way and submitted

⁶² Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

their individual interpretations to the congregation, a hermeneutical community.⁶⁵ This was not merely for pragmatic reasons; rather, it reflected their implied theology, which emphasized the corporate dimension of discipleship. As a result, many an Anabaptist interrogated under torture would refer constantly to scripture, often to the texts made familiar by repetition in the worshipping community and set out in the thematic concordances that circulated, with an invitation to the interrogator to prove a better understanding from scripture.⁶⁶

Absolute truth can be known, therefore, but the expressions of it are experiential and experiential. The ultimate truth is not a proposition but a Person who stated, “I am the Way, *the Truth* and the Life . . .” (Jn 14:6, NLV, emphasis added). So truth can only be known in relationship with Christ and can only be communicated through discipleship, which in turn is to be experienced corporately, not solely on an individual basis.

Conclusion

Thus, there are three aspects of Anabaptism, arising from dependence on the Holy Spirit’s work in individual believers and in congregations, that provide a basis for confidence in communicating at the contemporary mission frontier. First is the example of the Anabaptists’ motivation. Second, certain of their methods are of great contemporary relevance. Third is their discipleship, embodying truth.

In twenty-first-century Britain, expounding the gospel in lectures or preaching is less valid as well as less welcome and effective than sharing stories as equals. Many contemporary writers advocate the latter approach on the basis of effectiveness or of Jesus’s example.⁶⁷ Perhaps it would be more helpful for them to go further and to see, as the Anabaptists did, that dialogue is not only effective but also more faithful to a biblical understanding of the nature of mission.

65 Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2000), 166–69.

66 Michael Sattler is one of the earliest and best-known examples: see *Legacy of Michael Sattler*, 73.

67 For example, Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism: Which Way Now? An Evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell Church and Other Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism* (London: Church House, 2003), 171–84.

Glory

CAROL TOBIN*

The glory came down between the lines of the litany
Like a helicopter landing it took our breath away
Sucked it out of our lungs so that we were left gasping for breath

The song leader sputtered and sought to launch us into the heavens
noting on her instrument the change of atmospheric pressure
Angle up—it's time for the lift

But someone in the back forgot to turn up the volume
and there we were—weighty and waiting in the pews
We failed to launch

We gathered the hopes stowed over our heads and filed down the aisle
the Spirit having fluttered lightly away—wings flapping

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Buried, We Will Grow

The Story of Meserete Kristos Church

ANDREW MASHAS*

One day, after I had been working at Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) for a few years, I climbed the steps to the attic in my little office building and came across a stack of books. One of them was called *Beyond Our Prayers* by Nathan Hege.¹ In this book, I discovered a story that reflected the dynamic between a small Anabaptist missions agency in Salunga, Pennsylvania, and a grand movement of the Holy Spirit that saw hundreds of thousands come to faith in Christ halfway around the world. It was a story of the Holy Spirit at work—the same Spirit that swept over the waters in Genesis, the same Spirit that commanded light into existence. It is the same Spirit that toppled empires from Egypt to Rome. It is the same Spirit that shut the mouths of lions and gave prophets the ability to speak. It is the same Spirit that gave flesh to dry bones.

The first American missionaries from Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (now EMM) intended to witness among Ethiopia's Muslim population; however, it became apparent that traditional Orthodox communities were more responsive to church planting efforts, so Mennonite fellowships began to form with those groups. In the late 1960s, church leadership began to transition to the local people instead of remaining under foreign influence. It was around this time that spiritual revival broke out among the youth, similar to the East African Revival that had greatly influenced Tanzania Mennonite Church in the 1930s.² This new revival was more charismatic, with fervent prayer, healings, deliverance, and evangelism. Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) began to blossom as it worked toward self-governance. EMM supplied missionary personnel in the form of healthcare workers, Bible Academy

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1 Nathan B. Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia 1948–1998* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1998).

2 Alemu Checole et al., *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts: Global Mennonite History Series: Africa* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006).

teachers, evangelists, and others who would coordinate the work done by both EMM and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

However, by the early 1970s political upheaval took hold of the nation of Ethiopia. In the months following its founding, the Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army—also known as the Derg—began to gain more power and influence throughout the government. In 1974, the Derg staged a coup that swept through Ethiopia and took political control. In July of that year, the Derg obtained important compromises from the emperor, Haile Selassie, including the power to arrest and detain not only military officers but also government officials at every level throughout the country. Soon, former Prime Ministers Tsehai Taezaz, Aklilu Habte-Wold, and Endelkachew Mekonnen, along with most of their cabinets, most regional governors, many senior military officers, and many officials of the Imperial Court were imprisoned.

So began the systematic toppling of the emperor's control over the country. In August, after a proposed constitution creating a constitutional monarchy was presented to Haile Selassie, the Derg began a program of dismantling the imperial government in order to forestall further developments in that direction. On September 12, 1974, the Derg deposed and imprisoned the emperor. This sparked the Ethiopian Civil War, a conflict that would see at least 1.4 million dead by its end in 1991.

The relationship between the Derg and Meserete Kristos Church was volatile. Military officials would occasionally visit the Bible Academy in Nazareth to try to discover if there were any students involved with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), an underground movement that threatened the Derg. Academy staff would wrap all apologetic papers in plastic bags and bury them in various places across campus.

Around this time, MKC was assisting a Reformed group who started to practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *Semay Birhan* (Heavenly Sunshine) was a charismatic group known for mass prayer, casting out demons, and speaking in tongues. Their heart for ministry included a focus on university students, and they soon decided to form their own denomination. Due to MKC's connection with this group, it became more Pentecostal than the other Mennonite Churches in East Africa.

Despite increasing persecution, the MKC congregations continued to grow as the Holy Spirit worked through them, giving different gifts essential for church growth. In the capital city, Addis Ababa, three worship services were held every Sunday. EMM missionary Janet Kreider recalls the great crowds waiting for access to Bole chapel when one service was dismissed and another

began.³ The Holy Spirit swept through those meetings, and many physical healings took place: healing from cancer, paralysis, blindness, asthma. Healings would even extend to people who did not confess Christ, but the miracles would often prompt them to receive his salvation.

Pastor Daniel Mekonnen started to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as healing and words of knowledge. His unique ministry attracted many people to Christ all over the country. Daniel's testimony included his initial proclamation of faith in Christ, which came as a result of hearing about the healing of a blind man. He started to have a burden for people with various medical conditions. The Holy Spirit used him to lead the country in a great revival through which the mission of the church could be fulfilled. Even members of the communist government came to the revival meetings because they were interested in what God was doing there.

As the church grew exponentially, the government began to increase its surveillance of Christian worship. Over the course of seven months in 1982, Derg leaders appeared at the doors of all fourteen MKC congregations with the order that the churches were to close their doors and hand over their buildings to the Ethiopian government. The believers in these congregations totaled five thousand at the time. The church complied and eventually transferred its hospitals to the government, too. The Menno Bookstore was nationalized in 1977; the Bible Academy in 1982. When the government closed all of the congregations, they detained and imprisoned five of their leaders for four years.

Many Ethiopian believers were commanded to raise their left hands, curse their enemies, and shout a slogan that claimed the revolution was above everything. Many believers refused because they firmly believed God is above all. Many believed it was the Holy Spirit who gave them the courage to withstand the opposition. They were kept in prison for days and beaten in an attempt to get them to renounce their faith and claim allegiance to the revolution. Many considered it a privilege to suffer for their faith. Most notably, the Derg rounded up six key leaders within MKC and threw them in prison. EMM tried to help by sending Robert Kreider, former president of Bluffton (Ohio) College, to try and negotiate release for the prisoners. Kreider's efforts were to no avail. Even the late Paul Kraybill, executive secretary of Mennonite World Conference, tried to negotiate in 1984 with Derg representatives in France for their release.⁴ The Holy Spirit was paramount as their guide, reminding them how Jesus proclaimed that those who were persecuted in his name were blessed.

³ Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*, 169.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

EMM personnel were not forced to leave the country the way they had been in Somalia a decade earlier.⁵ However, the interaction with MKC would have to look different if missionaries wanted to stay in the country. Many missionaries were able to stay in the country because of their particular professions, but keeping a lower profile was necessary. MCC was able to carry on agricultural development work, reforestation, resettlement of refugees, and distribution of food during the famine.

When the Holy Spirit is all a community has, that community will be empowered to do the impossible. The system created during the church's underground period was nothing short of miraculous—a work of the Holy Spirit that subverted the ruling powers in many imaginative and beautiful ways. The Ethiopian church became invisible. It scattered into tiny networks of five believers per cell. House fellowships were comprised of two to four cells. No group discussed or knew anything about other groups. Meeting places were constantly changed. In Addis Ababa, cells were sometimes as large as ten or twelve. When rumors spread that the government was coming, the groups would split. Six weeks after the church's closing in Addis Ababa, the congregation of two thousand members that used to meet in one building was now meeting in a hundred homes throughout the city. Women became active in leadership during the underground. In fact, more women than men were leading cell groups. They also taught Sunday school and served as elders.

New members were added through Spirit-led individual witness. Special evangelists were assigned to disciple people for up to a year. When it was clear that new members were true believers and not government spies, they would finally be introduced to the larger group. As the church grew, the total number of members was not precisely known. An underground General Council was able to meet twice annually, creating a kind of broader fellowship for the MKC. Leaders secretly distributed Bible study material so all believers could study the same courses.

The underground church relied on the Spirit to carry on its ministry against all odds. Once, in 1985, an evangelist baptized eighteen new believers in a government hotel while communist officials were drinking on the porch. The believers came and went by twos in twenty-minute intervals. Evangelists continued to travel around to various regions and house fellowships in secret for ten years. When committees met, they never arrived at a house in pairs, never shook hands, and never greeted one another in the doorway.

⁵ Peter M. Sensenig, *Peace Clan, Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

By 1991, the civil war was over and the church was reopened. Its story of complete surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit continues. Meserete Kristos Church has become the largest single Anabaptist communion in the world. MKC continues to be a discipling church as well as a church of prayer. It is well-organized and effectively led. As the church continues to focus on growth throughout Ethiopia, it also looks to send missionaries to other parts of East Africa, including Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia. Eastern Mennonite Missions and Meserete Kristos Church continue to rely on the Holy Spirit as their guide to share the gospel to all nations.

When Meserete Kristos Church was closed down by the government in 1982, there were fourteen congregations and an estimated membership of about five thousand. When the ban was lifted in 1991, the church had grown tenfold. Today, the membership stands at over 255,000, with about 822 congregations across the nation. There are also over 1,000 church planting centers projected to become full-fledged congregations in one to two years. No individual or group can take credit for MKC's phenomenal growth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is a beautiful yet assertive passage from the Gospel of John that insists the Spirit of God cannot be controlled or manipulated for personal gain, no matter how hard humankind tries. "Just as the wind blows where it pleases, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8, ESV). We find scripture to be one grand story of humankind building civilizations and empires of oppression and violence, and the Spirit of God constantly overturning humankind's tables of greed and power. This story continues today, often in ways unseen to the world's eye.

Book Reviews

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*. Vol. 4 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2016. 520 pp. \$40.00. ISBN: 9780802868565.

Spirit and Salvation is the fourth of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's five-volume constructive and systematic theological project. I am a former pastor and practical theologian and am fairly well read in biblical studies, but I must confess that I struggled with this text. It is highly technical and the content, at times, poorly edited. I needed to read each paragraph a few times, and I tired of Kärkkäinen's tendency to reiterate arguments already covered. Given that I am a middle-aged, middle-class, white Christian male of North American residency—that is, someone who has been afforded a significant amount of educational privilege—I wonder who Kärkkäinen's target audience is. Consider the following passage:

I argue that the paranoid fear of “works righteousness” of much of Protestantism has to be challenged and corrected by the “synergistic” (Eastern Orthodox) and “cooperational” (Roman Catholic) understanding of (“prevenient”) grace—while at the same time (in agreement of the whole of the Christian tradition) all forms of Pelagianism must be resisted. (352)

Wow! Kärkkäinen is clearly speaking to fellow theologians and keen graduate students; his text is very dense. Some may say, “Of course, it's a constructive theological text! There's a place for that.” And yes, there *is* a place for that. Yet I question how impactful a project of this magnitude (a multivolume systematic) can be when it's written in a way that marginalizes those beyond the academy—namely, the majority of the church. That said, I acknowledge that Kärkkäinen is trying to be as theologically ecumenical as possible. He addresses many of his arguments in dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox community, and he engages Catholic, Protestant, and Charismatic forms of Christianity as well. The contemporary voices of liberation, feminism, and other so-called contextual theologies are also attended to.

The text is divided into two parts. The first explores the Spirit; the second, matters of salvation. In each part, Kärkkäinen engages biblical texts and the history of theological reflection. He also brings in the perspectives of other religious traditions, including Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu voices. Kärkkäinen's exploration of the other religions, I think, is important given the plural contexts many of us find ourselves in. Yet as someone with limited interreligious experience, I find it hard to offer a thoughtful reflection on what is being offered here.

Despite my criticism of Kärkkäinen's overly thick prose, I do appreciate the respectful and reverential ways in which he seeks to position his theological reflections. "All our explanations are humble and modest, and hence viable for dialogue and conversation" (3). Kärkkäinen does not claim definitive understanding. He seeks to learn from and honor a broad array of learning communities. At times, he even strikes very pastoral tones.

Perhaps my struggles with this text are due, in large part, to my lack of interreligious experience. I grew up in the Mennonite community of southern Ontario. I live, for example, in an area where some of the biggest churches come from the Plymouth Brethren tradition. They are Calvinist in their theological orientation. Although we Mennonites live right next door to them, we have had very little in-depth interaction with our Plymouth Brethren sisters and brothers. As a result, I have never learned about their distinctive understandings of "grace" and "works" and "predestination" (let alone "double predestination"!). When Kärkkäinen takes up theological topics like these in his text, exploring the multiple ways they have been understood and contested through time, tradition, and space, I realize that my understandings are shaped and limited by my small circle of Christian experience. I found Kärkkäinen's discussion of these topics, and how other Christians think about such, fascinating. I just wish it were more accessible.

One highlight of the book for me was Kärkkäinen's discussion around peace, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. I especially appreciated his reflections on forgiveness, which engage the thinking of Miroslav Volf, William Klassen, and Don McLellan.

Having received divine forgiveness,¹ an unconditional gift, men and women are called to imitate that act of hospitality. In forgiving, humans mediate the gift of forgiveness they have received themselves. "Failure to offer forgiveness indicates a devaluation of God's forgiveness."² Withholding forgiveness would mean the exclusion of another and would be nothing other than the exclusion of God.³ (284–85)

According to Kärkkäinen, reconciliation is the ultimate aim of salvation. Given his Lutheran heritage, it is not surprising that nonviolence does not play a key part in

1 Kärkkäinen (284–85) referencing William Klassen in *The Forgiving Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 151.

2 Kärkkäinen (285) quoting Don McLellan in "Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation," 13, cited in Célestin Musekura, *An Assessment of Contemporary Models of Forgiveness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 73.

3 Kärkkäinen (285) referencing Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 241.

how he conceptualizes reconciliation. Yet if “we understand peace and peacemaking as an indispensable part of our common faith” (Kärkkäinen 407, quoting the World Council of Churches in “Glory to God and Peace on Earth: The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation”), then there ought to be more engagement with the Historic Peace Churches and their nonviolent theologies of the Spirit, salvation, and reconciliation. Kärkkäinen doesn’t give any significant attention to such theologies.

In the introduction, Kärkkäinen makes the point that theology is about hospitality—that genuine theology is about giving and receiving gifts. I am still trying to receive the gift he is offering me. It’s still mostly an unwrapped gift. But I hope to return to it again in the future and give it another chance. If I do, I’m sure I will discover much that I was unable to receive the first time.

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Helen Richmond, *Blessed and Called to Be a Blessing: Muslim-Christian Couples Sharing a Life Together*, Oxford, Regnum, 2015. 168 pp. \$23.00. ISBN: 9781908355898.

A few weeks ago, I joined some high school students from my church as they traveled to our local Sikh temple. We are a part of a program called *Walking the Walk*, which brings together young people from a variety of faith traditions to learn from one another. We participated in the service, joined a group of Sikh high school students for *langar* (the open meal served at the temple), and then the youth spent an hour asking some Sikh leaders about their lives. They were particularly interested in what it was like for Sikh people to live in Philadelphia as a minority—how they hold on to traditions, how they feel about inequality in our city, what it is like to be visibly Sikh at all times. As a mentor for the program, I am blessed to listen to these youth talk, to watch them work out what it means to care for each other and to share a city.

Of course, we can’t get very far into a conversation before the broader political world breaks in. For the young folks from our church, who live in a diverse city and believe deeply in sharing their lives with people from other traditions, our country’s decision to vote for racist and Islamophobic policies—embodied in the Trump presidency—is scary. As we talked, I heard fear, uncertainty, anger—emotions I share with them. As a millennial (I’m 25) and a person in an interreligious relationship, I often don’t know exactly what to do with people in my church and my country who oppose a vision of faith communities living together.

Helen Richmond's *Blessed and Called to Be a Blessing* engages this fear and uncertainty about life together, and wisely does so from a particular vantage point. Focusing on marriages between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia and Australia, she offers models for how people in multi-religious marriages can support each other and navigate their faith communities. Richmond is herself a Christian woman married to an Indonesian Muslim man, and she unapologetically explores what frameworks and strategies can help Christians and Muslims live together.

Rapid globalization has spurred both a deep interest in plurality and interreligious community (as is evident among the young people in *Walking the Walk*), and reactionary movements against religious minorities. With so much uncertainty, we might all benefit from understanding how our different legal and theological legacies inform the present moment. This book can be an important contribution to that education, as Richmond spends the first part of her book tracing the history of Christian and Muslim attitudes toward intermarriage, as well as the histories of legal rulings on interreligious marriage in Indonesia and Australia.

These sections will interest readers differently, depending on their context. For example, I am less interested in the history of legal rulings in a country like Indonesia, where I have very little historical context to help make sense of changes in laws relating to intermarriage. On the other hand, as a Christian, I was helped by reading about the history of Christian intolerance toward others, which contrasted with early Islam's commitment to allowing marriages to other "People of the Book." Richmond's treatment of this issue helped me understand the historical depth of hatred that makes it difficult for Christians to accept people from their community marrying Muslims.

The second part of Richmond's book concerns itself with the concrete lived experience of interfaith couples in Australia and Indonesia. Drawing from interviews with these couples, Richmond shares stories of communities welcoming or rejecting interfaith marriages, parents arguing over how to raise children, and religious leaders supporting young couples in finding new ways to make meaning together. These stories force us to be honest with the complexity of living interfaith lives in communities that can be deeply exclusive. In the interviewees' questions about conversion and fidelity to family and tradition, I saw myself and my own struggles to live in an interfaith relationship.

Some of the passages that carry the greatest emotional impact grapple with couples' doubts about whether God has truly called them to live together in marriage. Some experience that doubt because of community pressure, and they come to believe their marriage is now a mistake. Others rejoice that they have found their *jodoh*, the Indonesian word meaning "soul mate." Richmond tells the story of one couple reflecting that the interfaith nature of their marriage, though rare in Indonesia, is a

blessing that has “sustained them and enabled them to live out a sense of vocation” (137).

Richmond finishes the book by exploring the range of approaches to interfaith marriage. Leaving aside coercive marriages, she finds various positive ways of making a life together, of sharing that sense of shared vocation. Some couples affirm a “Theology of Joint Witness,” where they find ways to affirm each other’s traditions and work together for the betterment of their community. Others practice a “Theology of Respectful Witness,” where difference is deeply respected and upheld. Neither is held up as the “best” way to live in relationship; instead, Richmond leaves us with a sense that every interfaith couple (and each supportive community) must navigate life together in their own way, finding ways to affirm each other’s differences while also working together. The balance between respect and compromise will be different for each of us.

In troubling political times, it can be tempting to close off our relationships, to confuse similarity with safety. Without downplaying the difficulties of interfaith relationships, Richmond gives us hope for life together. Her book walks us through the lives of real people struggling with real theological, legal, and interpersonal challenges. Their lives and her reflections birth strategies and frameworks that are useful for anyone looking to navigate an interfaith relationship or support others in doing so. As racist and Islamophobic violence becomes more explicit and common in the United States (as well as in Canada and Europe), it is even more important for everyone to work on these interfaith relationship skills. The witness provided by interfaith couples becomes a bright star in dark times.

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Drew G. I. Hart, *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, Herald, Harrisonburg, VA, 2016. 189 pp. \$16.99. ISBN: 9781513800004.

What does it mean to live as a racially oppressed group within a society? And why is it so hard for those of the dominant social group to see this racism? Drew Hart’s book *Trouble I’ve Seen* explores the ways we think about racism and how we can go about listening to those in our society who are racially marginalized. I write this review as a woman of color in Winnipeg, Manitoba—a land with an ongoing legacy of violent settler colonialism and racialization that has impacted Indigenous peoples in particular. Hart speaks from his context of being African American and explains what it means to be “black” in the United States.

If you have watched American news and tried to understand the dynamics of the racial tensions and injustices south of the colonial border, this book is for you. I

have cousins in America who are often so angry on social media. I now understand. I understand because this book shows what Hart calls the “underbelly” of racism, the part that you don’t see unless you actually live it. The book serves as a call to “white” churches to examine their role in racist societal structures and embrace the true image of Christ—a Jewish, not European, man who challenged unjust systems, walked in solidarity with the poor and the marginal, and invited the rich and powerful to act justly.

Hart begins with an exploration of the dynamics of a racialized society, sharing his experience of being racialized. What does it mean to be racialized? It means having people think that they know who you are without having any relationship with you. It is the tiring task of daily being thought of as morally, physically, and intellectually inferior and having to constantly prove you are not a “thug” or a “welfare queen” and remind yourself that, despite being a despised human being, you have value and were created in the image of God just like everyone else. It is feeling like you never quite belong in your country, hitting glass ceilings, “driving while black,” fearing for the safety of your children when they go out, being blamed for your poverty, and going to jail while someone white gets a slap on the wrist for the same crime. It means seeing one’s country’s long history of racial oppression still being played out, while members of the dominant society—who benefit from that history and have been taught that they are innocent and nice—see racists’ actions as isolated, even normal incidents, and label the racially marginalized as bad.

Ironically, Hart points out, the racially oppressed are often not believed when they identify racism, though it is precisely the racialized person who truly understands racism because he or she lives these experiences and confronts the injustice of the dominant group’s system on a daily basis. Being racialized also means being courageous and strong in the face of oppression and, through peaceful resistance and restorative justice, leading the oppressor to see Christ embodied through your stance.

Hart then takes the reader through a historical sketch of the concepts of “whiteness” and “blackness,” concepts wielded by Europeans to entrench racist structures, values, and racial violence in the United States. Those concepts persist today under new guise. This new form legalizes inequities in education funding for children of racialized groups; disproportionately incarcerates the young men of these same groups; denies skin color—and therefore racism—but blames skin color, not the unjust system and attitudes, as a problem. Hart concludes his historical survey by highlighting the colonial thread that connects the Native American experience of being forced off their land and becoming invisible, to the African American experience of being forced to come to another land and being subjugated in order to maintain the belief in white superiority. As regards the Indigenous experience, he reminds the reader that America was built not on Christian values but on stolen land. Land that’s still stolen and in need of reparative distribution.

Trouble I've Seen invites anyone in a dominant social position to peel back their societal attitudes toward the racially marginalized—attitudes they see as normal—and measure them against the teachings of Christ, who aligned himself with the marginalized. Christ is a model for both the oppressor and the oppressed. To the oppressor he offers the example of justice and solidarity with the sinned-against and an invitation to see others through God's eyes—as most worthy of being loved. To the oppressed he offers the comfort of one who himself has also been socially rejected and despised. Jesus calls both groups to conform their hearts and minds to his likeness and not to the patterns of society. We are called to be vigilant about all forms of oppression—racism, sexism, classism, and so on—where one group tries to dominate another. We must challenge them just as Christ did and strive to build a just society that treats all God's children with equal dignity, both at home and abroad.

While reading this book, I cannot help but think of the racism that my Indigenous brothers and sisters here in Canada experience on a daily basis. They face negative stereotypes and still live under the colonial-imposed Indian Act that strips Indigenous peoples of their jurisdiction and rights, legislates them into poverty, and puts them into a separate, less-funded system than other people in Canada. Their lived reality witnesses a betrayal of the treaties that they covenanted to with the Crown. Moreover, their reality witnesses a betrayal of the kind of just society that Hart summons us Christians to. So what might we do with this?

Here are some questions that we in Canada could explore:

- Does my church intentionally invite Indigenous voices into our spaces so we might attend to their perspectives and experiences?
- Do we speak up when we see Indigenous persons being treated disrespectfully in our neighborhoods?
- Are we learning about our colonial past in order to get over our instinctive drive to tell Indigenous Canadians to “get over it”?
- Are we finding ways to share life together as members of one treaty family?

Trouble I've Seen is a helpful text that encourages me to be brave and to seek transformative action. We are to be just as Christ was, bringing forth God's kingdom as we face the underbelly of racism in our society.

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Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015. 182 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 9780802872999.

I have been carefully reading and mulling over the complex, rich, and compelling content of *Embracing the Other* for several weeks, and today I've finally started putting together my thoughts. Today is November 9, 2016—the day after the United States' presidential election. Other commentators on this work have called it prophetic, and I echo these sentiments. Kim, with unrelenting clarity and precision, touches on many of the issues—racism, misogyny, economic inequity, and so on—that are being felt more keenly today by the established North American church than in some time. In continuity with the best of the prophetic tradition, Kim draws our attention to the sins of the people and calls us to a different way.

Embracing the Other is a hard book. Hard because it is technical, detailed, and academic. Hard also because it is unrelenting and determined in its analysis of race- and gender-based oppressions and the toxic theologies that support them. And the book is made even more difficult, and compelling, by the fact that the issues explored are all deeply personal to the author. Kim first emigrated to Canada with her parents in 1975 and moved to the United States in the early 2000s. She is no detached author. She has a stake in the issues, for they have “cost” her and the community she belongs to.

In the first chapter, “The Lives of Asian American Immigrant Women,” Kim states, “The advent of Asian immigration was neither easy nor pleasant. . . .” This is, of course, putting it mildly, as she makes clear just how terrible her experience was as an Asian immigrant. As a Canadian Christian, I found it unsettling (but not surprising) to hear Kim's description of our racism and exclusion. The church I identify with is not, Kim makes plain, as welcoming as we would like to imagine (32).

To help us grapple with the profound violence that Asian women have experienced, such as the abuse inflicted on Korean “comfort women,” (i.e., women forced into sexual slavery) Kim explores the Korean concept of *Han*: “*Han* arises when institutions, communities and nations create laws, policies, and institutions that cause subordination and subjugation of groups of people” (39).

For Asian American women, and women more broadly, *Han* manifests itself as misogyny. *Han* is produced by so many parts of life—work, marriage, even images of God (see pages 82, 84, 136, and 146)—that you eventually get the feeling that misogyny is produced by so many embedded narratives, theologies, and structures that it's currently inexorable. It is certainly overwhelming.

There are two key parts of the book that deserve special attention. First is Kim's treatment of the problem of “whiteness.” She addresses this problem in a way that

does not leave much wiggle room for those who would like to see themselves as not-racist because they don't (so they think) perform overtly racist acts or behaviors. One of the most powerful ideas about race—championed here by Kim and echoed by many others—is that racism is a sickness that sits deep within us and, as such, cannot be easily disavowed.

Race functions as a category of human classification, identity, and differentiation for the benefit of some and the detriment of others. . . . To identify someone as “racial” is to say they are not white. . . .

. . . *Because whiteness is seen as nonracial, white privilege is upheld systemically through favorable rules and practices toward those racialized as white.* . . .

Because whites often fail to recognize their power and privilege, it is sometimes necessary to prompt their awareness in order to work towards justice. (43–44; emphasis mine)

The *Han* that Kim and all racialized people experience will not be eliminated by postures of inclusivity—namely, being nice to people who are different. Whiteness and white privilege is a fault line that runs too deep for such facile responses. So how should one respond?

This is the second part of the book that requires attention. Kim's proposed response to all this racism and misogyny—the “Spirit of Love”—sounds like an idea everyone can get behind. But this Spirit is not some nebulous feel-good panacea. Kim means something specific and something that will be hard for many to embrace. This love is a transformative one and is identified as *eros*—intimate subjective engagement. “The erotic bridges the passions of our lives—the physical, emotional, psychic, mental, and spiritual elements” (141). And why is this kind of love hard to embrace? It's because our beliefs about love, its nature and appropriate role, have been shaped by the sinful theologies we inhabit. In mainstream conceptions, “Eros denotes the disorderly and the source of temptation that could drive humans to insanity. . . .⁴ However, much of this negativity can be attributed to a dualism that works to benefit a white Eurocentric male perspective. Therefore it is no surprise that some perceive reason to be superior to emotion, male to female, logos to Sophia, and logic to Eros” (143).

This is where Kim takes us: theologically and ecclesiastically, we must recover a genuinely erotic love. That's the key to eliminating our sinful misogyny and racism. And how are we going to do this? By embracing each other through acts and emotions that are intimate, messy, and vulnerable.

⁴ At this point, Kim references Diarmuid O'Murchu, *In the Beginning Was the Spirit: Science, Religion, and Indigenous Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 2012), 157.

Discomfort is a hallmark of the prophetic. If we are concerned about systems that mask and perpetuate misogyny and racism, we need to be open to courageous alternative thinking and practices that disrupt and resist patriarchy and whiteness. Kim's offering is a way into this. She is pursuing a theology that will liberate not only the oppressed but also unwitting oppressors like me.

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Catherine Vialle, Jacques Matthey, Marie-Hélène Robert, Gilles Vidal (*sous dir.*), *Sagesse Biblique et Mission*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2016, 278 pp. 30 €. ISBN : 9782204105637.

Sagesse Biblique et Mission contient les actes du colloque œcuménique de missiologie du même nom. Ce dernier a été organisé par l'AFOM et s'est tenu en mai 2014 à l'université catholique de Lille.

Il contient dix-sept articles auxquels s'ajoutent une préface et une relecture. Les auteurs proviennent aussi bien de la théologie biblique vétéro- et néo-testamentaires que de la systématique, la missiologie, voire même la philosophie.

Les articles sont regroupés en trois parties : sagesse biblique et sagesse des nations, figures de la sagesse biblique et missiologie de la sagesse.

La première partie regroupe des articles qui font entrer en dialogue sagesse biblique, sagesse des nations et mission. On y étudie par exemple les traces supposées ou avérées de sagesse des nations dans le matériau biblique (par ex. Job et Pr), la confrontation entre ces deux sagesse (Ac 17), les diverses manières dont les missionnaires ont appréhendé les sagesse locales, notamment en Océanie, ou les nouvelles sagesse qui émergent de la confrontation entre sagesse ancienne et évangile.

La seconde partie concerne des figures de la sagesse biblique. Elle contient des articles concernant certains sages de l'Ancien Testament (par ex. Salomon, Joseph), mais aussi un article sur Jésus, qui se révèle Sagesse en mission en Matthieu 11 et deux consacrés aux réflexions de Paul concernant la sagesse de Dieu (notamment en 1 Corinthiens et Colossiens), qui met en échec les sagesse humaines, devenues folie en comparaison. Il contient également deux articles stimulants l'un sur la sagesse biblique elle-même, l'autre sur la remise en cause par certains livres bibliques (c.-à-d. Job et Qohélet) d'une sagesse traditionnelle, montrant par là que contrairement à la révélation qui est donnée/reçue, la sagesse, confrontée au réel, se construit, parfois de manière dialectique, même si l'Esprit et sources des deux (sagesse et révélation) et les nourrit.

La dernière partie contient trois apports missiologiques, des points de vue œcuménique, orthodoxe et catholique sur la place et l'apport de la sagesse⁵ dans le travail missionnaire perçu à partir de ces trois traditions.

L'apport des articles au thème de l'ouvrage nous paraît inégal et pour certains peu pertinents. On se demande en particulier en quoi la déconstruction de l'image biblique de Salomon comme figure de sagesse nourrit la réflexion missiologique⁶.

On regrettera surtout que contrairement à Frédéric Rognon qui dans son intervention sur « Sagesse des peuples et universalité du salut » tient à honorer les deux pôles de son intitulé et travaille en particulier sur le « et » de la formulation⁷, une partie importante des auteurs soient restés cantonnés dans leur domaine d'expertise, sans vraiment faire droit à l'autre pendant du colloque.

L'article de Françoise Mies, « Qu'est-ce que la sagesse »⁸ est particulièrement interpellant. Celui-ci part de la distinction que fait le Père Adolfo Nicolás, de trois types de langages dans l'Ancien Testament : le langage historique, le langage prophétique et le langage de la sagesse qui émerge quand l'évidence de la foi est tombée. Constatant qu'en Europe et en Occident le langage prophétique n'est plus adapté parce qu'il n'y a plus de foi à purifier, il introduit le langage de la sagesse comme un message qui fait sens autant pour les croyants que pour les non-croyants ; peut-être le langage qui émerge pour les frontières dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, qui « permet de chercher Dieu en toute chose, dans le quotidien de la vie et ses expériences fondamentales, mais aussi de se tenir aux frontières des cultures, pour échanger en profondeur »⁹. Ou ainsi que le dit Michel Mallèvre dans sa préface : « les textes sapientiaux de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament témoignent d'un art de vivre et d'un dialogue avec d'autres cultures qui peuvent nous éclairer dans la mise en œuvre de notre responsabilité d'annoncer le royaume de Dieu. »¹⁰

Même si cela ne simplifie pas toujours le propos et donne un certain flou concernant la sagesse abordée, il se tisse aussi au fil de l'ouvrage un dialogue entre les différents types de sagesse¹¹ : sagesse des nations, enseignement sapientiel biblique, la Sagesse personnifiée de Proverbes 8 et Christ, Sagesse de Dieu. Comment

5 Sagesse avec un grand « S » pour l'apport orthodoxe.

6 Dany Nocquet, « Salomon le roi sage : de la tradition à la légende », p. 123-142.

7 p. 61.

8 p. 97-121.

9 p. 97.

10 p. 19.

11 Michel Mallèvre évoque cette question dès la préface (p. 8) : « la Sagesse biblique demeure difficile à cerner, tant dans un corpus délimité que dans ses rapports avec d'autres cultures ou encore dans la spécificité de son apport au sein de la révélation ».

l'enseignement sapientiel biblique découle-t-il de la Sagesse ? Cette Sagesse¹² est-elle présente dans les sagesse des nations anté-missionnaires ? Quelle sagesse nouvelle découle de la confrontation en mission enseignement sapientiel biblique et sagesse d'une nation ? Quel est le statut de cette sagesse nouvelle ? Autant de pistes lancées, qui stimulent la réflexion, avec des tentatives de réponses apportées par l'ouvrage, mais aussi un encouragement à étudier ces nouvelles sagesse pour formuler nos propres évaluations.

On notera aussi la belle typologie comparative du missionnaire et du sage, faite par Jean-François Zorn dans sa relecture finale¹³, soulignant dans l'introduction à cette typologie qu'un engagement missionnaire équilibré devrait laisser une place à une part sapientiale dans le vécu du ministère.

On pourra se réjouir que depuis quelques années la théologie se réapproprie et retravaille la question missiologique, et le présent ouvrage est dans cette lignée. C'est pourquoi il faudra plutôt voir cet ouvrage comme un travail préliminaire de défrichage du terrain, mais nécessitant par la suite un vrai travail d'articulation des notions puis orienté vers la pratique, qu'un ouvrage directement utilisable en missiologie et à fortiori pour le travail missionnaire lui-même.

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12 L'ambiguïté entre Sagesse personnifiée et Sagesse incarnée est volontaire dans ce propos.

13 p. 246.