

Anabaptist Witness

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

VOLUME 4 OCTOBER 2017 ISSUE 2

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VOLUME 4

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ISSUE 2

- 7 Editorial
Jamie Pitts

ARTICLES

- 13 Mosaic Maker
Melissa Weaver
- 15 Suffering Mission in the Passau Songs of the *Ausbund*
Gerald J. Mast
- 37 The Reconciling Role of Suffering within Sufi Muslim and
Anabaptist Theologies of Nonviolence
Jonathan Bornman
- 51 Daughters of Jerusalem
Melissa Weaver
- 53 Solidarity in Suffering
Grace Spencer
- 57 Saudade
Melissa Weaver
- 59 The Forgotten People
Anne Thiessen
- 67 The Furloughed Missionaries in Children's Church
Hillary Kobernick
- 69 Pregnant with an Evil
Marcus Rempel

83 A Salt of the Earth Man
Hillary Kobernick

85 Like Fine Red Veins
Melissa Weaver

REVIEWS

87 Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans, *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context, and Prophetic Dialogue*
Reviewed by Justin Eisinga

89 Ched Myers, ed., *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*
Reviewed by Matt Balcarras

91 Winona LaDuke, *The Winona LaDuke Chronicles: Stories from the Front Lines in the Battle for Environmental Justice*
Reviewed by Moses Falco

93 Iain Maclean, ed., *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*
Reviewed by Tommy Airey

96 Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*
Reviewed by David Driedger

Editorial

In mid-September, Goshen (IN) College hosted the 18th Believers' Church Conference, "Word, Spirit, and the Renewal of the Church." After a series of stimulating plenary speakers and paper presentations, Frank Thomas, a homiletics professor at Christian Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN), closed the conference with a powerful sermon on Luke 9:57–62. Thomas admitted that he wished things could be easy for followers of Jesus, but insisted on the relevance of Jesus's hard sayings: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"; "Let the dead bury their own dead"; "No one who puts a hand to the plough and turns back is fit for the kingdom of God" (NRSV). If only we disciples were guaranteed comfortable families, jobs, and churches, Thomas said, but in fact "we never know when God will ask more of us, we never know what will be required of us." Discipleship is a hard and costly road, and it involves a "narrow gate," as theology professor Nancy Bedford of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL) had emphasized earlier at the conference.

Thomas spoke of his African American community's sense of being under siege by increasingly vocal white supremacist movements in the United States and police officers who gun down unarmed Black people with impunity. He urged followers of Jesus today to hear and respond to what God is asking of them in the face of this and similar situations. Bedford named the false, American "White Jesus," contrasting it with the brown, Palestinian Jew Jesus of Nazareth who lived in solidarity with the vulnerable of his society. Bedford shared of the temptations offered to those who would worship the White Jesus, and counseled resistance. Resistance, solidarity with the vulnerable, responding to God no matter what—none of this promises immediate rewards or worldly success.

Missionaries are perhaps more aware than others that suffering is a possibility for disciples of Jesus.¹ Popular histories of modern mission movements often highlight martyrs such as Ramon Llull, Jim Elliot, Óscar Romero, Tom Fox, or Mariam Vattalil. Martyr stories, of course, are common throughout

1 Surprisingly, many introductions to mission history and theology overlook the role of suffering in mission and are sunnily optimistic about church mission programs and the shape of Christian participation in God's mission in the world. Scott W. Sunquist's recent introduction to missiology, however, puts suffering alongside glory as one of the two marks of Christian mission, both because suffering is a reality for many Christians and because Scripture portrays discipleship as joining in Christ's suffering and glory (*Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013], xiii–xiv).

the church: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and other ancient Christian bodies; Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and “Radical” Protestants; Evangelical and Pentecostal and independent Christian churches around the world—all have their martyr saints, many of whose stories have been collected into popular books.² Missionaries also often tell of hunger, thirst, imprisonment, beatings, and other non-lethal challenges faced in their work. All of these stories share the sense that while suffering is not desirable, it is likely to be encountered by those devoted to God’s mission.

Anabaptists and Mennonites have long testified that witness to Jesus incurs violent opposition. The *Martyrs Mirror* has been foundational for Mennonites throughout the centuries, and more recent collections lift up suffering and persecuted Anabaptists and Mennonites in Russia, Colombia, Vietnam, the Congo, and elsewhere around the world.³ Contributors to the 1984 volume, *Anabaptism and Mission*, portray suffering as intrinsic to early Anabaptist mission theology and practice,⁴ and the great Mennonite missionary-theologian John Driver writes of “cruciform mission”—mission in the way of the cross—as one of the key images of genuine Christian mission.⁵

Gerald Mast illuminates our understanding of the place of suffering in early Anabaptist mission with his article in this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*. Writing about *Ausbund* hymns penned by imprisoned Anabaptists in Passau, Mast contends that “mission as displayed by the Passau singers and songwriters assumes conflict and suffering to be intrinsic to the life-giving mission of the church,” though he avoids making suffering compulsory; it is to be “freely

2 See, for example, Thielman J. van Bragt, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2014 [1660]); Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (New York: Harper, 1957); John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981 [1570]).

3 Van Bragt, *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*; Charles E. Moore and Timothy Keiderling, eds., *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship* (Walden, NY: Plough, 2016); Aron A. Toews, *Mennonite Martyrs: People Who Suffered for Their Faith, 1920–1940* (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred, 1990). For a historian’s account of early Anabaptist martyrdom, see Brad S. Gregory, “Anabaptist Martyrdom: Imperatives, Experience, and Memorialization,” in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism: 1521–1700*, eds. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Boston: Brill, 2007), 467–506.

4 Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 22–23, 33, 57–58.

5 Driver, *Images of the Church in Mission* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1997), 221–22. For an extended reflection by a Colombian Mennonite Brethren on the relationship between mission and suffering, see Hugo Zorrilla, “Mission and Suffering: A Camouflaged Truth,” *Direction* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 73–80.

chosen and joyfully shared.” Jonathan Bornman develops a similar perspective on the “reconciling role of suffering” in Anabaptist theology through a critical comparison with Senegalese Sufis’ own conception of nonviolent suffering.

The undesirable, yet undeniable, centrality of suffering in mission is further explored by Melissa Weaver in her poem “Daughters of Jerusalem,” on women whose lives are marked by prayer, work, and suffering. Grace Spencer further reflects on learning about the solidarity of the cross while serving marginalized communities and facing her own medical issues.

Spencer’s discussion of her health reminds us that some suffering occurring in mission derives not from opposition and oppression but from the ordinary sufferings that mark our creaturely existence. Missionaries have health problems, heartaches, and family wounds like everyone else. In this light, Weaver’s poem “*Suadade*” can be read as a powerful examination of the displacement felt by a missionary returning to serve in a context where she had grown up. Our internal, emotional “walls” are part of what we bring to mission.

Anne Thiessen’s stories about mission among “forgotten” indigenous communities in Southern Mexico and Hillary Kobernick’s poem on “The Fur-loughed Missionaries in Children’s Church” explore some of the difficult conditions in which missionaries seek solidarity with those who suffer. These conditions are defined in part by war, poverty, hunger, and economic exploitation. Yet they are also places of friendship, healing, and beauty.

Kobernick writes of the “pale child” in a children’s church service who listens to missionary tales but “never know[s] how it feels to lack so much of everything.” What happens when Western (and other) Christians minister from places of unexamined privilege and entitlement? Marcus Rempel responds to this question by describing the Canadian Mennonite residential school system for indigenous children as “pregnant with an evil”; Mennonites “failed to perceive the violence of this system and got caught up in its colonial mandate and its racist rhetoric.” Similarly, Kobernick’s poem “A Salt of the Earth Man” confronts the painful legacy of John Howard Yoder and the church that enabled his sexual violence by silencing the women he had abused and insisting that he was “a good man.” These pieces rightly challenge us to account for the suffering caused by Anabaptist and Mennonite mission. Sometimes it is our own best efforts that must be resisted.

Our cover image and the images scattered throughout the articles are reproductions of paintings by Jane Gateson, a painter and a member of Grain of Wheat Church-Community, an ecumenical Christian church-community that lives and worships in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (see www.janegateson.com for more of her work). Her sharply contrasting tones and sym-

bol-laden figures—which at times seem to include both the living and the dead—provide a visual meditation on the themes in this issue.

The articles, poems, and images are framed by two poems by Melissa Weaver: “Mosaic Maker” and “Like Fine Red Veins.” The first acknowledges the hard work of writers who “strain to see the Pattern/in which all things (this, hard beauty)/hold together.” The second images hope for life beyond death, light beyond darkness, and Water beyond thirst. Reviews of recently published ecumenical and Anabaptist mission texts conclude the issue.

The contributors to this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* have strained to see the Pattern amid experiences of suffering in mission, and in doing so they point to the hope of resurrection life. They help us see that even if “we never know what will be required of us” in mission, we can trust God and God’s mission.

* * *

Jamie Ross wrote the call for submissions for this issue and gathered many of the pieces published here. As I announced in June, she has resigned her position as co-editor in order to seek out and invest in new relationships God is calling her to. Jamie’s leadership was decisive for the redevelopment of *Mission Focus* into *Anabaptist Witness*, and her impact on Anabaptist missiology and publishing will be felt for years to come. I am grateful to Jamie both for her partnership on this project and for our ongoing friendship, and I wish her the best in her new endeavors.

Jamie Pitts, editor



"Black Dog"

Jane Gateson

MELISSA WEAVER¹

Mosaic Maker

The mosaic maker stands
in piles of stained-glass shrapnel,
sifting through verbs and nouns
with bloodied fingers.

She struggles to find places for
stillborn
starvation
midnight-hued -cides and
sold.

She seeks a strong cement
and strains to see the Pattern
in which all things (this, hard beauty)
hold together.

¹ Melissa Weaver lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she manages to tend to a steady husband, a preschooler, toddler, and baby, an unruly backyard garden, and occasionally a poem or two. A former English and English Language Learner teacher, she seeks to be deeply rooted in her neighborhood, building relationships with kids and families who have come from all over the world. There's a place for her at the Trinity's table, and she is learning that's enough. She and her family find fellowship at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Her work has appeared in The Christian Century, Mothers Always Write, The Anabaptist Journal of Australia and New Zealand, and Transforming, a publication of Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Suffering Mission in the Passau Songs of the *Ausbund*

GERALD J. MAST¹

During the mid-1530s, an imprisoned Anabaptist songwriter named Hans Betz wrote the following words about the mission of Jesus Christ:

Christ the lamb came on earth and took on himself human weakness. . . .
The entire fullness of divinity was in Christ. . . . Through him everything
shall be healed. . . . The humanity of Christ became a dwelling of the gen-
tle divinity (*Gottheit zart*).²

The words of this song were eventually printed in a song collection that was incorporated into the influential *Ausbund* hymnbook, which is why these words about “Christ the lamb” continue to be sung by Old Order Amish congregations during each Advent season.³

The picture in this song of the mission of Jesus Christ—becoming a “dwelling of the gentle divinity” through which “everything shall be healed”—reflects also the vision for mission that shaped the particular Anabaptist community with which Hans Betz associated. Nearly sixty of the members of that community were imprisoned with him in the Passau castle at the time he wrote these words. Betz’s fellow Anabaptists were members of a larger communitarian circle that had been centered at Auspitz and led by Philip Plener, a weaver and

1 Gerald J. Mast is professor of communication at Bluffton University and author of numerous books and essays on Anabaptist advocacy, including *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion* (Cascadia, 2006), and *Go to Church, Change the World: Christian Community as Calling* (Herald, 2011). He served on the Missional Church Committee of the Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA from 2011 to 2017 and is vice president of the Mennonite Historical Society.

2 *Etliche schöne christliche Geseng*, (n.p.: 1564); Irvin B. Horst, ed., *Mennonite Songbooks*, German series, vol. 1., Facsimile ed. (Amsterdam: Fritz Knuf, [1974?]), 60–61; Robert A. Riall, trans., and Galen A. Peters, ed., *The Earliest Hymns of the Ausbund: Some Beautiful Christian Songs Composed and Sung in the Prison at Passau, Published in 1564* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2003), 252.

3 Many of these songs also became part of Hutterite hymnody. See William I. Schreiber, “The *Ausbund* Hymns in the Newly-Found Ehrenpreis MS,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 43, no. 4 (October 1969): 330–32.

itinerant Anabaptist missionary whose ministry had gathered around him a band of converts primarily from southwestern Germany.⁴ The particular group of Philipites imprisoned at Passau responded to their circumstances with joyful and doctrinally provocative singing, led by the poetically gifted ministers Hans Betz and Michael Schneider, who, between the two of them, authored the majority of the songs in the collection.⁵

The Philipites, like numerous other German Anabaptist refugees, came to Moravia because of the region's greater toleration for dissident Christianity during the first decade of Anabaptism. At first the Philipites joined the community of Silesian Anabaptists at Rossitz led by Gabriel Ascherham, and then, as a result of conflict with the Gabrielites, moved on to Auspitz, where they established a distinct communalist Anabaptist society. Despite earlier disagreements with the Silesian Gabrielites, the Philipites maintained fraternal relationships with them as well as with a growing community of Anabaptists from both Nicolsburg and South Tyrol who had settled at Austerlitz and were shaped by the leadership of Jakob Wiedemann and, later, Jakob Hutter.

The formation of these migrant Moravian Anabaptist conventicles displays a pattern of Anabaptist mission practice and migration: itinerant evangelists like Hans Hut, Philip Plener, and Jakob Hutter established small groups of converts in regions hostile to Anabaptism; these converts were commissioned to evangelize their family members, neighbors, coworkers, and friends.⁶ When such communities faced persecution by authorities, Anabaptist leaders encouraged the new church groups to migrate to more tolerant locations with established Anabaptist congregations, such as Moravia. Such a pattern intensified a trans-European Anabaptist identity unprotected by sword or prince, that prioritized relationships within the network over those in the community or region of birth.⁷

⁴ Robert Friedmann, "The Philippite Brethren: A Chapter in Anabaptist History," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 32, no. 3 (October 1958): 273–78.

⁵ For more on Schneider and Betz, see William I. Schreiber, "Hans Betz: Poet of the *Ausbund*," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53, no. 2 (April 1979): 128–36; John Oyer, "Michael Schneider: Anabaptist Leader, Hymnist, Recanter," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65, no. 3 (July 1991): 256–86. Schneider's wife, Gertaut Schneider, was among those imprisoned at Passau. Her trial testimony has survived in the sources (Oyer, "Michael Schneider," 263).

⁶ Wolfgang Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1984), 74–79.

⁷ Martin Rothkegel, "Pilgram Marpeck and the Fellows of the Covenant: The Short and Fragmentary History of the Rise and Decline of an Anabaptist Denomina-

Migrating groups typically settled in locations where there were already communities of believers who had been evangelized by the respective group's leader/s and who therefore had originally come from the same region as the newly migrated believers. So, for example, the Philipite community at Auspitz consisted primarily of migrants from southwestern Germany—Swabia, the Palatinate, and the Rhineland—who had been converted by Philip Plener or his associates. The Gabrielites at Rossitz were mainly from Silesia, where they had encountered the preaching of Gabriel Ascherham and his associates.⁸ Although there were some distinctive teachings among these Moravian Anabaptist groups, they shared in common with most Anabaptists a vision of Christian discipleship that included repentance, believers baptism, and living in community. Moreover, such Anabaptists assumed that all converted believers shared in the missionary task articulated in the Great Commission—to teach, to baptize, and to make disciples—a concept that has been described as a “lay apostolate.”⁹ While some Anabaptist leaders were assigned specific tasks of evangelism and church planting, their work was understood to be a shared project of the entire community of faith: all were called by virtue of being disciples to be involved in the work of proclaiming Christ.¹⁰ Throughout this essay, the word “mission” is thus a designation for the central task of the church as Anabaptist communities conceived it: to make disciples by teaching and baptizing. Of course, the specific content of such teaching, as well as the practices by which such teaching was displayed, varied from community to community.

The Moravian Anabaptists, including the Philipites who ended up in the prison at Passau, expressed a distinctive implementation of the mission of the church, inherited from the mystical social teachings of the enormously influential South German Anabaptist evangelist Hans Hut, as well as from the contemplative spirituality of the *Theologia Deutsch*. This anonymous mystical medieval source text was translated into German by Martin Luther and pub-

tional Network,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2011): 7–19.

⁸ Werner Packull has provided a detailed account of the formation of the Philipite and Gabrielite communities in Moravia. See Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments During the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 77–132.

⁹ Schäufele, “Missionary Vision,” 72–73.

¹⁰ According to Abraham Friesen, the Anabaptists insisted that the earth “did not belong to temporal rulers, nor even to the established churches” but instead “to Christ” who had “commanded his followers—not merely the professional clerics—to proclaim his teachings” (Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 99).

lished in many editions, including an “Anabaptist” version edited by Ludwig Haetzer with a preface by Hans Denck.¹¹

Hut advocated, among other distinct teachings, a “communitarian ideal” supported by a frame of apocalyptic expectation and the experience of mystical identification with Christ in his suffering.¹² Ray Gingerich has described the “mission impulse” of Hut’s network as follows: “The Anabaptist missionaries understood their own salvation and that of Christ’s corporate body (the church) to be completed in the process of being Christ’s suffering presence and proclamation in the midst of a fallen world. They understood their own redemption to be completed in the process of being the redeeming ones, the incarnational community.”¹³ Gingerich’s account of this distinct mystical Anabaptist mission impulse demonstrates how specific practices of discipleship that are often considered internal to the life of the church were regarded as practices of mission. Inner experience and outer display had become identified together as a witness of faith. This understanding explains how suffering could become a defining feature of mission for Anabaptists who were shaped by Hut’s mystical teaching of yielding to Jesus Christ and sharing in Christ’s suffering.¹⁴

The communalist Anabaptists in the Passau prison who inherited Hut’s mission program and teaching acknowledged two distinct sources of missional suffering in their song collection: (1) persecution by the offended surrounding world and (2) conflict with the brothers and sisters within the fellowship of faith.¹⁵ The imprisoned Philipites certainly experienced persecution by the religious and political authorities of this world; that is why they were detained in the Passau castle. They had been forced to leave Auspitz after revolution-minded Anabaptists established their regime of coercive communism at Münster and the Moravian nobility felt obliged to respond to the demands of Ferdinand I

11 Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 55–66. For a discussion of the influence of the *Theologia Deutsch* on Moravian Anabaptism, see Riall’s introduction to *Earliest Hymns*, 17.

12 Werner Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1977), 81.

13 Ray C. Gingerich, “The Mission Impulse of Early Swiss and South German-Austrian Anabaptism” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1980), 302.

14 For Hut’s account of the beginning of the Christian life, see his “A Beginning of a True Christian Life,” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunsbuch: Writings of the Pilgrim Marbeck Circle*, ed. and trans. John Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2010), 118–36.

15 Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 24–25.

that all Anabaptists be expelled from the Moravian territories.¹⁶ But they had also just experienced significant conflict with other Anabaptists in the larger network that included the Gabrielite and the Austerlitz communities, as well as another communal group at Auspitz distinct from the Philipites. A number of leadership conflicts featuring well-known figures like Wilhelm Reublin, Pilgram Marpeck, and Jacob Wiedemann had created mistrust among and within the congregations in the Moravian network. These conflicts ranged from questions about special privileges for leaders to arguments about practices of marriage and the disciplining of adultery to disagreements about matters such as war taxes and oath swearing.¹⁷

These ongoing and never-quite-resolved conflicts culminated in the bitter schism of 1533 when Jakob Hutter returned to Auspitz from his missionary work in the Tyrol and sought to assert his own leadership authority in relationship to other leaders such as Philip Plener and Gabriel Aescherham. The resulting feud led ultimately to a distinct community forming around the leadership of Jakob Hutter, who pronounced the ban on the Philipites and the Gabrielites, thereby breaking up the Moravian Anabaptist network. When the Philipite band imprisoned at Passau wrote and sang about their experience of the Christian life, they were reflecting on this experience of conflict, both with estranged Anabaptists as well as with a persecuting Christendom. Their suffering included both the trauma of being banned and the pain of being imprisoned.

Numerous accounts of these Passau songs generally have featured the songwriters' attachment to the German mystical tradition associated with Johannes Tauler and the *Theologia Deutsch*, including the emphasis on identifying with Jesus Christ in his suffering and death; resignation or yielding to the purposes of God; and the profound joy that follows the experience of God's presence amid pain and affliction.¹⁸ Some writers have debated the quality of these songs;

¹⁶ Packull explains the complex and stubborn resistance of the Moravian Estates to the persistent demands of King Ferdinand I to rid Moravia of Anabaptists. The Estates' decision to expel the Anabaptist communities at Auspitz, Austerlitz, and Rossitz was in essence a public cover for continuing unofficial tolerance of other Anabaptist congregations in Moravia. See Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 71.

¹⁷ The most thorough and balanced historical account of these conflicts is found in Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 214–35.

¹⁸ For example, in his pathbreaking study of Anabaptist hymnody, Rudolf Wolkan highlights the more mystical, less dogmatic emphases in Schneider's texts as compared with the texts of Hans Betz (Rudolf Wolkan, *Die Lieder der Wiedertäufer* [Nieukoop: B. de Graaf, 1965], 36).

others have situated them within the traditions of European folk singing or within the guild practices of the “Meistersingers,” who advanced the German Reformation by expressing Protestant doctrines through poetry and song.”¹⁹ Maureen Epp has emphasized the purposeful choices behind the diversity of musical sources for tunes associated with *Ausbund* texts, while downplaying the polemical qualities of the texts.²⁰ Rosella Reimer Duerksen has evaluated the doctrinal content of *Ausbund* texts, with some specific attention to the Passau songs, taking note of such themes as Christian love, martyrdom, the church’s future glory, believers baptism, Lord’s Supper, and the incarnation.²¹

Most researchers agree that the songs collected in the *Ausbund*—such as the Passau corpus—functioned both as spiritual practices and as doctrinal arguments. While written in poetic form and clearly meant to be sung, the songs also directly engaged Reformation-era debates about the nature and mission of the church, the work and authority of Jesus Christ, the ethical shape of the Christian life, and a variety of other theological questions.

Researchers have little evidence to work with in addressing the question of how early Anabaptist communities used these songs, although much speculation exists based on the thin evidence that appears here and there in the sources. In her recent dissertation, Beverly Durance provides a good summary of this speculation. Anabaptists, she notes, appear to have sung these songs both as individuals and in groups, both in the marketplace and in worship.²² When singing together, everyone in the group was expected to sing and to do so loudly and deliberately; “failure to do so did not reflect a lack of musical ability but a lack of belonging.”²³ Durance connects loud singing with the missionary zeal of the Anabaptists, citing numerous accounts of Anabaptist martyrs

¹⁹ For more on the Passau songwriters as possible practitioners of Meistersinger conventions, see Schreiber, “Hans Betz,” 131. Oyer (“Michael Schneider,” 279–82) offers a thorough evaluation of this claim.

²⁰ Maureen Epp, “New Readings of Text and Music in the *Ausbund*,” in *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music*, eds. Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2005), 34–38. Epp does not focus specifically on the Passau hymns, although she mentions them.

²¹ Rosella Reimer Duerksen, “Doctrinal Implications in Sixteenth Century Anabaptist Hymnody,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 1 (January 1961): 38–49.

²² Beverly Durance, “The Unifying Power of Song: The Swiss Anabaptist *Ausbund* as a Voice of Convergence in a Divergent Movement” (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 2007), 43.

²³ Ibid., 44.

singing loudly so that all could hear them, sometimes from their prison cells.²⁴ One contemporary account of Anabaptist singing emphasizes that it was in unison, by contrast to the four-part singing found in Reformed and Lutheran congregations.²⁵ A number of writings by Anabaptists in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries describe singing as a spiritual practice that should focus on the meaning of the words as echoed in the heart and as motivated by the Holy Spirit.²⁶

Certainly the practices of Anabaptist singing that appear to be confirmed in the historical record support the general claim I am making here that the Passau songwriters and singers understood their music as part of their Christian mission. However, my specific focus in this essay is to inquire into the vision of the church and its role in God's suffering and life-giving mission that is displayed in these song texts. That means I will read the mystical and contemplative features of these texts as descriptive of not only a spiritual experience (a spirituality) but also the work and mission of the church (a missiology), as these Anabaptists conceived it.

Suffering and Contested Mission

Central to the ecclesial mission pictured in the Passau songs is an understanding of suffering as intrinsic to, although not defining of, authentic Christian mission. This assumption of suffering for one's faith as a routine experience in the Christian life is prominent in Anabaptist literature and has already received considerable attention from scholars.

Alan Kreider, for example, explains how Anabaptist suffering needs to be understood as an outcome of social nonconformity arising from conversion to a freely chosen Christian life in imitation of Jesus Christ.²⁷ In early moderni-

24 Ibid., 49.

25 According to some Swiss Reformed ministers, the Anabaptists taught that "singing in four-part harmony is sinful babbling and displeases God." Ernst Müller, *History of the Bernese Anabaptists* (Aylmer, ON: Pathway, 2010), 144.

26 See, for example, Hutterite leader, missioner, and songwriter Peter Riedemann's discussion of singing in his Confession of Faith from the 1540s, written while he was in prison (John J. Friesen, trans. and ed., *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith* [Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1999], 146–47). See also the "Instruction on Singing" that appears near the back of a key Swiss Brethren prayer book, published in 1702 (Leonard Gross, trans. and ed., *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls: The Rediscovery of Redeeming Love* [Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1999], 289–90).

27 Alan Kreider, "The Relevance of *Martyrs' Mirror* for our Time," *Mennonite Life* 45, no. 3 (September 1990): 10–13.

ty, this conversion led to confrontation with the authority and privilege that supported the social order of Christendom at that time. Because Anabaptists continue to connect conversion with rejection of and by the corrupted world, they understand suffering as a “normal consequence of following Jesus.”²⁸ Such an expectation helps to strengthen Anabaptist resolve in the face of brutal persecution. But such an expectation also aligns with their experience of God’s presence amid their powerlessness and suffering.²⁹ Such a perspective explains why “Anabaptists of every era have known that there is no discipleship that does not lead to conflict.”³⁰

The Passau songwriters reflect this understanding of suffering as a routine outcome of taking up the mission of the church to teach, to baptize, and to make disciples. For example, song number 2 in the Passau collection calls “people everywhere” (*Volcker allgemein*) to “leave your sins, follow Christ the Lord, and live according to his will.”³¹ This evangelical invitation to live in Christ’s way and to share in Christ’s fellowship means also to participate in Christ’s suffering, according to the songwriter, Michael Schneider: “Whoever would inherit with him must have much pain (*leydens*) here for the sake of his name.”³²

It may be difficult for North American Christians to grasp how it is possible that the good news could include the likelihood of suffering, given the profound fear of suffering that pervades our culture and helps to monetize all manner of hedging against it, from the military industrial complex to the pharmaceutical empire to the insurance racket. In these songs, we find at least three ways in which suffering is offered and received as part of the good news: (1) the privilege of God’s attention; (2) the deep joy that suffering harbors; and (3) the possibility of divinization.

In a song attributed to Hanna Garber, for example, we find a standard Anabaptist use of the story of Cain and Abel to illustrate how suffering signifies God’s love and favor.³³ Abel, who pleased God, “had to suffer great distress (*leyden grosse not*) from his own brother who slew him.”³⁴ By contrast, “the false Satan . . . hates with cause those whom God has chosen,” because “he has been

28 Ibid., 12.

29 Ibid., 14.

30 Ibid., 15.

31 *Erlische schöne Christliche Geseng*, 8; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 62.

32 Ibid.

33 Kreider (“The Relevance of *Martyrs Mirror*,” 12) has noted the theme of “innocent suffering going back to Abel” that is a common theme found in the *Martyrs Mirror*.

34 *Erlische schöne Christliche Geseng*, 105; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 409.

rejected” and thus “has great wrath.”³⁵ On the one hand, God is said—depending on the stanza—to permit, send, and even ordain the suffering that comes to believers; on the other hand, it is clear that the rejected, wrathful, and hateful Satan “with all his servants fights against the Christians.”³⁶ This ambiguity about the source of suffering pervades the songs in the *Etliche Geseng* collection.

One way to read this ambiguity is that the songwriters are simply reflecting biblical texts that affirm God’s chastening or disciplining of those God loves, as confirmed, for example, in Hebrews 12:5–6. The development of this theme shows that the claims that God disciplines those God loves are a kind of short-hand for a more complex understanding of God’s agency and mission in the world. This more complex understanding emphasizes that God’s favor brings rejection to God’s chosen by the forces of worldly power. The mission of the faithful church will always be contested from without and from within. God’s favor therefore functions as a kind of first cause in a chain that includes the Cain-like persecution of the elect by God’s enemies. Whether God is said to permit or ordain such suffering, the immediate cause of suffering is the action of Satan and Satan’s servants. God will judge these persecuting actions, and the persecuted faithful will be rescued from their enemies and vindicated: “The godless will perish through their own misfortune because they have inflicted much pain on the righteous.”³⁷

Not only does faithful suffering signify God’s love and favor; it is also a condition of possibility for profound joy. Robert Riall, a translator and annotator of the Passau hymns, has remarked on this persistent motif throughout the *Etliche Geseng*: sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ leads to resurrection joy.³⁸ Such joy signifies the presence and love of God poured out on the believer as part of the experience of overcoming the world amid suffering: “If we rightly hang on him (Jesus Christ), God will give us everything with him: first suffering, then joy, from which the devil cannot separate us.”³⁹ A version of this confident expectation—first suffering, then joy—is expressed persistently throughout the song collection.

Yet, this expectation of joy is not naïve or glib. Riall points out that while the songwriters describe joy amid and following suffering as a ground of cer-

35 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 105; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 410.

36 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 105; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 409.

37 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 114; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 433.

38 Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 37–38.

39 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 23; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 126.

tainty for their faith, they also acknowledge its absence at times.⁴⁰ For example, *Etliche Geseng* 27 by Hans Betz begins with the honest confession of this absence: “I would now like to sing and likewise be happy, but I shall not succeed, nor will my heart find expression. So I must give it up, accept sorrow, get hold of my soul with patience, until my Comforter comes.”⁴¹ The joy found in suffering is both a reality and a promise, in other words. The promise helps a believer to survive when the reality eludes, especially when those who suffer can express this expectation poetically as a ground of hope as well as a testimony of experience.

Sharing in the suffering of Christ along with the resurrection joy that follows is essential for the Passau songwriters on the path to becoming like Christ—to becoming divine. The mission to which Anabaptist converts, like the Philipites, were called through baptism was a mission of divinization through joyful suffering: “Christ was not given to us simply to believe on him but also to suffer with him.”⁴² This suffering is not a practice or experience of passivity; it results from the active public proclamation of the same call answered by the Passau prisoners and other Anabaptist converts: desist from your shedding of blood, leave behind your sins, and find the truth a joy.⁴³

It is important to distinguish this call to visible missional suffering from the harmful piety of quietly endured suffering. It has often been the case that those with power and privilege in the church or in society urge those who suffer to do so in silence or without protest as a sign of their pious virtue. Because such expectations for suffering are often invoked today in ways designed to hide the sins of the world—including a sinful church—rather than to confess and desist from sin, it is necessary to develop more fully the Anabaptist vision of divinization as an outcome of Anabaptist mission conceived by the Passau songwriters and singers.

Suffering and Christ-centered Divinization

In his study of the Anabaptist concept of grace, Alvin Beachy defines divinization as “God’s act of regeneration” through which humanity is “actually made a

⁴⁰ This recognition of joy’s absence is more fully evaluated in Riall’s unpublished manuscript from which *Earliest Hymns* was abridged. See Robert Riall, “First Suffering, Then Joy: The Early Anabaptist Passau Martyr Songs, Translation and Commentary” (unpublished manuscript in Archives and Special Collections, Musselman Library at Bluffton University, 2003), 75.

⁴¹ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 51; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 222.

⁴² *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 90; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 356.

⁴³ A summary of stanzas 28–29 of *Etliche Geseng* 40. Ibid.

participant in the divine nature itself.”⁴⁴ Such regeneration and participation in divinity enables the believer to strive against sin and to overcome it.⁴⁵ Beachy identifies divinization as the “ontological result of grace” in Anabaptist theology, and he attributes this conviction to the radical reformation as a whole—ranging from Caspar Schwenckfeld to Pilgram Marbeck to Menno Simons.⁴⁶

Theologian Thomas Finger qualifies Anabaptist divinization as “christomorphic”—shaped by the life and teachings of Jesus.⁴⁷ Finger is attentive to the particular South and Central German Anabaptist mysticism that stressed sharing with Jesus Christ in his suffering and therefore also in Christ’s resurrection. This process—as described by South German Anabaptist leaders like Hans Hut and Leonard Schiemer—involves yielding one’s life to God by giving up possessions and expecting conflict with the world while at the same time anticipating “the Spirit’s filling of comfort and joy.”⁴⁸

The Passau songs examined here reflect this mystical embrace of divinization, of “transformation by divine energies.”⁴⁹ For example, in *Etliche Geseng* 10, Hans Betz develops an explanation of “spiritual eating and drinking,” reflecting Anabaptist understandings of the Lord’s Supper. He writes that “whoever receives God’s word, whomever it begets anew, becomes God’s child. Word becomes flesh in him.”⁵⁰ Here it is assumed that the same incarnational event that took place in Jesus Christ according to John 1 is also constitutive of the new reality of the believer. This reality has an inner dimension of the Word in the heart and an outer dimension of being clothed in Christ’s righteousness, as explained in the first song of the collection, also by Betz. Betz writes that the righteousness of Jesus Christ “has clothed” the believer and through the “goodness of the Spirit” has written the divine Word in (the believer’s) heart.”

⁴⁴ Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977), 174.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁷ Thomas Finger, “Salvation: Contrasting Concepts and Church Conflict,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 29–30.

⁴⁸ Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 121.

⁴⁹ Finger, “Salvation,” 29. Finger uses this definition of divinization from Gregory Palamas of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

⁵⁰ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 15; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 95.

This double outward clothing and inward writing “separates” the believer “from all sin now.”⁵¹

Such divine transformation through rebirth by the Word is described repeatedly in the songs of *Etliche Geseng* as writing or flowing or pouring of the divine into the human. The Holy Spirit “pours out into every heart” in order that the believer may “receive Christ” and “taste his ecstasy and goodness.”⁵² The divine power rushes “down to us so that its sap may help us.”⁵³ In *Etliche Geseng* 29, cited at the beginning of this essay, the substance of Christ flows from the Father, and “the entire fullness of divinity” that was in Christ “fills everything through him.”⁵⁴ In other song texts, the images of flow shift to metaphors of surroundedness—“we are encompassed by God as the seeds together in the apple.”⁵⁵ Like a mother, God is the one who gives birth to “every created thing,” to “whatever has life.”⁵⁶ God is a light of “bright radiance” that “drives away what sin and darkness there is” and “inscribes the light” in “human bodies.”⁵⁷ Christ has “poured out his blood” and “washed us clean” so that “we are of his flesh and bone and are of a divine nature (*Göttlicher arte*).”⁵⁸

These images bring to mind what feminist philosopher Grace Jantzen describes as an “imaginary of natality”—a symbolic picture shaped more by the bodily reality of birth and human flourishing than by the obsession of Western philosophy and theology with death and salvation.⁵⁹ To be sure, the Passau songs repeat much of the standard “masculinist philosophy of the West” with its concern for “death and other worlds” as well as its appropriation of the natural birth process by spiritualizing it.⁶⁰ For example, God certainly appears in some of the Passau songs as a distant figure of judgment and vengeance

51 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 7; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 53–54. Riall’s commentary on this stanza in *Earliest Hymns* explains that the righteous clothing Betz described is not the “imputed righteousness” proposed by Luther but rather an “infused righteousness” that transforms the believer’s life (53).

52 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 6; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 52.

53 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 40; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 188.

54 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 60; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 252.

55 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 72; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 300.

56 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 59; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 248.

57 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 17; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 103.

58 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 80; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 323.

59 Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 144–45.

60 Ibid., 128–43.

who acts on the world rather than within it.⁶¹ And salvation is sometimes understood to be release from the boundaries and limits of this world through a faithful death.⁶² And yet, the dominant vision in the Passau songs is a picture of a “gentle divinity” flourishing here on earth in the lives and relationships of human beings who are becoming divine in both spirit and body—by their attachment with the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. The religious and political authorities of this world oppose this flourishing, just as they were opposed to the life of Jesus Christ. And yet, such flourishing survives even as it endures suffering, because it embraces the joy and energy of human life—and the divine life that births and heals it. The suffering described by the Passau songwriters is more like the pain of childbirth—a suffering toward new life—than it is like the pain of punishment or abuse.⁶³

Suffering and Loving Solidarity

The human and divine flourishing envisioned by the Passau songwriters is less a personal experience of assured salvation and more a communal practice of thriving and mutually yielded relationships.⁶⁴ At the center of this communal practice is brotherly and sisterly love—the giving up and sharing of possessions as an outcome of authentic baptism: “In baptism, therefore, one will be received into fellowship,” a fellowship (*gemeinschaft*) that is recognizable as the body

⁶¹ God is described for example as a “just warrior” who “threw all the wagons of the Pharaoh into the sea” and whose “right hand slew every enemy.” *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 88–89; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 343.

⁶² “If we persevere to the end, God wants to give us a glorious crown,” and “Whoever now works faithfully in the vineyard for this short time will receive the crown.” *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 93; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 366.

⁶³ This connection between the Passau images of suffering toward divinization and the suffering of the natural birth process is a connection that Wanda Stopher—pastor at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio—pointed out to me during the weekly discussion of the Anabaptist Reading Group, which is a study group focused around Anabaptist source texts.

⁶⁴ “There can be no doubt about the fact that the competing concepts of salvation (*seligkeit*)—the Lutheran vocation from God with its sanction in predestined justification and the Anabaptist imitation of Christ with its goal of suffering sanctification—led to different kinds of Christian behavior and very different styles of the Christian life in the sixteenth century” (George Hunston Williams, “German Mysticism and Anabaptist Communism,” in *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz*, eds. Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967], 294).

of Jesus Christ because “there the members are together and take the same residence.”⁶⁵

Although the Philipites saw community of goods as a baptismal practice, they were moderate communalists; that is, they viewed community of goods as a voluntary Christian practice that emphasized mutuality in spiritual and material sharing.⁶⁶ The Passau songs make this spiritual and economic mutuality the central sign of yielding to the divine power and letting go of selfish compulsions that oppose mutuality.⁶⁷

The Philipite Anabaptist invitation to abandon self-centered concerns is made vivid in *Etliche Geseng* 48, stanzas 57–71, which declare that “there are two ways in this time: one is narrow the other wide.”⁶⁸ The extraordinary long-term influence of these eloquent stanzas is attested not only by their inclusion in current Amish lectionaries but also by their use as a common lullaby and children’s song in Amish family and school culture.⁶⁹ The author of these lines—who is anonymous—eloquently summarizes the primary motifs of the Philipite Anabaptist message and mission: the one who chooses the narrow way will be “despised by everyone” and can expect to “suffer great pain.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, those who choose this path are “born anew” and promised “peace and joy eternally” as opposed to those who walk the “broad way that is the path to hell.”⁷¹ Having laid out the options, the songwriter issues the defining invitation: “Let go, therefore, O world, of all your possessions and money and travel the narrow road so that you may obtain the eternal crown which God gives only to his Church.” This invitation is repeated for emphasis: “Let go, therefore, of all your possessions, greed, high pomp, and pride. Turn immediately from all sin. Then you will be counted as God’s child.”⁷²

⁶⁵ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 64; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 267.

⁶⁶ The exact details of Philipite community of goods are somewhat obscure; the sources suggest that their practice was less authoritarian and also less tidy than the emerging Hutterite model. See Friedmann, “Philipite Brethren,” 272–97. Friedmann’s account has been updated and qualified by Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 77–98.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between mystical strains of Anabaptism and communalist practices, see Williams, “German Mysticism and Anabaptist Communism,” 304–5.

⁶⁸ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 112; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 425.

⁶⁹ D. Rose Elder, *Why the Amish Sing: Songs of Solidarity and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 24–25; 36–43.

⁷⁰ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 112; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 425.

⁷¹ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 112; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 426.

⁷² Ibid.

For the prisoners at Passau, this choice to follow the narrow way—by yielding self and possessions to God and one another—led to an experience of God’s Word made visible in their communal life, which they remembered with urgency and longing. Recalling this experience of “fellowship (*gemeinschafft*) which your church (*Gemein*) maintained when they lived with one another,” Michael Schneider writes of a time when they “held all things in common” and when “no one said about his goods that they were his alone.”⁷³ Such a community of goods is a “treasure which you would give us in eternal life” and “for which we still strive” here on earth. Just as “your will happens in heaven,” so “whoever dwells with (the Lord) maintains the fellowship and has nothing of his own.”⁷⁴

In Schneider’s song about community of goods, he depicts Satan as opposing such “dwelling together” by chasing them away from their communities, by calling them heretics and fanatics, and by offering their lives in exchange for accepting back their possessions.⁷⁵ Community of goods in this song is the primary baptismal practice that brings opposition and suffering from the world. And it is also an essential part of the good news that the Philipite missionaries proclaimed and that “we understood well then, when we lived in Moravia and were with one another.”⁷⁶ This experience of dwelling together in brotherly and sisterly love was nothing less than the Word of God made visible: “It happened so that we could experience your Word in those years.”⁷⁷

Schneider draws on metaphors of nurture and mothering, likely from II Esdras 2:25–32, to describe the flourishing of this fellowship of love: “All who laid their treasures together would become strong with their nurses (*Ammen*),” who God nurtured along with the nurse’s children “while they were with her in the peaceful years which are now completely over.”⁷⁸ The loss of this flourishing fellowship with the experience of being “completely scattered” is the “greatest suffering of all.”⁷⁹ Yet, while this suffering of being scattered is the greatest of sufferings, Schneider expresses willingness to suffer with Jesus Christ, with the

⁷³ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 28; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 144–45.

⁷⁴ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 28–29; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 144–45.

⁷⁵ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 29; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 145.

⁷⁶ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 29; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 146.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 29; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 146–47.

⁷⁹ *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 29; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 147.

hope of and prayer for a future restoration of their fellowship: “You have certainly promised us that you would again gather us together out of all lands.”⁸⁰

Standing “firm in distress” is a primary goal articulated in this and other songs of the Passau corpus.⁸¹ Such standing firm together is one way the Anabaptist prisoners at Passau were able to express a form of the solidarity they had experienced in community at Auspitz. This solidarity in suffering is beautifully displayed in a hymn written by fifteen of the Passau prisoners, with each of them composing a stanza. The song is introduced by the prolific Hans Betz, who, in the first stanza, expresses the central role of singing in the joy the Passau prisoners were able to experience amid their suffering: “Joyously we want to begin in peace and unity. It is our desire that the sacrifice be prepared for the Lord with singing.”⁸² In the third stanza, a different writer with the initials P. S.—probably Peter Stumpheter—makes clear the communal purpose of their singing: “All you Christians, therefore, who are devoted to God, press on with a rich shout that we all together may win the glory that is promised us.”⁸³ Most of the stanzas in the hymn reiterate this commitment to staying together in unity amid opposition by the “cruel Pharaoh,” who “lays such a great coercion on us at this time.”⁸⁴

This emphasis on unity is so strong that Riall speculates there may have been a simmering schism within the Passau congregation about how firm a doctrinal stance the prisoners should take in face of persecution.⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that the prolific Passau songwriter Michael Schneider did not contribute a stanza to this hymn, raising the question of whether Schneider’s more deeply mystical version of Anabaptist piety as expressed in his song texts was perhaps somewhat less dogmatic about outward forms than the piety conveyed by the circle of fourteen identified with *Etliche Geseng* 22. In any event, it is clear that even in prison the Philipite understanding of mission as chosen suffering is articulated as a collective experience of profound attachment to one another, of brotherly and sisterly love, rather than as an individualistic display of heroic suffering.

80 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 29–30; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 147.

81 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 30; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 147.

82 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 38; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 180.

83 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 39; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 180.

84 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 39; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 181.

85 *Earliest Hymns*, 184, n.7. The final stanza of this hymn identifies the authors of the song as “the fourteen brothers who have decided” that “no one shall move us from this altar,” implying that others perhaps are less decided. *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 40; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 183.

Suffering and Social Critique

Like many Anabaptists, the Passau singers regarded suffering as intrinsic to genuine discipleship; at the same time, they were vocal in criticizing the corruptions of power and authority that caused their pain. As noted before, the Passau songwriters explained their suffering as both permitted by God and caused by Satanic forces. These Satanic forces—described in personal terms as the adversary or the opponent (*widerspiel*)—oppose and despise the pious at every hand, calling them Anabaptists (*Widertäuffer*), and shouting them down.⁸⁶ For their part, the Passau writers are bold in calling out the iniquities of the world around them—greed, pomp, pride, and possessions: “The world pursues money alone” rather than “what pleases God.”⁸⁷ Such critique is part of the church’s mission and discipleship; just as a “light” that “shines in the night,” so it is that “whoever follows Christ everywhere will be quickly recognized publicly and certainly.”⁸⁸ At the same time, the God who rescued Israel from Pharaoh will also rescue the suffering remnant from the clutches of Satan’s servants and bring judgment against those who abuse the pious.⁸⁹

It’s worth noting that this persistent antagonism between the pious and the Satanic is understood as a struggle within Christendom. The Anabaptist light shines on the corruption within the church; the Philipite mission is to Christians who have not yet accepted the gospel call to take up the cross of Jesus Christ and follow after him amid rejection and suffering. “Because the godless cannot believe, they think everyone is like them,” a Passau songwriter points out, critiquing the comfort in numbers associated with compromised Christianity; “Because their hands are polluted, no truth or love can be found in them,” and yet such people want to be known as “good Christians.”⁹⁰ In fact, the “false Satan”—the established church authorities—insists “there is no one on earth who can be pious and clean from sin” and mocks the discipleship of pious people.⁹¹ This “false Satan” presumes to be the source of pardon and penance: “He sells pardon in the place of God,” and “whoever does not bow or give him honor, he brings to anguish and suffering.”⁹²

86 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 108; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 418.

87 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 108-09; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 419.

88 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 108; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 418.

89 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 85; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 342.

90 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 109; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 420.

91 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 110; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 422.

92 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 110; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 423.

In another song, Michael Schneider develops the Anabaptist criticism of the pardon and penance offered by the “false Satan” with respect to celibacy and marriage: “Marriage pleases God,” but the adversary (*widerspan*) “will not have it.”⁹³ Referring to clerical celibacy, Schneider calls out this adversary who insists that “one should not be married here on earth” and “forbids a part of how God established the world in the beginning, which God grants to all.”⁹⁴ The same song develops a lengthy critique of liturgical practice that proscribes certain food, “alters time,” and requires fasting and festivals.⁹⁵ Such routines are related to the sacramental system of the “Antichrist”—who presumes to contain Christ in the food of the Eucharist—that has “prepared a little house, a monstrance inlaid with gold, and has put his god in there.”⁹⁶ The same system presumes to save a child, “even though it does not believe,” by smearing “the chrism on the child in the bath water.”⁹⁷

This critique of the economy of salvation and the “mission” of the established churches—those protected and corrupted by the sword—makes clear that the “new birth” and the “Word of the Lord” proclaimed by the Passau community is offered freely as a gift of God’s grace outside the institutional economy of Christendom that sells pardon in exchange for honor.⁹⁸ Instead, as the Passau Anabaptists understood the gospel, the believer receives everything from God (life, joy, eternal life) just as the believer gives everything to God (possessions, pride, comfort). The Passau singers persist in their invitation to their adversaries—to the whole world—to give up their possessions and the persecuting society that protected them.⁹⁹

But the Passau singers also proclaim judgment against their persecutors: “Whoever now imprisons and sheds innocent blood will have to be in eternal pain (*ewiger pein*)” and “whoever kills with the sword will also be killed by it.”¹⁰⁰ The singers pose a choice between curse and blessing: “God forces or compels no one into his kingdom. Whoever does right will live. To the evil servant who does wrong, his reward will also be given to him.”¹⁰¹

93 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 43; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 195–96.

94 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 43; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 196.

95 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 43 ; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 195.

96 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 44; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 198.

97 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 45; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 200–201.

98 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 110; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 422–23.

99 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 112; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 426.

100 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 111; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 424–25.

101 *Etliche schöne Christliche Geseng*, 46; Riall, *Earliest Hymns*, 203.

The specific critique of Christendom that is developed in the message of the Passau songs explains and justifies the active protest against European Christianity displayed in both the larger mission of the Philipite communities and the broader Moravian Anabaptist communitarian network. These communities were not withdrawn conventicles but public witnesses to the Christian establishment of their time, calling out the violence of the church's corrupted bargain with magisterial authorities and criticizing the persecution of religious dissenters and refugees. This public witness included practices of confrontation and protest such as street corner preaching and interrupting or boycotting establishment church services.¹⁰² Anabaptist suffering, as expressed in the Passau songs of the *Ausbund*, supports a mission of active conflict with and criticism of the prisoners' Christian adversaries. While they expected to suffer, they refused to justify the abusive and violent actions of their persecutors.

Suffering and Costly Reconciliation

It may seem that Anabaptists' appeals for their adversaries to repent from their violence were simply defensive and emotional displays rather than genuine efforts to evangelize or engage with their persecutors. There are certainly many stories of Anabaptist arguments and discussions with various hostile interlocutors that ended in execution and death for the Anabaptists—leading to the sense that Anabaptist appeals to adversaries generally served to escalate the conflict rather than defuse or transform it. And yet, in the case of the Passau prisoners, we seem to have a genuine instance of conflict transformation, at least as displayed in the relationship between two of the Anabaptist prisoners and the Passau cathedral dean Rupert Mosham.

Mosham's approach to Anabaptist dissent was to secure recantations not through threats of violence and torture but through cordial conversation and improved prison conditions. In the case of the Anabaptists at Passau, Mosham invited the leaders, including Michael Schneider and his associate Hans Beck, to friendly discussions about their faith and beliefs. Apparently, in at least one instance, he invited Schneider to his house for a meal and conversation.¹⁰³

¹⁰² A key Anabaptist leader who helped shape the South and Central German Anabaptist communities from the beginning was George Blaurock, who was notorious for his disruption of church services and claiming official pulpits for his own dissenting message. See his biography in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* for more details: Christian Neff, "George Blaurock (ca. 1492–1529)," *Mennonite Encyclopedia I* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), 354.

¹⁰³ Oyer, "Michael Schneider," 263.

These conversations were fruitful in the sense that they led to Schneider's acceptance of a six-point recantation of his Anabaptist beliefs, a decision also taken by several others in the Passau group, including Beck. These decisions to recant took place during a time of vulnerability for the Passau congregation, following the death of minister and songwriter Hans Betz, one of the fourteen authors of the jointly composed song *Etliche Geseng* 22 that expressed their decision to "press through" together despite great opposition.

Although he never left the Catholic Church, Mosham was himself a bit of an eccentric dissenter who shared some Anabaptist criticisms of the institutional church, especially the abuses by the clergy. These anti-clerical views were included in the recantation, which may have made it easier for Schneider and his fellow prisoners to agree. Despite their recantations, Schneider, Beck, and the others who relented to Mosham's appeals were not released from prison. Meanwhile, the local cathedral canons expressed great offense to Duke Ernst of Bavaria regarding Mosham's apparent sympathy for the Anabaptists.¹⁰⁴ Sensing that Ernst, who had originally supported Mosham's approach, was turning against him, Mosham fled from Passau in fall of 1539.

Meanwhile, Schneider and Beck broke out of prison and joined Mosham in Nuremberg to help him present his case to the Lutheran authorities there for ecumenical unity among various reform parties, including a more irenic response to Anabaptist dissent.¹⁰⁵ The Nuremberg authorities had a more favorable response to the Anabaptist recanters than to Mosham, and in October of 1539, Mosham, Schneider, and Beck moved on to Dinkensbühl.¹⁰⁶ In the coming year, Mosham traveled throughout Germany and Switzerland to advance his vision for the reunification of Christendom, but his esoteric and ecumenical views were not well received. He eventually ended up being imprisoned at the same Passau castle where the Anabaptists had been held—apparently committing suicide in the spring of 1543.¹⁰⁷ Schneider and Beck disappeared from the record after their involvement with Mosham at Nuremberg and Dinkensbühl, but Packull speculates that they may have ended up rejoining the Anabaptist movement as Swiss Brethren, given that Schneider's songs were included in the *Ausbund* and were thus claimed by the Swiss Anabaptists who published this song collection.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 270.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 265–70.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 268.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 270–71.

¹⁰⁸ Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 95.

In any event, the apparent bond that developed between two Anabaptist prisoners and a Catholic cleric suggests something more than a story of Anabaptist recantation. In this case, a powerful religious authority—a cathedral dean—responded to Anabaptist dissent with the hand of friendship and fellowship rather than with instruments of torture and execution. This radical act of friendship, along with the larger vision of reconciliation and unity that it displayed, turned out to be quite costly for the dean, who ended up in prison while the Anabaptists went free.

Thus, the suffering mission of the Philipite Anabaptist songwriters and singers can be said to have born much fruit, including the costly witness of a Catholic dreamer who yearned for unity, even with Anabaptists, and who suffered in prison, although without the spiritual benefit of communal solidarity as experienced and expressed by the Philipite prisoners through their gift of beautiful songs. That invitation to Christian communal solidarity and to sharing together in the suffering of Jesus Christ echoes through the centuries both as a protest against the violence-grounded comforts of this world and as a visible display of joyful and peaceable human fellowship. The invitation continues to be offered today in the singing and reading and discussing of the Passau prison songs as well as in the flourishing of Christian communities who have accepted this invitation and the divine mission to which it calls believers. The mission displayed by the Passau singers and songwriters assumes conflict and suffering to be intrinsic to the life-giving mission of the church and proclaims that faithful suffering, rather than being quietly endured might, for the sake of divine and human reconciliation, be freely chosen and joyfully shared.¹⁰⁹

109 For a fine discussion of the important distinction between an abusive vision of redemptive suffering and an empowering picture of solidarity with those who suffer, see Susanne Guenther Loewen, “Can the Cross Be ‘Good News’ for Women? Mennonite Peace Theology and the Suffering of Women,” *Anabaptist Witness* 3, no. 2 (December 2016): 109–21.



"The Changes We Often Fight"

Jane Gateson

The Reconciling Role of Suffering within Sufi Muslim and Anabaptist Theologies of Nonviolence

JONATHAN BORNMAN¹

“Ami is in the hospital with a burn!” The message is from Ami’s father, Serigne Fallou,² and the next day we go to visit his daughter. In the hospital, we learn that Ami’s burn is healing and she will be OK. We also learn that Fallou and family had earlier moved to Texas to start a new business venture but are now back in Pennsylvania after having been cheated by the business partner. Fallou and his wife are far away from family and friends. It is clear they’ve had suffering and discouragement but that they also feel optimistic about the future because “it is in God’s hands” and they have the “blessing of Shaykh Bamba.”

I first met Fallou at the weekly farm market where he sells goods from Senegal, the country where my family and I were Anabaptist missionaries from 1999 to 2009. Fallou is a Murid, a member of a Senegalese Sufi order. He and his family became our friends. Like Fallou, many of our friends and neighbors in Senegal were Murids. Murids (Arabic for “disciples”) see themselves as disciples of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba. Anabaptists see ourselves as disciples of Jesus. These two communities in which Fallou and I participate have some similar experiences of and responses to suffering in their respective histories, yet ultimately their understandings lead to different missions. This article describes these similarities and differences as it explores the question, How might this West African Sufi³ order enlighten Anabaptist self-understanding of the reconciling role of suffering and the ways this shapes our mission?

¹ Jonathan Bornman is a consultant for Christian/Muslim Relations at Eastern Mennonite Missions. See emm.org/peacemakers for more information.

² Ami and Serigne Fallou are pseudonyms.

³ See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba: Founder of the Muridiyya

Most Murids are Wolof, the largest ethnic group in Senegal. They are disciples of Ahmadu Bamba, the founder of their Sufi order—the Muridiyya—the only Sufi order founded by a black African. Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba received a Qur'anic education under his Qadiriyya⁴ father's teaching and as a young man traveled to seek out additional teachers in Senegal and Mauritania. He eventually received multiple *silsilas* (chains of spiritual authority) linking him back to Muhammed spiritually⁵ and qualifying him to take disciples and start schools. Upon his father's death, he rejected the opportunity to become a judge in the court where his father had served, saying, "I do not have the habit of mingling with rulers, and I do not expect any help from them. I only seek honour from the Supreme Lord (God)."⁶

Bamba spent many days, over a period of years, seeking the location of the city he was to found, often traveling into the uninhabited Ferlo (a region of Senegal) for *khawla* (spiritual retreat). On one such trip, he felt a mysterious power and saw a burning bush that did not burn up. Nearby was a giant *Mbéb* tree (Gum-Plane). Praying under that tree, he saw a luminous vision of "the fish which upholds the world."⁷ The vision had a double connection to Moses—the burning bush of Exodus 6 in the Old Testament, and the fish in the story of Moses and Khidr in surah Al-Kahf, 18:60–82. He named the great tree Touba, after the tree Mohammed saw in paradise on his *miraj* (ascension) journey.⁸

⁴ Founder 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) preached about the struggle to overcome the evil desire of the inner self, calling it the *jihad al-akbar*, or, "the greater holy war." See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵ Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 122.

⁶ Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, New African Histories Series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 59.

⁷ Fernand Dumont, *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba* (Dakar-Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africains, 1975), 48; Eric S. Ross, "Tübâ: An African Eschatology in Islam" (DPhil diss., McGill University, 1996), 56; Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 71; Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya*, Oxford Scholarship Online (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79.

⁸ Today, the second largest city in Senegal is Touba, the city founded by Bamba at the *Mbéb* tree. It is the spiritual and geographical center for Murids, no matter where they travel in the world. (See Christian Coulon, "The Grand Magal in Touba: A Religious Festival of the Mouride Brotherhood of Senegal," *African Affairs* 98, no.

Bamba's mystical experience was similar to the mystical quests undertaken by the founders of other Sufi orders and served to authenticate his spiritual authority.⁹ The inferred connection to Khidr, for instance, symbolically linked him with a “potent [source] of mystical knowledge in the Qur'an.”¹⁰ As a Muslim scholar from a prominent Wolof religious family with Qadiriyya connections,¹¹ as a prolific author,¹² and as the founder of Islamic centers of learning, Bamba drew more and more followers.

The Muridiyya: Bamba's Followers

In the 1880s, during the collapse of the Wolof kingdoms and the French colonial conquest of Senegal, Bamba's followership—the Muridiyya—began to grow rapidly.¹³ The expansion of this Senegalese Sufi brotherhood attracted the attention of the French colonial authorities, who considered Bamba and his widespread connections a threat. The French authorities eventually exiled him to Gabon (1895–1902), then Mauritania (1903–1907), and finally placed him under house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927.

The order Bamba founded¹⁴ is unique in that it embraces a distinctly nonviolent philosophy,¹⁵ and it validates and incorporates Wolof cultural values into its expression of Islam¹⁶ while retaining the characteristics common to most Sufi orders. Until recently, most Murid self-understandings of theology and history have been inaccessible, hidden in oral traditions or written hagiography in Wolofal.¹⁷ Thanks to recent work by linguist Fallou Ngom and historian Cheikh Anta Babou these traditions are now accessible.

391 [1999]: 195–210). Ahmadu Bamba is buried in Touba, and his tomb is one of the pilgrimage sites for Murids who make annual pilgrimage to the city.

9 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 72.

10 Ernst, *Sufism*, 38.

11 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 44.

12 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 21.

13 James F. Searing, “*God Alone Is King*: Islam and Emancipation in Senegal: The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914, Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), xxii.

14 Today, the Muridiyya are a growing presence in the American Muslim community.

15 J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 227; Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 41.

16 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 116.

17 Wolof written in a modified Arabic script.

Called to Suffering and Nonviolence

Murid hagiography develops the idea that Bamba received a calling to saint-hood and a mission of nonviolence¹⁸ on the day of *Alastu*,¹⁹ the same mythical day that Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and all the prophets received their callings. It was ordained, as part of Bamba's pact with God, that suffering was to be central to his mission; he must suffer and overcome to attain perfection and to fulfil his calling.

In Sufism, it is common teaching that the “human soul can only mature through suffering.”²⁰ Fallou Ngom’s translations of the Wolof poet Mousa Ka trace the many sufferings of Bamba and their cosmic meaning. Ka says that God revealed to Bamba ahead of time that the French would send him into exile and that they were serving God’s purposes. Bamba’s victory in suffering and his service to the prophet Mohammad mean that he can offer *baraka* (spiritual power, blessing; blessing as a tangible and transferable substance)²¹ to his followers, those who submit to him completely.

Bamba is known as an “apostle of non-violence.”²² Primary contributors to the study of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the Muridiyya²³ unanimously agree that he practiced and preached nonviolence. Of his own suffering in exile, Bamba said, “I have forgiven all my enemies for the Countenance of the Lord who turned them away from me forever, because I feel no resentment against them.”²⁴ He had seen the effects of the internecine wars of the Wolof

¹⁸ Murid hagiographers say that the conditions of Bamba’s pact with God on the Day of *Alastu* forbade any violence. Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 45.

¹⁹ See Qur'an 7:172; Ernst (*Sufism*, 43–44) says, “Perhaps the most distinctive Qur'anic theme developed by the Sufis was that of the primordial covenant, the pact that God made with the unborn souls of humanity, prior to creation.” Sufis understand that the prophets and saints received their respective missions from God on this day.

²⁰ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 137.

²¹ Ibid., 82.

²² Dumont, *La pensée religieuse de Amadou Bamba*.

²³ Ibid.; Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, “Amadou Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya: The History of a Muslim Brotherhood in Senegal (1853–1913)” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2002); Ahmed Pirzada, “The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2003); John Glover, *Sufism and Jihad in Modern Senegal: The Murid Order*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, v. 32 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007); Cheikh Seye, “Jihad, Peace and Non-Violence in Mouridism (1883–1927)” (MA thesis, Arizona State University, 2013); Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*.

²⁴ Abdoul Aziz Mbacké, *Jihad for Peace: Exploring Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s Philosophy* (Majalis, 2009), 15, <http://www.majalis.org/masalik/pdf/Jihad1.pdf>.

kingdoms (exacerbated by the French), and as a youth, he and his extended family were forced to migrate and participate in a local jihad that eventually precipitated the deaths of his sister, uncle, grandfather, and mother.²⁵ Bamba's revulsion at the violence of this jihad planted in him the seed of rejection of violence.²⁶ He had also seen the injustice of the French colonial invasion of his nation, and the impracticality of fighting such an overwhelmingly superior force caused him to seek other forms of resistance.²⁷ On top of all this, Bamba had encountered all manner of sufferings himself. Below is a partial list²⁸ of his sufferings (in no particular order):

- imprisoned in a cell with sharp objects (*Ka poem*) that prevented him from lying down or doing his prayers
- threatened with execution by cannon
- put in a garden with a lion, prevented from praying
- exiled in Gabon (seven years) away from his family and community (in extremely difficult climate and conditions)
- exiled in Mauritania (four years) away from family and community
- falsely accused of many things from Wolof rivals and the French
- kept under house arrest until his death

Bamba's response to suffering—his own and that of the Wolof people²⁹ during war and colonization—was exceptional, a different way of facing the world; in the midst of injustice and suffering, he forgave his oppressors and placed his trust in God. He consistently turned toward forgiveness, nonviolence, and working for the betterment of his people. In doing so, he found a way to bring traditional Wolof values of peace and patience in suffering (*mēn*) into the Muridiyya's collective understanding of what it means to be Muslim.

Calling himself a “servant of the Apostle,” Bamba strongly identified with the suffering and nonviolence of Muhammed in Mecca.³⁰ His belief in nonvio-

25 Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 42.

26 Ibid., 56.

27 Pirzada, “The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba,” 39.

28 Drawn from hagiographic and historical literature.

29 When three of his disciples were tortured by the Wolof King Teeñ Tanoor Gofñ, for example, he instructed the disciples to forgive the king. Eventually this ruler was won over as a convert to the Muridiyya (Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 81).

30 In Mecca, from 610 to 622, Muhammad experienced strong opposition as he called people to leave their idols and worship the one God. The Meccans opposed and persecuted him and his followers. A few were killed. Muhammad sent some of his followers to Ethiopia to find refugee.

lence also came directly from his *tafsīr* (exegesis) of the Qur'an. Using a hermeneutic of community well-being³¹ to exegete the text, he found nonviolent interpretations even in verses understood by terrorists to command violent jihad, such as 9:111–12: “God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God.”³² In Bamba’s way of interpreting, “these two verses [were] sacred injunctions for Muslims to pursue ethical excellence in society.”³³ “All disciples of Bamba—the Murid faithful, leaders, and disciples—are expected to be generous, even to their adversaries. This . . . contrasts sharply with its militant understanding.”³⁴

A hadith often associated with the Muridiyya states, “We have returned from the minor struggle (*jihad al-ashar*) to fight the major struggle (*jihad al-akbar*).”³⁵ Murids embrace the “major struggle” against the *nafs* (soul). Their collective understanding is that they have suffered and been victorious by virtue of the ethical and spiritual struggle of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba. His suffering and overcoming is understood vicariously as theirs if they follow his example. The baraka he earned is passed on to them by their submission to him,

The later Medinan period is generally considered to abrogate the Meccan period. It is interesting that Murids and Ahmadu Bamba focus almost exclusively on the Meccan period as a primary point of reference. I attribute this to the fact that Bamba suffered injustice and naturally connected with the Meccan period. So far in my research, I have not found Murid sources that address the issues of abrogation or the Medinan period. Sufis freely appropriate the imagery and symbolism from many sources—Qur’anic, Islamic history, other Sufi traditions, and biblical stories as well as other religious traditions; this interweaving and borrowing of symbolic experiences is a strong characteristic of Sufism.

31 What I am calling a “community well-being hermeneutic,” author Fallou Ngom describes as interpreting the Qur'an with concern for practical society implications and the betterment of society.

32 A. J. Arberry, ed. *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*, 1st ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

33 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 87.

34 Ibid., 88.

35 Pirzada, “The Epistemology of Ahmadou Bamba,” 39. Pirzada includes a footnote that reads, “Cited in al-Ghazāll, *Ihyg* ‘Ulwn al-Din, (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1998) vol. 3, 7. Hadith narrated by al-Bayhagi, and it is *daif* (weak) according to Al-’Iraqi’s analysis.” Additionally, I note that the validity of this hadith is highly contested; ibn-Taymiyyah says it has no sources (*al-Furqan*, 44–45), and the Ahmadiyyas quote it freely.

through submission to a *marabout*³⁶ who is a living descendent of Bamba. One becomes a Murid through the ceremony of *jebalu* (literally “to give over one’s life”), and this submission to one’s marabout opens the channel for baraka.

Murids in the United States compare Bamba to Martin Luther King, Jr. with his emphasis on peace and nonviolence, and to Malcom X with regard to black pride and dignity.³⁷ They draw deeply on their traditional values and themes of peace and nonviolence to shape their identity³⁸ in post 9/11 America. At a recent³⁹ Murid event (a fundraiser for mosque renovations) in Harlem, New York, at Mt. Calvary/St. Marks United Methodist Church, I met an eighteen-year-old Murid named Soulayeman,⁴⁰ who quickly and succinctly told me the essence of being a Murid. Tall and thin, he wore a robe with wide vertical stripes and reminded me of my own self-assured, young-adult children as he stated his beliefs:

Ahmadu Bamba was all about peace and teaching people to have good character. There are four enemies of the soul: the world, the unrestrained self, lust, and Satan. Following the teaching of Ahmadu Bamba is all about character formation. Avoid the bad things of the world, especially ‘touching’ women other than your mother, sister, wife, or girlfriend. If you have good character, then you can get close to God.

Soulayeman identified parties and gangs as things that the teaching of Ahmadu Bamba helps a young man avoid. He also emphasized that Bamba taught forgiveness:

Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba tells us to never do wrong. If someone does wrong to you, forgive them. When you forgive, you are saved from doing wrong to the person, and now that person is in God’s hands.

It is interesting that this young man specifically touched on an example of what to do when wronged (a form of suffering). You forgive the person, placing them in God’s hands. Submission to one’s marabout, and thus to Bamba, promises victory over suffering because of the baraka earned by their saint.

³⁶ A term used in Senegal to refer to saints and men of religion, Arabic equivalents: *waliyu* or *murabit Babou*, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 7. There exist a few acknowledged women *marabouts* as well.

³⁷ Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127.

³⁸ The Murid magazine, *Cultural Weeks Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba*, 2015 ed. had this title as its lead story, “Pacifist Jihad and the Economic Doctrine of a Great 19th-Century African Sufi.”

³⁹ July 27, 2017.

⁴⁰ Pseudonym.

Ngom agrees but warns that if a Murid fails, their faith and submission are called into question. Murid hagiographic literature contains

themes . . . of the victory and optimism of the sincere Murīds, who relied exclusively on Bamba and upheld the ethos of his ethics-centered doctrine. They also regularly emphasize the optimism and victory of sincere Murīds, successfully conveying to the masses the view that the resounding victories of Murīds occur in the context of daunting adversity and challenges. . . . [This literature has] no themes involving victimhood, defeat, or failure of Murīds. Murīds who fail in their endeavors are asked to “double-check the sincerity of their commitment in their hearts, for a sincere Murīd never fails in any endeavor. They are champions, just like The Master, Bamba.”⁴¹

Murids have a clear theology of patience in suffering, and their example is the suffering Bamba, whose eventual victory is tied to his suffering. Bamba earned this victory by his virtuous response to those sufferings and by his forgiveness of his enemies. Yet this does not seem to offer a word of hope to those who are struggling, suffering, or encountering difficulty in that those followers are told to check if they are sincere, the implication being that they are not for if they were, they would be “champions.” Material success in this life and paradise in the afterlife is often referred to by Murids as “paradise in the two abodes.”⁴² Drawing on Murid hagiographic sources written in Wolof by Bamba’s disciples, Ngom says, “Bamba believed that the virtuous, those who have unwavering faith in God and demonstrate, for the sake of God, *jikko yu rafet* (beautiful/ethical virtues), would necessarily experience successes in this life that surpass their expectations as preludes to their reward of Paradise in the hereafter.⁴³

It is a simple fact, however, that some Murids around the world are failing in their endeavors. What about them? It seems the Murid answer is to try harder. How might Murids respond to the words of grace offered in an Anabaptist theology of suffering?

Anabaptists and Suffering

Having described the Muridiyya, their founder Ahmadu Bamba, and their understanding of suffering, I now turn to my own Anabaptist tradition. As the Muridiyya are to the Muslim world, Anabaptists likewise are a tiny community

41 Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 185.

42 Ibid., 43.

43 Ibid., 85.

when compared to the larger Christian community. Historically, Anabaptists have taken up various perspectives on suffering, even if a common approach can be identified. John Oyer summarizes this as follows:

For the Anabaptists, suffering was

- (1) being in Christ. Suffering denoted following Christ, . . . joy in participating with him in suffering, obedience to him including taking up the cross (*Philippians 2:8*) . . .
- (2) Suffering was also redemptive. It led them to a complete identification with Christ, not only in his suffering and death but also in resurrection with him. To Menno suffering was a sign of election . . . (“Of the cross of Christ,” 1556). . . .
- (3) . . . Suffering was also disciplinary. It led the Christian in the hard school of Christ, in discipleship to Christ, strengthening him for every test, hardening her to endure every rack and refute clever inquisitor. It turned the Christian toward obedience to Christ and the fellowship of believers, therefore disobedience towards the world. . . . resolute, hardened soldier(s) of the Lord, (*Ephesians 6:13–20*).
- (4) . . . Suffering was inevitable; Evil, willful people and social structures inevitably imposed suffering on those Christians who remained faithful to Christ. Christ’s injunction to take up the cross and follow him . . . made suffering as he had suffered a universal factual reality (*2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:21*).
- (5) Suffering was avengeable. God would avenge his suffering people. Ultimately the righteous would be victorious and the . . . sinful persecutors would be defeated.⁴⁴

Murids and Anabaptists: Suffering, Nonviolence, and Salvation

Similarities

Ngom says, “The spiritual significance of Bamba’s suffering and its lasting impacts on his movement is . . . one of the most important, but least understood, aspects of the Muridiyya.”⁴⁵ This seems to be a realm offering fruitful

⁴⁴ John S. Oyer, “Suffering,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Suffering>.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 197.

interaction between Anabaptist and Murid disciples who want to understand each other. How are suffering, salvation, and nonviolence connected in Murid thought? How are they connected in Anabaptist thought? How are these commitments reflected in the respective missions of Murids and Anabaptists? Murids and Anabaptists have similar experiences of and responses to suffering in their respective histories, yet their understandings of suffering ultimately diverge and lead to different missions.

Historically, both Murid and Anabaptist communities have suffered injustices and persecution, and they share some understandings regarding suffering. Recently I met Khadim Bousso, the Imam of the Muridiyya community in New York City, who described his community as “all about peace, nonviolence and forgiveness.” This prompted me to tell him the story of Michael and Margrit Sattler: their fresh rediscovery of the teaching of Jesus, their subsequent preaching of peace and nonviolence—even toward the Turks who were invading Europe—and their martyrdom. Imam Bousso’s response was, “We are the same!” Although his enthusiasm overstated the similarities, he had a good point. Both of our communities understand persecution and both promote a response that forefronts forgiveness, trust in God, peace, and nonviolence. This emphasis is something I deeply appreciate about the Muridiyya.

Both Murids and Anabaptists also regard suffering as part of discipline and maturity. Historically, Anabaptists have understood suffering as testing that calls disciples of Jesus to obey his commands, turn away from the world, and embrace the fellowship of believers. We have understood that God uses suffering to grow people to maturity. Murids would agree that suffering is a testing that must be overcome with good works and ethical responses—responses that reflect the values of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba.

And both communities agree that vengeance is God’s business—that people of sincere faith forgive their enemies, trusting that God will avenge the wrong. Soulayeman, my young Murid friend, illustrated this in his statement (above), “When you forgive you are saved from doing wrong to the person, and now that person is in God’s hands.” In similar fashion, as my friend Serigne Fallou described being cheated by his business partner (another Murid), he gave witness that the situation was now “all in God’s hands.”

Both Murids and Anabaptists believe that ultimately the righteous will be victorious and the persecutors will be defeated, although there is perhaps some disagreement about the timetable. Murids are more oriented to victory happening in this world and Anabaptists more oriented toward an eternal reckoning.

Differences

Other aspects of suffering present areas of greater significant difference between Anabaptists and Murids. All the early Anabaptist leaders died martyrs' deaths and by any standard of worldly success were complete failures. This is starkly different from the path of Ahmadu Bamba, who suffered greatly but in his own lifetime saw his order grow, solidify, and begin to be accepted by other Sufi orders as well as by the colonial government. In addition, he died a natural death.

Anabaptists understand suffering as "being in Christ" and that following Jesus includes the joy of participating with him in suffering and obedience in taking up one's cross. Participating with Christ in his suffering also means conversely that Jesus is present with his followers in their suffering. This suffering is redemptive because Anabaptists identify with Jesus not only in his suffering but also ultimately in his resurrection.

The Anabaptist conviction of the inevitability of suffering if we are obedient to Christ would seem foreign to Murids. Their promise is that faithfulness will lead to victory. By this, they mean being faithful to Islam and to Bamba's teaching, and submitting to Bamba through one of his living descendants to ensure success and victory in this world and in paradise. Murids certainly allow for temporary setbacks on the way to ultimate victory, but faithful disciples suffering defeat and not succeeding in this world is unacceptable.

The Anabaptist understanding of suffering as redemptive is a notion that is not part of Islam or Murid understanding. In Islam, people are not redeemed by a savior; instead more emphasis is placed on personal effort. Bamba achieved victory over suffering by his patience and by his righteous deeds. His great, unrelenting effort is what perfected his soul and made him a friend of God and a source of baraka. Murids understand that by giving their life over to their marabout, they will receive baraka that will help them perfect their soul and then be loved by God. They hope that this baraka will give them "paradise in the two abodes." As Muslims, Murids stress instruction and right action that leads disciples to purity of soul and closeness to God. As Sufis, they stress the additional benefit of having the baraka of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba, who was appointed by God. The Anabaptist idea that God would come down in Christ and choose the suffering way of the cross is not a consideration for the Muridiyya. Bamba specifically says in his poem *Futzi*, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, "Thy son did not die on the cross, he ascended into heaven."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Melki Sedek So, *The Long Odyssey of Maat* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015).

While Murids look to Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, who offers the instructions of Islam and mystical baraka, to help them achieve success in the two abodes, their success is dependent on personal effort. Anabaptists are Christ followers and people of the cross. Jesus suffered and died for us and is Emmanuel—God with us—in our suffering. Jesus resurrected is our hope of glory. Herein lies the foundational difference.

Two Invitations

Both the Muridiyya and the Anabaptists believe they have a mission to each other and to the world. Both communities promote good works, peace, nonviolence, and forgiveness of enemies. At the core, however, they look in different directions for the source and fuel for these activities, and the message they offer suffering people is different. The Murid invitation is, Come join the Muridiyya way of Islam and gain instruction (Islam) and baraka (from Ahmadu Bamba) to help you achieve victory over suffering in this world and paradise in the next. The Anabaptist invitation is, Repent and follow the way of Jesus our Lord and Savior, who is with us in our suffering now and will take us to be with him forever in paradise. Both are invitations to community, but the communities are different. One trusts that instruction, effort, and baraka from their saint will achieve material success and relief from suffering in this world and paradise in the next; the other trusts in a Savior who will walk with us in our suffering, rejecting the idea that material success is an indicator of God's approval.

A Call to Mission

While camping with my wife's extended family, I listened as one of my brothers-in-law led a devotional on the love of God. Following a meaningful time of sharing, he asked us to sing "He (Jesus) came down that we may have love." As we joined voices together in this declaration of the incarnation, I was deeply moved. Jesus came down that we may have love, that we may have peace, that we may have joy as a free gift, not something we work to achieve. At the same time, I was disturbed, realizing that Serigne Fallou and Soulayeman can't sing this declaration; my Murid friends believe that the teaching of Islam and the baraka of their saint, Ahmadu Bamba, offer them the way to love, peace, and joy through their determined effort. A call to mission was reborn in my soul as I sat by the campfire singing this traditional song from Cameroon:

He came down that we may have love;

he came down that we may have love;

he came down that we may have love;

hallelujah for evermore.

LEADER: Why did he come?

2. He came down that we may have peace . . .

3. He came down that we may have joy . . .

4. He came down that we may have power . . .

5. He came down that we may have hope . . .

MELISSA WEAVER

Daughters of Jerusalem

“For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ . . .

For if people do these things when the tree is green,
what will happen when it is dry?” —Luke 23:29–31 (NRSV)

We are the women of brown branches,
limbs left where babies bathed,
cement the sweat from Earth’s labor pains.
Lord, have mercy.

We are the women of sanctions and silos,
of rivers of refugees run down
like water; of red-light not night-lights,
Sweetie tied to her pole.

We’ve seen rifle rip twenty,
Adam’s sin spun curls cold.

They’ve made barely boys bear
bullets up canals that once bore them.
Christ.

O dear God,
we beg stones to fall,
hills to turn tombs,
that we might (Lord, have mercy)
somehow rise whole with you.



"Family Reunion"

Jane Gateson

Solidarity in Suffering

GRACE SPENCER¹

Our journey is a long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other. —George Steiner²

I love spring. The neighborhood feels different during this season. The longer days invite kids to fill the once-empty front yards. Laughter breaks forth in the streets. We embrace winter because of spring, knowing that flowers will bloom again, confident that the sun will shine on our faces soon, holding onto the promise that the storm will eventually cease. Budding trees are signposts of new life. The wind whispers of what is coming—joy is just on the horizon. When we put seeds into the soil and fruit springs up from the ground, it feels like the fulfillment of a promise, like hope realized. I love that about this season.

Like the seasons, life in the neighborhood has a rhythm to it, and I am constantly oscillating between hope and despair, joy and sorrow . . . Spring is here now, but it's been a long winter. When I first moved into the neighborhood, I quickly became aware of the suffering of my neighbors—adults working for well under minimum wage because they were undocumented; teenagers who've had eight math teachers in one year; parents who can't afford the medical treatment their child needs. This year, I became one with them in their suffering.

It began last summer when I visited a Stations of the Cross hidden among forest trees in Oakhurst, California and prayed that I would be able to face death in faith, as Jesus had. Ironically, during my time of devotion I contracted Lyme disease. Not even two weeks of suffering went by before I begged God to let this cup pass from me. As my symptoms worsened, I watched my dreams slip through my fingers: I could hardly eat; I experienced pain in every place of my body; and I felt as though my brain could no longer process information. Once I realized my doctor had no solution, paralyzing anxiety crept in tempting me to envision the worst possible scenarios—would I ever finish

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² Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 231–32.

seminary, work as a missionary in another country, or even write again? I was face-to-face with my finitude and could hardly stand to look at it. I felt alone, abandoned, like God was sleeping through my suffering. I started to wonder if I even mattered. Why wasn't God healing me? Why wouldn't he even give me an explanation if not the cure? Was my life that insignificant?

I now know that Christ was present throughout my suffering—I was just listening for the wrong voice. While I was demanding answers, waiting for some dramatic gesture or miracle, God was whispering, "I know, Grace. I see you, I am with you, and I understand." God surrounded me with a loving community, including people who knew a lot about Lyme, whose support sustained me as I completed another year of seminary. This experience and God's faithfulness helped me understand that living a life of compassion is not about being the hero but about living in solidarity.

This last year I learned how to do that, to live in solidarity. I don't know if God was behind my suffering or in front of it, but I know he's been in it. There is a seventh grader in my neighborhood who is losing his eyesight, and the doctors don't have a diagnosis or treatment plan for him. As we've shared our pain, fears, and frustration with each other, holiness has dwelled between us. The way this boy joyously endures suffering, and acknowledges his anxiety about the future without allowing it to consume him amazes me. Together we're learning how to carry on through life without gripping it so tightly.

As we approached Easter this year, I decided to do a Stations of the Cross with our junior high students because I've experienced much of our journey with Jesus feeling like Good Friday—drowning in despair, wondering if the Father has forsaken us. Our prayers sometimes feel less like conversations and more like monologues; our circumstances cause our words to flow out in protest rather than devotion. I had been with a few of these students months earlier when their mom shared the news that she would be moving in with her boyfriend and would be leaving them with their grandma. Our path with Jesus leads us to the desolate Saturday—we find ourselves in the trenches, wandering through canyons, suddenly face-to-face with injustice and the complexity of life on the margins.

Yet even in the middle of winter, we await the arrival of spring. Eventually the days will get longer, and the warmer weather will allow the opportunity for things like ice cream dates. When I told some of the teenage girls in my neighborhood I was taking them to get ice cream at Baskin-Robbins, one of them said, "OH MY GOSH. Grace, I love you! Well, I loved you before, too." Winter fades into the background as we roll down the windows and sing as loud as we possibly can, embarrassing the cars next to us and ourselves.

Sometimes our mission feels like Sunday—our suffering is but a thread in the tapestry of God’s redemptive story. Recently, two of the students who have been waking up every Wednesday to go to Bible study with me before school told me they want to get baptized. As followers of Jesus, we get to celebrate the resurrection; hope is within our gaze. I wonder if baptism is just as much for the community of believers as it is for the ones being dunked. As they make a public commitment to follow Jesus, those of us oscillating between hope and despair swing to hope, witnessing the work of Jesus in our midst. When they emerge from the water and inhale the first breath of new life, we experience God’s immanence and remember his willingness to suffer with us.

Like the disciples who misunderstood Jesus’s death predictions, we misrepresent our mission when we focus solely on the resurrection. God does not swoop us up from death or help us escape suffering; the cross is not a talisman against misfortune in this life. Rather, God enters into our human situation and disarms death by submitting to it. God in human flesh is outside of everything we thought we wanted in a savior. The incarnation points to a God who is so passionately in love with and committed to his creatures that he would die to be with them. This is where new life begins—“suffering made audible and visible produces hope, articulated grief is the gate of newness, and the history of Jesus is the history of entering into the pain and giving it a voice.”³ The climax of God’s redemptive story emerges from this sacrifice, from this story of painful solidarity. His mission of restoring wholeness becomes our mission when we choose to embrace vulnerability; we can share the pain of others because he shares our pain.

We are invited to live in the tension—death precedes the resurrection; winter ushers in spring, and when spring is on the forefront, winter follows closely behind. As followers of Jesus, we should know, to use Michael Gorman’s words, that the cross is the shape and source of our salvation.⁴ We are most human, feel the most alive, and reflect the image of the Divine most clearly, when our actions emulate the loving actions of Jesus that led to the cross. We follow a God who, in Jesus, met us in radical solidarity. He took on flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14), emptied himself of his divine prerogative (Eph 2:7), embraced finitude, nearly starved in a desert, wept over injustice, and ultimately redeemed the world through his death. New life blooms out of solidarity

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 88.

⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

in suffering—God's solidarity with us and ours with others—if we're willing to take up our cross.

MELISSA WEAVER

Saudade

For Bethany, who returned to serve where little, and much, has changed.

*. . . A vague and constant desire for something
that does not and probably cannot exist,
for something other than the present, a turning . . .*

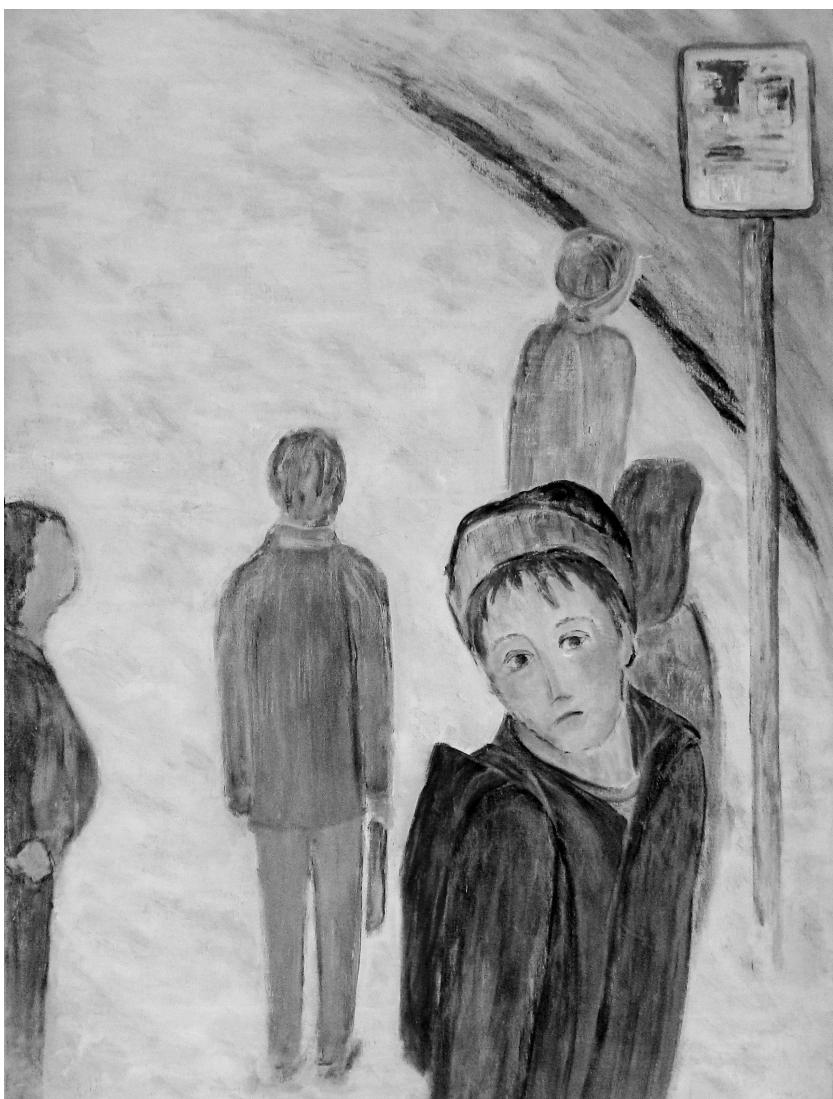
— A. F. G. Bell

Pedals propel the Ferris wheels
that lift her from the fog
of foreigners descended on the beach.
Atlantis has risen where fishing boats,
she was, once rocked to sleep.

Palms, plumeria, groves of mangoes
shimmer in the heat
like the husks of beetles
she had pinned from these fields
with tinier hands.

Here their burning calves had wrapped 'round
the broad backs of bawling calves,
had raced, leaving wedding-rice showers of sand
where hotels stand
like glittering temples.

At the guest-house tonight,
they will ask if she's been here.
With pale-face and tongue-Thai'd,
she'll evade. The AC breaks like waves
where the cows once could watch them.
Within walls that were not, what to say?



"Bus Stop"
Jane Gateson

The Forgotten People

ANNE THIESSEN¹

Remember the story in the Bible about the woman who had been hemorrhaging for years and her health care had run out?² And she didn't have anywhere else to go or any new alternative medicine to try? And she was mopping up blood with rags and hoping no one noticed because a woman's blood was deemed especially shameful? Remember how she kept low to the ground so as not to call attention to herself? Do you remember how "church folk" wouldn't let her in the door?

Remember how she had just enough courage to reach out from her position on the ground to touch a new doctor's hem with her fingers? And she knew? She knew it had finally, instantly, stunningly worked?

Remember the doctor looking back over his shoulder? Who . . . ? Remember his apprentices' annoyance. . . . "There is no one there! It could be anyone!"

Exactly. It could have been any of us. But it wasn't. It was this one nameless, shamefully bankrupt, and bleeding woman. The invisible one. The forgotten one. Remember?

I recently attended the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (MB) gathering in Thailand. The theme was mission, and the spirit was much about remembering the forgotten. A German Mennonite spoke of his family's heart-searing exile by train from the Ukraine across Russia, and a recent return to war-torn Ukraine, where he witnessed Christians reaching out to one another across enemy lines. A Turk spoke of joining Armenians in their somber memorial for those lost in genocide a century ago. A Malawian refugee spoke of his ministry in his camp, which he had chosen over being sponsored in North America. Two white men—a Canadian and a Brazilian—called us to address white privilege. Finding the forgotten and seeing the invisible takes

¹ Anne Thiessen grew up in Honduras in an American missionary family. After graduating from Wheaton College, she served as refugee camp coordinator under World Relief and as mission mobilizer under Artists in Christian Testimony. She now works alongside her husband, Robert, to establish the authority of Christ among Mixtec indigenous people in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, Mexico. She serves under Mennonite Brethren MBMission.

² See Mark 5:25–34 and parallels. I am imaginatively expanding on the biblical account.

intention, and we all witnessed a fresh will among MB leadership to tackle what sets some people aside.

My husband and I, MB missionaries, have experience working among such set-aside people. When we began exploring where we might work among the unreached Indian groups of Mexico, seasoned missionaries suggested we begin our search in the migrant camps in the north of the country where workers and their families were housed in stalls separated by tin or cardboard, under one long, low roof. The structures reminded us of chicken barns. We spent months meeting migrant workers in these camps, painstakingly learning the rudiments of their tonal language and building relationships.

Indian groups in Mexico are semi-autonomous, and often it is necessary to obtain permits from Indian authorities to enter or live in their towns. Often, outsiders are unwelcome, especially evangelists or missionaries, who are perceived as threats to the local customs and identity. We were advised to gain entrance to an area where there was no gospel presence, by earning the trust and invitations of migrant workers before choosing a specific Indian town where we would live.

This we did, and it led us to one of the few Mixtec towns that still had a Mixtec name (many other such towns had been renamed by Indian or Spanish conquerors). The village—nestled in the crack between two mountaintops that blocked out the sun till mid-morning and again in the late afternoon—was called *Yuvi Nani*, Forgotten People. Legend has it that these people were outcasts and refugees from their hometown in Oaxaca. But even the name of the hometown is lost.

If you had looked (as we did) on a government map that plotted towns and roads in the state, you would have seen that the entire portion covering Yuvi Nani was barren. There seemed to be nothing there. Some years later, a United Nations study claimed that Yuvi Nani and the towns surrounding it composed the most destitute of all municipalities in Mexico. In some ways, they were forgotten even by their own government. When we did some research on this particular linguistic group, we were informed by the most knowledgeable mission agency in the area that there were no known Christian believers or workers there and that it was the most neglected of all unreached fields in Mexico. So in we went.

And how glad I am that we did. Because out of this marginalized, forgotten group of people comes a marvelous story, one as close to the original story of Pentecost that I have seen in Mexico. One of the migrant workers named Philip had overheard some evangelical worship in one of the camps and was overwhelmed by how it communicated the power of Christ. Philip was (and

still is) quite monolingual. But he caught these things from the evangelical songs: Jesus rose from the dead and will raise me too. He hears me when I pray. He loves me and heals me.

Philip took this good news back to his village. After two years of Philip's witness, his brother-in-law Juan came to faith. Juan, a town authority, made use of the town's public speakers to gather everyone into the town square and preach good news. "You all know that we are far from God! We must turn back! We must follow Jesus in a New Way!" The entire village came to faith. That night, half recanted out of fear of reprisal, but the rest stayed true and formed a church. They wrote songs in Mixtec. They stopped the abuse of alcohol and the beating of wives. They stopped the practice of loan sharking and selling their daughters in marriage for profit. God had gotten ahold of them.

Then one day, before a year had passed, an assassin stepped out from behind a truck at noon and shot Juan dead in the middle of the street in a nearby city. Juan had been buying materials to build a church.

Soon after Juan died, Latino pastors visited the new church, persuading the worshippers that their language was unacceptable to God and that all worship must, for propriety's sake, be conducted in Spanish. The Mixtec prayers stopped. The Mixtec songs were lost. These church members—whose founder had been martyred, who suffered the threat of death every day and yet remained faithful—were now, by their own brothers in Christ, caused to suffer shame for their birthright as Indians. Like the hemorrhaging woman who had reached out to the Healer, they, as Indians, were invisible.

Those of us born into white privilege have difficulty even seeing the suffering of marginalized people and their resulting invisibility. We do not understand the shame of being forgotten. But through relationships and intentionality, we can learn, like the disciples did, to see those reaching out to touch the hem of Jesus from positions of powerlessness. With love, we can lift shame and restore dignity and identity when we honor invisible people in the name of Christ.

A few years ago, we found one of our brothers of the Forgotten People working as a migrant in Alabama. We stayed at his apartment for four days. He took us out to dinner at his favorite spot—McDonald's. When we were about to leave, he asked his son to take a picture of him and my husband, Robert. "You are my best friend," he said. This remains one of the highest honors Robert has ever received.

Another rural, marginalized Indian group in which we hold friendships is the Waunán of Panama, who came to Christ through Anabaptist witness. They, too, have a fascinating story of redemption as entire villages dedicated

themselves to Jesus when their leaders spoke the gospel to them with great faith. Where in Western culture today do we see such childlike trust and immediate obedience to Jesus? Recently when Robert was visiting these friends, they commented on a church conference they had held the year before. The visiting Latino preacher had spent hours persuading them of the need to be nourished through the study of God's Word. At the end of the conference, an elderly Woun had stood and said, "Brothers, I must prepare to die. I cannot read, and I am too old to learn. So I cannot receive sustenance." This man, an oral learner, was invisible to the literate, credentialed Latino pastor.

As I think about this story, I wonder how much of God's very nature is invisible to me and to all my Western kin—and even to that Latino pastor who was using a Western preaching style—because we are so careless with the life and wisdom of elderly Indian oral learners such as this nameless, suffering man who, if not hemorrhaging blood, was certainly hemorrhaging self-worth. How brave he was to articulate his pain. Few Indians do. They often merely accept it as their lot in life and keep silent. This is our loss, too.

Mexico. Panama. These two stories highlight the marginalization of rural Indian groups with stories to tell, who we ignore to our loss. But Indians are not the only marginalized groups in this hemisphere. We are surrounded by invisible people, by forgotten people—migrants, refugees, minorities, women, the poor, homeless, and disabled. My next two stories highlight rural, poor Latinos from Honduras and Peru. Often the powerful in one context are marginalized in another. It's hardly possible to find pure victims.

My husband and I were apprenticed by Honduran church planters in rural Honduras. The model they use for church reproduction and pastoral training has inspired hundreds of baby congregations all over the world, and their training materials—Train & Multiply—are offered through organizations like Project WorldReach. Yet few people know their struggle to be recognized by leaders within their own denomination because, as rural poor *campesinos* (farmers), they were perceived as improperly educated (none held formal, recognized credentials of any kind) and incapable of managing their own church structure. I was at a church conference where a Honduran city pastor with a US seminary degree made a power play to put the 200 or so rural churches under the authority of his own significantly more wealthy church in the country's capital. I was greatly relieved when one of the rural pastors, Oscar (one of my husband's mentors), with that familiar gentle courtesy and calm discernment we all knew so well, said, "For many years you have dismissed the extension training that qualifies all of us as *campesino* pastors. How would placing ourselves under your administration now help us?" And the power play dissolved. Managing

their own training had raised the *campesino* pastors' confidence in their own leadership.

These Honduran church planters gave us the best training possible for our work among the marginalized of Mexico. Nowhere else could we have found more wisdom, more simple obedience to Jesus, more tools of the trade, more practical models, or more humble teachers than among these *campesino* pastors like Oscar. Yet in many ways, since they don't publish in our mission journals or speak at our conferences, they are invisible, forgotten. Sometimes when I try to tell their story as a counter to missiology that disparages non-formally trained leaders, I feel like Rhoda of Acts, who had something incredible to tell but was dismissed because she was a servant girl. Somehow, in those instances I also lack the credentials to make myself heard.

I eventually find ways to speak, however, even as a woman, because I am formally educated and white. But how often do we hear an Oscar guiding us through church planting principles or gently chiding us for complaining when he was slighted by a fellow missionary? How often do we hear a Juan of Yuvi Nani preach? Or let a Waunán elder model oral storytelling? What voices do we listen to? Are we intentional about looking around for those invisible, dignity-hemorrhaging people who live around us?

My final story is about another group of church leaders I met in a marginalized rural area of Peru. In a visit there, I heard a bit of their history. My understanding of it goes something like this: After a natural disaster struck some thirty years ago, an Anabaptist agency arrived on the scene with relief aid. Relationships were made, and people came to Christ. The agency sent missionaries to pastor these believers, for about ten years. The missionaries, knowing that nationals should lead these churches, invited credentialed pastors from outside the denomination and paid them to lead the churches. When funding faded, the pastors left and the churches were again left leaderless. The agency adopted a new strategy, choosing a number of local leaders and sending them to a seminary in another Latin country on full scholarships. After four years, the graduates returned and pastored for a time, but soon they deemed it too difficult to remain in such poor congregations, and all but one left the movement. The strategy was deemed by the agency as a flop, the people too poor to make it work.

This is a familiar story to me. But when I arrived in this new place, I recognized such strong similarities to northern rural Honduras—where I had witnessed a church-planting movement among very similar people—that the missed opportunities for the Peruvian churches wounded my heart. The leadership potential of so-called “lay leaders” was invisible to the mission agency, as

was the potential for reproducing churches without a foreign credentialing system or foreign financing. In some ways, it was a modern telling of James 2:2–4, except that rather than a poorly dressed person entering the meeting and being told to take a seat on the floor, it was a poorly educated one. It was a different set of resources taken into account, but the same result. I know the people involved intended good. But misguided actions have unintended consequences.

The following are a few lines from an evaluation of the work in Peru, published by the agency in the 1990's and on which the agency acted.

In 1992 the mission decided to reorient its work with the purpose of strengthening the national work. From the outset, they had worked in marginal urban and rural centers. But after almost a decade of work they were not successful in becoming self-sustaining and the future was not promising. Furthermore, the approaches to missionary work that were born in the hearts of the local congregations became increasingly difficult because of the condition of the members. . . .

The national leader, including the president, did not have the training in administrative duties that are required by these kinds of associations. They were, therefore, dependent on the work of [the] missionary . . . [whose] departure in 1998 left an enormous vacuum . . . because he offered efficient and wise leadership that could not be replaced. . . .

What I understand from these words is that the ability of local elders to pastor their own churches was invisible to the seminary-credentialed evaluator. I also gather that responsibility for failure was placed not on the missiology of the white missionaries and formally educated pastors but rather on the “condition of the members.” The inference for me is that the spread of the gospel is hindered by poverty and its attendant lack of formal training.

I am relieved to say that the agency that started the work in Peru has since revisited its missiology, asked forgiveness of the local workers, and released them for ministry as it should have done thirty years ago. Several of the Peruvian leaders described to me their plans to begin new work, wondering at their newfound freedom. “We were always told before that we couldn’t do this,” one of them said. The church slowly learns its true nature.

I end with the song of one of Scripture's most marginalized characters—a poor Middle Eastern girl, wearing a veil, carrying a “bastard” child, suffering labor pains on the road with nowhere to go, soon to be a hunted refugee in a foreign country:

Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,

and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
For the Mighty One is holy,

and he has done great things for me.
He shows mercy from generation to generation

to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones

and exalted the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has helped his servant Israel

and remembered to be merciful.
For he made this promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and his children forever.

(Luke 1:46–55 NLT)

It is the worship by the marginalized that most awakens us all to the coming of the King. It is the joy of those whose shame, whose bleeding, whose degradation has been healed that opens our eyes to his presence. May we as Anabaptists—rich and poor, powerful and marginalized—go to him “outside the camp,” and join him there, identifying with and bringing redemption to the Forgotten People.

HILLARY KOBERNICK¹

The Furloughed Missionaries in Children's Church

Praise the emaciated cow in the slideshow, the gummy water buffalo. Praise the wooden cart with a hole busted in its floor, but still pulling a sick child over potholes to the country doctor. Praise the country doctor

who knows little, but enough here and there to save a child in this world. Praise the chlorine tablets dissolving in thick-walled water bottles, praise the wide-brimmed hats and the way dust glued to sweat makes sunscreen.

Lift your voice: praise the dead air waiting for a song each steaming morning walking from compound to need. Praise this basement, the pipes and wires and whirring overhead projectors spinning in endless dusty rotation.

Praise this hot room and the hard-backed chairs in which you sit with small aching back, the closest you get to suffering. Praise the end of furlough and their return to Cambodia. And pray for you, pale child, stranded in sufficiency, unblessed

never knowing how it feels to lack so much of everything.

¹ Hillary Kobernick has competed at the National Poetry Slam six times, representing Atlanta and Chicago. She holds a master of divinity degree and pastors a Mennonite congregation in Illinois. Her poems have been featured on Button Poetry's YouTube Channel and have been published in journals including DecomP, Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal, and The Christian Century.

Pregnant with an Evil

MARCUS REMPEL¹

I have again and again tried to show you that our present world can finally be understood only as a perversion of the New Testament. . . . We spoke about the mysterium iniquitatis, the mystery of evil, the nesting of an otherwise unthinkable, unimaginable, and nonexistent evil and its egg within the Christian community. We then used the word Anti-Christ—the Anti-Christ, which looks, in so many things, just like the Christ, and which preaches universal responsibility, global perception, humble acceptance of teaching instead of finding out for oneself, and guidance through institutions. —Ivan Illich²

“Kill the Indian in the Child”

For one hundred and thirty-some years, Christian churches in my country ran residential schools for the expressed purpose of “civilizing” Indian children into the Canadian body politic.³ Or, to use a more graphic summary of this mission in the words of Duncan Campbell Scott, the 1920s Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs: “to kill the Indian in the child.”

For seven generations, Aboriginal children were rounded up with planes, Royal Canadian Mounted Police⁴ vehicles, sometimes even garbage trucks, and hauled off to schools impossibly far away from their home communities. Upon arrival, their hair was cut off, purportedly for delousing. Moccasins, shirts, blouses, and trousers that had been lovingly made by their mothers, grand-

¹ Marcus Rempel is a founding member of Ploughshares Community Farm. His contacts in Indigenous communities have come as a Mennonite Central Committee Community Garden Co-ordinator, as a fly-in occupational therapist to band-run schools in northern Manitoba, as a Hydro Justice Coordinator, and most recently as a neighbor and collaborator with the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, an Indigenous theological school just a few twists of the Brokenhead River. The Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre is upstream from the farm where Marcus lives with his wife and two daughters as well as some other friends. This essay is a chapter in the author’s forthcoming book *Life at the End of Us Versus Them: Cross Culture Stories*, to be published by FriesenPress.

² David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2005), 169.

³ The residential schools program lasted from the 1870s to the late 1990s.

⁴ Also known as RCMP or “Mounties”—the national police force for Canada to this day.

mothers, and aunts were stripped off and burned with the same sanitizing justification. The children were forbidden to speak their own language and beaten if they were caught doing so. Any tie to home, community, or Indigenous identity was to be broken. They were not to speak to their own siblings. Each child was to become a shorn, uniformed tabula rasa on which the Christian commandments and Canadian civic virtues were to be cleanly inscribed. As a project on the public dime, all this was to be achieved at the highest efficiency of cost—that is to say, the barest minimum of care. According to the 1907 Bryce Report to Parliament, between 24 and 42 percent of these children died in the residential schools each year. Improvements to the care of these children were dismissed by the Canadian government as too expensive.⁵

Mennonites, typically averse to church-state collaboration in violence, failed to perceive the violence of this system and got caught up in its colonial mandate and its racist rhetoric. One Mennonite leader said in 1963, “We feel that saving the Indian out of his squalor, ignorance and filth is step one in bringing him to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.”⁶ In 1955, an official in the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs estimated that between one-third and one-half of all teachers in the “unorganized territories” (land located outside the boundaries of settler governance) were Mennonites.⁷

The abuses suffered by Aboriginal children at these schools and the colonial policy of forced assimilation are shameful beyond telling. I do not want to argue here, as other Christians have, that these abuses and policies have nothing to do with Christianity. We don’t get off the hook that easily. This is a tragedy that we must not only remember but also own. For if we are to avoid repeating such tragedies, we have to look for their source within our tradition. Canada’s Aboriginal children were kidnapped and driven down a road to hell that was paved with uniquely Christian intentions. To understand the origins of this strange evil that was convinced of its own benevolence, we need to revisit the days when imperial power first seduced the Christian church.

⁵ TRC Commissioner Murray Sinclair in conversation with Michael Enright on *The Sunday Edition*, August 10, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thesundayedition/cyber-misogyny-roller-derby-opening-chile-s-black-box-justice-murray-sinclair-sarah-jeffrey-on-the-oboe-ralph-nader-1.2905156/justice-murray-sinclair-on-truth-and-reconciliation-1.2905159>.

⁶ Steve Heinrichs, “Confessing the Past: Mennonites and the Indian School System,” Mennonite Church Canada, 2013, <http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/16436>.

⁷ Ibid.

An Emperor Converts

In the year AD 312, Constantine the Great was fascinated by how certain dynamics of the Christian faith made it uniquely suited for uniting and galvanizing his body politic, the Roman Empire. The ancient tribal identities of the empire's colonized lands had not been erased by the sword of conquest, and Rome was pulling apart through a growing centrifugal force.. Everywhere, local identities were re-asserting themselves and driving for greater autonomy. Though Roman identity had spread to the edges of "the known world," it was ill-suited to universalization, because it was ethnic. If Visigoths or Africans were granted Roman citizenship, they never really saw themselves as "Roman." Constantine was fascinated by the idea that, in Christ, as Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female" (Gal 3:28). Here was an identity that could both encompass and transcend ethnic and class identities. Here was a religion and an identity that could unite an empire.⁸

Apparently, Constantine found Christ on the battlefield, as he was preparing to meet Maxentius, his chief rival to the throne. According to legend, he saw a cross-shaped cloud and heard a voice: "Conquer by this sign." In response, Constantine painted crosses on the shields of his men. Within days, they were marching victoriously through the gates of Rome, holding up the Christian symbol on their armor and the severed head of Maxentius on the tip of a spear.

Whether or not Constantine's account of a heavenly sign was bona fide, his interpretation of what it meant to conquer one's enemies by the cross was most certainly novel. Up until that point, Christians by and large understood such conquering to mean winning over one's persecutors through the disarming, nonviolent love of Christ, a love Christ modeled on the cross through an act of forgiving self-sacrifice. The idea of a military campaign (or any project of the state) "in the name of Christ" was unthinkable prior to Constantine's impromptu paint job. In the words of Justin Martyr, an early Christian leader, "We who used to kill one another, do not make war on our enemies, we have each changed our instruments of war, turned our swords into ploughshares . . . and our spears into farming tools."⁹

⁸ Susan Wise Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World: From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 3-7.

⁹ Cited in Leonard Desroches, *Allow The Water: Anger, Fear, Power, Work, Sexuality, Community—and the Spirituality and Practice of Nonviolence* (Toronto: Trafford, 2004), 188.

While there was relief among Christians over the end of state-sponsored persecution—an end that came with Constantine’s legalization of the Christian faith—there was also grave concern about how this new relation to the powers would distort the faith. “As the Church increased in influence, it decreased in Christian virtues,” reflected the Christian scholar Jerome (c. 342–420). Within a hundred years of Constantine’s conversion, the Roman military machine was governed by an officially Christian doctrine of Just War; church and state were marching together in lockstep. Beheadings, wars, violent persecutions of religious heretics “in the name of Christ” had become not only permissible but also an unquestionable necessity for protecting the Christian state.

The Conscription of Christian Charity

The cross that was emblazoned onto the military machine was not the only thing that disturbed early Christian sensibilities. For the state also began to conscript Christian charity. The first “hospitals” were founded in post-Constantinian Roman cities as a way of addressing the growing homelessness problem, by ratcheting up and institutionalizing the early Christian practice of taking in the stranger as a way of receiving the Christ. Because Jesus told his disciples that whenever they welcomed “the least of one of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40, NRSV), early Christian homes had a practice of keeping a candle in the window, a scrap of bread in the pantry, and a spare sleeping mat ready to welcome strangers across the threshold of their own homes. John Chrysostom (“The Golden-Tongued”), a preacher at the time, preached vehemently against this transformation of the gospel call to welcome the stranger. So central did Chrysostom consider the habit of hospitality that he told his listeners if they ceased keeping this practice personally and spontaneously around their own tables, their homes would cease to be Christian.

Illich reminded himself and his friends of this practice by always carrying a candle stub in his pocket, which he would pull out any time “two or three” (or more) were “gathered together” (see Matt 18:20, KJV), placing it on the table and lighting it as a reminder that the circle of friendship gathered around it was always an open circle, held open expectantly for the other—another friend or a stranger (or even an enemy), who could become a friend. This openness to encounter the other was one and the same with an openness to the presence of Jesus. This was a far cry from the “instrumentalized machine” for efficient and professionally distant needs identification and service provision that this Chris-

tian practice would morph into—beginning with those first hospitals—which Illich refers to as the mutation of hospitality into hospitalization.¹⁰

Constantine is a prime example of Illich's refrain: "*Corruptio optimi quae est pessima*"—"The corruption of the best is the worst." This phrase summarizes Illich's thesis that the historically unique shape of modern institutions is best understood as a perversion of Christianity. Interestingly, the Christian parable that pushed Illich to this conclusion was the story that made him understand the radical ethnicity-transcending nature of the Christian gospel that Constantine found so attractive: Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan.

“Who Is My Neighbor?”

In the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do “to inherit eternal life.” (This, by the way is not a “how to get to heaven” question but a question about how to become a full heir—the ultimate insider—to the life of God as Jesus has been explaining it.) Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer and asks which Scripture is the interpretive key for the Torah. The lawyer answers, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus tells the lawyer, “You have given the right answer. Do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:27–28, NRSV).

But the lawyer pushes for clarification, as good lawyers do. He asks, “And who is my neighbor?” It’s a vague category, after all. How far does this obligation extend? To love another person as one’s own flesh, one’s own self, is no small commitment. The lawyer can see the extrapolations of this commitment widening outward to a limitless horizon and becoming either hopelessly dilute or impossible to practice. His question is a fair one.

Jesus, in typical fashion, answers with a story. Illich observes that this concrete, narrative mode is essential to Jesus’s reply. The reply must be a story; it cannot be reduced to a rule. In fact, the story is about the transgression of rules. Illich asserts that the “doctrine about the neighbour . . . is utterly destructive of ordinary decency, of what had, until then, been understood as ethical behaviour. . . . In antiquity, hospitable behaviour . . . implies a boundary drawn around those to whom I can behave in this way.”¹¹ This boundary is precisely what the lawyer is pushing Jesus to identify. Any ancient ethic required an *ethnos*—a tribe, a group—to contain it. Samaritans were not only outside the

10 Ivan Illich, “Pain and Hospitality,” a paper presented in Chicago, 1987. <http://brandon.multics.org/library/illich/hospitality.pdf>.

11 Cayley, *Rivers*, 51.

Jewish fold, they were also the group most threatening to Jewish identity—half-Jews who had married and mixed with the Gentile culture, which an ever-pressured Jewish minority struggled to ward off.

What Illich hears in Jesus's story is the surprising assertion that my neighbor is whom I choose “in response to a call and not a category, in this case the call of the beaten-up Jew in the ditch.”¹² The story suggests that “we are creatures that find our perfection only by establishing a relationship,” a relationship that “may appear arbitrary from everybody else’s point of view.”¹³ The lawyer asks for a rule. Jesus, in reply, tells a story about an outsider, and a religious rival being literally “moved in his innards” at the sight of his enemy’s blood and misery, a response that initiates a surprising relationship of cross-cultural love.

The Christian practice of breaking bread together across lines of tribe and class, calling one another “brothers and sisters in the Lord,” and violating long-held ethnic food and purity taboos by their mingled fellowship was a shock to the ancient world—a scandal. For the early church, these new practices of the beloved community were central. The main thrust of the ministry of St. Paul is to proclaim the breakdown of “the wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14, NIV) dividing Jews and Gentiles, through the mystery of the Cross—the blood and misery of another wounded Jew. This somehow has the power to move people in their guts toward a new compassion and sense of family, beyond any inherited identities or obligations.

A New and Dangerous Freedom

Illich shows again and again how the new gift of the Christian community is both precious and precarious. It is a new goodness prone to a new evil. The new sense of family was supremely convenient for a megalomaniac imperialist. Similarly, the mission to bring all the world into “one new humanity in Christ” was fundamental to the residential school project. In both cases, we see how the Christian transgressing of ancient tribal boundaries represents a new freedom that verges precipitously on a new danger. This freedom is at once a cause for rejoicing or cringing—depending on one’s place in history—for it set in motion the spread of a faith across the globe that, depending on only a subtle variation, begat encounters with either a radically new kind of peace or a radically new kind of violence.

The difference, according to Illich, lies in how the parable of the Good Samaritan is read as a summary of Jesus’s message—either as an invitation to

12 Ibid., 52.

13 Ibid.

relationship chosen freely, or as the grounds for a universal rule. His distinction brings to mind the slogan of Canadian luminary Marshall McLuhan—"the medium is the message." The medium of enfleshed, loving, and free "I-Thou" relationship is the message of Christ. Attempts at the same message, outside of this medium, become unavoidably perverse.

Illich's tour through early church history and New Testament texts brings Canada's church-run, state-sponsored residential schools into sharper focus than do typical "decolonizing" critiques. Yes, the residential school system was chauvinist, racist, and imperialist. But more insidious and ultimately more damaging to its young inmates than that was its hell-bent mission to save them. It is one thing to recover from the wounds of disdain. It is another thing to recover from the wounds of charity. For the survivor of violent charity, love itself has forever been disfigured.

The residential schools were not the product of a generic colonialism but a specifically (and perversely) Christian one. Illich contends that the misapplication of the story of the Good Samaritan as the basis for a universal rule—the obligation to rescue the pitiable—gives the Christian West an attitude toward the other that is unique in history:

Only . . . with the Western European Church did the alien become someone in need, someone to be brought in. This view of the alien as a burden has become constitutive for Western society; without this universal mission to the world outside, what we call the West would not have come to be.¹⁴

This uniquely Western, biblically derived (and deranged!) sense of mission drove school teachers and administrators to impose their saving ministrations upon Canada's First Nations, convinced that they were the rescuers and Canada's First Peoples were those in need of being rescued. A closer reading of the tale of the Good Samaritan might have made the teachers consider that the ones they viewed as aliens—members of a "lost race"—could turn out to be the ones to rescue *them!* But this humbler reading was missed. That the missionary might be the one in need of saving did not occur to Western mission workers. Attributing needs always to the other, they targeted the most vulnerable members of Indigenous communities—the children—not out of malice but out of Christian mercy! While there were undeniably pathological predators who infiltrated the residential schools, many of the staff were well-meaning missionaries who dedicated their lives to the "service" of these children. The

¹⁴ Ivan Illich, "Vernacular Values by Ivan Illich," 1980. <http://www.preservenet.com/theory/Illrich/Vernacular.html#1>.

government chose Christian missionaries for this project because of their passionate sense of charity. The missionaries were willing to work literally for nothing, believing that their mission to “the poor” was securing them “treasures in heaven” in place of material reward.

The perverse nature of the relationship between these would-be saviors and the children they felt obligated to love and then shackle, arose directly out of a Christian mission stripped of its sense of freedom and reduced to a set of rules demanding universal dissemination. Humans have always had rules but rules contained by an ethos—the spirit of a particular people in a particular place.

For an Indigenous example, Ella Deloria sums up traditional Dakota ethics with the following four commands: First, “Be a good relative. That is of paramount importance!” Then, “Be related, somehow, to everyone you know.” Next, “Be generous.” And finally, “Be hospitable!”¹⁵ In many ways, this ethic is more spacious and gracious than the rule-bound, minutia-obsessed Christianity imported to Turtle Island¹⁶ by Europeans. But this spacious ethic of generous hospitality does have boundaries; it draws a clear line around the tribe within which it is applicable.

Melanie Kampen, a Mennonite theologian who is decolonizing Christian theology by interrogating it with Aboriginal paradigms, points out that the wideness of this “all my relations” ethic is not to “be confused with a liberal tolerance that seeks to dilute differences and dissolve identitarian boundaries. The exclusivity of the tribe [is] important.”¹⁷ She argues that the boundedness of Aboriginal ethics to a specific place and people “cannot result in dominance or colonization.” This is a vital insight into why many Indigenous cultures have no interest in colonizing or converting other peoples. But at the same time, this sense of ethical enclosure cannot call for a Lakota to “be a good relative” to a Cree or an Ojibwa.

Jesus, on the other hand, tells a story to his first-century Jewish community of a Samaritan who breaks out of such a boundaried world and loves someone to whom he has no tribal ties. This was—and is—good news. Illich’s insight is to see how easily this good could turn evil. For when this new freedom became a rule, a door opened to a tyranny never before known in history. Whereas a Ghengis Khan or a Julius Caesar could behead children without a second

¹⁵ Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 48–49. First published 1944.

¹⁶ Turtle Island is a traditional Aboriginal term for our continent, arising from a sacred story where Nanabush builds up the land on the back of a turtle.

¹⁷ Melanie Kampen, “Unsettling Theology: Decolonizing Western Interpretations of Original Sin” (master’s thesis, University of Waterloo, 2014), 54.

thought in the process of extending his empire, Christians could now round them up for total cultural annihilation, purportedly out of charity and for the children's own good.

Mysterium Iniquitatis: The Mystery of Wickedness

Illich finds in St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians an awareness of this new evil to which Christians are uniquely prone. He writes: "The Church had gone pregnant with an evil that would have found no nesting place in the Old Testament."¹⁸ Paul names this evil *mysterium iniquitatis*, the "mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:7, NRSV) and identifies it with the antichrist, a spirit that would nest in the church, taking on an appearance of Christ's spirit but would in fact be its demonic opposite.

To the modern reader, such words sound terribly churchy and weird. But Illich believes that the phenomenon of the antichrist can be investigated historically, without recourse to faith or belief, by powers of observation available to Christians and non-Christians alike. "The more I try to examine the present as an historical entity, the more it . . . forces me to accept a set of axioms for which I find no parallels in past societies and displays a puzzling kind of horror, cruelty, and degradation with no precedent in other historical epochs."¹⁹

I can think of no more accurate category in which to place the abduction, forcible confinement, and assimilationist reprogramming of Canadian Aboriginal children by coercively charitable Samaritans acting in the name of Christ. And from here, it is not difficult to imagine the road to the darkest, hideous, sexual and physical abuses now catalogued by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools.

The sick relationships between these abusive saviors and their captive charges reminds me of the torturer/nurse Annie Wilkes in Stephen King's horror novel *Misery*,²⁰ whose plot can be read as a terrifying parody of the tale of the Good Samaritan. Wilkes finds the author Paul Sheldon on the roadside, injured by a car crash, and takes him back to a remote cabin to nurse him back to health. She tells Sheldon she is his greatest fan, but her twisted love admits no freedom. When she finds his newest manuscript not to her liking, she becomes highly agitated, lecturing him on its violence and profanity. As time goes on, she becomes psychotically punitive, jailing and re-injuring Sheldon, forcing him to rewrite his story as she wants it to go, with a "nicer ending." In

18 Cayley, *Rivers*, 59.

19 Ibid., 60.

20 King, *Misery* (New York: Viking, 1987).

the end, Sheldon narrowly escapes with his life, a profoundly broken man who succumbs to alcoholism and for years loses his voice as a writer.

The parallels between this psychological horror story and Canada's residential schools are uncanny, eerie. How many Christian missionaries began their service to Canada's First Nations with a romantic tale of rescue in their heads? How many became bitterly violent when the children they thought they were saving did not reciprocate their fantasy? How many young Aboriginal Paul Sheldons were trapped in the terrifying dilemma of trying their best to reshape not only their behavior but also their own language and narrative, to please a violently controlling Nurse Wilkes while desperately scheming how to escape? Can any of the conversions to Christianity in these schools be considered as anything other than Stockholm syndrome, the twisted dynamic that turns hostages to identify with their kidnappers?

Resisting Erasure, Embracing Inclusion

In contrast to the residential schools, some Christian missions have been freely offered and freely received among Canada's First Nations, and their stories shine like a light in the darkness of missions co-opted by the colonial machine. The Right Reverend Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Bishop for the Anglican Church of Canada, is a carrier of that light. One of his most compelling stories comes from the Gwich'in people of Alaska, where MacDonald served as bishop prior to coming to his current post in the church (which in itself represents a startling counter-narrative to the predominant colonial story).

When the very first Anglican Bishop of Alaska arrived in Alaska in 1862, he found four thousand Gwich'in reading the Morning and Evening Prayers in their skin huts every day as they followed the caribou. "They were probably the most Anglican people in Canada at the time," says MacDonald of their rigorous routine of Christian prayer, "without the benefit of clergy, I might add."²¹ The prayers were in their own language, translated into Gwich'in from Ojibway by the Catechist Robert MacDonald, an Ojibway who had come to live with them decades before the Gwich'in had any contact with white missionaries. MacDonald and other Aboriginal catechists had been trained in Winnipeg by the Anglican Church and Mission Society, in many ways a theologically conservative institute but nevertheless one that accepted Canada's Indigenous

²¹ Mark MacDonald, "Indigenous Anglican Ministry in Northern Canada" (public lecture, St. James Cathedral, Toronto, October 28, 2014). All quotes attributed to MacDonald in this section come from this lecture unless otherwise noted. A video of the lecture was formerly hosted on the St. James Cathedral website.

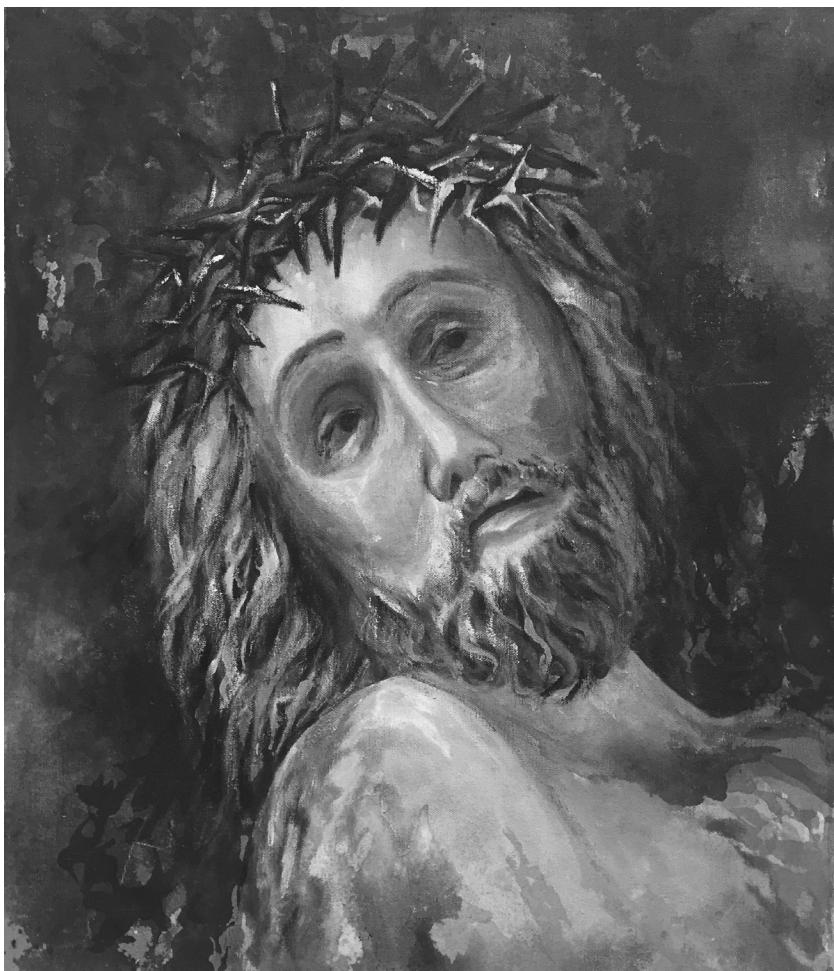
peoples as having “a valid culture, a valid cosmology and a valid way of life.” The task of mission, as it was understood, “was not to make Indigenous people like Westerners, but to make an Indigenous form of Christianity develop.”

The Gwich’in remain to this day one of the most separatist Indigenous communities in Canada. A friend of Bishop MacDonald’s, an orthodox Jew, has remarked to him, “I never thought I would find such a thing. But in this case, their Christian faith has helped them to resist colonization rather than submit to it.” To MacDonald, this surprise is a sign that “the Gospel and the power of God is greater than our intentions. Which means that even when we intend to use the Gospel to ‘civilize’ someone, you end up with a Desmond Tutu; you wind up with a Martin Luther King; you end up with a Black Elk.”

Black Elk was an Oglala holy man and a Roman Catholic catechist, who experienced pressures from missionary overseers to abandon his traditions. Yet at the end of his life, Black Elk decided to reclaim his Lakota identity openly, recording the sacred rites of the Lakota and the shamanic vision that had marked him as a young boy as a spiritual leader for his people. At nine years of age, he had been taken up into the heavens by the sacred Thunder-beings of the West and given glimpses of his people’s future. His vision had also had universal dimensions, but unlike that of the residential schools project, in Black Elk’s vision, tribal identity was brought into an enlarged human family by inclusion rather than erasure: “And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father.”²²

To Black Elk, Jesus was easily recognizable as “a good Lakota.” Mark MacDonald argues that leaders such as Black Elk or Robert MacDonald are typical of what he calls Aboriginal spiritual genius, representative of a vast majority of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Turtle Island, whom both anthropologists and the church have historically written off as failures. MacDonald estimates that there is a small minority—roughly 5 percent—who are pursuing a path of pure traditionalism, and an equally small minority of fully assimilated Aboriginals, who are completely cut off from their communities and culture as intended by the residential schools project. The 90 percent in the middle, dismissed as “tainted” by anthropologists and “syncretists” by the church, are heroes to

22 Cited by Edwina Gateley in *Christ in the Margins* (New York: Orbis, 2003), 115. Gateley’s text is accompanied by the stunning iconography of Robert Lentz, who fashions traditionally styled religious icons with unofficial, marginal saints: figures such as Black Elk, Julian of Norwich, and Albert Einstein.



"Head of Christ 2"

Jane Gateson

MacDonald for the way they have married the essence of Christian faith to an Indigenous cosmology and way of thinking.

MacDonald sees Christian Indigenous elders offering Canada a unique opportunity to understand anew the nature of the Canadian story and the spiritual wisdom that blends what is essential and good in the Christian Gospel with the “all my relations” worldview of Indigenous peoples. He says: “I think there is probably no other country—and I know a lot of what’s going on elsewhere—that has this possibility of really changing the way we understand not only Indigenous people but the environment and all kinds of things.”

MacDonald is often asked by contemporary Canadians why his people would want to be Christian, given all the disrespect and abuse they have experienced at the hands of the church. He gives two reasons: The first, he says, is simply Jesus, whom they find “compelling, and lovely, and powerful.” The second is the memory of those early missionaries who made their life with the people, “who traveled where they traveled, who ate with them when there was game, who starved with them when there was none.”²³ The people still remember their love and their sacrifice.

These missionaries are the kind that Illich talks about and celebrates wherever he finds them. Genuine Christian mission, according to Illich, “demands searching self-criticism, and a disposition to listen and lose oneself. It requires an ability to bracket and relativize one’s own culture in order to hear what the Gospel says when it speaks in the voice of another culture.”²⁴ “To use the Gospel to prop up any social or political system” is “blasphemous.”²⁵ The gospel as a tool for one culture to colonize another is an abomination.

Re-orienting

In this, Illich is stating one maxim of modern society in its strongest terms while stubbornly defying another. Yes, the idea that religion can be used to prop up political structures is automatically suspect and deeply distasteful to a majority of Canadians today. In our cultural memory, the sanctimonious and secretly abusive clergyman forcibly educating children into subjection to God and Country has become an archetype, the worst kind of boogeyman, and we are not letting him back in. But we are not stopping there; we will not abide any kind of missionary anymore. The idea of the self-critical, self-surrender-

²³ Mark MacDonald, Keynote address at Diocesan Sacred Circle, St. Peter Dynevor, June 16, 2012. Personal notes.

²⁴ Cayley, *Rivers*, 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

ing, non-colonial, non-ethnocentric missionary Illich praises has become an impossibility to us. Such missionaries cannot exist in the postmodern liberal imagination. They must not.

Yet as we bar that door, we are attempting an expulsion that no culture has ever sustained: a politics without religion. Every people on earth have spiritual narratives and authorities that underpin their social and political conventions. For First Nations as a paramount example, a divorce between their spiritual world and their polity is unimaginable. They testify that a human being, or a human culture, cut off from its sacred stories, from its spiritual songs and healing rituals, is an amputation, an empty shell. This is precisely the gravest harm inflicted by the residential school system on Canada's Aboriginal people.

So where does this leave us? We must not repeat the dynamic of that system by remarrying religion to the state, but neither may we repeat its dynamic by re-divorcing the physical world from the spiritual. Like Illich, I cannot but see our predicament in apocalyptic terms. We are at the end of the world as we know it.

There is a resolution possible, but this involves something entirely new in human history: a culture oriented toward a spiritual power completely free of all violence or coercion. The challenge for the churches in the new millennium is to embrace the novelty of this project and reject absolutely the foundational violence from which it turns away.

HILLARY KOBERNICK

A Salt of the Earth Man

"Yoder . . . never disputed the 13 charges"
—*The Mennonite*, January 2, 2015

If boys will be boys and girls are sugar and everything nice
then we see how one girl can become a preservative, staving off

the boy's rot so he doesn't taste off, sour, to the rest of us though he
tastes each girl eventually in turn and she and she and she and she

and she and she and she and she and she and she and she
and she preserves the meal with sugar and silence, by which I mean not

not speaking but not being heard so she and she and she and she and she
and she and she and she and she and she and she and she learns

to cut the pie, pass out the pieces without flinching. And if God should
look down and set the truth free, let the church lament that he is a prisoner

to the truth. Let the church disrupt the hands that stitch this story,
let her sing that silence is golden, that she and she and she and she and she

and she and she and she and she and she and she and she is bronzing
the only gold we have, God, he is a good man, a man who has done so much
good

and if on the way he put glue in her sugar, yes we could taste and see it
or we could tell her to drink the cup given to her. She and she and she

and she and she and she and she and she and she and she and she
and she interrupted while he was still speaking. She and she and she and she

and she and she and she and she and she and she and she
moved

his dirty laundry from kitchen to sanctuary, a trail of holy men behind shoving shirts

back into the basket, saying pray on it, against it, suffer nobly through it, in silence

of it, for sugar, for everything nice, by which they mean everything silent

enough to hear him speak for he is a good man, a man
who has done so much good, a salt of the earth man

and she and she and she and she and she and she
and she and she and she and she and she and she

and she is a sweet woman, a sugar and salt
of the earth woman, a preservative twice over.

MELISSA WEAVER

Like Fine Red Veins

Like fine red veins in yolk these bends
pulse so you'll grow,
lithe and reaching.

These turns burn, more like buried
than burrowing, head-against-stones in the dark,
hard, blind weaving.

But beneath honeycomb graves there are rumors of Water
that will run through our cells, roll down
sweet mighty stream.

I'll keep twisting deep, sink, come and drink
of the mystery; you'll spread, mirror of seeking,
as you gulp light, bear,
leave.

Book Reviews

Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans, *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context, and Prophetic Dialogue*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2015. 280 pp. \$40.00. ISBN: 9781626981355.

We live in an age of noise. We are encouraged to talk, to always have a response or an opinion. One just needs to turn to the latest news channel to hear people talking over each other in a spiral of political thought and opinion. This is what we're taught dialogue is supposed to be—a sort of contest between opposing forces, a fight to the death for the loudest voice.

How refreshing it is, then, to have an assortment of authors across the spectrum of religious thought agree on what is most necessary in this current climate of political and religious unrest: listening. *Mission on the Road to Emmaus* is a compilation edited by respected theologians Stephen B. Bevans, professor emeritus of mission and culture at the Catholic Theological Union, and Cathy Ross, general secretary of the International Association for Mission Studies, featuring a variety of missiologists and practitioners reflecting on the idea of “prophetic dialogue.” This term was coined by Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in a previous edition to describe a new (or perhaps ancient?) way of engaging in mission; as a dance that is “based on the beautiful but complex rhythm of dialogue and prophecy, boldness and humility, learning and teaching, letting go and speaking out”¹).

In essence, prophetic dialogue is an attempt to thin out the language of contextual theology and apply it to the life of the missionary, the person who carries with them the good news of resurrection and salvation into every area of life; arguably, this person is every follower of Jesus Christ, each person who continues to call themselves by the label “Christian.” The Christian is to be one who listens and engages in deep relationship with others while also speaking out about the transformation of the world in and through Christ. Engaging in prophetic dialogue is ultimately about the “communication of the gospel, about offering a word of hope, about commitment to justice, peacemaking and reconciliation” (xv).

The authors make a significant effort to unpack and come to grips with the concept of prophetic dialogue, applying it to various streams of thought in the field of theology and mission. While I appreciated much of the theological discussion, what stood out is the paradox or tension found in the relationship between listening and proclaiming. Right from the beginning, Bevans and Ross emphasize that the first step of evangelism is not spoken word but attentive ears and relationship: “deep

1 Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), xiii.

listening, docility (the ability to be taught), gentleness, the ability to forge real relationships” (xii).

Many of the authors riff on this theme of listening, emphasizing the need for authentic relationship in order for prophetic dialogue to take place. Emma Wild-Wood asks how listening and a posture of prophetic dialogue can be informed by the lens of migration. “A spirituality of displacement,” she writes, “allows those of different cultures to listen and learn from one another” (64). Frances Adeney, in her chapter on contributions from contemporary women to the idea of prophetic dialogue, describes a posture that involves “listening deeply with a presence and respect that honours others and a humility that learns from them” (151). Ultimately, listening is an important word to describe how we should interact not only with fellow human beings but also with the Holy Spirit. Maria Cimperman encourages a contemplative outlook, recognizing that dialogue requires “reflectively and prayerfully seeking to hear what the Spirit might be inviting us to” (171).

This can’t be emphasized enough. Mission must begin with deep listening. To God, to the people of the place, to the land itself, and to the stories that have shaped the relations in particular places.

Over the last several years, I have participated in a number of learning experiences that have forced me to listen deeply to new perspectives. I have sat with members of Grassy Narrows First Nation as they described the pain of witnessing the abuse of their land and its toll on their people. I have eaten meals with my host family in Guatemala and heard them describe the pain of losing their son in an accident while he was a migrant worker in the United States. I have engaged in conversation with women and men living on the streets of so many cities. I have repeatedly found myself on the listening end of dialogues with people pushed to the margins of society. These moments felt so divine, and my only role was to listen. My instinct wanted me to provide solutions. But I could only offer presence and words of grace and peace after engaging in long bouts of listening; my role was to listen first and then to speak.

As I move from a season of mobility and travel into a season of rootedness in a particular place, I want to continue to root my presence with others in a state of listening before speaking, gathering before teaching, solidarity before advocacy. Bevans and Ross have provided a rich text to help those of us with similar aspirations to work through our responses to injustice and our desire to engage in mission in a pluralistic and fractured world.

I am left with questions of course: How do we ensure our listening does not come with preconditions? Is dialogue ever not a power struggle between competing parties? At what point(s) do we speak out, and what is the role of the prophetic word in dialogue? Is evangelism our ultimate goal in beginning any dialogue with someone from another faith? I am not sure *Mission on the Road to Emmaus* answers these

questions, but if anything, it opens the door toward a less patronizing and colonizing approach to mission. For too long missionaries have wielded a power that has hurt and maimed God's creation and those who dwell within it. Perhaps prophetic dialogue as an approach to mission could yield the beauty of reconciliation and the wonder of peacemaking in a world desperate for both. Perhaps prophetic dialogue is a dance we ought to get caught up into, and listening is just the first step.

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Ched Myers, ed., *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2016. 223 pp. \$30.00. ISBN: 9781498280761.

The Huu-ay-aht First Nation live on the west coast of Vancouver Island, ninety kilometers down a rough gravel road from Port Alberni, British Columbia. The community operates a campground on the coast of the Pacific Ocean at the mouth of the Pachena River. I read *Watershed Discipleship* while my family and I were guests of the Huu-ay-aht for four nights this past August, on the land that has been the Huu-ay-hat home for thousands of years. Being in a place like that, surrounded by a mature temperate rain forest and a deep, soft, sandy beach—the ancient home of people who have lived there in balance with the land for countless generations—it was easy to think about the terms and conditions of human life. The relationship I have with the planet—its biological possibilities, its physical constraints—was made plain there. The place is rich and vast, but my footprint was more visible, my waste more obscene.

There is nothing among the Huu-ay-aht that makes the patterns of destructive consumption in Western civilization seem natural or reasonable. Being there, I saw again the immensity and fecundity of the planet, and I was both encouraged and overwhelmed. But my memory was good, and I could still remember the place where I had come from, the suburban town where I live, and I recalled with crystal clarity how life there feels nothing like this damp and foggy forest springing up out of the sand on the edge of the world. Where I live, it is entirely reasonable to never consider the non-negotiable biological limits of the planet. It is entirely reasonable (to most people) to live there and not know anything about where you live.

Are we, the inhabitants of this planet, in a watershed moment? Or has the moment passed? Have we passed the point of no return, consuming our way past what is sustainable? Ched Myers describes the “resisting and renewing” movement of

Watershed Discipleship as having three convictions: (1) that we are in a watershed moment of crisis that demands everything we do as Christians be both environmentally and socially just; (2) that the locus of our lives as followers of Jesus always takes place (whether we realize it or not) in the context of a specific watershed; and (3) that we must be disciples of our watersheds. For the sake of hope, I will choose to believe that we are still in a watershed moment and that there is a future of rich natural abundance still available to us on this planet, even though it does not always feel that way.

The contributors to *Watershed Discipleship* are also optimistic, or at least they inspire optimism in me. I am always inspired by people, such as the ones in this book, who do hidden and hard work that runs against the grain of mainstream capitalist culture. If I had not heard these stories, I don't think I would know that an alternative way of living is possible. But reading Katerina Friesen or Reyna Ortega or Matthew Humphrey, I believe it just might be possible for me to live differently too.

What do we do if the truth is not encouraging? Do we ignore it? Or—if the arc of the universe is, as Martin Luther King would oft say, fundamentally bent toward justice—does it mean that discouraging truth isn't the whole truth?

I would be remiss if I didn't specifically mention Sasha Adkins's chapter "Plastics as a Spiritual Crisis." I did not find her chapter encouraging, yet it is certainly the truth. The truth is that we have chosen to live lives that poison our planet. Plastics, to briefly summarize Adkins's work, are not amenable to life on this planet. They have no place in the natural order, and their poisonous presence grows with every year. Reading Adkins on plastics drives me to contemplate the larger and equally depressing "power" that nurtures the life of plastics—the extractive and isolationist mechanisms of global capitalism. Like plastics, capitalism is not amenable to life on this planet. It is hard to imagine what a new world would look like without plastics, but that's what's required of us.

Reading *Watershed Discipleship*, I felt like I had found something that satisfied a need I previously had been unable to articulate. I've read Wendell Berry. I've felt a hunger to know my place and to have a place that I am committed to. I've thought a lot about how being a follower of Jesus means living as part of creation, enjoying abundance and appreciating boundaries. But I had not yet considered that I should "recenter [my] citizen identity in the *topography of creation* rather than in the *political geography of dominant cultural ideation*" (15). Myers and company have convinced me that to live a life of justice and peace means I must live a life that is in right relation with the land. And to do that, I must learn the legacy of Indigenous communities (18) like the Huu-ay-aht First Nation that have so much to teach those of us who hope for a future for our children when this watershed moment has passed.

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Winona LaDuke, *The Winona LaDuke Chronicles: Stories from the Front Lines in the Battle for Environmental Justice*, Fernwood, Winnipeg, MB, 2017. 310 pp. \$25.00. ISBN: 9781552669594.

Whenever I visit my Opa in Germany, I quickly find myself in the living room listening to him tell stories of his past. These include his experiences as a child, enlisting in the German army, fighting in the Second World War and being taken captive, and the long road of recovery after returning home. Although I have heard my Opa's stories many times, I am always amazed because I can never quite imagine what it must have been like to be him and to do what he did. I feel a similar sentiment after reading *The Winona LaDuke Chronicles*.

In this book of short vignettes, Winona LaDuke—prominent Indigenous land defender and two-time Green party vice presidential candidate—recounts many personal experiences, histories, traditions, and teachings of her Anishinaabe people as well as many other Indigenous nations around the world, weaving before us pictures of colonization, land loss, militarization, agricultural degradation, and most significantly, ecological crisis. Her stories span the United States—from North Dakota to Hawaii—to countries like Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand.

LaDuke has witnessed a lot of injustice in her time. She recounts lands being taken from Indigenous peoples by Settlers in the United States and Canada. She speaks of genocide and systematic racism that sees Indigenous communities underfunded and overrepresented in the justice system. She also writes about the many ways Indigenous communities have been coerced and forced to give up their rights and resources for government and private corporations.

But that's not the end of the story. At the core of LaDuke's chronicles is a fundamental disconnect in relationship that has boiled over into a war. There are lives at stake and sides to be taken. As we continue to strip the earth of its resources for our consumer lifestyles, we are seeing the devastating effects on our environment and the change in climate. We soon realize that all of humanity has a lot to lose in this battle.

For over forty years, LaDuke has been on the front lines of environmental justice education and advocacy. Her stories are not meant to be taken as allegory or myth. They are meant as a warning and a battle cry, rallying those who seek to protect creation and human rights from the powers of greed and oppression. And if we are to open our eyes to see, we need to change our paradigm. Through LaDuke's stories, we are invited to see the world and life in a new way. Yes, there are some

Indigenous communities who are benefiting from fossil fuel extraction, but a traditional view sees the invaluable interconnectedness between all life—human, plant, earth, water, and so on. It is our duty as humans to care for and protect the earth. And that is what LaDuke calls herself and all those on her side of the battlefield—protectors.

As with my Opa, when I listen to LaDuke's voice, I feel an overwhelming appreciation and respect for what she has experienced. I also feel as though there's no way for me to imagine what she has been through and the kinds of action she has taken. But the big difference between my Opa's war and the battle for environmental justice we see today is that LaDuke's stories are my own. They are happening right now in my backyard. The proposed Energy East pipeline carrying bitumen will run alongside Winnipeg's aqueduct. Other major pipeline expansions run just south of me through Gretna, Manitoba. The lights in my sanctuary are powered by massive Manitoba hydro-dams that, unbeknownst to most, wreak tremendous damage on northern Indigenous communities and ecosystems.

LaDuke leaves little room for the imagination to try to visualize who the enemy might be. At the height of command are big oil companies who frack the earth, run the Alberta tar sands, and insist on building pipelines like Keystone XL without the "free, prior, and informed consent" of most on the ground communities. Their accomplices are Settler governments who seem to be more interested in accumulating wealth and power than preserving the basic human rights of Indigenous nations and Settler land owners. She does not hesitate to name names.

The difficulty with this book is that it forces you to take a side, to choose whether you are going to join in protecting the earth and human rights or sit back and do nothing, perhaps with immediate benefit but eventual long-lasting consequences.

I believe this is the point where many of my Christian sisters and brothers will decide whether to give this book to a thrift shop or keep it on their desk. A lot of questions are raised before a church that is confessionally committed to the well-being of creation: What are our missional commitments? Are we not, as prescribed for us in our creation stories, called to care for the earth? Are we not, as commanded by Jesus, called to care for the poor and disenfranchised? Are we not, as shown to us in the story of the church, called to stand up against evil even at great cost?

If we respond affirmatively to these questions, to what extent do we act? Should we rally and protest? Should we send postcards and letters to our elected officials, urging them to protect Indigenous rights? Are we supposed to divest from fossil fuels? And if that doesn't work, are we supposed to stand in the way of trucks and pipelines? Are we to take up the tool of sabotage? Are we supposed to fight?

LaDuke provides the fan for the flame. What we do with that flame is up to us. The possibilities, as seen in her stories, are endless. But LaDuke doesn't provide us with specific guidance. Moreover, one stumbling block that readers may find is that while LaDuke uses many statistics and quotes and offers indictments over-against corporations and officials, she doesn't provide citations, leaving it to the reader to verify her claims. For those of us Settlers who are already unsure of which voices to believe, we need confidence that LaDuke's information is accurate.

Anabaptists have a lot of work to do to figure out exactly where we fit in this critical time of climate change and Indigenous human rights violations. LaDuke sets before us the depth of the problem and offers glimmers of hope. We are invited to partner and to give our voice. We are invited to stand up against an evil identified in our own society and culture. The *Winona LaDuke Chronicles* have the potential to stir a righteous anger that convicts us to act. So may we move forward in the love of Christ, trusting the Holy Spirit to show us the way.

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Iain Maclean, ed., *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, Routledge, NY, 2016. 296 pp. \$54.95. ISBN: 9781138264717.

Without justice there is no reconciliation. This refrain echoed a half dozen times throughout Indigenous activist Leah Gazan's keynote address on the final night of a conference titled "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls Churches to Action: Building Capacity for Restorative Solidarity." One hundred Indigenous and white Settler leaders listened in and nodded intently at this sacred Saskatoon gathering, convened in the aftermath of the bold Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a seven-year process documenting the testimony of approximately one hundred fifty thousand Indigenous people who were taken away from their families and placed in residential schools as children.

The TRC, based on their findings and informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007),² issued ninety-four calls to action, six of them specifically geared toward churches and faith communities. Gazan's plenary proclamation concisely summarized the questions, comments, and concerns stoked by Indigenous leaders on that pre-Indigenous Peoples Day weekend in 2016, particularly by the seven residential school survivors in attendance who served as elders, guiding participants with both historical memory and spiritual anticipation.

2 http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

It was in the wake of this soul-stirring conference that I soaked up *Reconciliation, Nations, and Churches in Latin America* (2016), a compilation of ten essays from scholars homing in on the role of churches in reconciliation processes; Christian theological understandings of reconciliation; and visions and paths toward future reconciliation. These contributions build on lessons from the more than twenty-five commissions experimenting with truth and/or reconciliation processes in the Global South over the past twenty years, mostly in Latin America. This reading was the perfect pairing with my attendance at the Saskatoon gathering. It scripted me to a more confessional, humble space, enabling me to realize finally just how out-of-the-loop I've been about the bold Indigenous-Settler collaborations conducted to the north and south of my United States context.

If any place on the globe needs a national TRC, of course, it would be the United States of America. We white liberal Christian “Americans” possess a dangerous combination of hubris and cluelessness, still hung over from the self-congratulatory celebration of our first black President and now slumped over in a self-righteous stupor, woozy from an electorate who opened the doors of the White House to a race-baiting, misogynist, reality-TV-star billionaire. Amazing how quickly we shifted the blame to our favorite scapegoats: the rednecks and the Russians! The truth of the matter is that we are neither post-racial nor postcolonial. We’ve built a wall of denial so high and wide that we are blocked from the horizons of a real way forward. *Without justice there is no reconciliation.*

In his essay on a Latin American theology of reconciliation, José Comblin, a Belgian priest and professor of theology in Brazil, proposes that “reconciliation . . . presumes a total inversion of the whole civilizational and cultural process” (169). The TRC process is about fact-finding, but more importantly it calls for a spiritual awakening. It ushers in a conversion of the national imagination, what University of California, Berkeley professor Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls “incessant processes of decolonization” (240). Margaret Guider, Professor of Religion and Theology at Western Jesuit School of Theology, calls it simply a commitment to both truth-telling and “never again” (123–27).

Maldonado-Torres, in his concluding chapter titled “Reconciliation as a Contested Future: Decolonization as Project or Beyond the Paradigm of War,” summarizes the entirety of this decade-old re-publication edited by James Madison University’s Iain Maclean: “The chapters in this volume all suggest in one way or another that the work of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and related mechanisms for promoting reconciliation could be seen as part of this struggle against racist, sexist, and colonial hegemony” (241).

Dr. Elaine Enns, my colleague at Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, posits that the goal of healing the trauma wrought by colonization is what she calls “restorative solidarity,” a combination of inner work, critical historical awareness, and empathy

that results in a deep understanding of “how our story is connected to theirs, such that our mutual healing and wholeness is, in fact, intertwined.”³ This is precisely what, according to Enns, psychotherapist Miriam Greenspan calls “intervulnerability,” the road to real salvation: “awareness of the mutuality of suffering impels us to search for ways to heal the whole, rather than encase ourselves in a bubble of denial and impossible individualism.”⁴

Meanwhile, we find ourselves stuck in the bubble, not heeding what Martin Luther King warned my parents’ generation was the most “dangerous development in our nation”: “the constant building up of predominantly negro [sic] central cities ringed by white suburbs.”⁵ This viciously overlooked form of segregation has led to vast swaths of white Americans being “more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.”⁶ The comforting white noise of suburban silos makes it virtually impossible to hear the painful testimony emanating from the reservation, the ghetto, and the barrio.

This white noise is precisely what Notre Dame professor Margaret Pfeil, in her chapter on the Peruvian TRC process, diagnoses as “a collective guilt of omission.” Pfeil describes Peru’s recent history as affected by a false consciousness in which “structures leading to death on a massive scale were not identified, making it harder for individuals to take conscientious action” (181). We USAmericans are also guilty of distracting ourselves from how these deathly powers dominate our political and personal lives.

Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America is a helpful resource of history, social analysis, and theology for all those taking seriously the role of TRCs in our challenging pursuit of restorative justice in the North American context. The book’s weakness is that it is not accessible to everyday people of faith and conscience attempting to organize in our communities. This compilation, from authors with both expertise and experience on the ground, is substantive and timely, but it risks being left to languish in the academy, limited by its length and language. Our hope is that serious readers of this project will be inspired to translate for the rest of us.

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3 Elaine Enns, “Facing History with Courage,” *Canadian Mennonite* 19, no. 5 (February 2015): 4–9.

4 Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic, 2015), 74.

5 Martin Luther King, “Two Americas,” Speech at Gross Pointe, Michigan, March 14, 1968.

6 Ibid.

Benjamin W. Goossen, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2017. 288 pp. \$49.50. ISBN 9780691174280.

Benjamin Goossen's *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and German Nationalism* outlines the intricate and entangled realities of identity, race, and politics in the context of European Mennonites—both those who remained in Europe and those who migrated to Russia and the Americas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central to Goossen's thesis is the inherent instability, or, more positively, pliability of identity and how identity gets shaped by the sociopolitical forces of a given time and place. While Mennonites emerged with a sharp antagonism to the dominant expressions of both church and state during the European reformations, their later heirs and leaders positioned Mennonite identity in relation to German national identity. By the nineteenth century, this included leveraging German nationalism as an attempt at ecclesial unity (31), articulating Mennonite history resembling German national hymns (61). This was not always a linear development with divisions and conflicts between rural and urban congregations in Germany or between German and diasporic congregations abroad. In Russia, Mennonites claimed Dutch ancestry to avoid Russian suspicion of Germans, while later making German claims in the face of the Russian Revolution in order to garner the support of the Nazi army. This pliability even leads to a notion of "Mennonite nationalism," allowing Mennonites to remain disconnected with *anything* undesirable when gaining passage out of Europe to the Americas.

In Canada, Goossen's work has already received negative reviews on the grounds of historical inaccuracies⁷ and confessional failings.⁸ How is one to evaluate these claims in relation to the field of Mennonite and Anabaptist mission? An interesting subtext to this book is how the migrant nature of Mennonite history relates to those populations Mennonites encounter. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Mennonite migrants were regularly characterized by their ability to turn their environment toward their own interests, interests that were often shown to align with German ideals or values. As Mennonites established themselves in Russia and the Americas, Wilhelm Mannhardt—a prominent academic and the first Mennonite in Germany to receive a doctoral degree—published extensively on the alignment of Mennonite colonies with German ideals. He praised them for the agricultural acumen and the purity with which they kept themselves in foreign

7 Peter Letkemann, *Mennonite Historian* 43, no. 3 (2017): 11–12.

8 Barb Draper, *Canadian Mennonite*, Aug 15, 2017, <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/stories/review-mennonite-nazi-connection-unconvincing>, accessed September 28, 2017. I was not sure how to describe Draper's criticism. I called it "confessional" because it seemed she found Goossen's argument incompatible with her overall *sense* of who Mennonites are and have been.

lands (38–41). The promotion of these ideals continued in other forms, which were later contrasted to “barbaric” or “primitive” practices of locals in Russia (101–2) or Paraguay (117). Later, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization utilized notions of racial purity to advocate for Russian Mennonites as valuable immigrants since they had refrained from miscegenation (116). The most extreme form of these notions is seen in the work of Fritz Kliewer—a Mennonite educator in Paraguay—who stated that while missionaries could readily spread *Christianity*, the idea “that an Indian could become a Mennonite is a thing of impossibility” (142). One Nazi ethnographer considered Mennonites “at the pinnacle of all German settlers in Russia. . . . Wherever they settle, the Mennonites are the unquestioned leaders of the Germans” (152). While notions of in-group purity and superiority are not unique to Mennonites, Goossen teases out Mennonite forms of this trait.

For every claim and example Goossen makes about Mennonite identity there are counterclaims and examples. Yes, have the conversation about historical accuracies. And, yes, have the conversation about the diversity of anecdotal experiences and accounts. But do not neglect to have the conversations about a tendency among Mennonites of European descent in the past two centuries to accept, nurture, and benefit from forms of nationalism and self-understanding that have led to the disregard, abuse, and even outright violence toward communities they have come into contact with. These conversations are important not only for uncomfortable reflections on Nazi alignment but also in more “positive” expressions, with Mennonites believing they know best about peace, advocating for “third-way” positions that fail to side with the vulnerable, or simply taking pride in “simple” and humble lifestyles. Rather than defending against inaccuracies and limitations, resources available to search out and expose tendencies toward privileging and valuing one people group over another should be readily (even if critically) embraced. Goossen’s work offers one such resource. Inasmuch as Mennonites have offered a glass of water in Christ’s name, Mennonites have also played a part in the worst of human judgments. The integrity of a future Mennonite witness may depend on the church’s ability to account for both.

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Call for Submissions

Anabaptist Witness 5.1

What shape will mission partnerships between churches of the global North and churches of the global South take in the future?

The demographic center of global Christianity has shifted to the global South, where churches are experiencing rapid growth and are animated by a passionate commitment to sharing the gospel in word and deed with their neighbors near and far. The rise of global Christianity is challenging our understandings of mission as unidirectional (as from North America and Europe to the rest of the world) and as requiring Western finances and status to be successful.

New visions of mission have slowly emerged as multidirectional, global partnerships of churches (be they from the North or the South) join the work of God's reconciling Spirit in the world. Yet churches in the global North retain significant power, both in terms of financial resources and access to other resources (networking, education and training, etc.), and such power imbalances can lead to distorted mission partnerships.

The October 2018 issue of *Anabaptist Witness* examines what makes for robust global partnerships through reflection on these and related topics.

Visit the *Anabaptist Witness* website for more information:
<http://www.anabaptistwitness.org/calls-for-submissions>.

Submissions are accepted through May 18, 2018.

Call for Proposals

Eighth Biennial Graduate School Conference:

"Texts, Experiences, Interpretations"

The eighth biennial Graduate Student Conference hosted by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC) invites proposals for scholarly papers that explore texts, experiences, and/or interpretations.

The primary purpose of the conference is to provide a forum for graduate students who work on Anabaptist/Mennonite related topics and/or who identify with Anabaptist/Mennonite traditions to present their ongoing academic research in an interdisciplinary context and engage with each other as colleagues and peers.

To read a full description of the call, visit the TMTC website:
<https://uwaterloo.ca/toronto-mennonite-theological-centre/graduate-student-conference/call-proposals>.

The conference will take place June 14–16, 2018, at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, Toronto, Ontario.

TMTC also expects to make travel bursaries available to qualifying presenters, and details about accommodations will be released closer to the conference date.

