

# Anabaptist Witness

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

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

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- 9 Editorial/ A Timeline of Women in Mission  
*Jamie Ross*

## ARTICLES

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- 17 “A Mission to Themselves”: Changing Views of Mission in  
North American Mennonite Women’s Organizations  
*Anita Hooley Yoder*
- 29 Building Right Relationships  
*Kimberly Penner*
- 47 Response to “Building Right Relationships”  
*Arli Klassen*
- 53 Awake  
*Harold Recinos*
- 55 I Have No Husband:  
A Reflection on the Life of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden  
*Brianna C. Millett*
- 63 “Other Ways in Which We Can Serve”:  
Mennonite Nurses in World War II  
*Ann Graber Hershberger*
- 83 Neither Male nor Female:  
The Story of Wakuru and the Zanaki People  
*David W. Shenk*
- 91 The Tension of Grace  
*Anne Thiessen*

- 97 Jesús, la mujer y el encuentro en un espacio de frontera  
*Alix Lozano*
- 103 Jesus, the Woman, and Their Encounter in a Border Region  
*Alix Lozano*
- 109 Can the Cross Be “Good News” for Women?  
Mennonite Peace Theology and the Suffering of Women  
*Susanne Guenther Loewen*

## REVIEWS

---

- 123 Kristen Welch & Abraham Ruelas, *The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women*  
*Reviewed by Bre Woligroski*
- 124 Frances S. Adeney, *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology*  
*Reviewed by Susanne Guenther Loewen*
- 127 Tim Otto, *Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships*  
*Reviewed by Joanna Harader*
- 130 Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*  
*Reviewed by Kelly Bernardin-Dvorak*
- 132 Peter M. Sensenig, *Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia*  
*Reviewed by Jonathan Bornman*
- 134 Roberta R. King and Sooi Ling Tan, eds., *(un)Common Sounds: Songs of Peace and Reconciliation among Muslims and Christians*  
*Reviewed by Matthew Knight*
- 137 Samuel J. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*  
*Reviewed by Maxwell Kennel*
- 138 Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*  
*Reviewed by John F. Lapp*

**142** Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*

*Reviewed by David W. Boshart*

**145** Rosalind I. J. Hackett, ed., *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets, and Culture Wars*

*Reviewed by Jodi Spargur*

**147** Qwo-Li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*

*Reviewed by David Driedger*



# Editorial

*“Gender matters everywhere in the world. And I would like today to ask that we begin to dream about and plan for a different world.”*

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,  
Nigerian novelist and nonfiction writer

*“Mission work empowers....We must change gender relations to empower missions.”*

—Dorothy Oluwagbimi

One of my earliest memories from my childhood congregation in the rural Midwest of the United States is of the controversy that came about when a female member taught an adult Bible study. It was the controversy linked to this event that caused me to realize that my gender set me apart and that the church would at times limit the ways in which I could serve. Eventually, because I felt called to a life of ministry and had natural tendencies to manage and lead, I left Anabaptism, hoping to find a faith community that would not restrict my vocational movement and calling.

It was in my first year of service in Kyrgyzstan that I not only reclaimed my Anabaptist identity but also discovered what so many other women had before me—that serving as a missionary offered an opportunity to lead within the church. Distanced from the North American institutions I was affiliated with, I found space to exercise my gifts.

Through mission engagement, women have long been empowered to empower. From the records of the life of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden—an early Anabaptist who escaped a convent, studied the scriptures, and carefully went from one village to another teaching others the way of Christ—we read how women strategize. In the Old Testament story of Esther, who saved the Jewish people from destruction, we see how women subvert. And the legacy of Walpurga Marschalkin von Pappenheim, who edited one of Pilgram Marpeck’s writings, demonstrates that women organize. As Bre Woligroski shares in the

introductory book review of this issue, “women find a way.”

Understandings of gendered roles in North America in the mid-nineteenth century led to the (maternalistic) belief that women were responsible for reaching other women and their children with the gospel, resulting in what historian Dana Robert identifies as the first-gender-linked mission theory.<sup>1</sup> The motto “woman’s work for woman” shaped North American Protestant understandings of mission for more than forty years. By the time of the landmark 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, where few of the thousands of delegates were women, Protestant women in America were already celebrating fifty years of the Golden Jubilee tour of the American women’s ecumenical missionary moment. By 1916, when twenty-four thousand North Americans were engaged in mission, 62 percent were female.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that Anita Hooley Yoder begins this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*. In “A Mission to Themselves: Changing Views of Mission in North American Mennonite Women’s Organizations,” she documents major shifts in Mennonite understandings of mission in the mid-twentieth century. As North American congregations began to transition away from international efforts toward an emphasis on ministering to the communities in which they lived, women’s organizations also shifted their focus. During this transition, women in North America began to emphasize self-care and personal faith development within their own circles rather than abroad.

Kimberly Penner contends in the second article that female international missionaries had more opportunities to serve in leadership than their sisters back home—as I also experienced in my years of international service. Despite women’s increased freedom, however, women’s organizational efforts were still subordinate to male-dominated church structures. As Dana Robert notes in *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*, men have traditionally been the gatekeepers of church institutions and mission theories (and men continue to dramatically outnumber female missiologists today).<sup>3</sup> Typically, women have engaged mission at personal and ethical levels; consequently, church planting efforts were mostly led by men. In those rare occasions when women did plant a church, leadership was quickly turned over to their male counterparts. Penner suggests that this tendency continues to shape church planting leadership today and might explain the dearth of female

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1 Dana L. Robert, ed., *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 7.

2 Ibid., 5.

3 Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press), 409–10.

church planters in Mennonite circles.

The central argument of Penner's paper, however, is that power is unleashed when mission structures and leaders listen for and to the voices of the marginalized. This act of listening allows for the opportunity to build relationships of shared power and mutuality. Arli Klassen responds, affirming Penner's primary argument but then pushes the conversation forward by naming the complexity of oppressive systems. People on the margins in one context often have power in other contexts. "There is no clear divide between 'from the margins' and 'to the margins.' "

As a white woman, I have recently felt this tension between marginalization and power. Power is complicated. While white heterosexual women in the United States have believed that all of our gender were bound together in sisterhood, some of us have recently discovered what our marginalized sisters have known all along: we continue to fail each other. We have allowed our fear of difference to outweigh the strength we have when united. And this is also true of the church. We continue to fail each other. We fail when we do not seek out the voice of the marginalized. We fail when we do not recognize the other as created in God's image. We fail when we hold on to our own power at another's expense. We have failed and continue to fail our sisters, brothers, and transgender and intersex siblings.

I had hoped that this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* would, in part, allow for a relevant and much-needed conversation about how to minister to and with transgender and intersex individuals in the global church. But, while this concern surfaces briefly through many of these papers, we have not yet made the conversation front and center. We have highlighted stories of one gender, bringing forward a powerful voice, but have not looked for or listened to other voices well enough.

In this issue, you will find stories of courageous individuals determined to share the gospel. Their legacies and the challenges they put forth provide us with much to draw on as we consider gender in our changing contexts and what it means to bear the good news.

Jamie Ross, Co-Editor



# A Timeline of Women in Mission throughout the Centuries<sup>1</sup>



## 5th Century BCE

Esther; Persian Empire

Esther goes from exile to royalty in the Persian Empire and saves the Jewish people from destruction. She teaches us that God is still present amid suffering and violence.



## 1st Century CE

Priscilla;  
Rome, Corinth, Ephesus

Priscilla, together with her husband, Aquila, traveled with the apostle Paul as a fellow teacher, missionary, and friend. She instructed Appollos, a first-century evangelist.

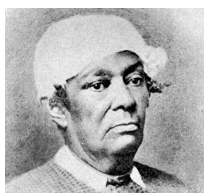


## 6th Century CE

Euphemia;  
Mesopotamia

Euphemia ministered to the poor and modeled simple living. Her commitment and zeal led others to give generously to those in need.

<sup>1</sup> This timeline was adapted with permission. Jamie Ross, “Women in Mission” (timeline), *Extending Beyond*, Mennonite Mission Network, September 2016, 2–3.



**1798–1865** ○

**Betsey Stockton;  
United States**

Betsey was born into slavery but was freed when baptized. Known for her work among indigenous Hawaiians and Native Americans, she is considered the first single female missionary of modern mission.



**1873–1931** ○

**Dora Yu;  
China, Korea**

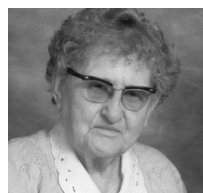
Dora is considered the foremost Chinese evangelist in the early 20th century. The beginnings of the Chinese house church movement can be traced to her revival ministry.



○ **1789–1826**

**Ann Hesseltine Judson;  
United States,  
India**

One of the first female American foreign missionaries, Ann taught Bible study classes and wrote a catechism in Burmese. Ann was the first Protestant to translate any of the Scriptures into Siamese.



○ **1912–2008**

**Erna Fast;  
United States, Germany**

Erna helped provide German students and the elderly with food, books, and clothing, eventually establishing an exchange program between colleges in the United States and Germany.



**1934–**

**Nellie Maduma Mlotshwa;**  
**Zimbabwe**

Nellie was a pioneer pastor, theologian, and peace-builder in the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) of Zimbabwe.



**1952–**

**Sandra Campos Cruz;**  
**Costa Rica**

Sandra coordinates the Costa Rican Bible Institute, serves as a pastor, and is on the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee.



**1958–**

**Rebecca Osiro;**  
**Kenya**

Rebecca is the first woman ordained to ministry in the Kenya Mennonite Church.

She is the Mennonite World Conference vice president, and a leader with African Anabaptist Women Theologians.



**And the timeline continues...**

The women listed here are only a handful of the women who touched lives in mission across the street and around the world. Their spark, stamina, and gifts continue to inspire hundreds of women to rise and follow God's call wherever that may lead.



# “A Mission to Themselves”

## Changing Views of Mission in North American Mennonite Women’s Organizations<sup>1</sup>

ANITA HOOLEY YODER<sup>2</sup>

Mennonite understandings of mission went through a major shift in the mid-twentieth century. As local populations abroad assumed leadership of many mission stations, North American missionaries reconsidered their role in the international missionary endeavor. At the same time, North American Mennonites were sensing a need to better proclaim and embody the saving gospel of Jesus Christ in their own countries and even their own churches. In the context of these trends, Mennonite women’s organizations—which had been strong supporters of international mission since the start of the missionary movement in the nineteenth century—shifted to a more local and even internal sense of mission in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than (only) supporting externally focused mission workers and relief projects, Mennonite women’s organizations articulated goals that revealed a concern for bettering the society and denomination that women were part of themselves. As the women’s organizations drew attention to the need for self-care and personal faith development, they helped redefine the nature of mission in the broader church.

A denomination-wide women’s organization for the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC) began in 1917. Twelve years later, the organization stated that its purpose was “to glorify God and serve the Conference and its missionary representatives (1) in the support of home and foreign missions; (2) in the spread of mission interests; (3) in the promotion of cooperation between mission societies and missions; and (4) in the production and dissem-

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on material from Anita Hooley Yoder’s book, *Circles of Sisterhood: A History of Mission, Service, and Fellowship in Mennonite Women’s Organizations*, forthcoming from Herald Press in summer 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Anita Hooley Yoder is a graduate of Gosben College and Bethany Theological Seminary. She lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and works in campus ministry at Notre Dame College. She’s a fan of good books, good food, and good (and bad) Cleveland sports teams.

ination of missionary literature.”<sup>3</sup> The organization started a magazine called *Missionary News and Notes* and facilitated connections between missionaries (and relief agencies) and the prolific quilters, sewers, and canners in church women’s groups across Canada and the United States.

But something happened when women gathered together to engage in tasks they could have done in their own homes. Women shared concerns and prayed for each other. They voiced their opinions on matters in the church and community. They led devotionals and gave “talks.” Women often attended meetings mainly to help others, whether through raising money for international mission, mending clothing for a local orphanage, or packing food for Civilian Public Service camps. But they also found a source of personal support and spiritual uplift in their gatherings, which in some contexts were held as often as once a week. Women’s groups provided a space for their members to exercise not only skills like sewing and food preparation but also public speaking, managing finances, and chairing committees. In an analysis of Mennonite women’s societies in Canada, Gloria Neufeld Redekop characterizes the societies as “parallel churches,” where participants could “support each other, grow spiritually, and live out their Christian faith.”<sup>4</sup> Women came to the groups not only to support missionaries but also to minister to each other and receive encouragement themselves.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the GCMC women’s organization, then called Women in Mission, had begun to embrace and articulate a more member-focused approach. A *Women in Mission* brochure from 1980 stated that the organization’s purpose was to help its members “become effectively involved in the total mission of the church.”<sup>5</sup> The brochure’s eight “goals for the ’80s” included assisting women in developing their gifts, strengthening relationships with women internationally, relating to the hurting and lonely, and improving television, along with continuing to support denominational and regional ministries.<sup>6</sup> “They were, in effect, calling for a mission to themselves,” wrote Gladys

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3 Edith C. Loewen, “Women in Mission (General Conference Mennonite Church),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Women\\_in\\_Mission\\_General\\_Conference\\_Mennonite\\_Church&oldid=78870](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Women_in_Mission_General_Conference_Mennonite_Church&oldid=78870).

4 Gloria Neufeld Redekop, *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women’s Societies in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 99.

5 Information in this paragraph is from *Women in Mission* brochure, ca. 1980. Box 1, Folder 3. Women in Mission, Promotional items/printed matter 1980s–early 1990s. MLA.VII.N.3. Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, KS.

6 Ibid.

Goering in her description of this time period in the organization.<sup>7</sup> During an era of increased attention to women's roles in church and society, the women's group recognized both the resources and the needs of its own members. Mission and service were no longer things to be done only in faraway places but were activities for women to engage in themselves in their communities and within their own groups.

Over the years, the women's organization of the "Old" Mennonite Church (MC) also shifted the way it articulated its mission—and its connection to international mission. A denominational network of local women's groups was first organized through the efforts of Clara Eby Steiner around 1915. In the mid-1920s, the fledgling women's organization was subsumed under the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities.<sup>8</sup> During this time, the organization essentially became a sewing circle committee, with primary responsibility for providing handmade materials for missionaries and mission stations. In 1955, the organization took on a broader focus and new name: Women's Missionary and Service Auxiliary (WMSA). Minnie Graber, board president of the organization, explained: "This new strain of interest involved the total life of women. They met in fellowship groups, missionary meetings, sunshine circles, in prayer groups, homemakers groups, home builders—and many other types of groups."<sup>9</sup> While some of these congregational women's groups were primarily focused on missionary support, others gave more attention to their own members as they sought to raise godly families and strengthen their own faith.

When the MC denomination reorganized in 1971, the women's organization connected not with the Board of Missions but with the newly formed Board of Congregational Ministries. Now called the Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC), the organization listed ten goals in its 1975 handbook, none of which included the words "mission," "missionary," or "service." The goals did mention encouraging Bible study, helping women and girls find faith and utilize their gifts, developing leadership potential, strengthening the quality of family life, and "responding as Christ's representatives to

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<sup>7</sup> Information in this paragraph is from Gladys Goering, *Women in Search of Mission: A History of the General Conference Women's Organization* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1980), 99.

<sup>8</sup> This arrangement was not the idea of the women's organization's leaders. See Melvin Gingerich, "The Mennonite Woman's Missionary Society: Part II," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 37.3 (1963): 214–33; Sharon Klingelsmith, "Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900–1930," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54.3 (1980): 163–207.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1983), 207.

needs in the community and world.”<sup>10</sup> Many local groups continued to maintain close connections with missionaries and engage in material work for Mennonite Central Committee projects and relief sales. However, like the GCMC group, the goals of the MC women’s organization showed a shift from (only) supporting missionaries and mission projects to seeing their members as doing God’s work themselves—and receiving spiritual benefits themselves. Barbara Reber (director of WMSC) expressed this greater attention to personal needs during her report to the 1979 MC delegate assembly. “It is as important to drink from the well as it is to give a cup of cold water in His name,” she said.<sup>11</sup>

For generations, Mennonite women’s groups had chosen verses like Galatians 6:9 for their theme: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (NIV).<sup>12</sup> The admonition to serve others and tangibly live out one’s faith had always been strong in Mennonite contexts. But as activities like silent retreats and small group Bible studies became popular in the 1970s, Mennonite women also started referring to other sorts of biblical passages. A late-1970s WMSC devotional guide cited verses like Ephesians 3:4: “If you will read what I have written, you can learn about my understanding of the secret of Christ” (GNT); and Philemon 1:6: “My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in our life in union with Christ” (GNT). The guide promoted intrapersonal and interpersonal development through prayerful journaling and spiritual friendships. Perhaps the most appropriate biblical passage for late-twentieth-century women’s groups was the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), where Jesus commends Mary’s attentive listening over Martha’s busy preparations. In the midst of increased interest in spirituality and faith sharing in the broader Mennonite church during the 1970s,<sup>13</sup> women’s groups often led the way, drawing on their existing structure to create spaces for women to attend to their spiritual lives

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>11</sup> “WMSC Report to Assembly,” August 16, 1979. Box 3, Folder 17. Women’s Missionary and Service Commission Executive Committee Records, 1917–1997. IV-20-001. Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN.

<sup>12</sup> According to Redekop’s 1988 survey, this was the most frequently cited verse by women’s groups connected to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (*Work of Their Hands*, 112).

<sup>13</sup> In *Seeking Places of Peace: A Global Mennonite History—North America* (Intercourse, PA: Good, 2012), Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt write that many Mennonites were part of the small group movement that “swept the North American evangelical world” in the 1970s (265).

as well as the physical needs of others.

A shift in the goals of women's organizations and understandings of mission in general was happening not only in Mennonite contexts. In fact, the move from a solely external focus for women's groups probably happened earlier in some denominations. In Joan C. LaFollette's discussion of Presbyterian women's organizations, she writes that by 1943 many groups within the denomination had started to "move away from being strictly missionary societies to being more inclusive societies, with broader activities of study and service."<sup>14</sup> LaFollette notes that this shift happened "partly in response to the church's broadening definition of mission" as well as in an effort to attract younger women who were not participating in the organizations as their mothers and grandmothers had.<sup>15</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, many Christian groups were starting to recognize some problematic aspects of international mission, while at the same time sensing the need to become more relevant to their own North American constituents.

Questions about the nature of international mission that impacted many Protestant groups also touched Mennonites. For example, in the early 1940s a revival movement spread among Protestant missionaries and local populations in East Africa.<sup>16</sup> Many new believers joined churches, but white missionaries also repented of their superior attitudes. Mennonite missionaries participated in this movement, especially in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), including respected women like Lancaster County natives Phebe Yoder and Catharine Leatherman. "The Lord came to me and showed me that the African brothers and sisters and I were on the same level," reflects Leatherman in *Quiet Shouts*, a book about Lancaster Conference women leaders by Louise Stoltzfus.<sup>17</sup> Stoltzfus reports that during this experience the missionaries "found themselves as changed as the people to whom they ministered."<sup>18</sup> Female missionaries were closely connected to congregational women's groups, and women likely heard about the missionaries' experiences firsthand through correspondence and later

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14 Joan C. LaFollette, "Money and Power: Presbyterian Women's Organizations in the Twentieth Century," in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, eds. Milton J. Coater et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 215.

15 Ibid.

16 For more on this event, see Richard K. MacMaster, *A Gentle Wind of God: The Influence of the East Africa Revival* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2002).

17 Quoted in Louise Stoltzfus, *Quiet Shouts: Stories of Lancaster Mennonite Women Leaders* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1999), 109.

18 Ibid., 67.

speaking engagements. It seems likely that changes in the attitudes of international mission workers would have caused Mennonite women to rethink their own attitudes about the work of their organizations.

Several decades later, questions about the nature of international mission work played out in the pages of Mennonite magazines. The January 4, 1966, *Gospel Herald* (the MC magazine) ran an article titled “Hard Times for Missionary.”<sup>19</sup> The article detailed the challenges of mission work in African countries where white Westerners were viewed with suspicion (understandably, according to the author). Later that year, the paper published a two-part article by R. Pierce Beaver titled “Why Ram Christianity Down Their Throats?”<sup>20</sup> Beaver advocated for respectful dialogue with people of other religions in order to promote more culturally appropriate versions of Christianity in different contexts.

Similar conversations were happening in *The Mennonite* (the GCMC magazine). The theme of 1966’s first issue was “As You Go Speak for Your Faith.” The lead article by Walter Goering called the church to continue spreading its Christian faith but also addressed needs of hunger, peace, “brotherhood” with other Christians, and literacy.<sup>21</sup> The article described a broad view of mission, though one that was still mostly outward focused. However, immediately following Goering’s two-page article in the magazine was a two-page poem titled “Soliloquy of a Pastor’s Wife.” In the poem, Sylvia Jantz questioned the many outward-focused roles she held or was expected to hold.<sup>22</sup> “I must have time to find myself,” she wrote. Jantz described doing something simply for the pleasure it brought and then noted, “This is neither selfish, nor sinful. / For can the re-creation this brings / Be contained for self alone?” In a way, Jantz’s poem can be read as an expression of an alternative view of mission work. Taking care of one’s own self—finding time for personal renewal and enjoyment—is valuable in the life of faith. The value is not solely for the self, for, as Jantz implied, the “re-creation” she experienced would spill out as she ministered to others.

Changing understandings of mission, an increased focus on spirituality, and influences from the women’s liberation movement combined to move Mennonite women’s organizations in new directions in the 1960s, 1970s, and

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19 “Hard Times for Missionary,” *Gospel Herald*, January 4, 1966, 17–18.

20 R. Pierce Beaver, “Why Ram Christianity Down Their Throats?” *Gospel Herald*, June 28, 1966, and July 5, 1966 (566–67 and 588–89).

21 Walter Goering, “The Church Takes to the Road,” *The Mennonite*, January 4, 1966, 2–4.

22 The rest of the paragraph references Sylvia Jantz, “Soliloquy of a Pastor’s Wife,” *The Mennonite*, January 4, 1966, 5–6.

beyond. Petkau writes in her history of Canadian Women in Mission (the women's organization of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada) that local groups may not have noticed the gradual shifts taking place in the organization and the general outlook of its members.<sup>23</sup> But the missionaries the groups supported saw changes when they returned to North America for visits. Petkau records the reflections of one international missionary who joined a North American women's group for a prayer retreat in 1977: "I found a fellowship which was very deep and a spiritual maturity in the participants which is hard to find anywhere. I came away, however, with a question, 'Is it out of date to pray for missions?' This question has not yet been answered....I have concluded that while, in general, the spiritual life of the church has greatly improved, our concerns are immediate concerns: me, my family, my church, my friends, etc."<sup>24</sup>

This (unnamed) missionary both applauds a deeper spirituality and laments a more internal focus in the Mennonite women she observed. On the one hand, it can seem selfish to focus on concerns only within one's own sphere. On the other hand, in drawing attention to their own contexts—by proclaiming "a mission to themselves"—Mennonite women were in some cases uncovering serious concerns that had been ignored for years.

One of those concerns was violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual abuse. In an article about women in Anabaptist traditions in North America, Marlene Epp notes the irony that most peace churches did not include violence against women in their theological work until quite late in the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> It took efforts from grassroots networks of women to convince church leaders of the importance of this issue.<sup>26</sup> While these networks of women were mostly outside of the denominational women's organizations, the turn to more local concerns helped open spaces for these kinds of conversations within the organizations as well. Vel Shearer, editor for the MC women's organization from 1978 to 1987, remembers that in the late 1970s

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23 Esther Petkau, *Canadian Women in Mission: 1895–1952–2002* (Saskatoon, SK: Canadian Women in Mission, 2002), 176.

24 Ibid., 177.

25 Marlene Epp, "Women of Anabaptist Traditions," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 267.

26 For example, see Rachel Waltner Goossen, "'DeFanging the Beast': Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015): 42–44.

the church was not yet talking about violence against women.<sup>27</sup> Shearer was also working as a counselor for women in her community and had heard many stories of abuse. Figuring it had to be happening in the Mennonite church as well, she devoted an issue of the organization's magazine to domestic violence. She received a letter back from one reader wondering what to do when your husband was abusing you—and he was also your pastor. Shearer realized that the topic was indeed a relevant one, but the denomination had little theological or practical resources to help people in abusive situations. Sara Regier, coordinator of Women in Mission in the late 1980s, remembers that during her time with the organization there was starting to be a stronger awareness of inappropriate sexual behavior in the church.<sup>28</sup> “I think every district I went to, I heard stories,” she said in a 2014 interview.<sup>29</sup> Regier met many women who expressed the feeling that if they said something, nobody would listen.<sup>30</sup> While neither the MC nor the GCMC women's organizations started specific programs to address domestic violence or sexual abuse, the attention they gave these issues in their magazines and program resource guides were small steps toward cultivating greater awareness in the broader church.

Of course, giving attention to personal and societal issues does not preclude an interest in mission, and the magazines for both women's organizations continued to carry reflections from missionaries and relief workers. Still, the role of Mennonite women's organizations continued to shift, down to the local level. In 1988, Redekop conducted a survey of Mennonite women's societies in Canada, receiving responses from 116 groups in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.<sup>31</sup> When respondents were asked to mark their group's top priority, over 60 percent chose “fellowship.” About 20 percent chose “serve the local church” as a first priority, and zero chose “mission” as a top purpose.<sup>32</sup> Redekop finds these results noteworthy compared with the prominent support of mission the groups espoused in their early years, though she also notes that service and

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27 Information in this and the following three sentences is from Vel Shearer, phone interview by author, May 5, 2015.

28 Sara Regier, interview by author, Newton, KS, December 10, 2014, audio recording.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Redekop, *Work of Their Hands*, 5. Redekop also surveyed Mennonite Brethren groups. I have only included information about the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, since those congregations were connected to the GCMC or (to a lesser extent) the MC.

32 Ibid., 117.

mission were selected by the survey respondents as significant second and third priorities.<sup>33</sup>

Lois Deckert, who was involved with Women in Mission at various points throughout the late 1970s to early 1990s, reflected in a 2014 interview on the changing role of the GCMC women's organization.<sup>34</sup> She noted that some of the older missionaries felt abandoned by the women's groups, whose "mission outlook had changed and broadened."<sup>35</sup> Deckert, who grew up as the child of missionaries in India, said that some of her missionary friends saw her as a deserter. "But mission to me was much more than some place overseas," she explained.<sup>36</sup> Marian Hostetler directed the MC women's organization (WMSC) from 1987 to 1996, bringing connections from work in Africa with the mission board and Mennonite Central Committee. Hostetler remembers having significant contact with returned missionaries, who would come to the MC offices in Elkhart and be sent to her for help with material needs like bedding.<sup>37</sup> But WMSC's most prominent role during Hostetler's time continued to be supporting women's retreats, where women in area conferences and congregations gathered to listen to God and share with each other. Under Hostetler's leadership, WMSC also tried to more intentionally connect with Mennonite women from various North American cultural groups. By the early 1990s, the WMSC executive council included representatives for Hispanic, African American, and Native Mennonite women. Hispanic and African American Mennonite women were also having vibrant retreats of their own, which provided space for women to use their leadership gifts, receive encouragement, and minister to each other.

In 1997, the MC and GCMC women's organizations merged in anticipation of the merger of their respective denominations. Reference to mission or missionaries was omitted from the new organization's name in favor of a more general title: "Mennonite Women." Mennonite Women proclaimed that every woman in a Mennonite church was part of their constituency, whether or not they attended a local women's group. Mennonite Women's leaders bolstered the organization's somewhat tenuous identity by engaging in projects of aid and service. They facilitated "Sister-Links" between women in international

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Lois Deckert, interview by author, Newton, KS, December 10, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The rest of the paragraph draws on Marian Hostetler, interview by author, Goshen, IN, October 3, 2014, audio recording.

contexts and women's groups in North America. They built on an existing fund of the GCMC group to provide scholarships for women studying theology in developing countries. They promoted activities that used the material skills of women, such as making quilted wall hangings for homes renovated by Mennonite Disaster Service.

When in 1999 the (Old) Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church merged and reorganized as Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Women also divided into Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada. Under the auspices of Mennonite Women USA, Rhoda Keener organized a series of Sister Care seminars, which were initially promoted with the tagline “equipping women for caring ministry.”<sup>38</sup> As the seminars were further developed by Keener with Carolyn Holderread Heggen and Ruth Lapp Guengerich, they took on more of a self-healing component. “Our own wholeness is what precipitates being an effective caring person,” Keener said in a 2014 interview about Sister Care. “And so we start with ourselves.” Keener noted that this focus has been confusing to some women who come to the seminars expecting mainly to hear practical tips for caregiving situations. Instead, Sister Care’s first unit is titled “Claiming My Identity as God’s Beloved.” Keener remembers a comment from one of the first meetings she had with women leaders after she started as Mennonite Women director in 2001. When she asked what the organization should be doing, Gracie Torres replied, “The most important thing is that women know that they have worth.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, the organization’s mission should start with empowering its own members.

Today’s Sister Care seminars are a prime example of Goering’s “mission to themselves” comment from 1980—in both the “selves” and the “mission” sense. The seminars start with the individual wounds and blessings of women, then give the women tools for extending Christ’s message of comfort and wholeness to others. Sister Care seminars have been presented around the world and have especially gained traction in Latin America, where Latina leaders have replicated the teaching in their own contexts over one hundred times.<sup>40</sup> In a

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38 This paragraph draws on Rhoda Keener, interview by author, Shippensburg, PA, October 16, 2014, audio recording.

39 Quoted in Rhoda Keener, “To Know We Have Worth,” *Timbrel*, May–June 2007, 15.

40 Linda Shelly, Mennonite Mission Network director for Latin America, estimated that as of July 2015 Latina leaders had taught ninety-five Sister Care seminars reaching 2,800 women (quoted in Laurie Oswald Robinson, “Timing is Everything,” *Beyond Ourselves*, November 2015, 7). More seminars have happened since then.

way, Sister Care has brought the Mennonite women's organization full circle, returning it to significant international engagement.

Throughout their existence, Mennonite women's organizations have been a significant part of the church's missionary efforts. While their early work was mostly about direct support of missionaries and international mission stations, the organizations always had at least a partial "mission to themselves," as women found support in each other's company while working together on a project for those outside their group. As understandings of mission have shifted in recent years, Mennonite Women USA's dual focus of inward development and outward service can perhaps be a model for the denomination. The women's organization has understood that people of all places need the life and wholeness Jesus brings, whether they are people of unreached cultures or overexerted church members. Mennonite Women USA's current vision statement invites women "across generations, cultures, and places to share and honor our stories, care for each other, and express our prophetic voice boldly as we seek to follow Christ."<sup>41</sup> Sometimes the cultivation of a prophetic voice and a care for others is an outward-directed urge, charting new places of mission and service around the world. Other times that prophetic voice and caring spirit is directed inward, as women engage in "mission" among their own members and within their own souls.

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<sup>41</sup> "About Us," Mennonite Women USA, <https://mennonitewomenusa.org/about-us/>.



# Building Right Relationships

KIMBERLY PENNER<sup>1</sup>

This paper explores, from a feminist postcolonial perspective, the history of Canadian Mennonite women missionaries as well as mission emphases in the work of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) and Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada) leadership. While I engage Canadian contexts primarily, the conclusions I draw should translate across national differences. These case studies will illustrate the need for a nonviolent theology of mission that is good news for all and that will incorporate an understanding of erotic power.<sup>2</sup> Such a theology, I claim, is rooted in a commitment to naming and dismantling colonial theologies of mission and embodying what the World Council of

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberly Penner is a doctoral student in *Theology and Christian Ethics* at Emmanuel College (United Church), a department of the Toronto School of Theology. Her doctoral research explores the possibility of a life-giving, peace-oriented ethics of embodiment and sexuality for Mennonites. In her writing, she reclaims physicality for peacemaking by valuing the embodied, material experiences of women and other marginalized persons as potential sources of the Holy Spirit's leading.

<sup>2</sup> Feminist theologies and ethics, while diverse, demonstrate a shared commitment to the experiences of the oppressed—particularly women—as a starting point and source of moral insight and theo-ethical discernment. They analyze the function of power in social relations in order to reveal how hierarchical dualism functions to exclude and perpetuate relations of domination and subordination. See, for example, Tracey Ore, *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2000) and Letty Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1987).

The meaning of “postcolonial” in this case requires clarification. In conjunction with Musa Dube in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), I am working with the following understanding of postcolonial as a word “coined to describe the modern history of imperialism, beginning with the process of colonialism, through the struggles for political independence, the attainment of independence, and the contemporary neocolonialist realities....” *“Postcolonial subjects,”* on the other hand, describes both the former colonizers and the formerly colonized” (15). Drawing on Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4, Dube adds that “postcolonial is not about dwelling on crimes of the past and their continuation, but about seeking transformation for liberation” (16). Reading texts through a postcolonial lens means paying attention to interconnected points related to issues of land, race, power, readers, international connection, contemporary history and liberation, and gender.

Churches (WCC) calls “mission from the margins.”<sup>3</sup> A theology that is good news for all will also embody Christian ethicist Beverly Harrison’s articulation of justice as “rightly ordered relationships of mutuality within the total web of our social relations.”<sup>4</sup> Both the WCC and Harrison highlight the potential of the Christian body of oppressed people to imagine and embody what it means to birth the Spirit together in community. Mission work includes, first and foremost, listening for the presence of the Spirit in the experiences of the oppressed, marginalized, and excluded as they struggle for justice.

### A Brief History of Canadian Mennonite Women Missionaries

In the twentieth century, missionary work abroad granted Canadian Mennonite women<sup>5</sup> the opportunity to exercise greater leadership and autonomy than Mennonite women who remained in Canada. In her seminal work, *A History of Mennonite Women in Canada*, Marlene Epp writes that strict gender roles at home, which limited women’s authority and ability to pursue forms of ministry assigned to men (such as preaching), led many women—both single and married—to sign on for mission work overseas. While some women remained in their local congregations to work for greater inclusion in their church’s leadership structures, others “realized they would have to leave home to exercise

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A commitment to peace and an understanding of nonviolence from a feminist perspective seeks the rejection of violence and war. It also seeks equality for women, located in a positive understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God as a gendered being—whichever gender a person identifies with (Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Feminism and Peace,” *The Christian Century* 100, no. 25 (1983): 771–76). Adopting a feminist perspective, I claim that peace and justice are intertwined and that nonviolence includes resistance to injustice. Other proponents of this view include, for example, Glen Harold Stassen, ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1998), John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (New York: Good Books, 2014) and Carol Jean Penner, “Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices: Peace Theology and Violence Against Women” (unpublished PhD dissertation, St. Michael’s College, Toronto, 1999).

3 World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013).

4 Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation: A Feminist Perspective,” in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1985), 253.

5 I use the terms “Canadian” and “Mennonite” as descriptors for women who lived and worshiped in Canada and who identified as Mennonite in some capacity (some as General Conference and some as Mennonite Brethren, for example).

their vocational goals and leadership skills within the church.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, women engaged in mission work abroad were not monitored in the same way as in Canada. “Women could preach and prophesy on the mission field, but only because they were well out of sight, and when male missionaries were fewer in number.”<sup>7</sup> As a result, Canadian Mennonite women contributed greatly to mission work and took opportunities to experiment with gender roles outside of the social and religious norms they were accustomed to. Epp notes that “frequently, it was women’s organizational work and economic activity that undergirded the successful functioning of local churches, larger denominational institutions, and mission boards.”<sup>8</sup> Mennonite women also used their gifts to build long-lasting relationships by remaining in a given community for decades and by addressing the physical and spiritual needs of those they served.<sup>9</sup>

Many missionary women invested significant portions of their lives in a particular community. Helen L. Warkentin, for example, served in India for thirty-six years. She was, however, “involuntarily retired” by representatives from the Mennonite Brethren mission board that oversaw this project.<sup>10</sup> Epp reflects on the positive impact that Warkentin had on the community in which she served. She writes, “Whatever the reasons for her termination, it is clear that Helen’s work in India was nevertheless appreciated by people in that country since, after her departure, a village and orphanage were named after her and a school holiday declared on her birthday.”<sup>11</sup> Away from the watchful eye of the North American church, Helen was able to act with great authority that resulted in long relationships and lasting impact. Sadly, “most church histories have treated [Mennonite women’s missionary] activities as a separate, even incidental, aspect of congregational life.”<sup>12</sup>

While there is much to celebrate about Canadian Mennonite women’s missionary activities, a significant tension exists within this history. Mission work overseas afforded Mennonite women leadership roles, but these roles did little to dismantle the system of patriarchy and colonialism that informed the theology and the hierarchies of their home churches and of Western society.

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6 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 144.

7 Ibid., 178.

8 Ibid., 163.

9 Ibid., 147.

10 Ibid., 151.

11 Ibid., 152.

12 Ibid., 163.

Missionary work saw Mennonite women as traveling to “foreign lands” to convert the un-Christian, dark-skinned “Other.” The work of missionaries was commonly understood to be “expounding the Bible among the ‘heathen.’”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, lands and peoples outside of North America were considered “exotic” and desirable primarily for their ability to be converted to Christianity.<sup>14</sup> A 1958 edition of the *Canadian Mennonite* reveals that something called “colonization evangelism” was promoted as a missionary tactic. This approach encouraged Mennonites to settle in “foreign lands” and evangelize while also working as teachers and nurses.<sup>15</sup> These mentalities, explained in part by the social context of the time, were nonetheless destructive in that they reinforced hierarchies of power over others.

In her efforts to dismantle the colonialism of Christian mission, feminist postcolonial theologian Kwok Pui-lan claims that missionaries were sent abroad in part to Westernize the exotic “Other.”<sup>16</sup> Commitments to Christianization and Westernization further reveal the ways in which Christian mission work reinforced patriarchal practices and theologies. Reflecting on the involvements of single women and missionary wives in the field, who were sent to save the souls of “heathen” women, Kwok states:

These women participated in “colonialist feminism” both discursively and institutionally, by propagating the impression that native women were illiterate, oppressed, and waiting for white women to bring light to them. Judging from the magnitude of women’s participation in mission and the amount of money raised to support such activities, the women’s missionary movement must be regarded as the largest women’s movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As industrialization and urbanization increased the separation of the public and private realms, and women’s roles were curtailed by the cult of female domesticity, the missionary movement provided an outlet for women, especially for the graduates of the newly founded women’s colleges and seminaries.<sup>17</sup>

While Kwok’s research does not focus on Mennonite women missionaries in particular, many of her claims apply to them. Read together, Epp and Kwok reveal that Mennonite women experienced greater freedom in foreign mission work than Mennonite women missionaries at home. The geographical distance

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13 Ibid., 139.

14 Ibid., 146.

15 “Farmer Missionaries,” in *The Canadian Mennonite* 6, no. 2 (January 1958): 2.

16 Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 17.

17 Ibid., 17–18.

between home congregations and the mission field meant that women missionaries abroad had the opportunity to take on leadership roles that they were not granted at home—such as preaching. Mennonite women missionaries also experienced greater freedom and increased authority in their work abroad compared to Mennonite women at home, as a result of the heightened dynamics of race, culture, and class in foreign contexts. As white Western women witnessing to dark-skinned non-Western “others” within a patriarchal and colonial system, they had more social privilege than those they witnessed to and more privilege than these social factors afforded them in missionary work at home.

Other scholars respond critically to the work of women missionaries. In *Women in Mission: From the New Testament to Today*, feminist theologian Susan Smith writes:

Throughout the two thousand years of Christian history, Christian women have participated in the mission of the triune God in a variety of different sociocultural contexts....Almost without exception, male ecclesial leadership in its exercise of authority relied on patriarchal models of governance for the church. Historically, this has meant that in the exercise of their mission, Catholic women [for example] have worked in a way that suited the requirements of a patriarchal church.<sup>18</sup>

Quoting theologian Letty Russell, Smith adds that “the work of women in mission is not the same as a feminist missiology.”<sup>19</sup> Dana Robert in her extensive research on the diverse histories of American women in mission makes similar conclusions. Robert writes, “Despite sharing the overall mission theories and attitudes of men of their own eras, American missionary women across the years exhibited common, gender-based concerns and emphases in their mission theory. First of all, women had in common their subordination to the official, usually male-dominated, structures of the church.”<sup>20</sup> Robert notes that it was the role of male missionaries primarily to be church planters, for example. Furthermore, “Even when women had their own gender-specific mission societies and separate constituencies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their lack of rights in the church itself meant that they operated in an ecclesiastical context that was unpredictable and accepted or rejected them

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18 Susan E. Smith, *Women in Mission: From the New Testament to Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 198.

19 Ibid. Smith takes this quote from Russell’s article “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20 (2004).

20 Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Mason, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 409.

according to its own whims.”<sup>21</sup>

In sum, while women were able to “side step normative gender roles,” they often embodied the established roles of men rather than reimagining the role of a missionary and their theology of mission. Kwok writes, “Caught in the politically charged colonial space defined by race and class, these white women were not natural allies of native women.”<sup>22</sup> Their missionary work depended on relationships of inequality in which white Christian women were above non-white unchristian women.<sup>23</sup> As feminist postcolonial scholar Musa Dube adds: “Women are usually patriarchally oppressed beings, but some women are also imperial oppressors of Other women.”<sup>24</sup> This was a danger and a reality for Mennonite women missionaries. Telling the stories of Canadian Mennonite women missionaries and celebrating their achievements is important. It is also important to underscore the ways in which mission work at the time perpetuated relationships of inequality. Whose voices are missing in this history? Who was excluded by the way the Word was proclaimed?<sup>25</sup> By listening to and for the voices of the oppressed, Christians engage in mission from the margins and unleash the potential to transform oppressive relationships into relationships of shared power and mutuality rooted in the example of Jesus.

I turn now to the substance of current theologies of mission, particularly within MCEC and MC Canada, to discern whether these theologies continue to perpetuate social hierarchies and relationships of power over, or whether they promote equality and mission as mutual relationship building for peace and justice.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Kwok also points out the important fact that during the 1960s second wave, feminism explored relationships of inequality within the church and society in which they lived but “did not pay sufficient attention to how white women had colluded in colonialism and slavery.” Thus, some feminist theologians continued to reproduce colonialist assumptions, for example, by homogenizing non-Western women and viewing Western women as superior. In the case of Mennonite women, however, a relationship with feminism did not develop until late in the twentieth century. Today, it is imperative that feminist Mennonite discourses are also postcolonial as they deal with the ways in which oppressive relationships of one kind relate to oppressive relationships of other kinds.

<sup>24</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 200.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Grey, “From Patriarchy to Beloved Community: Exploring New Models of Ministry for Feminist Theology,” *Feminist Theology* 1, no. 3 (May 1993): 125.

## Current Perspectives on Mission within MCEC and MC Canada

In the spring of 2015, I co-chaired a symposium on mission at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC) in partnership with MCEC titled, “Engaging Women’s Voices on the Church, Theology, and Mission: A Task for the Church and the Academy.” The purpose of the symposium was to offer a platform for a few women in the academy (students from the Toronto School of Theology) and in the church (MCEC) to engage with key leaders at MCEC (Brian Bauman, MCEC Mission Minister, and Henry Paetkau, Area Church Minister) and to offer their perspectives on the topic of the church, theology, and mission.

In promotional material for the event, I listed possible topics of conversation, including MCEC’s focus on discerning what it means to be missional in a post-Christendom context, especially given declining numbers in older Mennonite congregations. In the promotional material for the event, I also shared a reflection from Bauman from a conversation he and I had during a planning meeting for the event, in which he noted that he has not had the opportunity to work with many women because there are not many women overseeing new church plants and church adoption. Why do women make up a distinct minority in new church development in Canada? While Bauman’s experience is specific to new church planting, I noted that the absence of women’s voices in that particular context raises questions more broadly about women’s perspectives on the church, theology, and mission today.

Several key issues were named at the symposium through paper presentations and group discussion periods. A common concern among students was that MCEC’s emphasis on the missional church relies on a gendered notion of mission that reinforces patriarchal assumptions. The clearest emphasis in MCEC’s missional work appeared to be church planting, which is worth reflecting on. In part two of MCEC’s “Moving into the Future” discussion series on “Extending the Peace of Christ,” MCEC Executive Ministers state the need for Mennonite understandings of mission to adapt to social change and post-Christendom. Congregations must be places of nurture, they claim, but also missional through community engagement. The emphasis on church planting is clearly named in this discussion series. In part three, “Unity in Diversity,” the Executive Ministers emphasize the need for ongoing unity on matters that MCEC churches have historically agreed on. These issues are “church planting, passing on our faith to youth, and wanting to be in mission

together.”<sup>26</sup>

A model of mission as church planting incorporates an understanding of mission as one-directional—“to the margins” rather than mission “from the margins.” A one-directional relationship perpetuates inequality. According to historian Dana Robert, the subordination of women missionaries to male-dominated norms and structures led women to focus less on ecclesiology and church planting and more on the “the personal and ethical aspects of mission.”<sup>27</sup> Stated differently, “women’s mission theory focused either on personal witnessing or on working toward the reign of God. Church planting and the subsequent relationship between church and mission was rarely part of women’s public missiological agenda.”<sup>28</sup> Here, Robert names a potential reason why Mennonite women may not be involved in MCEC’s church planting ministries today and why mission understood primarily as church planting ought to include a critical analysis of power, gender, and race, among other topics.

Theologian Susan Smith also considers the correlation between church planting and gender. Smith names church planting as one of five significant definitions of mission. The other four definitions are (1) mission as the work of conversion, so that souls are saved; (2) mission as working toward a more just society as a continuation of the mission of Jesus and living into the reign of God already; (3) mission as interreligious dialogue in order to understand the beliefs and traditions of other religious groups; and (4) mission as inculturating the good news.<sup>29</sup> Smith reflects on the significance of these approaches for women and argues that if mission is understood as church planting, then special attention must be paid to the ways in which church planting might replicate patriarchal structures and relationships of power over.<sup>30</sup> Of the five perspectives of mission, Smith claims that the last three will likely resonate most with women and, in particular, feminist theologians. She writes: “If we understand mission as liberation, as interreligious dialogue at both the formal and informal level, or as inculturation, this points to an understanding of mission that is grounded in an incarnational theology.”<sup>31</sup> These understandings of mission focus on “the coming of the reign of God by striving to be part of

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26 “Moving into the Future: Unity in Diversity,” *Mennonite Church Eastern Canada*, accessed April 29, 2016, <https://mcec.ca/mcec-moving-future>.

27 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 410.

28 Ibid.

29 Smith, *Women in Mission*, xviii.

30 Ibid., xix.

31 Ibid.

those movements and struggles that want to ensure that people can live with dignity and respect” and are good news for all, especially women and others whose bodies and experiences have been excluded and marginalized.<sup>32</sup> Church planting does not contain and embody this focus.

Since the symposium over a year ago, MCEC’s perspective on mission remains unchanged. MCEC’s executive leaders have yet to examine the relationship between gender and mission in their views of mission or to problematize the power relations therein. The social privilege of MCEC’s four executive ministers as white, heterosexual, middle-class men living within a society that privileges these social locations increases their risk of theologizing mission from the center rather than the margins of social accessibility and power. Even so, it does not prevent them from modeling relationships of mutuality and shared power. Each person in the community of faith has the ability to be self-critical and to examine their privilege. This is significant since, as theologian Mary Grey reminds us, “Before we can speak of new models of ministry and mission, we have to talk about who the church is currently—who is excluded from the welcome table.”<sup>33</sup> Who is living on the margins of our existing congregations? How could their voices be granted greater authority in discerning the leading of the Spirit for the life of the church? How could the positions of the executive ministers of MCEC be outlined to include increased self-reflection and power sharing?

MC Canada also faces challenges with regard to its view of mission. The national church body is currently in the midst of a process to discern the future of its structure and mandate. As part of this process, the Future Directions Task Force (FDTF) was created on the recommendation of Area Churches by the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada to discern future directions in regard to two central questions: (1) what is God’s Spirit calling us to in the twenty-first century? and (2) what are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow?<sup>34</sup> The FDTF names God’s mission as reconciling and restoring the world into God’s good purposes. Like MCEC, the FDTF highlights the important role of church planting as a form

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32 Ibid.

33 Grey, “From Patriarchy to Beloved Community,” 120.

34 Mennonite Church Canada, “Future Directions Task Force Report: Overview: God, Mission, and People: A Draft for Conversations and Testing” (Feb. 2, 2015), accessed April 29, 2016, [http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/20278/FDTF\\_-\\_God\\_Mission\\_and\\_a\\_People\\_-\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/20278/FDTF_-_God_Mission_and_a_People_-_Overview.pdf).

of regional church witness.<sup>35</sup> Unlike MCEC, it views mission within a discipleship framework and connects mission to peace building. The FDTF states, in particular, that “suspicion of authority, widespread loneliness, and a weariness of war are elements of the context today to which historic Anabaptist emphases on mutual discernment, community and peace are relevant.”<sup>36</sup> This is an important point to reflect on. In an outward-focused understanding of mission, little attention is paid to how Mennonites are currently practicing mutual discernment, community, and peace themselves. Yet those have been significant areas of concern and brokenness for the Mennonite church, particularly with regard to conversations around sexuality and inclusion. An understanding of mission from the margins conveys the idea that churches themselves are in need of transformation.

Articles from the Canadian Mennonite highlight additional perspectives on mission within MC Canada. Deborah Froese, director of MC Canada’s news service, explores Mennonites’ mixed feelings regarding evangelism. Reflecting on the Mennonite World Conference address by Hippolyto Tshimanga—MC Canada’s Director for Africa, Europe, and Latin American Ministries—Froese highlights Tshimanga’s claim that an uneasiness toward evangelism and church planting in Canada is “likely impacted by Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) exposure of the church’s role in oppression and abuse of Indigenous Peoples” and that “in the aftermath of those TRC revelations, feeling skittish about mission is understandable.”<sup>37</sup> Froese goes on to say that Robert J. Suderman, a former MC Canada general secretary and a past MWC Peace Commission secretary, does not think this uneasiness is warranted. He claims it reflects a “disconnect between what MC Canada is doing and what people in the pews think it is doing.”<sup>38</sup> Despite Suderman’s claims, Froese concludes with the hopeful suggestion that it may be time to understand mission as “sharing—not imposing—the joy, challenge, delight and freedom we find in Christ, and

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35 Mennonite Church Canada, “Future Directions Task Force Report: Final Report Bundle” (Dec. 7, 2015), 1, 25, accessed April 29, 2016 [http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21840/FDTF\\_Final\\_Report\\_Bundle\\_2015-12-07.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21840/FDTF_Final_Report_Bundle_2015-12-07.pdf).

36 Mennonite Church Canada, “Future Directions Task Force Report: Overview,” 2.

37 Deborah Froese, “What’s up with Mennos and Mission?” *Canadian Mennonite* 20, no. 9 (Apr 20, 2016), accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/stories/what%E2%80%99s-mennos-and-mission/>.

38 Ibid.

[time to] be open to the perspectives of God held by others.”<sup>39</sup>

MCEC’s, and to a certain extent MC Canada’s, understanding of mission relies heavily on church planting and/or an understanding of mission *to* the margins rather than *from* the margins. Such an understanding of mission does not suggest or seek to embody a theology of mission as liberation from oppression for all, rooted in the good news of the kingdom of God.<sup>40</sup> Women and those whose voices are disproportionately absent from current conversations about mission within MCEC experience the negative impacts of this reality most heavily. That said, and as history has shown, they themselves are also capable of reproducing these hierarchies and colonial views of mission.

In the next and final section of this paper, I argue that the Spirit empowers believers to participate in God’s mission by dismantling systems of oppression and building right relationships of shared power/mutuality that embody God’s peace and justice.

### Going Forward: Mission with Shared Power/Mutuality<sup>41</sup>

A theology of mission that is good news for all peoples and creation promotes liberation for all from oppression. While Beverly Harrison does not speak of the church’s “mission” per se, she constructs a particularly important vision of the gospel for a liberatory Christian ethics that has significant implications for a nonviolent theology of mission. Harrison argues that “genuine experience of transcendence arises in the ecstatic power emergent between those who have

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39 Ibid. For an article that supports Froese’s perspective, see Dick Benner, “Of Mission and Politics,” *Canadian Mennonite* 20, no. 9 (April 20, 2016), accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/stories/mission-and-politics>.

40 See Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” in *Rethinking Power*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 174–95. My understanding and use of the term “oppression” is informed by Young’s definition of oppression as structural or systemic; that is, “the inhibition of a group through a vast network of everyday practices, attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and institutional rules” (180) and its “five faces”; namely, exploitation, marginality, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

41 French philosopher Michel Foucault argues that power is relational, the effect of particular configurations of relations and discourses, rather than a thing that can be owned. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980). My articulation of right relationships as relationships of shared power (i.e., mutuality) is informed by Foucault’s theory of power as relational. It also incorporates a feminist correction to Foucault’s work in the form of an analysis of gender and an analysis of inequalities between women and men. For more on feminist corrections to Foucault see Caroline Ramazanoglu, ed., *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

connected with each other, intimately engaged with God, in emancipatory praxis.” According to her, “Passion for justice, shared and embodied, is the form God takes among us in our time.”<sup>42</sup>

In this section I draw on Harrison’s work to articulate a theology of mission that takes seriously the task of believers to adopt a radically relational understanding of justice and peacemaking as that which embodies the kingdom of God and, as a result, includes a commitment to re-appropriating all our social relations, even relations to God, so that shared action toward genuine human cosmic fulfillment occurs.<sup>43</sup> I begin by articulating the necessity of a theology of shared power for a theology of mission. I continue by highlighting the importance of reading scripture from a feminist postcolonial perspective for a theology of mission. I conclude by naming the potential that sexual relationships and relationships with the earth have in mission. These are brief examples of work toward a nonviolent theology and embodied practice of mission.

### *Relationships of Shared Power*

A theology of power indicates the particular relations of power that the Divine models and calls believers to embody. In this article I claim that God calls disciples of Jesus to embody relationships of shared power and mutuality. These are relationships that demonstrate love, justice, and peace toward oneself, God, and all of creation. As Harrison writes: “Like Jesus, we are called to a radical activity of love, to a way of being in the world that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, and passes on the gift of life...We are called to confront power that thwarts the power of human personal and communal becoming—that which twists relationship. Jesus’ sacrifice was for the cause of radical love—doing justice; righting relationship.”<sup>44</sup> Power is enhanced “when shared, reciprocal, and constructed by the limits that respectful interrelationship imposes.”<sup>45</sup>

In her reflections on biblical understandings of power in the Gospel according to Mark, Lydia Neufeld Harder notes that the power of the resurrection is not dependent on status or coercion, and the power of God embodied in human authority is healing, creative, and subversive.<sup>46</sup> It is the role of the believing

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42 Harrison, *Making the Connections*, 263.

43 Ibid., 245.

44 Harrison, *Making the Connections*, 19.

45 Ibid., 175.

46 Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion, and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Perspective* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1998), 130, 132, 133.

community to name and challenge uses of power to dominate or control.<sup>47</sup> Feminist-Mennonite theologians Dorothy Yoder Nyce and Lynda Nyce reiterate: “Power is an important quality of the divinity”—expressed as power for/to, with, and within the “marginalized...to renew their strength.”<sup>48</sup>

Anabaptist Mennonite views of power have varied over time and have frequently lacked an articulation of the ways in which relationships of power operate within faith communities—particularly with regard to sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and ability. Historians Benjamin Redekop and Calvin Redekop note that early Anabaptists distinguished between God’s power, vested in the individual will and the community of the faithful in nonhierarchical structures, and state power, vested in the dominating relationships of state and religious hierarchies.<sup>49</sup> They also reveal how this position evolved over time into a distrust of any form of power and an insistence on powerlessness as the ideal within the community of faith. To this day, many Mennonites are not aware of how adopting an identity of powerlessness can act as a “deceptive, benign cover behind which naked power may operate as though invisible...power is renounced yet not in truth forsaken.”<sup>50</sup> Mennonite understandings of mission that do not explore how relationships of power operate within and outside of the community of faith are examples of this.

Feminist postcolonial critics explain the significance of examining relationships of power and their overlapping influences.<sup>51</sup> According to Kwok,

Postcolonial feminist critics have stressed the intricate relationship between colonialism and patriarchy such that the analysis of one without the other is incomplete. Those male postcolonial critics who leave out gender run the risk of overlooking that colonialism involves the contest of male power and that patriarchal ideology is constantly reshaped and reformulated in the colonial process. On the other hand, those feminist critics who isolate gender from the larger economic and colonial context court the danger of providing a skewed interpretation that tends to reflect the

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47 Ibid., 139.

48 Dorothy Yoder Nyce and Lynda Nyce, “Power and Authority in Mennonite Ecclesiology: A Feminist Perspective,” in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, eds. Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 162.

49 Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, eds., *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), vii.

50 Ibid.

51 The connections between relationships of power are explored within what is typically referred to as a framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality recognizes that relationships and power dynamics between social locations and processes

interests of the socially and economically privileged.<sup>52</sup>

Oppressions are interlocking. For this reason, communities of faith should be suspicious of all relationships of unequal power operating within their theologies and biblical interpretations.

A shift in language and thinking from “mission *to* the margins” to “mission *from* the margins” is the result of this kind of critical analysis of power relations. Reflecting on the WCC’s shift in this regard, Athena Peralta reiterates that “mission from the margins” supports the work of peacemaking and justice-making as it empowers, for example, women living in absolute poverty to be part of decision-making processes that impact their well-being or economy of life.<sup>53</sup> Missional actions that include a redistribution of power in this way are embodiments of the kingdom of God.

### *Use of Scripture*

Postcolonial feminist Musa Dube argues that biblical scholarship that does not wish to reinforce patriarchal and imperial relationships must pay attention to themes of land, race, power, readers, international connections, contemporary history and liberation, and gender in interpretations of biblical texts. Questions for the hermeneutical community include: Why have biblical texts endorsed unequal power distributions and racial differences? Which interpretations empower geographic areas and races that have typically been disempowered?<sup>54</sup> In her research on empire and mission in the gospel according to Matthew, for example, Dube lifts up African Independence Churches’s (AICs) women’s readings of Matthew 15:21–28 as pieces of a feminist, postcolonial vision of mission that celebrates mission as liberating interdependence built on relationships of shared power.<sup>55</sup> She uses the term *interdependence* “to describe and un-

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(e.g., racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, sexism) are linked and can also change over time and differ by geographic setting. Professor of Law Kimberle Crenshaw developed intersectionality originally as “a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color” but recognized its potential more broadly “as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (“Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 [1991]: 1296).

<sup>52</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Athena Peralta, “Mission Together toward Economy of Life: Feminist Perspectives,” *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 1 (April 2015): 62–64.

<sup>54</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 184–95.

derline the interconnectedness of different histories, economic structures, and political structures as well as the relatedness of cultural texts, races, classes, and genders within specific and global contexts.”<sup>56</sup> *Liberating interdependence* is built on relationships of shared power, or as Dube states, “relationships that recognize and affirm the dignity of all things and people involved.”<sup>57</sup>

The reading strategies of the AICs women enable a view of Israel as an all-inclusive category in Matthew 15:24 for all who believe in God. They also enable a view of Canaan as an important and rich land of value to the Israelites. In such an interpretation, the Canaanites are not reduced to a secondary position or inferior culture.<sup>58</sup> One participant interpreted the Canaanite woman in particular as an example of the spiritual wealth in Canaan and an indicator of what it meant that the land of the Canaanites was a land “flowing with milk and honey” (i.e., a land rich in material and spiritual resources). Dube writes, “This imaginative interpretation highlights the power and will of AICs women to map a vision of liberating interdependence....It decolonizes the imperial strategies that employ the rhetoric of poverty and lack of religious faith among the colonized in order to justify dominating Other nations.”<sup>59</sup> Dube demonstrates that a key component of a nonviolent theology of mission is an interpretive reading strategy that reads “mission narratives with the understanding that they are the key biblical texts that authorize international travel and relations in order to interrogate the power relations they advance.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Erotic Power: An Embodied Approach to Mission and Sexual Relationships as Missional*

If Christian mission is about building right relationships of shared power, and sexual relationships are an important type of human relationship, then disciples are called to image God to others through sexual relationships of shared power. This is particularly urgent work since women, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, and Queer), and disabled person’s sexualities and bodies have been and continue to be excluded and demeaned by patriarchal impulses in both the church and society. With regard to sexuality, “mission from the margins” means listening to the Spirit as the Spirit speaks through the experiences of people whose bodies and sexualities have been excluded, marginalized, and oppressed as those people struggle for peace and justice through a redistribu-

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 200.

tion of power.

A redistribution of power enables the church to appreciate sexuality and erotic power as places in which God's love and desire for peace and justice can be shared and received. *Eros* is often viewed with fear, suspicion, and negativity in the church and associated with a fearful view of women's bodies and sexualities. Reclaiming *eros* "as a source of power that puts us in touch with our deepest feelings and allows humans to connect with others"<sup>61</sup> is an important part of a feminist postcolonial theology of mission. *Eros* describes the integral desire for intimacy and relationship (with the divine, with humans, and with creation) that all humans possess and is neither separate from nor less significant than *agape*—the self-sacrificial love most commonly identified with God and lifted up as exemplary by the church. Reclaiming *eros* as a positive source of power that can mediate divine love in our relationships—seeking mutuality rather than self-interest—is important for overcoming the male-female and sexuality-spirituality dualisms in the Christian tradition and is a key part of the missional work that believers are called to embody. As feminist liberation theologian Anne Bathhurst Gilson articulates, "Because women have been associated with *eros*, sexuality, and evil, reclaiming *eros* from patriarchal control has resulted in the affirmation of the power of women."<sup>62</sup> The body, sexuality, and the erotic are thus locations for God's revelation in history. If mission work is about building relationships of mutuality, and sexuality via *eros* is that dimension of us that urges relationship,<sup>63</sup> then sexuality and erotic power are keys to Christian conversations about mission.

### *Relationships of Shared Power with Creation*

The health of the planet is integrally related to conversations about gender and mission. For example, Kathleen Stone, executive for economic and environmental justice for United Methodist Women, highlights the integral connection between mission, colonization, and the confiscation and ownership of land by settlers in North America.<sup>64</sup> Stone aptly names the foundational sin of the colonizers as thinking they were more deserving and more legitimized

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61 Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 70.

62 Anne Bathhurst Gilson, *Eros Breaking Free: Interpersonal Sexual Theo-Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1995), 69.

63 Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 115.

64 Kathleen Stone, "Foundational Tremors: Gender, Power, and Climate Justice," *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 1 (April 2015): 73–74.

than the indigenous peoples and lands they encountered and thus justified in dominating these peoples and lands. She writes:

Men of European descent told themselves, and told everyone else through law, philosophy, and policy, that this was the case. Around the world, people of the “wrong” gender, race, religion, culture were captured and put into fenced-off areas, enslaved, and killed....Once we can speak this humbling, difficult truth of a foundational sin that we’ve inherited, as an entire human community, we must imagine and birth a vastly different life together—one with foundations of true mutuality, healing centuries of economic and political injustice.<sup>65</sup>

An understanding of mission as that which takes place on the margins will change narratives of domination with regard to all of creation and will appreciate the ways in which God’s presence is in and through it. Mission work thus includes partnering with indigenous peoples and creation in relationships of mutuality in which their diverse voices are heard. Believers are asked to consider, what do nonviolent relationships of shared power look like with regard to the earth and its creatures?<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Exploring the history of Canadian Mennonite women missionaries as well as current trends in MCEC and MC Canada from a feminist postcolonial perspective reveals the complex and intersectional relationships of power related to gender and mission. It also reveals the absence of a truly nonviolent theology of mission (i.e., one that is liberating for all). In conjunction with feminist postcolonial scholars, I claim the importance of an understanding of Christian mission as that which calls believers to embody radical relationships of shared power/mutuality commensurate with God’s vision of justice and peace. Such a theology is nonviolent and enacted when:

- reading Mennonite mission histories while paying attention to relationships of power and privilege.
- celebrating the fact that the Spirit’s presence is not limited to the institutional church but is already present in all of creation.
- recognizing that a commitment to mission is a commitment to dialogue, which must begin on the margins and requires a critical analysis of power within the community of faith.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>66</sup> I adopt a view of peace and justice as intertwined. Within this view, a commitment to nonviolence is necessarily a commitment to justice-making in all our relationships, including with creation, and at both the personal and social systemic levels.

- recognizing that human bodies are important locations in which believers are called to embody relationships of shared power/mutuality.
- recognizing the earth itself as a partner in mission.

In the words of theologian Irma Fast Dueck, “God invites us into relationship and calls us to build relationships with one another based not on domination and control but rooted in the compassionate love and vulnerability we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A renewed understanding of power, conceived relationally, may help us better understand the nature of God’s power, and it may aid us in building our life together as Christian community.”<sup>67</sup> If this is a transformative invitation to which we as Christians are called, then it ought to inform our theology of mission. It does so by inviting us to build relationships of mutuality that transform existing relationships of power as we seek to embody the kingdom of God here on earth—developing and embodying a theology of mission from, rather than to, the margins.

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67 Irma Fast Dueck, “Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Power in Christian Community,” *Vision* 72 (Fall 2014): 78.

# Response to “Building Right Relationships”

ARLI KLASSEN<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In this reflection I will respond to Kim Penner’s article “Building Right Relationships of Shared Power/Mutuality.” While I am neither a theologian nor an academic, I am a practitioner, a sometimes activist, and a power broker. I write this reflection as one who has many privileges, as I am both Canadian and white. In the hope of promoting dialogue and strengthening the church, I will respond out of my own experiences and reflections.

Penner’s central thesis is that mission must take place from the margins and focus on transforming oppressive relationships—especially those defined in terms of gender, sexuality, and relationship to the earth. When transformation fully occurs, she argues, it results in right relationships of shared power and mutuality. This deep transformation is essential in developing a nonviolent theology of Christian mission.

While I heartily affirm and embrace Penner’s central argument, I would like to clarify some points and engage the conversation she has set out for us. I will focus on two primary questions that surfaced as I reflected on this article. First, what is the role of those in power as they engage God’s mission and work in the world? And why is mission here defined as only transforming broken systems? What makes this definition Christian? How do Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the church factor into this definition? I will briefly reflect below on these questions and conclude with some observations from my own life experience.

## Roles and Responsibilities of Those in Power

As I reflect on Penner’s paper, and as a white Canadian who carries individual and institutional power, I find myself asking: What is the role of people in mission who are not living on the margins? What is the role of our powerful Anabaptist institutions? Penner pleads with those of us who have power to share that power. She also highlights that those with power should not pretend

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<sup>1</sup> Arli Klassen has trouble answering the question “Where are you from?” having lived and served in multiple settings and countries. She hopes to stay for a while in Kitchener, Canada, and is currently a member at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener.

to be powerless. Penner then suggests some important ways forward for those who carry power as they engage mission—suggestions that deserve further reflection and development.

Penner emphasizes the sharing and redistribution of power, and I would like to suggest further that those in power should take direction from and be accountable to those on the margins. However, when this ideal is carried out, it is very difficult to avoid tokenism, and it generally places a high burden on just a few individuals from the margins, who are then expected to represent all the diversity within their own groups.

Penner also highlights interdependence as a key step toward building right relationships. But interdependence does not mean that one group steps aside for another. Rather, interdependence requires that all work together. This interdependence involves listening, accompaniment, and debate. Interdependence must include everyone sharing needs, resources, suffering, and joy—and in all directions. There is no clear divide between “from the margins” and “to the margins.” Oppressive systems are complex, and people who are on the margins in one aspect are often the people with power in another aspect. There are not many people who do not carry any power in our global context, whether that be power due to race, gender, nationality, or sexuality.

Sharing and distributing power and moving toward interdependence are challenges faced by Global North Anabaptist institutions as well as the individuals in them. Power in and of itself is not a bad thing, but how we use it matters. I would like to read more about what people and institutions with power are doing and should be doing. Appointing a few people of color and women to staff and board roles is a start, but it is simply not enough. Penner’s example of women missionaries in our history who sidestepped normative gender roles but did not challenge patriarchal structures is a case in point.

## **What Is Mission?**

Penner not only explores who directs or initiates mission but also considers which activities are included in mission, and names addressing systemic oppression as its primary concern. But why is mission only or primarily about transforming systemic oppression in building up the kingdom of God? What makes this definition of mission Christian? How is Jesus central to this understanding? At what point do we consider individual and corporate transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit? And what is the role of the local congregation in all of this?

Peace and justice building are aspects of addressing systemic injustice and oppression and certainly help build up the kingdom of God, but my understanding of Christian mission includes more than working to change systems

of oppression. Mission is also about inviting people into transformative relationships with God. It is through God’s grace that we experience forgiveness and reconciliation, and not only reconciliation with God but also with those who are harmed through oppression. It is in the practice of following Jesus as disciples that we are enabled to address social injustice. And, penetrating deeper than we can even imagine, the work of the Spirit precedes wherever God might call us. This engagement in God’s mission includes personal transformation through faith in Jesus, and an invitation to others to share in this transformation. This transformation builds up the church as the body of Christ here on earth and includes the active dismantling of oppression around us.

What about the church? Penner understands church planting as one-directional—going “to the margins” rather than coming “from the margins”; she consequently sees it as problematic. Church planting certainly can be something that perpetuates inequality, and maybe even the language itself plays into this. But church planting often also supports initiatives led by people from the margins by building up congregations within their own communities. Supporting indigenous efforts at building up the body of Christ is valuable work that can and should be done by people who carry power.

## Reflection

My aunt Ann Klassen was one of those Mennonite Brethren women missionaries who operated well outside of gender norms. She is the only white adult buried on indigenous land in the Paraguayan colonies. Even though she was a woman, she still carried much power. Rather than treating indigenous peoples as “others,” she instead used her power to help build interdependent relationships. Aunt Ann became friends with the local people, remembering them throughout her life and distributing most of her belongings to them before she died. She had a strong concern for the indigenous women and was an advocate for projects that helped families holistically.<sup>2</sup>

As Penner states, oppressions intersect. For several decades I worked with Mennonite Central Committee in multiple countries, and during this time I learned much about where and when I had power as a white North American and where and when, as a woman, I did not. I learned how accompaniment and advocacy are important roles for people with power. I learned how to intentionally take direction from and be accountable to people with less power. I learned about moving along a continuum toward becoming an anti-racist intercultural institution. And I learned that most of our Anabaptist institutions have a long

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.mbhhistory.org/profiles/wiens-a.en.html>. Accessed on October 17, 2016.

way to go. These concepts should be included in any theology of mission that considers the roles of people and institutions with power as well as those from the margins.

In recent years I have worn a few part-time hats in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) contexts, including that of researching the needs of MCEC congregations, starting up the ReLearning Community program as its first coordinator, acting as a mission associate in supporting church plants, and now sitting on the Executive Council. I too lament the lack of women and people of color in MCEC leadership roles. In the Crossroads Anti-Racism assessment, MCEC is approaching level 3 (representative of symbolic change) on the continuum of moving toward being fully inclusive (level 6).<sup>3</sup> MCEC's three program priorities include extending the peace of Christ, growing congregations, and forming leaders. MCEC is actively involved in discipleship training programs, encouraging local congregations to share their experience of God through action and relationships within their own neighborhoods, supporting church plants that are initiatives mostly by people on the margins, and mentoring and developing incoming leaders from groups on the margins. And, while MCEC is not directly accountable to people from the margins, much of MCEC's mission activity is in direct response to and in support of requests and initiatives with direction provided by people in the margins.

I also currently work with Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Our vision is to foster and strengthen interdependent relationships among Anabaptist churches around the world and collaborative partnerships among MWC members—mission being one of several named networks provided for collaboration. I lament the hesitation North American churches have in understanding that we need our brothers and sisters around the world as much as they need us. I lament that too often North American churches do not take the initiative to collaborate actively with Anabaptist brothers and sisters in the Global South. I lament that some Global South member churches, given their experience of the impact of colonialism and global inequality, see North American Anabaptists as simply a source of funding. In MWC we attempt to make space for interdependent relationships and collaboration, but much growth is clearly still needed.

In 2014, MWC General Secretary César García made a presentation ti-

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3 Crossroads Ministry, "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization," adapted from original concept by Baily Jackson and Rita Hardman, and further developed by Andrea Avazian and Ronice Branding. See [http://www.aesa.us/conferences/2013\\_ac\\_presentations/Continuum\\_AntiRacist.pdf](http://www.aesa.us/conferences/2013_ac_presentations/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf), accessed October 21, 2016.

tled “A Vision for Global Mission” to the Council of International Ministries (North American Anabaptist mission and service agencies).<sup>4</sup> In this presentation, he called for a new paradigm: “The goal is not simply to flip the power relationships between the agents and assumed recipients of mission, but rather to change the basic assumption of mission altogether—to align with God’s mission of bringing together the diverse cultures from around the world.” He spoke about the role of North American mission agencies in modeling interdependency, holistic mission, intercultural relationships, and leading from below.

I too yearn for interdependent relationships of mutuality and shared power within our faith community. I too yearn for mission activity that transforms the oppressive systemic structures in our world—including those of gender, sexuality, class, nationality, race, and relationship to the land. I hope we can work together on a theology of mission that includes clarity on how people with power and people from the margins might collaborate on mission. I hope we can work together on a theology of mission that includes building up the body of Christ through both personal transformation and systemic transformation of our world. Then we might be able to rejoice with the great multitude described in Revelation 7:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

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4 César García, “A Vision for Global Mission amidst Shifting Realities,” *Anabaptist Witness* 1, no. 1 (October 2014), accessed October 13, 2016, [http://www.anabaptistwitness.org/journal\\_entry/a-vision-for-global-mission-amidst-shifting-realities-2/](http://www.anabaptistwitness.org/journal_entry/a-vision-for-global-mission-amidst-shifting-realities-2/).



# Awake

HAROLD RECINOS<sup>1</sup>

The women who live to bless and  
aid will not hide inside the hope

they fervently press on. With faith  
they take gigantic steps toward the

voice calling them with clanging bells  
to service in the field, on the slopes, the

absent villages and streets where injustice  
delivers lilies to those sobbing beneath the

failing light of day. Many have strained in  
wonder about what they see in them, how

they return good for wickedness, make the  
broken mend, and show the mystery that

makes the world a birthplace for peace.  
These completely free women will not

turn their wet eyes away till the dust  
across society sings of divinity's casing

light in all the places closed from sight  
and dazed by loathing, violence and hate.

These women the gracious Spirit led to hear  
the ancient voice that breaks oppressive chains

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and calls them to live faith away from darkness  
in this madly divided world—these women God

exalts!

# I Have No Husband

## A Reflection on the Life of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden

BRIANNA C. MILLETT<sup>1</sup>

-Are you married?

-No.

-Are you dating?

-No.

-Do you want to date?

-Not really.

-Do you want to get married?

-Not at this present moment. Maybe someday. Maybe not.

In my simple life in the rather homogenous land of the upper Midwest, I have been engaged in more dialogues like this than I care to count. I am a thirty-four-year-old woman. A thirty-four-year-old unmarried woman. A thirty-four-year-old unmarried woman who is also not dating. This status is unquestionably non-normative.

If you're anything like the rest of the contemporary, hyper-relationship-focused, Western society in which I live, you are probably saying to yourself, "What's wrong with her?" Or, "I bet she has serious issues." You might be curious about my physical features—it's OK, that's generally the direction our culturally conditioned minds wander. You might even have thought, "Eeek. She must be a ghastly piece of work." Whatever your immediate curiosity suggests, let me assure you, there is nothing "wrong" with me. I do not have serious issues. (Issues? Sure. But who doesn't have their fair share of issues? We are, after all, works in progress.) And as for my physical appearance? Well, I happen to think I'm rather lovely. And my mother agrees.

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## Introduction

When I heard about the theme for this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* on gender and mission, I knew I wanted to share a personal reflection. The aim of this reflection is twofold: First, I wish to highlight the significance of the unmarried person's ability to live a life wholly devoted to following Jesus. I believe the community of unmarried people needs encouragement, and the church at large needs to adjust the methods by which they "minister" to this community. I will also highlight a story that I find deeply encouraging—that of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden (or, Lijsbeth Dirks). Elisabeth was a single and courageous woman who did not let her marital status or gender stand in the way of her commitment to Christ or to her vocational calling as a leader and teacher in the early Anabaptist movement.<sup>2</sup>

Elisabeth's story demonstrates the radical gender equality found in Christ, and models the full personhood of unmarried individuals. One need not be male or married in order to participate fully in the mission of God. For generations, leadership opportunities have been withheld from women, who have then been encouraged to instead pursue a life of "marital bliss." But I believe Elisabeth's story has something different to say. I have something different to say. And scripture has something different to say.

## Significance of the Unmarried

I may not blame my "singleness" on God. Singleness, like suffering, death, and all else that is less than perfect in this world, was not God's original plan for his creation. It was one of the many results of man's fall.<sup>3</sup>

I remember the first time I read this quote by Margaret Clarkson. It was the final year of my undergraduate studies, and I was researching ideas for my final thesis on the topic of singleness. For years I had been shaped and led to believe that a person is not complete until that person has been wed to another. I grew up with the messages perpetuated by Walt Disney; those of us from the West are intimately familiar with these stories—classic tales of forlorn beauties pining for their prince to come. As I entered into young adulthood, I heard the same messages, but Hollywood beauties began to take the place of the cartoon beauties of my childhood. Still, the ideal was the same: women should be physically beautiful and passively wait for their prince to swoop in and inaugurate

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2 While I certainly commend, indeed even admire, the faith journey of an individual whose life came to an untimely end due to persecution, I cannot commend, nor do I wish to imply, that martyrdom is the sign of true faith.

3 Margaret Clarkson, "Singleness: His Share for Me," *Christianity Today* 23, no. 10 (February 1979): 15.

their true, complete life.

As a young adult, I came to faith in Christ and quickly learned that the message the church<sup>4</sup> provided was not unlike the messages I received from Hollywood: “It’s not good for a human to be alone.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, God created marriage.<sup>6</sup> And so the “biblical” narrative goes. I was young and new to faith, so I took this particular narrative as God’s perfect design. Marriage, I was told by mainstream culture and the church, was the ultimate fulfilling lifestyle.

If, as Clarkson suggests, singleness is equal to suffering and death, and if singleness is in fact not God’s original plan for creation, then I am wildly outside of God’s plan. But I do not feel like I am in a state of perpetual suffering because of my singleness. I do not feel as though it is equal to death. And far more importantly, I do not believe I am rebelliously outside of God’s plan—quite the contrary! It is this cosmic inconsistency that compels me to speak and write in order to encourage others by providing an alternative understanding of singleness.

I believe it is not good for humans to be alone; such a state fails to faithfully reflect the image of the triune God. Our God is a God of community. “It’s not good for a human to be alone” is then profoundly true. To fulfill the lack of companionship, God created community. It is not marriage that God created to satisfy human’s aloneness. Male and female were created so that together they might collaboratively co-rule the creation project that God began.<sup>7</sup> Can marriage be a part of this collaborative co-ruling? Certainly. Some will marry, but others will not. Some will reproduce biologically, but some will not. The primary purpose of male and female is not that of marriage and producing

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4 By “church,” I am primarily referencing conservative American Christianity, since this was the tradition in which I was raised through my late-teenage years.

5 The church tradition that formed my early years of faith would have said “man” instead of “human,” since this tradition placed great significance on God creating male before female.

6 Female, then, was only created to fulfill the life of the male. She was, according to some church traditions, created so that male and female could marry and reproduce.

7 See Gen 1:26. Many interpretations use the word “rule” (e.g., NASB, NIV, NET, NAS, ERV). Others use “reign” (NLT), “have dominion” (ESV, WEB, ASV), “be masters over” (ISV). For centuries, individuals and various communities across the globe (including in my own Western context) have interpreted this Genesis text through an anthropocentric lens. However, I understand this ruling as a reflection of God’s shalom. We as humans are to join together to bring about God’s shalom in all of creation. For more on this shalom interpretation, see N. T. Wright’s work *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

offspring<sup>8</sup> but to collaborate and faithfully partner with God in mission so that we might together help fulfill the creation project by cultivating shalom in the here and now.<sup>9</sup>

Unmarried women are complete in this alternative interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative. While we have not yet fully lived into God's liberating message, we can know that women should not be confined to the role of mother, be told that we are lesser than men, or remain silent because of our gender. In Christ we are liberated from the pressure to marry and reproduce. Let us rejoice and share this good news! Living into God's original plan allows us to paint with different colors, strokes, and designs that were once unavailable to us. And this is what brings me to the story of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden.

### Elisabeth van Leeuwarden

In the early years of Anabaptism, the priority of one's commitment to Christ frequently led individuals to separate from their spouses, families, and communities. A commitment to Christ was considered the one true marriage.<sup>10</sup> If one spouse was not committed to the traditions of Anabaptism and the other was, then separation was considered a viable option. I do not want to suggest that fractures in marriage, families, and communities due to differing faith convictions are righteous, but understanding this practice does provide context as we consider the life of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden.

Born into a family of great importance, Elisabeth received a quality education, which, while not entirely uncommon, was also not the norm for women in the sixteenth century. Her parents placed her in a convent near Leer where she learned, among other things, to read both Dutch and Latin. After hearing of a man who was executed because of his rejection of mass as well as for his adult baptism, Elisabeth began to ferociously study her Latin New Testament.

It is at this point in Elisabeth's life where I personally find her to be a great

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8 Biological reproduction was just one facet of the invitation to "be fruitful and multiply" found in the Genesis creation narrative. This may be one reason why both male and female were created. I emphasize this because many assume that the reason male and female were created was solely for the sake of marriage. Again, let me reiterate that *some* were given to marriage and *some* were not. By highlighting this "community" idea of the Genesis narrative, I am hoping to decentralize the marriage-focused interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2.

9 For more on this particular interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative, see John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

10 For more on this topic of separation of spouses, families, and communities, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1995).

source of encouragement. As a woman who has chosen to work in the world of academia, I am encouraged by Elisabeth's willingness to question the theological norms (in her story, those norms concern the practices of baptism and mass) and seek out what the New Testament had to say about the matters at hand. It takes a tremendous amount of courage to raise questions, to dare to believe that the ways of Jesus can and do say something different than what you might find practiced in your own environment. Elisabeth practiced this courage. And I strive to do the same.

As she studied, Elisabeth's ideas about following Jesus began to change. Her understandings of baptism and the call to obedience became different from that of her surrounding Catholic community. Suspicion was ignited among the nuns when Elisabeth began questioning the faith values of the community around her. Eventually, Elisabeth was accused of heresy and imprisoned. A decade after her release from prison, she secretly sought help from the milkmaids, and it was decided that she should sneak out dressed as one of them in order to move to a safer place.

In Leer, an Anabaptist family took Elisabeth in and began to instruct her in Anabaptist faith and teachings. While there, her own theological convictions deepened, separating her further from the faith of her childhood and her life in the convent.

Let's step back and think about this for a bit. Experiencing internal theological shifts can be painful and lonely and can result in questions and doubts. I wonder, did Elisabeth ever hesitate? As she began to incorporate the traditions of her new Anabaptist friends, did she have any uncertainty? Did she feel the way I did when I began to clothe myself with Anabaptist convictions and traditions—ones that were so different from those I'd previously been taught?

It was at this time that Elisabeth became a leader in the Anabaptist movement. She was a learned woman, and her years of study allowed her the knowledge and confidence to become an influential teacher. This was the vocation she was called to. Encouraged by Menno Simmons, Elisabeth accepted this challenge and thereby influenced many in their journeys with Christ. She must have had such courage! Not only did she take on radically different theological ideas from those she was raised in, but she also taught them to others! This was no small feat.

The more she spoke out, the more the Anabaptist community feared that Elisabeth might attract the attention of the authorities, and so she was taken to Leeuwarden where she was received by another family of Anabaptists. Despite the community's efforts, Elisabeth was found and again accused of heresy. In their search, officials discovered Elisabeth's New Testament. Because literacy

was frequently granted only to men, these officers assumed the Bible belonged not to Elisabeth but to Menno Simons, who they assumed was her husband!

While in prison, Elisabeth was interrogated before the city council. They asked her (under oath, mind you) whether she had a husband. She responded, “It is not permitted us to swear at all; our words shall be yes, yes, or no, no. I have no husband.”<sup>11</sup>

Can you imagine this scene? Under fierce interrogation, Elisabeth demonstrated a courage I can only hope for. Instead of cowering before the city council, she responded with an unshakable commitment to her faith in Christ and to her faith community. The interrogation continued:

-We want to know which people have you taught.

-Oh no, my lords, do not leave me alone on this; but ask me about my faith, which I will so gladly tell you.<sup>12</sup>

She had no husband, she did not betray her faith family, and the Latin New Testament was *hers*. Her courage was the scaffolding that held her faithful to Christ and to Anabaptist convictions through both her first and second interrogations. This final round of accusations took place within the torture chamber, where thumbscrews were applied to her thumbs, forefingers, and shins. Even through the pain, Elisabeth held fast. “Help me, O Lord, your poor servant, for you are a helper in time of need,” she cried.<sup>13</sup>

The Lord gave her courage, to be sure, but her body still suffered. Through it all, she remained steadfast in her commitment to Christ, refusing to inform the authorities who had baptized her and protecting the identities of those she had discipled. Elisabeth van Leeuwarden was sentenced to death by drowning in 1549.<sup>14</sup> Nearly five hundred years later, her story continues to influence the lives of many.

As a female leader in the church, I have grown weary of gendered expectations. I am tired of the messages that suggest women cannot and should not lead, teach, or preach. I am exhausted by the gender imbalances found in church leadership. I am sick of being told (whether implicitly or explicitly) that I am not complete until I am married. But, inspired by Elisabeth, I will no longer apologize for utilizing my gifts. I will not apologize for being single

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11 C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 360.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 362.

14 Ibid., 363.

and not dating. I will respond instead that I am made complete only in Christ.

And for your witness and testimony, Elisabeth van Leeuwarden, I thank you.

## Final Thoughts

In Mark 3, Jesus provides a radical re-articulation of family. “Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (3:35, ESV). In the context of first-century Jewish culture, this is an outlandish statement. But as Jesus’s words and ways are prone to do, this statement also brings liberation and life to a marginalized community. No longer is marriage and the biological family the path to survival or to participation in God’s family. In this passage, Jesus makes discipleship our *first* calling. Our spiritual family now defines our relationships.

Elisabeth was not married. She had no husband. And while marriage was most certainly the cultural norm of the sixteenth century, she was a sister to many and wedded to Christ. She did not need to wait for a husband to tell her she was complete. She did not need to birth a child to secure her future. She did not wait to live her life. She studied, she taught, she held fast, and she lived faithfully. This is the kind of life I strive to live.



# “Other Ways in Which We Can Serve”<sup>1</sup>

## Mennonite Nurses in World War II

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

At the height of World War II, several Mennonite nurses felt strongly that physical needs must be addressed alongside spiritual needs in order for Christians to faithfully witness to the gospel. This conviction led many of these women to serve in relief efforts, international missions, and Civilian Public Service (CPS). During this time, *Mennon nursing* was launched as a quarterly publication by the Mennonite Nurses Association, a ministry of the (Old) Mennonite Church. The first two issues included lists of nurses in fulltime Christian service, naming some as missionaries and others as relief workers. Regardless of their title, Mennonite nurses believed strongly that they were each called to carry out the Great Commission.

In the United States and alongside the rest of the country in the early-to mid-1940s, the church and the nursing profession were in great upheaval. Nursing, as a developing field, and war created societal pressures that honed and deepened Mennonite nurses' commitments to mission and service as nonresistant Christians. Due to the emphasis on identity and affiliation, American Mennonite nurses felt an urgency to define themselves over and against a war-dedicated profession and in a context of male-dominated church structures. These nurses reinvented their identities through organization and through written and verbal communication. But aside from those contained in Rachel Waltner Goossen's volume *Women against the Good War*, most stories remain buried in diaries, CPS camp papers, and nursing organization documents, waiting for someone to brush off the dust and share their content with

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1 Carol Blosser to Harold S. Bender, November 24, 1942, Hist. Mss. 1–378, file 53, folder 1, Archives of the Mennonite Church, quoted in Rachel Waltner Goossen, “Conscientious Objection and Gender: Women in Civilian Public Service during the Second World War” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1993), 62.

2 Ann Graber Hershberger teaches in graduate and undergraduate programs in nursing and cross cultural studies as a professor at Eastern Mennonite University. Hershberger chairs Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and previously served in community health and development in Central America.

the broader church. It is time to shed light on the particular niche and role of American Mennonite nurses in this unstable period.

This paper will explore the professional formation of (Old) Mennonite American nurses, first describing their wartime context and then probing the organizations they structured in response. I will share examples of the pressure these nurses faced in the midst of a pro-military culture and in the midst of the Mennonite church's response to the war, highlighting accounts of nurses in the CPS camps. These stories illustrate how personal, professional, and spiritual aspects of identity often come together.

## American Nursing Response to World War II

The history of American nursing contains many documented stories from World War II.<sup>3</sup> Records from 1944 emphasize patriotic zeal and encourage participation in war efforts. And, while the First World War resulted in nurses with wartime experience, more were needed when the Second World War began. Consequently, the *American Journal of Nursing* (AJN) initiated a monthly column that not only informed nurses about the war in Europe and discussed care of the wounded but also encouraged nurses to enlist for wartime service.<sup>4</sup>

### *The National Nursing Council for War Service*

Leaders in the nursing profession believed strongly that American nurses should support the war effort, and because of this conviction, several American nursing groups met informally in 1939 to anticipate and plan for needs they would have in the event of war.<sup>5</sup> This gathering resulted in the formation of a coalition of nursing service and membership agencies known as the National Nursing Council for War Service (NNCWS). The coalition initiated several efforts, including generally advancing the field of nursing; increasing the number of graduating nurses; and conducting a survey to determine the number, training, and availability of nurses.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the survey did not ask if nurses were willing to serve; it merely requested that respondents check *where* they

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3 Phillip Kalisch and Beatrice Kalisch, *The Advance of American Nursing*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little & Brown, 1995). See also Stella Goostray, *Memoirs: Half a Century in Nursing* (New Hampshire: The Reporter Press, 1969).

4 Linda S. Beeber, "To Be One of the Boys: Aftershocks of the World War I Nursing Experience," *Advances in Nursing Science* 12, no. 4 (1990): 32–43.

5 Goostray, *Memoirs*, 67.

6 Ibid., 68. The National Nursing Council for War Service deftly changed its objectives and work to strengthen the nation and the nursing profession. The council was successful in securing federal funds for nursing schools and for individual students

were willing to serve—in army, navy, or civilian positions.<sup>7</sup>

### *Nursing Education and Congressional Response*

Government officials and nursing leaders agreed there were not enough nurses or nursing students in training to meet the health needs of a nation at war. The NNCWS set a goal of 97,000 students entering training per year to meet the need, but only 47,000 were admitted in 1942.<sup>8</sup> With much support, Congress passed the Nurse Training Act in 1943 to lure young high school graduates away from the excitement and adventure of “war work” and into nursing.<sup>9</sup> This legislation established the Cadet Nurse Corps program, providing member nursing students with tuition, uniforms, books, and a monthly stipend in exchange for their commitment to “pledge themselves to serve in military or essential civilian nursing throughout the war.”<sup>10</sup> In order to qualify, nursing schools had to meet certain requirements.<sup>11</sup> Mennonite nursing schools did not apply for this program.

As the war dragged on, it was feared that the nurse shortage could not be relieved by patriotic and moral persuasion or pressure. In late 1944, when Americans in Europe were sustaining 1,750 casualties per day and 23 percent of US hospitals were underutilized due to a lack of nursing personnel, the government felt pressured to act. One of President Roosevelt’s proposals in his 1945 State of the Union Address was to register and draft nurses. The bill passed the House but lagged in the Senate, and as the tide of the war in Europe turned toward the Allies’ favor, the need for a draft dissipated and the bill was dropped.<sup>12</sup>

By 1945, half of the 240,000 active, registered nurses in the United States had volunteered for the armed forces. An estimated 29 percent of those who

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in the Cadet Nurse Corps, which had a lasting impact on the field. Titles of their key projects include the Survey of Nursing Needs and Resources, the Program to Plan for a Single Professional Accrediting Agency in Nursing, a Study of the Socioeconomic Status of the Profession of Nursing, and the Study of Selected Aspects of Nursing Education.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Appendix I.

<sup>8</sup> Lucile Petry Leone, “The U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps: Nursing’s Answer to World War II Demands,” *Imprint* 34, no. 5 (1987): 46–48.

<sup>9</sup> Joan Lynaugh, “Moments in Nursing History,” *Nursing Research* 39, no. 2 (1990): 126–27.

<sup>10</sup> Lucile Petry, “The U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps,” *American Journal of Nursing* 43, no. 8 (1943): 705.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 707.

<sup>12</sup> P. Kalisch and B. Kalisch, *The Advance of American Nursing*, 346.

volunteered were on duty by the end of the war.<sup>13</sup> For the most part, Mennonite nurses were not among those who volunteered. Nursing and other Mennonite medical professionals created an alternative and nonresistant response to participating in war efforts.

## American Mennonite and Mennonite Nurses' Response to World War II

Following World War I, Mennonite leaders in the United States pursued government recognition of their pacifist position. As a result, the 1940 Burke-Wadsworth Bill, which reinstituted the draft, included a provision that civilians opposed to war could instead be assigned to "work of national importance under civilian direction."<sup>14</sup> In 1941, the first Mennonite CPS camp was set up near Grottoes, Virginia. This was one of nearly sixty-five camps eventually administered by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)—the relief and service agency of the Anabaptist churches, which had been organized for post-World War I relief work in Europe in 1920. In total, Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites established and administered under the Selective Service Administration nearly 150 CPS camps.<sup>15</sup> The draftees, classified as Conscientious Objectors (COs) or I-E by their local selective service board, were sent to these camps to work on projects considered to be of national importance. During the years Mennonites administered these camps, the constituent churches of MCC provided over three million dollars to help run the program.<sup>16</sup>

The camp staff included a director (always male), dietician, matron, and nurse; this staff provided camp administration and cared for the needs of the draftees. Occasionally, women—often wives of directors—filled several of these roles simultaneously. While some nurses were single, others were married and often entered CPS at the same time as their spouses. Elise Boulding, a sociologist and peace scholar, reflected on her experience of serving alongside men: "I remember feeling, like many women did, that I wished I were a man so that my conscientious objection could be recognized."<sup>17</sup> These CPS camps allowed Mennonite nurses to provide relief in a time of national and global crisis. Mennonite nursing leaders and schools supported this avenue of service

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13 Ibid., 348.

14 Ibid., 50.

15 Melvin Gingerich, *Service for Peace: A History of Mennonite Civilian Public Service* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1949), 84.

16 Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 87, and Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 26.

17 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 4.

and provided robust support for involvement in mission.

### *Mennonite Nursing*

In 1942, the Mennonite Nurses Association listed 175 registered nurses (RNs) and one hundred RN students who were members of the (Old) Mennonite Church. This number is considered low and only represents participants from one denomination.<sup>18</sup> These and other Mennonite nurses in the United States felt pressured by the nursing profession to express their patriotism in proscribed ways via military or noncombatant service. In 1942, one nurse wrote to church officials who were administering the CPS camps for conscientious objectors:

I am a graduate nurse and am interested in some type of nursing in place of army nursing. I believe my peace principles could be carried out more effectively outside the army or the navy. I have delayed writing because help is needed here at the Mennonite Hospital (in Bloomington, Illinois), but according to a recent Red Cross meeting, we will be taken regardless, if we are not a supervisor or a head nurse. Since I will not be permitted to help here much longer I feel I should make an effort to find some type of nursing where I can still carry out our principle of peace. Someone told me there are CO camp nurses. Is there room for any more nurses in the camps? Or are there other ways in which we can serve?<sup>19</sup>

While Mennonite nurses were already involved in multiple types of service, the national emphasis during this war on patriotic responsibility, alongside the legitimate need for medical professionals, sharpened their interest in community service. Working as a nurse in CPS camps was one way to demonstrate their faith. Mennonite nurses also showed their commitment through relief efforts for war victims; nursing in under-resourced clinics; and missionary service. These service opportunities were promoted and encouraged by Mennonite nursing schools.

### *La Junta School of Nursing*

La Junta (Colorado) was the first nursing school in the (Old) Mennonite Church. Opened originally as the Mennonite (TB) Sanitarium in 1908, the school became a community hospital and added a school of nursing in 1914

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18 Guy F. Hershberger, *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951).

19 Carol Blosser to Harold S. Bender, November 24, 1942. See note 1 above for full citation information.



Photo 1. Edna Peters, one of the nurses who served at the camp in Hill City, South Dakota, smiles at the camera. *Photo courtesy of Mennonite Central Committee Photograph Collection IX-13-2, Archives of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., Akron, PA.*

under the auspices of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities.<sup>20</sup> More than 150 nurses graduated by 1940. Additionally, other Mennonites trained at nursing schools outside the church but closer to their homes.

One of the goals of the La Junta School of Nursing was to prepare nurses for a life of service to others. In the article "Shall I be a Nurse?" Maude Swartzendruber, a supervisor at the hospital, said that a woman considering nursing as a profession should "choose to be a nurse because of her desire to be of service to humanity; not for the good she will receive, but for the good she will give and do."<sup>21</sup> This article was published in *The Youth's Christian Companion*, and the entire issue was dedicated to nursing, encouraging young adults to consider it as an opportunity for service. Mennonite church leaders noticed how the nursing profession promoted an ethic of service during a time of war. Orie O. Miller, the founder and director of MCC, said in 1945, "One of the striking changes from World War I to II is that the Mennonite nurse is skilled. Along with this skill in nursing come discipline in high standards, the ability to work in organizations and consecration to the Lord."<sup>22</sup>

The La Junta school directors did not accept the offer of government funding for nursing education via the Cadet Nurse Corps but did shorten the curriculum so that their graduates could sit for the state board exam along with other students in Colorado graduating from the accelerated Cadet Nurse Corps training.<sup>23</sup> This act, while affecting the school's budget, did not decrease enrollment. Graduating class size increased steadily throughout the early 1940s.<sup>24</sup> As the number of Mennonite nurses increased, so also did the need for communication and organization among them, especially as the nation prepared for and entered the war. The Mennonite Nurses Association emerged to meet that need.

### *Mennonite Nurses Association and Mennonursing*

In the pre- and early war years, some Mennonite nurses joined the noncombatant Women's Army Corps, while others joined the armed services. Mennonite nursing leaders Maude Swartzendruber and Verna Zimmerman wished to

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20 Maude Swartzendruber, *The Lamp in the West* (Newton, KS: United Printing, 1975), 14.

21 Maude Swartzendruber, "Shall I be a Nurse?" *Youth's Christian Companion* 24, no. 2 (1943): 429.

22 *Mennonursing* 1, no. 1 (1945): 3.

23 Interview with Florence Nafziger conducted by author, October 25, 1997, in author's personal collection.

24 Swartzendruber, *The Lamp in the West*, 125.

present alternatives to counter what they felt was a growing trend toward secularization in the field of nursing.<sup>25</sup> They wrote articles in church publications highlighting the Mennonite church's stance on war and encouraged nurses to consider CPS or some other form of service not connected with the military.<sup>26</sup> To further facilitate this forum, in 1941 the Mennonite Nurses Association (MNA) was born.

Female nurses began to gather outside church buildings during the annual meetings of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. While the men met inside and tended to the formal agenda, the nurses met in “cool and private” cemeteries; these conversations eventually gave birth to MNA.<sup>27</sup> Letters to pastors and bishops in the United States and Canada sought out members for the new organization, and regional chapters were also formed. These insightful women were careful to plan MNA in such a way as to not alarm the male leaders of the church, who might have been concerned about the formation of a women's organization. One way they did this was by enlisting the support of sympathetic male leaders.<sup>28</sup>

In the constitution of the MNA, written in 1942, one of the stated objectives was to “formulate a program for Mennonite nurses as conscientious objectors during a wartime crisis.”<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, Mennonite nurse leaders seemed to be more reactive in preparing for the war than the proactive National Nursing Council for War Service (NNCWS). But these Mennonite nurses still contributed a great deal to mission and service efforts, especially considering the barriers they faced as women in the Mennonite church.

*Mennon nursing*, the journal of the MNA, was created for dialogue and communication among Mennonite nurses around the world. The first issue in 1944 carried an article by H. S. Bender, chairman of the Peace Problems Committee, titled “Can a Nonresistant Nurse Serve in the Army?” In this article, also published in the *Gospel Herald*, Bender said they should not, and gave the following reasons:

- The army nurse becomes a regular member of the army and takes full

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25 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 77.

26 Ibid., 77.

27 Frances Bontrager Greaser, “A Historical Overview of the MNA” in *The Gift of Presence: Stories that Celebrate Nursing*, eds. Dave Jackson, Neta Jackson, and Beth Landis (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1991), 177. Greaser notes the irony of an organization that focuses on healing and wholeness having had its beginnings in a cemetery.

28 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 73.

29 Ibid., 73.

responsibility for her conduct as a member of the armed forces. She identifies with the organization which prosecutes the war, and takes her share of moral responsibility for the military operations of the army of which she is a part.

- The army nurse is denied her opportunity to witness for peace and goodwill as a follower of the Prince of Peace. She puts out her peace light when she enters the army.
- The army nurse is essential to the operations of the army. Without nurses the army could not continue to fight. The essentiality of nurses is underlined by the proposal now being made to draft women nurses to meet the deficit.<sup>30</sup>

Bender assured nurses that if a draft came, “adequate provisions would be made” and the church would administer a CPS program for Mennonite nurse conscientious objectors.

Local MNA chapters were instrumental in informing nurses of national and local war matters related to their stance as conscientious objectors. The first issue of *Items of Interest* was produced by the Harrisonburg, Virginia, chapter of the MNA on April 29, 1944, and at a time of much uncertainty and change in the profession. The editor noted:

Though an infant in publication, it brings you life size issues. It portrays the nursing world of today, at the disposal of the needs of humanity, responding quickly and efficiently to the call for service—the latter term being used in its general sense. The armed forces have long ago organized their nursing powers. The government is preparing recruits through the Cadet Nursing Corps. Almost every other RN in the United States has been affected by the employment stabilization program. In what position does this place the Christian nurse? Fortunately enough it leaves her to center her loyalties as she will.<sup>31</sup>

Other articles in this issue outlined the changes in the War Manpower Commission and detailed how nurses were classified for availability in military service; apparently there was no classification for nurse conscientious objectors. Readers were alerted to the difficulties nurses might face should they want to change jobs. These potential obstacles were due to the Procurement and Assignment program, which required clearance from an old employer before a

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30 *Mennon nursing* 1, no. 1 (May 1944): 7.

31 Mimeographed paper, “Items of Interest,” April 29, 1944, Mennonite Nurses Association, box 1 of Harrisonburg Mennonite Nurses Association 1943–1990, folder: HNA/Miscellaneous, Eastern Mennonite Historical Library, 1.

nurse could be hired by a new employer. Readers were encouraged to read the *AJN* for more information.

Thus, national and professional pressures to serve the war effort strengthened and clarified the commitments of Mennonite nurses to mission and service. Nurses and church leaders desired to not only serve a hurting world but also remind others of the church's stand for nonviolence, and even in the face of extreme pressure to cooperate with government, government-aligned nursing agencies, and war-supporting organizations.

Records indicate that some new Mennonite nurse graduates were threatened by their state examining board and told that they would not receive their certificates of registration if they did not volunteer for the military.<sup>32</sup> Other graduates, like Karen Swartz, who graduated from La Junta in 1940, decided to exit the profession, changing their career and life plans due to the increasing pressure to enlist and congressional activity, anticipating a possible draft. Karen and her fiancé, Charles Graber, decided to move up the date of their marriage, thus avoiding the draft. This also curtailed Karen's nursing career far earlier than planned due to the expectation that nurses would not work outside the home once married.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly the Mennonite Nurses Association played a key role in the communication and organization that enabled Mennonite nurses to serve professionally, also allowing them to remain true to their convictions while engaging the church in mission. The following section will highlight narratives of nurses who served in CPS camps, relief efforts, and long-term missions. These stories offer a glimpse into the lives of American Mennonite nurses as they created a new space for professional and faith-based service in male-dominated contexts.

## Narratives of Service as Mission

### *Nurses in Civilian Public Service*

#### Staffing the Camps

"Hearing about a stray nurse who might be available for CPS makes me feel like a gold miner in the year 1849,"<sup>34</sup> reported one official. In fact, many CPS

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32 This is sourced to a letter from Henry Fast, director of CPS, to Orie O. Miller, director of MCC, referenced in Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 75.

33 Interview with Karen and Charles Graber conducted by author, November 15, 1997, in author's personal collection.

34 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 73, 76. Some of these CPS camps tried to seek nurses and doctors from the Japanese internment camps, but this was not permitted by Selective Service officials.

camps had difficulty finding enough nurses to attend to the medical needs of the draftees. The work of MNA, however, had paid off. Because they had so deliberately located and communicated with Mennonite graduate nurses, camps managed by MCC were less likely to struggle finding enough nurses. Mennonites were more likely to trust and support their own service initiatives, in part because La Junta had remained independent of the Cadet Nurse Corps.<sup>35</sup> Many nurses found their way to the camps through word of mouth, while others were contacted by MCC. Some went because their husbands joined CPS upon being drafted. More than forty nurses served in CPS camps from 1941 to 1946.<sup>36</sup>

Waltner Goossen describes “push” and “pull” factors that brought nurses and other women into CPS. One “push factor” was that some nurses found themselves in positions of downward professional mobility when their employers learned and disapproved of their pacifist stance. “Pull” factors included nurses following their husbands or fiancés to camp, or joining CPS in order to express their pacifist beliefs.<sup>37</sup> One nurse sought out MCC because she “wanted to do something for the peace movement.”<sup>38</sup>

Because of Roosevelt’s War Manpower Commission, which carefully monitored hospital employment, some nurses experienced difficulty extricating themselves from hospital work. Nevertheless, CPS officials sometimes assigned nurses to camp employment despite threats that nurses’ licenses could be revoked if they left the hospital.<sup>39</sup>

### Nurses’ Position as Paid Staff

CPS staff nurses earned from twenty-five to forty dollars a month, which was more than men with less education earned. As one nurse put it, “My husband as director made \$10 and I made \$40, we were set.”<sup>40</sup> As newlyweds with no children, they had few other expenses since room, board, and medical care were

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35 Ibid., 74.

36 Compiled from the appendix of a partial listing of all MCC-CPS staff appointees, referenced in Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 1949.

37 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 71.

38 Karen Myers, quoting Kathryn Shank Turner in “Valiant Soldiers for Peace: Mennonite Women and Civilian Public Service during World War II” (term paper, Eastern Mennonite University, 1992), 4. Turner’s paper is available at the Menno Simons Historical Library at EMU.

39 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 75.

40 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September 29, 1997, in author’s personal collection.

provided by MCC.

These female nurses entered a male-dominant culture. And yet they held more power and independence inside the camps than outside. One nurse mentioned several times in her diary that when her director was gone, she was placed in charge. Later, she also had to fill in as dietitian and was expected to plan menus and manage finances. She noted, “So help me, the only woman with 100 men...it is a big job to control my emotions and fight rebellion, but I want to try to learn all I can from the experience.”<sup>41</sup> Moyer felt “overwhelmed by the duties.”<sup>42</sup>

Sometimes having little previous experience, nurses found themselves in charge of many, sometimes more than a hundred men.<sup>43</sup> Yet these women rose to the challenge. They were employed, while the men were draftees. The men did not forget that difference and reminded nurses that employees could leave if they desired.<sup>44</sup> Men sometimes resisted or ignored the nurses’ requirements of cleanliness and orderliness in the barracks but soon discovered the power of these women, who were not afraid to restrict the privileges of the uncooperative.<sup>45</sup>

While the draftees were sent to camps from all walks of life, the female nurses were comparatively homogenous, as they were more similarly educated. They generally had some college education and further education in nursing school. Virginia Grove Weaver, for example, finished a college degree before nurse training in Virginia, since her father would not give her prior permission to enroll in nursing school.<sup>46</sup>

### Camp Medical Duties

In most camps, daily nursing was quite routine: offer primary care, determine who was too ill to work, keep those most sick in the infirmary, and seek a phy-

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41 Bessie C. Moyer, diary entry while at CPS No. 20, Sideling Hill, April 8, 1943, Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University.

42 Bessie C. Moyer, diary entry while at CPS No. 20, Sideling Hill, April 15, 1943, Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University.

43 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September, 29, 1997, in author’s personal collection.

44 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 71.

45 Bessie C. Moyer, diary entry while at CPS No. 20, Sideling Hill, October, 1942, Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University.

46 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September 29, 1997, in author’s personal collection.

sician's help for those in need of further attention.<sup>47</sup> Vera Yoder gave this report from the Luray, Virginia, camp: "In general the nurse must diagnose, inasmuch as she must decide which cases she can treat adequately and which she should refer to a physician....This type of discrimination is one of the most difficult duties of the CPS nurse. She is really 'on her own.'"<sup>48</sup> Edna Hunsparger noted that in CPS one had to "scrap all the best (nursing) theories."<sup>49</sup>

More mundane chores included inspecting dorms and kitchens to determine good health habits. And when a draftee needed to go to court to petition a medical leave or discharge, the nurse was required to go and testify.<sup>50</sup>

Among these other tasks, nurses gave typhoid vaccinations to all new draftees. More often than not, the vaccination resulted in a reaction that included high fevers requiring careful monitoring. The payoff in the long run appeared to be good, however. While the *Virginia Health Bulletin* issues of 1941 to 1945 published numerous articles about typhoid outbreaks, no mention was made of the three CPS camps in Virginia during that time, indicating there were likely no outbreaks in or around the camps.<sup>51</sup>

The concern in the Western camps was Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF), "that great danger lurking in the wilderness of the Rockies." One nurse was chagrined to learn years later that, though she had been proud of a 100 percent vaccination rate and no cases of RMSF, the vaccine was only 10 percent effective: "And to think of all those shots I administered!"<sup>52</sup>

The illnesses and problems the nurses faced in the infirmaries were common for the time and to be expected considering the work the draftees were doing. A doctor was usually available in the nearest town. Sometimes nurses and doctors disagreed, resulting in tension. One nurse noted that she was "not

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47 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September 29, 1997, in author's personal collection.

48 Items of Interest, April 29, 1944. Mimeographed paper issued by the local Mennonite Nurses Association, Harrisonburg, VA. Box 1 of Harrisonburg Mennonite Nurses Association 1943–1990. Folder: HNA/Miscellaneous. Eastern Mennonite Historical Library. 3.

49 *Mennon nursing* 2, no. 1 (1946): 5.

50 Mary Mann, *Our CPS Stories: Service for Peace* (Elkhart, IN: Prairie Street Mennonite Church, 1996), 54.

51 Virginia Department of Health, *Virginia Health Bulletin*, vols. 5, 6, 7, 8.

52 Quotation from camp nurse Catharine Crocker in *State Lines and Canopies: Stories from Smokejumpers. CPS Camp #103: 1943–46* (Missoula, MT, n.d.). This document is available at the Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University.

so favorably impressed with the camp doctor.”<sup>53</sup> Making matters more difficult, camp directors had to consider camp finances, while the nurse might have preferred confirmation of someone with more experience, regardless of expense.<sup>54</sup>

Patients often experienced mental health issues and sometimes epidemics. Moyer notes in December of 1943, “Flu epidemic, 21 patients....Glorious day, water frozen all day.”<sup>55</sup> And death, of course, was also present in the camps. While there were the rare incidents of brain abscesses or appendicitis, most camp deaths were due to work-related, vehicle, or recreational accidents.

### Conversations in Camp Life

Life in these camps was often both rich and difficult. Mennonite church leaders saw nursing with CPS as an important opportunity to shape peace theology and other educational pursuits. Formal and informal classes—teaching Spanish, and topics related to social issues and theology, for example—were held in many of the camps. These classes encouraged lively discussions even in the infirmary as friends came to visit ill draftees.<sup>56</sup> The mix of COs and staff from various backgrounds resulted in shared conversations among people with diverse perspectives. Orpha Mosemann, a nurse serving in Galax, Virginia, said that “CPS is a melting pot for many church prejudices.”<sup>57</sup>

### Relationships with Neighbors

Communities surrounding the camps responded in various ways to the COs. A sampling of the *Daily News Record*, the local daily newspaper of Harrisonburg, Virginia,<sup>58</sup> yielded no editorials or letters to the editor against the COs from 1941 to 1944, and yet Mennonites who lived there during that time remember the looks and comments they received when they walked down the street.<sup>59</sup> In Indiana, nurse Mary Mann noted that people near the Medaryville camp were not sympathetic to the CO camp residents: “People made comments. You just

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53 Bessie C. Moyer, diary entry while at CPS No. 20, Sideling Hill, September 1942, Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University.

54 Ibid., October 1942.

55 Ibid., December 16, 1943.

56 Ibid., diary, August 26, 1943.

57 *Mennon nursing* 1, no. 1 (1945): 3.

58 *Daily News Record*, 1941–44, Harrisonburg–Rockingham Public Library.

59 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September, 29, 1997, in author’s personal collection.

had to get used to it."<sup>60</sup>

Frequently, nurses found themselves serving as health provider not only for the camps but also for the surrounding communities; their community service helped humanize camp and community relations. One nurse remembered that "some of the neighbors weren't the friendliest to our boys but they knew where to come when they were sick." This nurse made free house calls and served sick or injured neighbors in the camp in the Black Hills of South Dakota.<sup>61</sup> Another nurse served vacationers at nearby Glacier National Park.<sup>62</sup>

In Florida, camp staff faced rejection by some not because they were COs but because they engaged the Black community. The camp quartet sang in Black churches and invited Black preachers and leaders to speak at their camp. They also intentionally established a relationship at a nearby Black college. This interracial collaboration led to harassment of COs by some local white neighbors. Racial tension, alongside other political factors, eventually forced the unit to close.<sup>63</sup>

Other camps, however, had different experiences. Citizens of Terry, Montana, met before the camp opened and decided to welcome the COs as part of their community. Relationships were strong and friendships developed. The camp even, for a time, provided a science teacher for the local high school.<sup>64</sup>

### Mental Health Units

The desire to help alleviate human need and suffering eventually led CPS to offer mental health care. Mary Mann recorded that in Medaryville, Indiana, where camps raised pheasants to increase the food supply for the state, the Amish boys were content but the "better educated boys were unhappy." These COs were dissatisfied because they "felt this was busy work and the government was pushing them back away from the public."<sup>65</sup> Selective Service official Lt. Col. Neal M. Wherry believed it was impossible to assign COs to social welfare work, because "they might spread their philosophies and thus hamper the war effort."<sup>66</sup>

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60 Mary Mann, interview by author, October 25, 1997, in author's personal collection.

61 Marie Lohrenz, quoted in Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 77.

62 Virginia Grove Weaver, interview by author, September, 29, 1997, in author's personal collection.

63 Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 252.

64 Ibid., 12–13.

65 Mann, *Our CPS Stories*, 54.

66 Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 213.

As better paying jobs for the public came available in industry, the need for personnel in mental hospitals increased; the staff at Philadelphia State hospital even dropped from one thousand in 1941 to just over two hundred in 1942. Hospital capacity was two and a half thousand, but by 1942 there were six thousand patients. Because of this dramatic change, Selective Service officials decided CPS workers could be of help. Thus, Mennonites and other pacifists entered mental health work, a move which changed many of their careers and left a strong influence on mental health policies and practice in this country. Lt. Col. Hershey notes in his 1941–42 Selective Service report that the move to include COs as staff in mental hospitals was “probably the most significant action taken...during this period.”<sup>67</sup> He also records that numerous COs entered into nurse training courses as a result of the exposure to mental health care needs.

It is unclear how many nurses worked in the mental health hospitals. Since CO draftees lived on or near the hospital grounds rather than in large base camps, there was no need for camp staff nurses. Nursing needs, however, still remained. Some nurses joined their husbands and fiancés on staff at hospitals. Some female college students, not all of them nurses, formed units and volunteered during the summer at several mental health facilities. These volunteers were freer than CO draftees to give public witness to their pacifist convictions.

Women at Goshen College formed one of these volunteer groups, known as the CO Girls or the COGs, in August of 1943. Their purposes included “giving expression and developing their convictions on peace and war, to relieve human need and to assume responsibility in supporting the stand taken by the young men.”<sup>68</sup>

Florence Nafziger graduated in 1940 from La Junta and enrolled in Goshen with the hope of completing her degree and then heading to India as a missionary. One summer, she joined the Goshen COG group as a staff nurse at the Ypsilanti Mental Hospital in Michigan, where her brother Nevin served with CPS. She was the only graduate nurse on staff besides her supervisors. With the exception of her experiences with cockroaches, Nafziger enjoyed her work at the hospital.<sup>69</sup>

## Public Health and Medical Units

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67 Lt. Col. Lewis B. Hershey, *Selective Service in Wartime: 2nd Report of the Director of Selective Service, 1941–42* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 270.

68 Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 102.

69 Florence Nafziger, interview by author, October 25, 1997, in author's personal collection.

The first CPS unit to work in public health was through a joint Brethren and MCC project in Crestview Florida. These agencies and staff cooperated with local health departments in the hookworm eradication project.<sup>70</sup> Unit personnel installed 577 latrines and 38 septic tanks, dug 57 wells, and screened 31 houses to stop malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The unit was moved to Tallahassee a year and a half later because of constant local newspaper criticisms of CO status.<sup>71</sup>

The Mississippi state board of health requested a CPS public health unit, and the Harrison County camp opened in February of 1945. The staff served citizens regardless of ethnic background. Camp staff volunteered after work each day to improve the physical plant of the North Gulfport Negro School, including replacing broken window panes and stopping up leaks around the chimney. They also informally provided recreational activities, such as games, music, and films for local residents. These relationships resulted in church exchanges and other visits.<sup>72</sup> The nurse assigned to this camp worked more with the community than with the draftees. She was loaned to the local health department and worked in the clinic, gave vaccinations in schools, checked children for lice, and made home visits for local school children and for pregnant women who were under the care of midwives.<sup>73</sup>

In Puerto Rico, nurses joined CPS men in public health and community development projects. A hospital and clinic were built in a rural area known as La Plata in collaboration with the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration. In 1945, nurses and physicians at the hospital saw 900 outpatients per month and in 1946 trained 18 nurse aides.<sup>74</sup> This involvement resulted in a permanent presence and service in the area for the next several decades.

### *Nurses in Relief Efforts*

American Mennonite nurses had engaged in emergency relief work as part

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70 Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 254. An estimated 33 percent of the population was infected with hookworms and 30 percent of the homes needed latrines. Some places in the county had an 84 percent infection rate. Using latrines is the most effective way to combat the parasite, since hookworm eggs are excreted in the feces.

71 Mennonite Central Committee (2015), CPS Unit No. 027-01, accessed November 2, 2016, <http://civilianpublicservice.org/camps/27/1>.

72 Gingerich, *Service for Peace*, 261–62. This experience resulted in the opening of a permanent voluntary service unit operated by MCC that has provided teachers, nurses, and community development workers to Mississippi for five decades.

73 Ibid., 262.

74 Hershberger, *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War*, 194–219.

of missions prior to World War II. The Relief Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities or the Mennonite Relief Committee (MRC) began work with victims of the Spanish Civil War in 1937.<sup>75</sup> Relief work efforts from 1939 until the United States entered the war centered on supplying meals, clothing, and shelter to refugees in France, England, and in the German controlled area of Poland. While numerous women were appointed to serve there, it is not clear how many were nurses.<sup>76</sup> As noted, drafted men were not permitted to work overseas, thus this sort of assignment was desirable. When MCC finally secured permission to send a nurse to England, nurse Ellen Harder said, “When the call came to go overseas I couldn’t say no, because 150 men would have loved the opportunity.”<sup>77</sup>

Five of the ten female workers appointed to the Middle East relief work between 1944 and 1945 were nurses. There, they were loaned to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and served in refugee camps of persons displaced from the Balkans.<sup>78</sup> One nurse, Marie Fast from Minnesota, wrote to *Mennonnursing* in 1944, “At present I am working on the Children’s Wards. We have over a hundred children and it is quite a job to keep them at least half way in order. Our technique—you wouldn’t know we had any training at all, but we get results. Some time I should like to tell you about our Measles Hospital. That experience alone was worth the trip over here! I wish you could see some of my morasmic [malnourished] children who are filling out now, and we are by this time definitely fond of them.”<sup>79</sup>

The second issue of *Mennonnursing* included a memoriam: “To Marie Fast, who on May 2, 1945, was lost at sea while serving her Lord in relief nursing.”<sup>80</sup> Marie had served in a camp of 30,000 Yugoslav refugees at El Shatt in the Sinai desert and had accompanied a group of 1,700 refugees returning to their homeland. She served alongside one other nurse and a doctor, traveling by truck, boxcar, and ship. On their return voyage, the ship hit a mine just before it reached Italy. Before traveling with the refugees, Marie had given a letter to a teammate, addressed to her friends and family, with the label “Just in case.”<sup>81</sup>

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75 Hershberger, *Service for Peace*, 195.

76 Ibid., 190.

77 Ellen Harder questionnaire, quoted in Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 99.

78 Hershberger, *Service for Peace*, 206.

79 Marie Fast, “Notes from Overseas,” *Mennonnursing* 1, no. 1 (1944): 9.

80 *Mennonnursing* 1, no. 2 (1945): 2.

81 Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman, *Coals of Fire* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1954), 103–10.

Other nurses served in Europe, India, Africa, and later on in the Philippines. They also assisted MCC as twelve thousand European refugees resettled in Canada, South America, and the United States.<sup>82</sup> MNA reports that 38 (Old) Mennonite nurses were involved in the relief effort.<sup>83</sup> Nurses from other Mennonite conferences joined these service workers.

### *Missions Nursing*

Local and foreign mission service provided additional opportunities for nurses during the World Wars. These service opportunities utilized the nurses' training and leadership skills in service to Christ. These women had often felt called many years before they actually left for the field.

Florence Nafziger, who grew up in Idaho, felt a call when she was only ten years old to serve as a missionary. Her mother, quite practically, encouraged her to become a doctor, nurse, or teacher so that she would be ready for a life overseas, and so Florence committed to a life of nursing. After high school, Nafziger was still too young for nursing school, so she enrolled in a junior college in Hesston, Kansas, for two years.<sup>84</sup> After graduating from Hesston, she attended La Junta Mennonite School of Nursing. Since the school was managed by Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Nafziger surely heard of many opportunities for mission service.<sup>85</sup>

Following training, Nafziger went to Goshen College to finish her bachelor's degree, where she also served as college nurse. As noted above, she joined other college women and volunteered one summer at Ypsilanti Mental Hospital in Michigan with the CPS unit. At the end of the summer, she had to decide whether she should remain in the United States or go to India as she had planned. First, the superintendent of the hospital asked her to stay to create and teach a psychiatry course for graduate nurses. Then one of the CPS men, whom Florence was very fond of, asked her to marry him. Finally, the president of Goshen College asked her to establish and staff a college health program. Because Nafziger strongly felt called to India, she said no to all three, knowing that she was giving up three rewarding opportunities. During the summer of 1945, Nafziger spoke to a group of church youth in a small park about India, even as local citizens around her noisily celebrated the end of the war. She sailed for India in November after obtaining permission for civilian passage

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<sup>82</sup> Hershberger, *Service for Peace*, 213.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>84</sup> Florence Nafziger, interview by author, October 20, 1997, in author's personal collection.

<sup>85</sup> Swartzendruber, *Lamp in the West*, 64.

and spent nearly forty years teaching nursing.<sup>86</sup>

Edith Showalter of Harrisonburg, Virginia, is another nurse who chose to serve as an international missionary. Edith completed two years of college at Eastern Mennonite School and then studied nursing at Catawba Sanatorium near Roanake, Virginia. She graduated from the University of Virginia Hospital School of Nursing in Charlottesville in 1944 and taught there as assistant nursing instructor for a year until she left for Africa. *Mennonnursing* published an article by Showalter in 1945 in which she discussed the options open to graduate nurses. She mentioned private duty, general duty, public health, industrial, TB, orthopedic nursing, and nursing education as possibilities.<sup>87</sup> She noted that relief nursing and missions nursing, while they might require a life of hardship and loneliness, are well worth the sacrifice.

## Conclusion

Mennonite nurses joined thousands of other American nurses in responding to the health care needs created by World War II. Their service, however, was different, formed by biblical calls to mission, service, and peace taught by their church and reinforced by student experiences in Mennonite nursing schools and interactions in the Mennonite Nurses Association. These women faced strong professional and community pressures to conform to the majority view of what an appropriate nursing response was in time of war. Their personal and communal beliefs led them to resist these pressures and helped them find their own ways of responding to the crisis. They faced new challenges as nurses as they participated in CPS, relief efforts, and international missions. The service of these American Mennonite nurses during these tumultuous years proved that there is indeed “another way in which we can serve.”<sup>88</sup>

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86 Florence Nafziger, interview by author, October 25, 1997, in author's personal collection.

87 Edith Showalter, “Gain for Me, Loss for Christ,” *Mennonnursing* 1, no. 3 (May 1945), 5–6.

88 Carol Blosser (see note 1 above).

# Neither Male nor Female

## The Story of Wakuru and the Zanaki People

DAVID W. SHENK<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In 1936, my parents, Alta and Clyde Shenk, moved to Bumangi, Tanzania, about eighteen miles from Lake Victoria's eastern perimeter. This is where they began a pioneer ministry of bearing witness to the gospel among the Zanaki people, who had never before heard of Jesus.

Four years ago, my wife, Grace, and I took several of our teenage grandchildren on a legacy journey to East Africa, where I was born and raised, and our time in Bumangi was a highlight of our travels. After visiting the local church there, which was packed with about seven hundred people, we joined a family who wanted to share how the gospel had transformed their mother, Wakuru. They told us, "We want the great-grandchildren of Alta and Clyde Shenk to know how significant the gospel has been in transforming the lives of women in our home. You must know the story of our mother." Much that I share in this reflection is what we heard that morning from the children of Wakuru and her husband, Nyakitumu.

### Wakuru's Story

Not long after my parents' arrival in Bumangi, a young girl arrived on our doorstep and called out, "Hodi!" The girl was Wakuru, and she was about ten years old at the time. Calling out "Hodi!" was a custom of the Zanaki when they desired entrance into another's home. Before Wakuru even walked through our door, she stated simply, "I want to learn about God." In doing this, she became one of the first Zanaki seekers.

There was no literature among the Zanaki at that time, so my parents began to tell Wakuru the Genesis stories to introduce her to the God of the Bible. In these stories, one of Wakuru's first discoveries was that God created human-

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Shenk grew up in Bumangi, Tanzania, where his parents were pioneer Mennonite missionaries among the Zanaki people. Both as a professor and author, Shenk encourages peacemaking among Muslims and Christians. He and his wife, Grace, provide leadership for the Eastern Mennonite Mission's Christian/Muslim Relations Team. They have served together in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States.

kind in God's own image. In the image of God they were created, both male and female. Those stories from Genesis turned Wakuru's world upside down! She was filled with hope.

When Wakuru was twelve years old, her father announced that she would soon marry an elderly, polygamous man. She learned that cattle had already been paid as the dowry price. Among the Zanaki, once the dowry was paid, there could be no retraction from the marriage contract. The elderly man who planned to marry Wakuru lived within a worldview that considered women as means to create progeny, and the marriage contract a promise that a woman would produce children for her husband. The more children a woman could produce the better, so having multiple wives was desirable in order to produce more offspring. This was true among the Zanaki, and it is also true of traditional societies across Africa.

This quest for children was a desire for salvation. Many in traditional African societies believe that we cannot be remembered after death by God, because God has gone away; salvation, therefore, can only be attained by children remembering their deceased parents. Within this worldview, offspring are essential and everyone must marry; singleness is unthinkable. Most in these societies desire children who will remember them in the next world.

Wakuru grew up in a tribal context that was not yet touched by modern cultures or Christianity, and at that time the Christians among the Zanaki could be counted on one hand. However, a significant transformation took place during Wakuru's childhood. When my parents arrived, the Zanaki were completely illiterate. My parents published the Gospel of Matthew in Zanaki, which brought about great change. This new ability to read the accounts of Jesus transformed the village. Across the valley from our home, people were hearing about Jesus for the first time. The hill across the valley was Wakuru's home.

After hearing the biblical stories for two years, twelve-year-old Wakuru had a hunch that Jesus might provide a solution for her marriage quandary. She secretly trekked the couple of miles across the valley to our house. Yet again, she stood on our doorstep, this time telling my parents, "I have decided to follow Jesus."

With this confession of faith, Wakuru also refused to enter into the arranged marriage. Never before in this village had a young girl refused to accept this demand. But Wakuru had seen the relationship of my father and mother as one of love, and she desired the same for herself. The Zanaki world was turned on end.

In response, the clan elders exploded with frustration. Wakuru was beaten

and chained and her life threatened. Yet with quiet commitment, she simply refused to accept what her father demanded. For the first time a girl broke free from the demands of an unwanted marriage, and the Zanaki society has never been the same.

On one occasion, four men appeared in the doorway of the church while the congregation was gathered in worship. They commanded Wakuru to follow them, who instead ran to the front of the church and sat by my father. With a quick martial arts movement, he disempowered the leader and led the men to sit under a tree in the church's courtyard. When the service concluded, Wakuru gathered the clubs they had brought to beat her and gave them back to her assailants, blessing them each in turn.

### **There Is Not a Friend Like Jesus**

Before Wakuru died, I visited my childhood home in Bumangi for a dinner. Wakuru came into the dining room from the kitchen where she was supervising the meal.

She asked me, "Do you remember the time my brothers came to beat me, and I hid under your bed? You were just a little boy. Often in those days my parents would imprison me and tie my hands and feet in iron clamps so I could not escape." "When they were not home," she added, "I would sing, 'There is not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one, no not one.' Jesus was my friend in those long months of pain and conflict."

### **Created in the Image of God**

Resisting a polygamous marriage was not the only conflict Wakuru faced in her choice to embrace her identity as a daughter of God created in the image of God. The next conflict loomed at puberty, the stage of life when all girls were to submit to genital mutilation. This practice was used to anchor the woman's progeny into the covenant of tribe, ancestors, and family.

The transaction of mutilation was rooted in the covenant blood of the society's ancestors, and not in the life-giving blood of the Lord Jesus's covenant. The practice mutilated women, who are created in God's image. With unshakable resolve, Wakuru informed her parents that she would not participate in the practice and rituals surrounding the mutilation. And she stood firm. The elders were aghast, and the whole society reeled yet again at the impact of Wakuru's trailblazing action. Her firm stand had cracked the tribal monolith of the mutilation.

Many years later, Wakuru's daughters wanted us to know that their mother's clear stand opened the door for them to likewise refuse this suffering. Today the practice of female genital mutilation in Zanaki is largely abandoned.

One of Wakuru's daughters shared, "Mother was the pioneer; today so many are walking in her example."

### **There Is No Divide**

Several years later, Wakuru got caught in the web of another conflict between the transforming revolution of the gospel and the practices and totems of the tribal society in which she lived. Within Zanaki, there were two totemic clans, the basket-makers and the blacksmiths, and intermarriage between the clans was forbidden. The conflict occurred when Nyakitumu, one of the first Christian youth in Zanaki, sought Wakuru's hand in marriage. As a member of the blacksmith clan, he should not have been seeking the hand of Wakuru, a woman from the basket-making clan.

Nevertheless, Wakuru and Nyakitumu decided to confront this totemic stronghold. They shared with their families that in Christ there is no divide, for all people are equally created in the image of God. They married, and theirs was the first Christian wedding in the church in Bumangi. Greatly angered by this, the tribal leaders and shamans cursed this couple so that they would be forever childless. God, however, blessed them with thirteen children! In the course of time, this couple became leaders of the churches that emerged throughout the Zanaki regions.



Photo 1. Nyakitumu and Wakuru, senior pastor couple at Bumangi. *Photo courtesy of the author.*

### Who Carries the Basket?

Developing a Christian home was a challenge for Nyakitumu and Wakuru since there were no models of Christ-centered home life among the Zanaki. A practice as routine as carrying the grocery basket could become a practice of ridicule or blessing.

Nyakitumu once told my father that shortly after his marriage he and Wakuru went to the market together. In Zanaki society, the woman always carried the grocery basket on her head and walked behind her husband. On this occasion, however, as Nyakitumu and Wakuru were leaving the market for home, Wakuru said, “My husband, I have a headache. I need you to help me carry this basket.” He replied, “You are my wife. It is your responsibility to carry the basket.” Some distance onward, he looked back and saw Wakuru without the basket.

“Where is the basket?” he demanded.

She replied, “It is your money that bought the groceries, so they are yours. I told you I had a headache. The groceries are on the roadside.”

Wakuru was indeed a revolutionary, but so was Nyakitumu. Men did not carry grocery baskets. And I suppose no woman had ever refused this assumed responsibility. The expected Zanaki response would have been for Nyakitumu to beat Wakuru.

But instead of punishing her, Nyakitumu asked Wakuru for forgiveness, walked back to where Wakuru had left the groceries, and carried them home even though others might have laughed at him along the way since he was doing what they would consider women’s work.

One of my earliest memories as a little boy was hearing a woman wail in a homestead across the hills of Bumangi when I was tucked into bed one night. But this never happened to Wakuru. She shared with me that Nyakitumu never beat her; instead, he loved her.

### Valuing Education

In nearly every sphere of their lives, both Nyakitumu and Wakuru challenged patriarchal systems. When the Bumangi primary school opened in 1936, they were among the first to enroll. Wakuru’s enrollment in literacy classes was a shock to many because it flew in the face of their belief that women were good at cooking and capable of caring for the cows and goats but men were the ones called to academic pursuits. Together, Wakuru and Nyakitumu subverted these notions, eventually ensuring that their daughters also had access to higher education. Consequently, the women in this family have excelled in the academic and professional world.

## Celebrating a Milestone

I kept in touch with Nyakitumu until he died. In his last letter, Nyakitumu wrote of his fiftieth wedding anniversary with Wakuru. Their children gifted them with new outfits for the occasion, and choirs sang along the half-mile trek from their home to the church. Bishops and pastors from across the region attended the packed event. Even government officials came by to offer congratulations. A bull was slaughtered for the grand feast, and Bumangi resonated with song and celebration.

Since polygamous families did not celebrate such milestones, Wakuru and Nyakitumu were the first to celebrate a fiftieth wedding anniversary in Buman-gi. This was a landmark for the Zanaki tribe, and everyone joined together to thank God for Wakuru and Nyakitumu's commitment.



Photo 2. Elisha Nyakitumu and Susana Wakuru (center). They are surrounded by several of their thirteen children and grandchildren, with their firstborn, Rebeca, to the far left. *Photo courtesy of the author.*

## Genesis and Gender Empowerment

Throughout Wakuru's life, she encountered tension between the biblical values she discovered and modeled and the society in which she lived. As I reflect on her story, I am reminded of her discovery of the revolutionary good news found in Genesis 1–3—that she was a child of God, created in God's image. This news changed her life, and because of her resulting zeal, the community around her was changed as well.

The stories of Wakuru's life highlighted the gender transformation that biblical revelation offers. Wakuru and Nyakitumu's faithful witness to Christ transformed their whole society and helped bring about an awareness that all people, including women, are created in the image of God.

The following eight themes are grounded in these chapters of Genesis that seem to have formed Wakuru and shaped the choices she made.

1. Men and women are equally created in the image of God (1:27).
2. We are one humanity (2:7).
3. Marriage is the one flesh covenant union of a man and woman (2:20–25).
4. Children are a blessing but not essential to the marriage covenant (2:22–25).
5. Our fullest humanity is in a covenant relationship with God, not in marriage (1).
6. Individually and corporately we have turned away from God; one of the core expressions of turning away is distorted relationships between humans, often expressed in men domineering women (3:15).
7. Being a mother is not a woman's highest calling. Rather, all people are created for covenant relationship with God.
8. God promised a son who would bring about healing and forgiveness in our societies, personhood, brokenness, and sin (3:15).<sup>2</sup>

And, as in Wakuru's story, engagement with these biblical themes takes place not just between church and society but also within the life and ministry of the church, and at a deeply personal level.

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<sup>2</sup> These eight themes are developed by Walter Trobisch in *I Married You* (Boliver, MO: Quiet Waters, 2009.) Trobisch observes that the vast majority of traditional societies are organized around belief systems that view the woman as a field and having children as the purpose of marriage. He argues that Christianity provides an exception to this worldview. Chantal Logan developed a similar assessment in her essay "Is the Gospel Good News for Muslim Women?" in *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*, eds. James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk, and Linford Stutzman (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2005), 141–52.

## **Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Transformation**

Forgiveness and reconciliation were central for Wakuru and Nyakitumu. As a young girl, Wakuru gathered the clubs of the men who wanted to beat her, returning them to the men and wishing each of them the peace of God. As an adult, in every return visit to Bumangi, Wakuru would share with me stories of reconciliation between her and her parents. Before her mother died, Wakuru felt that a full restoration of relations with her parents was at hand. Her mother even invited Wakuru to share gospel stories from time to time.

Wakuru and Nyakitumu did not set out to start a movement. Rather, they were two youth who met Jesus and tried to follow their Lord faithfully. In spite of conflicts at nearly every turn, they were careful to cultivate life-giving relations each step along the way. Continual forgiveness in the midst of the confrontations they faced was the hallmark of their revolution.

These stories highlight the gender transformation that biblical revelation offers. Wakuru and Nyakitumu's faithful witness to Christ transformed their whole society and helped bring about an awareness that all people, including women, are created in the image of God.

## **Conclusion**

These stories began when a young girl walked across the valley in Bumangi to meet with a tiny community of Christians. She made that trek alone to investigate the rumor that there is good news in Jesus.

In the face of enormous opposition, her quest transformed her and her people. Because of her curiosity and commitment, her village learned that in Christ "there is neither male nor female" (Gal 3:28).

# The Tension of Grace

ANNE THIESSEN<sup>1</sup>

Usually I live in Mexico, but I've been back in Canada for the past year. Here, I am part of a group that sponsors a Syrian refugee family. It's difficult to communicate across the linguistic barriers, but our families' shared goal of helping integrate the Syrian family into Canadian life has created a strong bond between us, especially between the Syrian mother and me. We trust each other. So when I see my friend rush to put on a headscarf and long jacket at the sound of my husband's knock on the door, or watch from the sidelines when everyone else is enjoying a dip in the pool, I want to blurt out, "You don't have to do that! It's not necessary! There is such freedom in the world, if only you knew!" But I don't say this, because I would accomplish nothing and might jeopardize our friendship. We each have our own conscience and view on modesty. Many of us who serve cross-culturally live with this tension—the tension between wanting to share our faith and the freedom it provides, and not wanting to impose our cultural norms. This is tough. When we minister to people who are different from us, our gut reaction is often to judge them on our terms. How do we share our faith with others without expecting them to somehow become just like us? This is the tension of grace.

In the last few weeks, I have traveled in and out of an assortment of cultures, each with its own perspective on the roles of men and women, husbands and wives. I went from attending a church in Canada where women are not allowed to be elders or to preach regularly, to leading in another church in Mexico, where I, as a woman, am an elder and preach regularly. There, I counseled a newly married Hispanic woman to submit silently to her husband's preferences on how to rear the three children in their blended household, while in my own marriage I am a partner in such decisions. In Mexico, where my husband and I work as missionaries, there are village cultures that expect wives to work in the home and rarely step foot outside alone. Just down the road from these villages are other village cultures where the women are out on their own all the time, selling their wares or visiting friends in other places. We minister among churches that don't allow women to lead as well as among churches that call women as their pastors. Our own family culture rarely matches up with the diverse family cultures of the people with whom we minister, and this is true

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*1 Anne Thiessen serves with MBMission in southern Mexico.*

even among Christians. Even those within the body of Christ don't often agree on gender roles, whether in the church or in marriage, and much less often on details such as apparel. How should we minister to one another in the midst of such differences?

I know of a group of well-meaning American short-term workers who visited a Mexican indigenous village and were appalled that the women had no say in how many children they bore for their husbands. Birth control was not an option, because it was viewed as a way that a woman could defy and even cheat on her husband. This group of Americans called an impromptu gathering with the women and taught them about birth control. When the men heard about this, they were furious and accused the visitors of inciting rebellion and undermining village unity and male authority. Although the birth control talk would have been appropriate in some other place and time, this particular setting was not suitable for this particular message. It was interpreted simply as outsiders inciting anarchy. The team had targeted a village custom without first exploring the marriage relationships out of which this custom had grown.

The Bible itself contains varying views on gender roles. Abraham is torn between a jealous wife and a taunting concubine, and his grandson has four women. Paul requires Timothy to appoint elders who are “husbands of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). His very use of this phrase presupposes male elders in those first churches, but Paul casually mentions female leaders in his lists and greetings. He insists that “in Christ there is no Jew *or* Gentile, slave *or* free, *male and female*” (to paraphrase Galatians 3:28), undermining the norms of his day without directly contravening them. This is a long way from the law that allowed a man to pay a fine for spoiling a slave girl's virginity. The Bible, over the time of its writing, shows a progression in how people have treated the most vulnerable in their societies. It concludes with Jesus's life and teaching, which places infinite worth on all. Jesus's presence in a culture plants seed for change, overturning its injustices. Early Christians were known for sheltering the helpless of their world. And when the church is most faithful, it continues to plant seeds of good news that brings about change, providing for the marginalized and bringing freedom and hope to people around the world.

I saw this power of the gospel when it was shared for the first time with a Mexican Mixtec village. Some fifty villagers came to Christ in response to the testimony of one of their own family members, a migrant worker. Without any prompting from outsiders, they as a group decided that some of their practices had to stop—drunkenness and the beating of women that often resulted, and, as they called it in their language, the “selling of their daughters,” when money was paid for arranged marriages. They came to believe this practice was de-

meaning for the girls. I saw then how the gospel carries within itself the seed for righting every injustice. The members of this Mixtec village said that the women and girls were in some ways poorly treated by their menfolk, and the new Christ-followers took the initiative to bring about change.

Of course, as an outsider, I could have called their attention to the many wrongs I believed they had missed. I might have tried to persuade them to have marriages that looked more like my own. On the other hand, I'm sure that they, if they had come from the critical, analytical, dominant race that I had, could just as easily have pointed out to me my relational flaws and perhaps the way my race treats so dismissively the young or the old and has so much trouble sheltering the homeless. The Holy Spirit pricks the conscience of different people in different ways so that they hurry to right different wrongs; as Christians, if we are not careful, we may be too quick to judge what others have (from our perspective) obviously neglected, without trusting God's Spirit or waiting to see in what direction God is already moving them.

The tension of grace is found also in my current home in Canada, where conversations about gender include concerns for transgender individuals and communities. Anabaptists, located across multiple spectrums, accuse those who oppose their convictions of betraying Christ in some fundamental way. Each side is reluctant to acknowledge that the others are trying to be faithful. Despite the evidence of irreconcilable differences, I believe the Holy Spirit can guide all sides into truth. But it would take honesty and listening from Christians, and an abundance of grace. Meanwhile we live with the tension.

It might sound as if all that Christians have to do is present the gospel, wait for the Spirit to work, and expect all will be well. But of course this isn't true. Missionaries have much to give to people of other cultures, but only once we have listened, understood our new neighbors' cries of pain, and recognized their steps of obedience toward God. Our goal should not be to pit genders against one another, demanding rights and privileges, but to facilitate reconciliation by modeling mutual respect and submission in our relationships. Christians come to bring peace, dignity, and goodness to the relationships they encounter, not to break them. People responding to Jesus should be known for loving one another more, not less.

So what do we have to offer when we see people in the cultures around us in pain because of gender roles? What if religious leaders in a culture caution men that, like Eve, women tend to lead their husbands into sin? Or what if these leaders teach women that their religious duty is to tolerate infidelity and abuse? Or that women bring such abuse on themselves so that the welts on their bodies are their own fault? I have heard these things in the places I have lived. We

are no longer talking about clothing choices but about demeaning attitudes toward people. Then what do we do beyond listening, modeling, teaching, and sharing experience?

Jesus didn't overturn the authority structures of his day, which included government, tradition, church, and family. But he did value care of others above these lesser laws. Jesus did not hesitate to contravene these lesser laws for the sake of love and compassion. So the scriptures say he sent his preachers to "men of peace" and his freshly healed leper to a temple priest for their approval. He and Paul both began their preaching under synagogue authority. From this, we learn that whenever we can obey local law, we should. Notice Peter's defense when he disobeyed the priests: "Should we listen to you, or to God?" (paraphrase of Acts 4:19). So even though the women in some cultures may have more freedoms, we should not carry these freedoms to other cultures as weapons. We should, instead, seek out the ways in which women are valued and build on that which we find.

One application of this principle is to honor the head of household when we arrive with a new gospel, not skirting around his or her back to speak to his or her family without permission. In many cultures the saying is true: "If you bring a child to Christ, you've reached a child. If you bring a father to Christ, you've reached a family." How would any of us as parents react if we found missionaries of another faith targeting our children? In many cultures, women are considered vulnerable, deserving of protection, like children. To respect family authority in the act of sharing the good news is to recognize that God deals with us not just individually but also as families and bonded groups. After all, God is a unity of persons under authority.

But power corrupts, and when power structures just won't relent and people are in pain, there are no easy answers. There are no clear rules. Responses must be provided case-by-case. Sometimes intervention is necessary; sometimes rescue. When a woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus and men raised stones to kill her, Jesus pricked the men's consciences. He made them feel the woman's guilt as their own. He set aside their law to kill, without defying it. "If any of you..." He aligned himself with the woman and traced her pain in the sand. "Neither do I condemn you. Go in peace." He changed the relationship of the steely eyed men to the woman that day, making them one with the woman, instead of leaving the woman as an "other" to be condemned (John 8:1-11). I doubt they ever forgot that change.

We need to ask ourselves what type of person might feel condemned, surrounded by attackers, in our own circles? Among Mexican Evangelicals, it might be unwed mothers. Among Canadian Anabaptists, it might be trans-

gender individuals. We need to ask God in situations such as these to prick our consciences, as he did those of the threatening crowds around that adulterous woman. Like Jesus, we need to invoke the higher law of love, which can change our relationships with those whom we have condemned and release pardoned men and women to go in peace.

We face tension whenever we engage people who are different from us. We make mistakes. We judge and are judged wrongly. But the more we engage the other—the more we learn to love them—the more God teaches us how to walk through the tension into grace. We dare not shun these relationships, because there is no other way to learn.



# Jesús, la mujer y el encuentro en un espacio de frontera

ALIX LOZANO<sup>1</sup>

*Marcos 7: 24-30 (Reina-Valera, 1960)*

*24 Levantándose de allí, se fue a la región de Tiro y de Sidón; y entrando en una casa, no quiso que nadie lo supiese; pero no pudo esconderse. 25 Porque una mujer, cuya hija tenía un espíritu inmundo, luego que oyó de él, vino y se postró a sus pies. 26 La mujer era griega, y sirofenicia de nación; y le rogaba que echase fuera de su hija al demonio. 27 Pero Jesús le dijo: Deja primero que se sacien los hijos, porque no está bien tomar el pan de los hijos y echarlos a los perrillos. 28 Respondió ella y le dijo: Sí Señor, pero aun los perrillos, debajo de la mesa, comen de las migajas de los hijos. 29 Entonces le dijo: Por esta palabra, ve; el demonio ha salido de tu hija. 30 Y cuando llegó ella a su casa, halló que el demonio había salido, y a la hija acostada en la cama.*

## Introducción

Este encuentro ocurre fuera del territorio judío. El lugar geográfico está entre Galilea, Tiro y Sidón, es decir, es un área similar al espacio fronterizo que se da en nuestros países latinos, como entre Paraguay y Brasil. En los territorios que quedan entre fronteras generalmente hay conflictos culturales, religiosos, políticos y económicos, que tienen implicaciones diferentes a los conflictos que se viven en las ciudades del interior. Es en la frontera de estos países donde se encuentra Jesús. Por eso, lo que aquí sucede con Él tiene sentido y relevancia. En estos sitios fronterizos se imponen normas y se define quién tiene el poder. Además, las fronteras son vigiladas y deseadas por los países a los que pertenecen. Hay mercadería barata que viene de ambos lados, el comercio es fluido. Esto es lo que sucede en la realidad actual de América Latina. Las

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personas que tratan de pasar y no tienen documentos migratorios, son sacadas fuera de la frontera y devueltas a su país; entre éstas se encuentran campesinos, migrantes, refugiados, desplazados; los sacamos a la periferia, son los sin tierra, los excluidos; ellos y ellas no caben en el país, se encuentran escondidos debajo de la mesa.

Ahí estamos las mujeres, como en un lugar simbólico. Todo el texto acontece en la frontera de esos países. Jesús sale del centro, de la capital, y se dirige a la frontera.

Ahora veremos tres momentos que el texto nos permite analizar.

### **Primer Momento: Versículos 24-26**

Jesús entra en una casa, pero no quiere que nadie se entere porque sabe que éste no es su territorio y que puede irle mal. Pero no puede pasar desapercibido. Porque una mujer, que no quiere esconderse, avanza. Va al lugar prohibido y entra en la casa; traspasa la vergüenza y el honor y se atreve a quebrantar las reglas sociales. Es bien sabido que estaba prohibido que una mujer y un hombre conversaran en un espacio público; era algo que se consideraba impúdico, perverso. Pero ella, con valentía, rompe con los valores negativos de la cultura y las fronteras que delimitan lo masculino y lo femenino.

Veamos quién es esta mujer y qué es lo que la moviliza. En primer lugar, no se menciona su nombre. Se dice que es griega, sirofenicia de nacimiento. Seguramente, como alguna de nosotras, es una mujer con hijos e hijas, cabeza de familia posiblemente; no se menciona esposo o compañero alguno. No es judía pero busca y suplica ayuda a un judío. Conoce a Jesús solo de oídas; sabe que Él tiene poder para sanar, pero ella tiene el poder del atrevimiento. Porque tiene una petición especial y muy importante: que Jesús eche fuera al demonio que ha poseído a su hija. Como muchas latinas, nosotras también hemos llegado a Él en busca de socorro y alivio a nuestro sufrimiento, necesidades no satisfechas y luchas interminables.

La primera lección que nos deja esta mujer, es que decide romper los límites impuestos por medio de la cultura y la religión. No se queda en la pasividad, solamente orando en el interior de la iglesia. Se atreve a actuar con valentía; se atreve a dejar las prohibiciones de su entorno, en cuanto a relaciones sociales, o a usar el poder de la palabra. Ella supera estos mandatos y sale de la invisibilidad en que la han mantenido. Esta mujer sirofenicia no muestra miedo a arriesgarse; es audaz y atrevida, echando mano de comportamientos que las sociedades han asignado a los varones. Ella reconoce a Jesús; su objetivo es buscar y obtener el bienestar y salud de su hija. El profundo amor que siente por ella hace que desafíe y rompa límites establecidos y esquemas de autoridad.

Lo mismo ocurre en este I Encuentro Latinoamericano de Mujeres Teólo-

gas Anabautistas, en el marco del Congreso Mundial Menonita. Llegar a este momento ha implicado, entre otras cosas, traspasar fronteras, escuchar historias de mujeres, romper esquemas tradicionales, y desafiar estructuras.

Para llegar hasta aquí, hemos tenido que resignificar nuestro papel como mujeres teólogas: fue necesario ser inclusivas y reconocer los ministerios, vocaciones y llamados que cada una tiene. Eso sí, animando y desafiando a cada una a la capacitación bíblica y teológica, porque ésta nos podrá ayudar a abrir la mente para ir comprendiendo aún mejor los desafíos y compromisos que tenemos.

### **Segundo momento: Versículos 27-28**

En esta porción está el corazón del texto. Es el desafío central. Jesús tiene clara su misión, que es ir al pueblo de Israel. Usa la figura de la mesa servida a donde está claro para Él a quién ha venido a servir. La mujer le responde que eso es cierto, pero también es cierto que de la mesa caen migajas, y debajo de la mesa están los perrillos, los cuales se comen las migajas que caen. Ella persiste, irrumpe y provoca una ruptura en el pensamiento de Jesús:

- Su paradigma, su modelo, sufre un cambio. La mujer le propone: «yo estoy debajo de la mesa, me pertenecen esas migajas y no me las puedes quitar. No importa que estén debajo de la mesa».
- A pesar de la exclusión, lo que cae le corresponde. Ella lo considera su derecho. Esto se aparta de una actitud de resignación, de humillación; requiere fuerza y energía; tiene una misión sanadora que se manifiesta en la fuerza de ser capaz de rechazar. Lo más relevante para ella en ese momento es la vida de su hija: sanarla, cuidarla. En juego está la vida; no hay fronteras ni misiones; no hay nada y si la vida está en juego eso es lo más importante<sup>2</sup>.

### **Tercer momento: Versículos 29-30**

«*Por esta palabra ve...*». Se realiza el milagro, hay buenas nuevas, pensamientos de vida. Él queda transformado, evangelizado; ella, empoderada. Entrar en diálogo con Él posibilita lo imposible. Ella regresa a casa, pero ya no con las manos vacías; regresa a su mundo, a su realidad, a su cotidianidad, a su iglesia, a su misión. Regresa distinta, transformada, feliz, por haber hallado a un judío que le ha posibilitado su transformación interior. Se libera ella, libera al mismo

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<sup>2</sup> Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, «Transgresión y proclamación en la tierra de frontera», *Revista Con-spirando* 43 (mayo 2003): 24.

Jesús y, además, su hija es sanada. Jesús tiene su propia experiencia de liberación y conversión a partir de este encuentro. Jesús amplía su visión y misión en lugares de frontera.

Ella amplía su comprensión de Dios como un Dios solidario, que se mueve en espacios de frontera y por debajo de la mesa. Jesús crece como hombre hacia una nueva masculinidad, sensible frente a la dinámica patriarcal. Esta comprensión de hombre, diferente de la época, de la experiencia y del encuentro con la otra lo transforma, como los encuentros genuinos entre hombres y mujeres de Dios.<sup>3</sup>

### *Pistas clave para nuestro trabajo y compromiso*

- Necesidad de continuar con el trabajo de las mujeres donde nos encontremos y seguir declarando la vida en libertad para ellas.
- Necesidad de interpelar el *status quo* que esclaviza y deforma la vida de las mujeres. Como cristianos hablamos de la doctrina sana. ¿Cómo puede haber iglesias con doctrina sana, si las mujeres no tenemos acceso al liderazgo ni a la formación bíblico-teológica? ¿Cómo puede haberla si estamos silenciadas, invisibilizadas y somos excluidas de la comunidad? Todo lo que ata necesita ser revisado: nos produce enfermedad, esclavismo, temor y nos aleja de Dios.
- En el libro de Gabriel García Márquez, *Del amor y otros demonios*<sup>4</sup>, se relata la historia de una pequeña niña que ha sufrido una serie de calvarios a lo largo de su corta vida. Como su comportamiento y forma de ver la vida no encaja con lo establecido, todo el tiempo la están torturando para expulsar al supuesto demonio, lo que termina en su muerte. García Márquez dice, «A veces atribuimos al demonio ciertas cosas que no entendemos, sin pensar que pueden ser cosas que no entendemos de Dios»<sup>5</sup>.
- Otras veces, interpretamos como formas demoniacas la presencia de Dios en el trabajo de las mujeres, nos da miedo, demonizamos este tipo de situaciones, porque no las entendemos.
- Es importante romper barreras y crear nuevas relaciones de género con y entre nosotras y con ellos. Ser amigas, solidarias, reconocernos mutuamente, felicitarnos, admirarnos y promocionarnos. Se hace necesario que nos transformemos a nosotras mismas y que transformemos a nuestra

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3 Ibid.

4 García Márquez, *Del amor y otros demonios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1994).

5 Ibid., 51.

familia, a nuestros hijos e hijas.

- Caminar en espacios de frontera nos permite transformar, convocar y desafiarnos. Seremos sanadas nosotras y otros, porque podremos ver con ojos nuevos y bendición nueva. ¡Hasta que el Señor se ría con nosotras y juntos podamos celebrar la vida!

Amén.



# Jesus, the Woman, and Their Encounter in a Border Region

ALIX LOZANO<sup>1</sup>

*Mark 7:24–30 (ESV)*

*24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. 25 But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.*

## Introduction

This encounter takes place outside of Jewish territory, between Galilee, Tyre, and Sidon. One could compare this location to the border areas of our Latin American countries (such as the area between Paraguay and Brazil) where there are cultural, religious, political, and economic conflicts whose implications are different from those of conflicts in the cities of the nation's interior. In these border areas, goods are cheap and commerce flows from both sides, rules are imposed, power hierarchies are established, and neighboring countries watch the borders with passionate interest. This is the reality today in Latin America. People attempting to cross over the border without migration documents are sent back to their countries; they are *campesinos*, migrants, refugees, displaced people who we shoved out to the margins. They are without land, the excluded

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ones. There is no place for them in our countries; they are squatting under the table.

Here, too, in this symbolic place are the women. And here, we also find Jesus, who has moved out of the center, away from the capital city to the borderlands, where whatever happens to him has special meaning and relevance.

The whole text moves through this border area between countries. Now we will examine three moments in that text.

### **First Moment: Verses 24–26**

Jesus goes into a house, but he doesn't want to be seen, because this is not his territory—things could go badly for him if he is discovered. But he cannot go unnoticed, because a woman who doesn't want to remain in hiding comes forward. She dares to break social rules, and overcomes shame and the honor code: she goes to the forbidden place and enters the house. It's well known that conversation between men and women is prohibited in public—it's considered immodest, even perverse—but she bravely breaks with negative cultural values and the boundaries demarcating the masculine and the feminine.

Let's examine who this woman is and what drives her. In the first place, her name is not mentioned. It's said that she is Greek, Syrophenician by birth. Probably like some of us she's a mother of boys and girls and perhaps, since no husband or partner is mentioned, she's also the head of a household. She begs a Jewish man for help even though she is not Jewish and she knows Jesus's power to heal only by hearsay. But she has the power of boldness because of her special and extremely important petition—that Jesus drive out the demon that possesses her daughter. Similarly, many of us Latin American women have come to Jesus in search of help and deliverance from our suffering, our unsatisfied needs, our endless struggles.

The first lesson this woman leaves us is her decision to break with the limits imposed by culture and religion. She does not remain passive, just praying inside the church. She dares to act with courage; she dares to throw off her culture's restraints regarding social relationships and to use the power of the word. She overcomes these mandates that had made her invisible. This Syrophenician woman shows no fear in taking a risk; she's audacious and bold—attitudes that our societies have attributed to men. She recognizes who Jesus is, and her purpose in connecting with him is to pursue and secure the well-being and health of her daughter. Her deep maternal love drives her to challenge and break the limits and the patterns of authority.

We have done the same in this First Gathering of Latin American Mennonite Women Theologians held as a part of the Mennonite World

Conference assembly. For us, to arrive at this moment here today has meant, among other things, to cross borders, listen to women's stories, break traditional patterns, and challenge structures.

In order to arrive at this point, we had to redefine our role as women theologians: it was necessary to be inclusive and recognize each one's ministries, vocations, and calls but not without encouraging and challenging each other to get biblical and theological training to help us open our minds to a better understanding of our challenges and commitments.

### **Second Moment: Verses 27–28**

In this passage, we find the heart of the text, the central challenge. In Jesus's view, the mission is clear—to come to the people of Israel. He uses a metaphor—the table laden with food—and it's clear from it whom he has come to serve. The woman responds that this is true but it's also true that crumbs fall from the table and that under the table are the dogs who are eating the falling crumbs. Through her persistence, she bursts into and breaks open Jesus's thinking:

- His paradigm, his model, undergoes a change. The woman states: "I'm under the table, those crumbs are mine, and you can't take them from me. It doesn't matter if they are under the table."
- In spite of the exclusion, what falls from the table is hers. She takes it as a right. This declaration moves away from an attitude of resignation and humiliation; it requires strength and energy; she has a healing mission manifested by her power to be able to reject [Jesus's initial answer]. The most relevant thing for her at this moment is the life of her daughter—to heal her, to protect her. Life itself is at stake; there are no boundaries, no missions, there is nothing. If life is at risk, that trumps all.<sup>2</sup>

### **Third Moment: Verses 29–30**

*For such a reply...* The miracle happens, there is good news and a renewed way of thinking [*pensamientos de vida*]. Jesus stands transformed, evangelized, and the woman is empowered. Coming into dialog with Jesus makes the impossible possible. The woman returns to her home but not with empty hands. She returns to her world, her reality, her daily life, her church, her mission. She returns different, transformed, happy for having found a Jewish man who

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<sup>2</sup> Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, "Transgresión y proclamación en la tierra de frontera," *Revista Con-spirando* 43 (May 2003): 24.

makes her inner transformation possible. She liberates herself, she liberates Jesus, and her daughter is healed. Jesus has his own experience of liberation and conversion because of this encounter. He widens his vision and mission in border spaces.

The woman enlarges her understanding of God as a God of solidarity, a God who moves in the border spaces and under the table. Jesus grows as a man toward a new masculinity, sensitized to patriarchal dynamics. This new vision of masculinity—different from that of his own time and emerging from his experience and encounter with the other [*la otra*—transforms him, as all genuine encounters between men and women of God do.<sup>3</sup>

*Key Points for Our Work and Commitment:*

- Wherever we find ourselves, we need to continue working with women and proclaiming freedom in their lives.
- We need to question the status quo that enslaves and deforms women's lives. As Christians, we talk about healthy, wholesome doctrine. How can there be churches with wholesome doctrine if women don't have access to leadership or biblical-theological training, if we are silenced, made invisible, and excluded from the community? Everything that binds us and enslaves us needs to be revised because it produces sickness, slavery, fear, and drives us away from God.
- Gabriel García Márquez's book *Of Love and Other Demons*<sup>4</sup> tells the story of a little girl who has suffered a series of ordeals throughout her short life. Because her behavior doesn't fit into accepted norms, she is continually tortured to expel the supposed demon, a process that finally kills her. García Márquez says, "Sometimes we attribute to the devil certain things we do not understand, without considering that these might be things we don't understand about God."<sup>5</sup>
- Sometimes we interpret the presence of God in women's work as demonic. It makes us afraid, so we demonize it because we don't understand it.
- It's important to break barriers and create new gender relationships among us and between women and men. We must nurture friendship and solidarity among women; we must recognize, congratulate, and promote each other as capable and competent. We must transform

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<sup>3</sup> Silva, "Transgresión y proclamación en la tierra de frontera," 24.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *Del amor y otros demonios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 51.

ourselves as well as our families and children.

- Walking in the social borderlands allows us to be transformed and challenged. We ourselves will be healed, and we will heal others because we'll be able to see with new eyes and share a new blessing. May the Lord laugh with our joy! Let's celebrate life together!

Amen.



# Can the Cross Be “Good News” for Women?

## Mennonite Peace Theology and the Suffering of Women

SUSANNE GUENTHER LOEWEN<sup>1</sup>

For women who have been assaulted or abused, the message to passively accept suffering as the will of God is not good news. The encouragement that there is a reward in heaven and that their suffering will strengthen their faith does not offer concrete hope in difficult circumstances. There is no indication that God’s way may lead away from suffering to new life. It would be theologically treacherous for a violated woman to reject further suffering. This theology would question whether she was refusing to take up her cross and follow Jesus.

—Carol Penner<sup>2</sup>

Within the past several decades, as there has been a proliferation of women’s interpretations of the Christian Scriptures and theology in light of their neglected experiences *qua* women, aspects of traditional interpretations of the cross have become profoundly problematic. Many theologians have highlighted the harm that has been caused in exhorting women to submit to abuse and violence because it supposedly images the cross of Jesus Christ: they question the simplistic connection of women’s suffering to the crucified Christ, because this connection results in the problematic notion that all suffering, perhaps especially undeserved or innocent suffering, is redemptive and God-willed and therefore to be “endured” rather than resisted.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Susanne Guenther Loewen recently completed a PhD in theology through the Toronto School of Theology. Her dissertation focused on Mennonite, feminist, and womanist reinterpretations of the cross and redemption, specifically with regard to nonviolence, suffering, and gender. She and her spouse and son live in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she is co-pastor at Nutana Park Mennonite Church.

2 Carol J. Penner, “Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices: Peace Theology and Violence against Women” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 1999), 68.

3 Carol J. Penner, “Content to Suffer: An Exploration of Mennonite Theology from the Context of Violence against Women,” in *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, Occasional Papers No. 16, ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992), 99.

As Canadian Mennonite-feminist theologian Carol Penner highlights above, this problem is perhaps more acute within historic peace churches such as her Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Though—or even because—this tradition has rejected notions of redemptive *violence*, it has historically emphasized nonresistance to evil and thereby given redemptive *suffering* a central place within its theology, ethics, and soteriology. Penner argues that despite its orientation toward peace and nonviolence, Mennonite theology has been largely silent regarding violence against women and women's suffering. In her view, aspects of Mennonite peace theology have been harmful toward women, as they have encouraged passive submission to all forms of suffering as redemptive within a self-abnegating ethic of enemy-love.<sup>4</sup> This ethic elevates the crucified Christ as paradigmatic for peace ethics, emphasizing that Christians are to likewise take up our crosses. But for Penner, because of a neglect of women's experiences of violence and abuse within the Mennonite church and theology, this understanding of the cross has perpetuated the suffering of women.<sup>5</sup>

Penner is certainly not alone. In recent years, many Mennonite women and some men have been asking corollary questions to those of mainline feminist<sup>6</sup> and womanist<sup>7</sup> theologians—seen, for instance, in feminist theologian Rose-

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4 Ibid., 2–3, 29–50. Penner discusses this in her chapter on theologians John H. Yoder and Guy F. Hershberger.

5 This understanding of nonresistant enemy-love also negatively affects other historically marginalized groups, but this paper will focus on the suffering of women, including the countless ways women are disempowered, sexually objectified, impoverished, and denied a voice within their families, places of worship, and/or communities simply because of their female bodies—the most overtly destructive example being the all-too-common experiences of physical violence and sexual violation or rape.

6 I define feminist theology as particularly concerned with the sin of sexism or discrimination based on sex, gender, and/or sexuality. Privileging gender-egalitarian, liberative aspects of Christian Scripture and tradition and the embodied experience(s) of women as the central sources for theological reflection, feminist theologians resist interrelated forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and eco-cide.

7 I follow Jacquelyn Grant and JoAnne Marie Terrell in defining womanist theology as a movement of Black or African American Christian women who share many key feminist concerns but insist on doing theology independently of feminists and of Black men, based on their experiences of being triply oppressed by racism, classism, and (hetero) sexism. See Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1989), 209, and Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 136–37.

mary Radford Ruether’s famous question, “Can a male savior save women?”<sup>8</sup> which becomes more specific as womanist theologian JoAnne Marie Terrell wonders, “Is the profession of faith in the cross inimical to black women’s self-interests? Or, is there power in the blood?”<sup>9</sup> Mennonite theological discussions focus on the disturbing legacy of nonresistant understandings of the cross that pressure women in particular to take up their “crosses” of physical and sexual abuse and avoidable suffering.<sup>10</sup> As such, these discussions can be summarized as asking, “Can the cross be good news for women?” I contend here that the cross can indeed be preached and taught as good news for women but only if it is carefully (re)interpreted *theologically* as well as *ethically*: that is, as conveying Divine solidarity with the oppressed, which promotes liberation, not as a symbol that all suffering is redemptive nor that women are to submit to violence and abuse. In what follows, I will explore this possibility within mainline feminist and womanist theologies as well as among Mennonite scholars who engage women’s voices, and thereby aim toward an integrated, feminist/womanist-Mennonite reinterpretation of the cross as good—peaceable *and* liberative—news for women.

### Tragedy or Triumph? Feminist and Womanist Theologians Discuss the Cross

Before turning to a specifically feminist/womanist-Mennonite reinterpretation of the cross, it is important to survey the mainline feminist and womanist theological debates concerning whether or not the cross is salvific for women. At one end of the spectrum are those who argue that the cross is not liberative, that it is solely a symbol of tragedy. Examples include feminists Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, who famously call the cross a symbol of “divine child abuse” and conclude that “no one was saved by the death of Jesus,” since “suffering is never redemptive.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Rita Nakashima Brock finds it unacceptable “to make claims that any person’s tragic, painful death is

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8 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 116–38.

9 Terrell, *Power in the Blood?* 6–7.

10 I distinguish between “avoidable suffering,” life-giving forms of women’s suffering such as childbirth, and other forms of suffering that are simply part of being embodied, finite creatures (illness, death, etc.). See Doris Jean Dyke, *Crucified Woman* (Toronto: United Church Publishing, 1991), 66–67, and Mary Grey, *Feminism, Redemption and the Christian Tradition* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1990), 7.

11 Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, eds. Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 2, 27.

divinely willed or necessary for others to be saved.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, in light of African American women’s experiences of sexual, reproductive, and labor “surrogacy” during slavery, womanist Delores S. Williams questions the image of Jesus as the ultimate surrogate figure “in a bloody act that supposedly gained victory over sin and/or evil.” She concludes that “there is nothing divine in the blood of the cross.”<sup>13</sup> All four view Jesus’s life and ministry as salvific and exemplary but not his death by crucifixion. While this is one possible response to the misuse of the cross in light of women’s suffering, it leads, in my view, to a low Christology that empties the cross almost entirely of theological significance, a notion I will take up in the next section.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who argue that the cross can be redemptive, and go so far as to depict the crucified Christ as female (sometimes called “Christa”) to represent Divine solidarity with the suffering particular to women.<sup>14</sup> Feminist Mary Grey explains, “Christa liberates not by . . . proclaiming that there is an innate redemptive quality in [women’s suffering]; but by being present with and sharing in the brokenness, identifying this as the priority for God’s healing love, Christ gives hope, empowers, and enables the process of resistance.”<sup>15</sup> Womanists Jacqueline Grant and JoAnne Marie Terrell likewise image Christ as a “divine co-sufferer,” specifically as a Black woman, which represents God’s identification both with “all people of color,” who “share the cross of systemic racism,” as well as with “all women,” who “still die daily on the cross of sexism.” Terrell further specifies that the cross is salvageable only with the recognition that “there is nothing of God’s *sanction* in violence.”<sup>16</sup> Liberationist-feminist Dorothee Sölle also speaks of the cross as “repeatable,” since Jesus “suffers wherever people are tormented.” The God of love does not

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12 Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 94, 98–99.

13 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 143, 145–46, 148.

14 Tina Beattie argues that the Christa renders the cross a monument to violence against women, but she assumes it is somehow less tragic to crucify a Jewish man under Roman occupation. See Beattie, “Sexuality and the Resurrection of the Body: Reflections in a Hall of Mirrors,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Rockport, MA: Oneworld, 1996), 142–43.

15 Grey quoted in Julie Clague, “Symbolism and the Power of Art: Female Representations of Christ Crucified,” in *Bodies in Question: Gender, Religion, Text*, eds. Darlene Bird and Yvonne Sherwood (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 44, 49. Clague quotes Grey here. See also Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 81.

16 Grant, 220–21; and Terrell, 124, 122, 100.

apathetically cause or ignore suffering but remains “on the side of the victim”: “God is not in heaven; [God] is hanging on the cross.” This siding with the victim leads Sölle to speak of nonviolent resistance as a purposeful co-suffering for the sake of liberation, which she compares to birth pangs or life-giving suffering. For Sölle, the cross is thus double-edged—reminding the oppressed that God is with them and desires their liberation, and calling the privileged to emulate God’s loving solidarity with the oppressed and nonviolent resistance to suffering.<sup>17</sup> In my view, this understanding of the cross both names the tragedy of the innocent/unjust suffering while affirming its exemplary, nonviolent, and liberative theological symbolism of Divine co-suffering with women.

### **Peace and Women’s Suffering: Feminist/Womanist-Mennonite Interpretations of the Cross**

Building on feminist/womanist critiques of traditional interpretations of the cross, a number of Mennonite theologians have reinterpreted the cross. Methodologically, they have begun integrating feminist and womanist attention to women’s experiences of suffering with the Mennonite orientation toward peace and nonviolence. The majority of such discussions, however, remain focused on the *ethical* significance of the cross (i.e., how it is or is not exemplary for Christians) rather than its *theological* significance (i.e., what it communicates about God and God’s actions in history). While admittedly related, the two questions are not identical. While I value the emphasis on ethics and praxis that Mennonites, feminists, and womanists share, I would like to see our theology and its embodiment in praxis knit even more closely together.

American Mennonite theologian J. Denny Weaver has been criticized for his nonviolent reinterpretation of the atonement (i.e., soteriology of the cross).<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with feminists and womanists that traditional, violent understandings of the atonement are justly accused of connoting “divine child abuse,”

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17 Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 82, 94–95, 147–48, 163–64, and Sölle, *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the Death of God*, trans. David Lewis (London: SCM, 1967), 99. See M. Susanne Guenther Loewen, “Making Peace with the Cross: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Dorothee Sölle and J. Denny Weaver on Nonviolence, Atonement, and Redemption” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 2016).

18 J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 5–7, 323, 141–42. Weaver recognizes that “James Cone’s black theology of liberation developed from a very different underside” and had a “different agenda” from his nonviolent atonement theology.” He acknowledges that these “twin critiques” are “marginal in different ways and to different degrees....” Weaver uses Cone’s critique alongside a Mennonite critique, which takes seriously Cone’s charge that slavery

Weaver constructed his “narrative Christus Victor” model that de-emphasizes the cross within redemption, contextualizing it within the narrative of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. In Weaver’s terms, God did not “send Jesus for the specific purpose of dying, nor was his mission about death....Jesus’ mission had a life-giving purpose—to make the reign of God visible”—that is, to announce God’s nonviolent victory over the powers of sin, death, and violence through resurrection.<sup>19</sup> According to Weaver, both of the other major historical interpretations of the atonement—in which, briefly put, God required Jesus’s death either to satisfy Divine justice (Anselmian satisfaction and/or substitutionary atonement) or to show Divine solidarity (Abelardian moral influence)—fail to overcome the problem of God requiring some form of violence for the sake of salvation. In Weaver’s words, “If God is truly revealed in the nonviolent Christ, then God should not be described as a God who sanctions and employs violence.”<sup>20</sup> The cross is thus “anything but a loving act of God,” Weaver insists, but rather signifies Jesus’s rejection by “the powers” that he confronted nonviolently. This nonviolent resistance and distinct “modus operandi” cost Jesus his life and likewise costs believers “our lives, which we give to God for the rest of our time on earth.”<sup>21</sup>

Weaver’s position commendably seeks to overcome both the problems of redemptive violence, as per his Mennonite peace tradition, and the problem of redemptive suffering identified by feminists and womanists.<sup>22</sup> It is also crucial that Weaver makes a case for human and *Divine* nonviolence, speaking of Jesus as the clear revelation of God’s nonviolence and thereby drawing close connections between theology and ethics through a Christocentric imaging of God. But precisely in the event of the cross, Weaver does not follow through on this trajectory. Speaking of God as somewhat removed, he states, “God did not

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and racism against African Americans is an insidious form of violence that must be addressed by a church and theology claiming to be nonviolent. See J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium*, C. Henry Smith Series (Telford, PA: Pandora U.S., 2000), 140–41.

19 J. Denny Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 160–62. See also 46–48.

20 Ibid., 245–46, 183, and J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 5.

21 Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 269, 94, 48, 312; see also 308.

22 For instance, Weaver follows womanist Delores Williams in recognizing that turning away from sin has a distinct meaning for the oppressors and the oppressed: “The oppressed ceased [*sic*] acquiescing to oppression and join the rule of God; oppressors cease their oppression and submit to the rule of God.” Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 213–14, and *Nonviolent God*, 273.

intervene in Jesus’ death and allowed Jesus to die in fulfillment of his mission to bring redemption to all people.” In following rejectionist feminists and womanists who dismiss the notion of the cross as Divine solidarity and posit a low Christology,<sup>23</sup> Weaver therefore ends up distancing God not only from violence and suffering but also from those who suffer, ultimately depicting an apathetic God who avoids rather than addresses human suffering. If God remains a bystander even to Christ’s suffering, the cross is effectively reduced to a mere moment of human tragedy, and it becomes difficult to see how it could speak meaningfully about God’s response to women’s experiences of suffering.<sup>24</sup>

In her article “Freedom of the Cross,” womanist-Mennonite Nekeisha Alexis-Baker brings womanist theologies in particular into conversation with Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder’s interpretation of the cross. She speaks of how the cross has at times been empowering to slaves and at other times has “reinforced their oppression.” Following Yoder, she differentiates between voluntary and involuntary forms of suffering, arguing that the cross is “the result of Jesus’ voluntary decision to reject violence, hate, hostility, and non-involvement in confronting the powers,” which allows Christians to denounce “racial discrimination, domestic violence, sexual abuse, or emotional neglect” as entirely different, involuntary, and therefore non-redemptive forms of suffering. She concludes that “equating the rape of Black women during slavery with Jesus’ crucifixion...risks supporting theologies of the cross which already undercut Black women.” Still, she pushes beyond Yoder’s ideas of “revolutionary subordination” and submission to tyrannical authority because these ideas do not adequately name the necessity of public nonviolent resistance.<sup>25</sup> While Alexis-Baker recognizes that the cross is double-edged in that it can be used to oppress or empower, her position—like Weaver’s—also separates women’s suffering from the cross. In other words, if the cross only relates to voluntary forms of suffering, then it offers no “good news” of God’s liberating and empowering presence among those suffering involuntarily. Additionally, Alexis-Baker relies too heavily and uncritically on Yoder’s thought, given his abuse

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23 Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 44, 166–67, 245n69, and *Nonviolent God*, 57.

24 See Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, 161, in which he states that his atonement theory “avoids” the problems raised by Brown and Parker. See also 8–9, 151, where Weaver’s detailed definitions of violence fail to include reference to sexual abuse or assault, though he mentions sexual abuse within feminist and womanist theologies and in passing in *Nonviolent God*, 193–94.

25 Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, “Freedom of the Cross: John Howard Yoder and Womanist Theologies in Conversation,” in *Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist (Waterloo, ON: Herald,

of women.

Other Mennonite theologians, however, do move toward recognizing that the cross can speak to women's suffering in liberating ways. As alluded to above, Penner writes that "parts of our Mennonite peace theology tradition have not brought peace to women's lives, but rather increased suffering," in part because "women's experience has not been an important source for written Mennonite theology." She contrasts the copious Mennonite materials on peace as conscientious objection to war with the glaring neglect of violence against women, which has not historically been considered a peace issue.<sup>26</sup> She writes, "In Mennonite theology little effort has been made to distinguish between different kinds of suffering, between the pain of sickness and the pain of sexual assault, the anguish of natural disaster and the anguish of family breakdown. The common message in Mennonite thought is often that suffering, all suffering, should simply be endured, just as Jesus endured the cross." "The result," according to Penner, "is that women with broken bodies have sat in pews and listened to a theology that seemed to spiritualize their very real agony."<sup>27</sup> For Penner, Mennonite theologian John H. Yoder's work on "revolutionary subordination" has been particularly unhelpful for women who have been abused, since it "provides no corrective" to the notion that abuse victims who choose to remain with their abusive partners are participating in the kind of voluntary, innocent suffering that Yoder deems a redemptive echo of the cross—to say nothing of Yoder's own abuse of women.<sup>28</sup> But for Penner, the cross cannot be dismissed as oppressive, because among those experiencing suffering, "some... have found comfort in Christian symbols," even "hope" and "the strength to carry on" in the notion that Christ or God suffers with them; this image, she implies, can be experienced as the first step toward liberation from suffering.<sup>29</sup> Penner thus outlines a life-giving, narrative approach that takes women's experiences as abuse victims and/or survivors seriously and also "grapples with the [Christian] tradition rather than rejecting it outright." In this way, she takes an important step toward giving theological depth to an ethical reading of the

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2009), 84, 87–89, 92–94. For a discussion of Yoder's abuse, see Rachel Waltner Goosen, "Defanging the Beast: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015): 7–80.

26 Penner, "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices," 180, 14.

27 Penner, "Content to Suffer," 99, and "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices," 137.

28 Penner, "Content to Suffer, 103–4.

29 Ibid., 106, 108, 99, and "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices," 143–45, 173–74.

cross, but she does not develop a full-fledged, constructive interpretation of the cross. Penner’s reframing of women’s suffering within a Mennonite feminist peace theology remains methodologically vital, however; to name but one poignant example, she writes: “Some writers have characterized patriarchy as a ‘war against women.’ In the face of this violence, who will be the new conscientious objectors?”<sup>30</sup>

Along similar lines, American theologian Gayle Gerber Koontz goes one step further regarding the notion of Divine solidarity with the suffering of women. Her discussion of forgiveness within “liberation pacifism”<sup>31</sup> helpfully articulates from a Mennonite-feminist perspective women’s *response* to their suffering—as women responding to violence with a peace and compassion that assert their agency. She argues that while all Christians are called to nonviolent “redemptive resistance to evil,” for an abuser this means “let[ting] go of dominating power,” while a victim “needs to claim her power to act.” She names nonviolent tactics for victims, such as “fleeing...breaking silence and seeking help,” and “rather far down the list,” forgiveness of the abuser, clarifying that forgiveness here does not exclude being angry, divorcing, or leaving an abusive relationship—the latter do not constitute “violent or revengeful acts,” for Koontz. She further stipulates that abusers cannot ask “anything” of the one they harmed and that the faith community is to both support the victim and hold the abuser accountable in love.<sup>32</sup> Koontz’s reinterpretation of the ethic of enemy-love, for women who have experienced abuse, is profound in its reinterpretation of forgiveness and “Christ-like love” as an empowering choice oriented primarily toward survival and liberation.<sup>33</sup> In calling survivors to this actively compassionate response to their suffering, she understands forgiveness not as reducing them to self-abnegating victims, but as an assertion of their agency and a tactic of nonviolent resistance. Importantly, Koontz here differentiates between dominating power and the power of “persuasion,” “influence,” or compassion, associating the latter with God’s power and with the paradox

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30 Ibid., 174, 165, 146–47, 171.

31 Koontz draws this category from J. R. Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gin-gerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1991).

32 Gayle Gerber Koontz, “Redemptive Resistance to Violation of Women: Christian Power, Justice, and Self-Giving Love,” in *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, Occasional Papers No. 16, ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992), 30, 34, 39–41, 44–45. Penner disagrees with Koontz on this. See Penner, “Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices,” 160–61.

33 Koontz, “Redemptive Resistance,” 31, 33, 35.

of the cross itself, speaking of Jesus's words of forgiveness from the cross as exemplifying the very "love and compassion of God." While posing the important question "How can we trust the goodness and power of a God who does not use violent or coercive power to resist evil, when there is so much relentless violation and suffering?" Koontz also affirms the paradoxical power of "compassionate love," which does not constitute "nonresistance" but "ultimate resistance" in refusing to acknowledge dominating power as the strongest or only kind of power; it refuses to "dominate in turn, by refusing to turn evil with evil." Furthermore, she argues that compassionate love provides an alternative between "just" violence and bystanderism in the face of the suffering of the innocent—namely, compassion as "a power which helps people who are suffering claim their own power," gain the "courage to resist," and at least sense "divine love" in situations of "inevitable or hopeless suffering."<sup>34</sup> Here Koontz identifies the specific suffering of women with the cross in a *redemptive* and *liberative* way, speaking both of Divine solidarity with all forms of suffering *and* of the paradoxical call to emulate and be empowered by this Divine compassion to resist suffering.

The feminist/womanist-Mennonite theologians above take crucial steps in the right direction by raising questions surrounding what it means to take up our crosses, what kind of suffering can be redemptive, and how the church can respond to women's experiences of abuse in life-giving, liberative, and empowering ways. While they have learned much from the feminist and womanist critiques of how the cross has been harmful, Koontz is the only one who explores in some depth the constructive and redemptive possibilities that feminists and womanists find in the cross as a *Divine act responding to the suffering specific to women*. She thus overcomes the Mennonite tendency to view the cross primarily as symbolic of ethics, discipleship, or *voluntary* suffering to the exclusion of the additional, theological significance of the cross as God's compassionate response to the reality of *involuntary* suffering. In this way, Koontz's perspective provides the closest parallel to Grey's, Grant's, Terrell's, and Sölle's interpretations of the cross as symbolic of Divine co-suffering, which can be profoundly life-giving for victims of oppression. This interplay between theology and ethics transforms God's relationship to suffering. To claim God's nearness to those who suffer—not in the sense of God willing or causing their pain but rather as being "the priority for God's healing love," as Grey puts

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34 Ibid., 34–37. This recognition that suffering cannot always be avoided or resolved moves away from an understanding of God as being in absolute control of history, toward a nonviolent God who is unconditionally present among the suffering and desires their empowerment and liberation whenever possible.

it<sup>35</sup>—leaves us with a God who is not in absolute control of history but whose compassion empowers nonviolent resistance. In this sense, to image God as crucified need not signify masochistic submission to suffering, since it can subversively symbolize resistance to suffering through the power of compassion, which aims toward liberation, healing, and new life.

Still, the implications of such a theological notion remain to be explored in depth from a Mennonite perspective attentive to the suffering of women. While most Mennonite thinkers surveyed above attempt to move from the traditional ethic of nonresistance to evil toward an ethic of nonviolent resistance, the cross here points us toward another ethical imperative: compassion for the suffering, which images the compassion of God as Jesus Christ. In effect, this turns our attention primarily from the perpetrators of violence (as enemies to be loved) to the victims or “the least of these,” with whom Jesus identifies (Matt 25). Finally, the evocative connections between the cross as solidarity, the new life of resurrection, and many women’s powerful experiences of birth and mothering also comprise an unexplored aspect of this wider question, as literal instances of women’s struggle to create life.<sup>36</sup> Thus, women’s life-giving experiences can interrupt the self-destructive and violent narrative of redemptive suffering with an affirmation of life that is both symbolic and embodied—that is, both theological and ethical, sometimes termed “sacramental.”<sup>37</sup>

### Glimpses of the Good News: Three Narratives of Women at the Foot of the Cross

Instead of closing with a summary of the various feminist, womanist, and/or Mennonite theologies I have explored above, I would like to end with three glimpses into the way in which the cross has been and can be experienced as good news with regard to the suffering of women:

1. A group of women survivors of sexual abuse meet in a church basement. Some of them decide to attend the church’s Passion play, even though

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35 See Grey quoted in Clague, “Symbolism and the Power of Art,” 81.

36 See references to Sölle above and Grey, *Feminism, Redemption, and the Christian Tradition*, 160, 174–79, 186, 191. Mennonite feminist Malinda E. Berry also explores the connection between God giving birth and the cross as a “Tree of Life,” but without a developed notion of the cross as divine solidarity. See Malinda Elizabeth Berry, “‘This Mark of a Standing Human Figure Poised to Embrace’: A Constructive Theology of Social Responsibility, Nonviolence, and Nonconformity” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2013), 18, 16, 29.

37 Here I follow Terrell’s understanding of the “love-justice ethic as a way of *sacramentally* witnessing to the goodness and the power of God, evincing God’s proleptic activity” in the here and now. See Terrell, *Power in the Blood?* 55, 57.

they're not part of the congregation or even "religious." Afterward, one responds, "This cross story...it's the only part of this Christian thing I like. I get it. And it's like [God] gets me. He knows." It's this story, "*not* nicer healing tales or Easter's glad tidings," which both resonates with their experiences of suffering and "lift[s] them up" as being understood by a God who has suffered trauma.<sup>38</sup>

2. In sharing their experiences, a group of American Mennonite women survivors of sexual violence realize together that the language of Jesus's exemplary self-sacrifice on the cross within the Communion liturgy has "exacerbated their trauma." They form "a small group of pastors, theologians, liturgists, and survivors of sexualized violence," who are currently revising the Communion liturgy from the Mennonite *Minister's Manual* to be more healing and life-giving for survivors and the wider Mennonite church, including such lines as, "**My God, ... as I prepare to share in the abundant life you offer through this bread and wine I recognize the ways I have been living in death: these I lay down. I step into life.**"<sup>39</sup>
3. On the grounds of Emmanuel College in Toronto—a theological college of the United Church of Canada—stands a sculpture called "Crucified Woman," by Almuth Lutkenhaus-Lackey. Though many find it scandalous, calling the female Christ-figure heretical or too sexual, others see it as a revelation of Christ's closeness to women's suffering—both life-giving forms like childbirth and tragic forms like rape and physical abuse. The artist was told that for the first time, many "women saw their suffering, their dying, and their resurrection embodied in a woman's body." It has become "a place where women know that their suffering is gathered up into the suffering of Christ." In 1989, upon hearing of the Montreal Massacre of fourteen engineering students, killed simply for being women, hundreds gathered around the "Crucified Woman" to remember the victims—and also to remember that

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 76–77.

<sup>39</sup> Hilary Jerome Scarsella, "The Lord's Supper in Relation to Sexualized Violence: Harm and Healing throughout the Ecclesial Body," Paper presented at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA, November 22, 2014; and Scarsella, "Sexual Abuse and the Lord's Supper," 95–96, 107. In the latter, she indicates in bold type the changes she has made to the liturgy from John D. Rempel, *Minister's Manual* (Newton, KS: Faith & Life, 1998), 73–74. See Scarsella et. al, "The Lord's Supper: A Ritual of Harm or Healing?" *Leader* (Summer 2016): 33–48.

God has not turned away but knows and feels their pain.<sup>40</sup>

These crosses—and the God of Solidarity and Life they portray—have the potential to move us beyond the myths of redemptive violence and redemptive suffering. At the foot of these crosses, women name their pain. We can, with them, witness to God’s call for nonviolent resistance and conscientious objection to all the ways we are living in death. With compassionate desire we might then step into liberation, healing, and life.

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<sup>40</sup> Clague, “Symbolism and the Power of Art,” 36, and Dyke, *Crucified Woman*, 2, 56, 66.



# Book Reviews

Kristen Welch and Abraham Ruelas, *The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, 2015. 173 pp. \$32.47. ISBN: 9781620325636.

Women find a way.

From within the rugged homesteads of the American West, the raucous tents of the revivalist movement, and the vlogs and hashtags of modern-day feminism, women have pushed their way through social barriers into places of strength and social subversion.

And they're so rad.

*The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women* offers a (somewhat scattered) history of the early stages of the American education equality movement. Beginning within the often-over-mythitized Wild West and continuing past the Industrial Revolution, this book details the struggles, tactics, wins, and losses of the fight toward educational equality for women in the United States. Particular attention is paid to the intersecting advancements of women's economic independence and opportunities for social and spiritual leadership; unsurprisingly, these progress hand in hand.

While the use of the word "seminary" has changed throughout history, this volume focuses on formal secondary and higher education offered to females within the United States. Depending on the time and context, classes focused on home-based, social, or academic skills, often covering topics such as manners, needlework, music, literature, reading, spelling, math, or theology. Both the quality and content of women's education progressed slowly; it was limited at first to teachings on morality and household matters but eventually matched the quality and offerings of education provided for men. This history is one of struggle, which Welch and Ruelas pack into a small volume, weaving together a story of women's resiliency and artful subversion.

Unfortunately, the story is not so artfully presented; the text at times becomes dull, wandering, and unfocused. Caffeine is required to make it through the entirety of chapter 4. But the hardy reader who perseveres is rewarded in the final section with a well-articulated and vibrant feminist historical goldmine. The conclusion documents fascinating stories of the larger American women's rights and social justice movements, which hold the key to fully understanding the preceding chapters. Like water in a desert, these stories are deeply refreshing and needed.

Women find a way. When the revivalist movement focused on the urgency of

spreading the message of Christianity, women used the opportunity to speak and preach unapologetically and uncensored, and from church pulpits. When the notion of separate spheres for men and women was enforced, women insisted that formal education was a necessity. Schools were equipped to teach the delicate arts of morality, manners, and homemaking and paved the way for deeper educational pursuits. When Evangelicalism demanded female silence and subservience, women's groups flourished inside and outside of church walls, and they created networks and events for themselves, without the presence of men. Often these circles focused on meeting charity needs. The intimacy of these activities and spaces allowed women to open up, share ideas, and strategize. When the price and social consequences of alcohol drained families of financial resources, women worked together to spearhead the temperance movement, applying social pressure to their husbands in order to ensure economic stability within the home. This is just one of many examples provided of the power of women working together.

In depicting the history of female education in America, Welch and Ruelas make clear that not all benefited from this movement. White women who already held some degree of social privilege benefitted the most, while those who were socially and racially marginalized continued to be denied much. These divisions ran so deep that distinct movements were required. The authors devote three chapters to the efforts and progression of the Indigenous and African American education movements. This volume shows us one example of the dark side of social justice work. Social justice movements, in the United States as well as around the world, hold their own hierarchies and internal injustices. In order to be both effective and ethical, movements toward equity must encounter and take seriously identity politics as well as intersectionalities of experiences. Feminism is only worth pursuing if it benefits all.

To know our history is to know our future. The struggle for women's educational and economic equality is far from over. Racism, oppression, and social barriers persist, but so do women, who continue to find ways to strategize, subvert, and organize. We have done this since the beginning. We women find a way.

BRE WOLIGROSKI *finds her way within ecumenical and social justice circles. Her seminary studies were scandalously co-ed, involving neither needlework nor manners. Bre's family settled on and holds responsibilities within Treaty 1 territory (Canada).*

Frances S. Adeney, *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology*, Pickwick, Eugene, OR, 2015. 300 pp. \$29. ISBN: 9781498217194.

"The church has been like a bird with one wing. That is not right. But we cannot stop the power of God. Women will be empowered." —Evelyn Parkin, Australian

## Indigenous theologian (14)

Frances Adeney is Professor Emerita of Evangelism and Global Mission at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In her volume *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology*, she draws from her experience as a professor in Java, Indonesia, and the United States, and also on interviews with ninety women to delineate women's ways of practicing "mission theology." Her research is broad in scope—tracing women's roles in mission from the early church to the present postmodern context—due to the dearth of conventional, written sources available, since "Christian women...have practiced the *Missio Dei*, usually *without* the privilege of time and resources or the status of authority to speak and write about those matters" (254, emphasis original). Thus, despite their considerable experiences and contributions to mission theology, many of the women interviewed did not identify as theologians. "They were modest about their influence—sometimes too modest," Adeney concludes (xiii–xiv).

Adeney's study counteracts that modesty, examining women's experiences of God calling them to leadership roles traditionally reserved for men, such as preaching and teaching. The women's experiences often involved a struggle for acceptance, as in the striking story of late nineteenth-century African American preacher Jarena Lee. When Lee approached her bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church to discuss her calling to preach, the bishop upheld the tradition's stance against women in "public ministry."

But Lee's spirit could not rest. She tried for eight years to suppress her calling from God. At length, in agony of soul, she returned to Bishop Allen's church to plead again her cause. Again she was refused. But the next Sunday, Jarena Lee stood up in the congregation and began to preach. So powerful was her preaching that Allen...relented, becoming one of her greatest supporters....Bishop Allen even cared for Lee's children when she was away on preaching trips (41).

In highlighting the obstacles women face in responding to God's call in their lives—whether it be an unsupportive or gender-discriminatory church community, family or spouse, or a reticence to accept one's own leadership gifts due to gender—Adeney affirms these women's "perseverance, creativity, and flexibility" in finding ways to live out their callings to be "theology-makers" rather than only "theology-followers" (184–86, 40). Adeney also affirms women "leading from the margins" (179), finding less formal ways of practicing mission theology as spouses of mission workers, beginning mission work later in life, or supporting others' mission work (3–4, 24, 185).

Adeney's discussion of the turn to spirituality within "third wave" feminism is particularly helpful as she identifies concerns that characterize women's theologies, including embodiment; "the *sacredness of everyday life*"; choice and agency; "self-

*trust*” in the face of what Virginia Woolf dubbed the “gentle violence” of systemic sexism; empowerment; relationality; and “*celebrating difference*” (28–34, emphases original). Another strength lies in her nuanced examination of the double-edged nature of sacrificial ethics for women doing “mission theology.” While recognizing the centrality of self-sacrifice in the Christian tradition—which warrants her only mention of Anabaptism (150)—she explains that sacrifice involves “much ambiguity for women.” Exhortations to self-sacrifice “can be used in oppressive ways” as women are “coerced into” sacrificing themselves in ways that benefit men in authority, or “‘choose’ self-sacrifice because they have internalized cultural expectations in their context.” Adeney rightly argues that self-sacrifice “then becomes not a source of holy living but an obstacle to be overcome” (151–52, cf. 260). As Anabaptists, we should note the strong association between our tradition and this potentially oppressive notion of self-sacrifice.

Due to the informal or unofficial ways in which women have practiced mission theology, Adeney’s understanding of mission is necessarily broad, if not vague. For her, mission encompasses everything from evangelism, interfaith dialogue, and friendship building to teaching, academia, providing health care, and engaging politics (255, 3–4, 96, 169). Her chapter on Dorothy Day’s contributions to the Catholic Worker Movement in the United States blurs the lines even further, since she labels Day, who worked for social justice in her own context, an exemplary “missionary” (115–33). Does “mission theology” for Adeney include any and all ways in which Christian women practice their faith? She seems to assert as much, claiming, “Today Christian mission is from everywhere to everywhere” (172). But in identifying these various women’s lived theologies in many historical and socio-cultural-political contexts as “Christian mission,” Adeney privileges a loaded term that is not necessarily embraced by these diverse women and/or communities.

Adeney also underemphasizes the legacy of colonialism, in which the “mission theology” of white Western women is also complicit. She admittedly distinguishes between the “Imperial Mood” of theology “from above” (as hierarchical, rationalistic, dualistic, abstract-philosophical)—which presupposes the superiority or “orthodoxy” of the “traditional Western European” worldview—and the “Contextual Mood” of theology “from below,” based on experience, community, solidarity, and cultural memories and narratives (38–39, 56, 61–62, cf. 77). Crucially, Adeney acknowledges in passing that women can also theologize in the “Imperial Mood” (57). She is careful to include many contextual, liberation, and feminist theological voices from the two-thirds world and to call for a degree of mutuality in intercultural relationships (243, 250). Still, it is lamentable that Adeney does not engage postcolonial feminist theologians like Musa Dube or Kwok Pui-lan. Women such as these might help complicate her claim that women have been marginalized in mission, by raising the ways in which white Western women’s mission engagement *has also marginalized others* or at least benefitted from racist and colonialist ideolo-

gies. According to Kwok, even feminist theologians have not sufficiently grappled with “how white women ha[ve] colluded in colonialism and slavery” as well as in the neocolonialism of globalized capitalism and “development.”<sup>1</sup> This critique certainly applies to Adeney’s work. To name but one example, she describes a worship service into which Indonesian women incorporated “traditional Indonesian dress” and used rice and Indonesian wine as the elements of Communion. Instead of recognizing this as a powerful act of decolonizing worship, Adeney reduces it to an aesthetic choice to incorporate “beauty” into worship (46).

Such an oversight reveals that while Adeney’s work valuably recovers the underemphasized voices and contributions of women to Christian mission theology, it does not sufficiently critique the underlying triumphalism that continues to characterize most Christian understandings of mission. Ultimately, her work needs the “other wing” of postcolonial theologies in order to present a more complete and complex portrait of women’s mission theology.

SUSANNE GUENTHER LOEWEN *is a child of former overseas church workers, and a theologian, pastor, spouse, and mother. This past fall she completed her PhD in feminist and Mennonite theologies from the Toronto School of Theology and began as co-pastor at Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon.*

**Tim Otto, *Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2014. 154 pp. \$17.00. ISBN: 9781625649768.**

I am well acquainted with the “conflict over gay relationships,” at least within Mennonite Church USA. The “at variance” notation on my Ministerial Leadership Information form is a testament to my personal engagement with questions of marriage and inclusion in the church. I am frustrated with the current state of denominational conversation and would love to find a resource that could truly transform the conflict. And that is why I was interested in reviewing Tim Otto’s *Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships*.

Otto’s discussion of economics and family are insightful; according to him, the capitalist ethos tells us that we are “a bundle of needs” and that our romantic partner’s primary purpose is to meet those needs (28). The Christian perspective, he argues, must oppose this idea of marriage as just another means of consuming a product. Otto clearly shows how consumerism can lead to unhealthy relationships—platonic and romantic, straight and gay.

I also appreciate the author’s encouragement for churches to provide theological

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<sup>1</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 18–19.

and practical supports for married couples—to celebrate the faithfulness and commitment that is so often dismissed in our consumer culture. Otto rightly notes that same-sex couples often have difficulty finding social supports for marriage in the broader culture and therefore particularly need these supports from their faith communities (107).

As pastor of an intentional Christian community, Otto consistently pushes his readers toward a richer understanding of Christian community. The individualism that has become the gospel of Western society is antagonistic to the heart of Jesus's teachings, yet Christians and Christian churches can easily get swept up in that individualism. "Though we've been trained to think about our bodies as private property," writes Otto, "Scripture teaches us that we are connected and we affect each other" (46). A deep understanding of community is critical as we navigate questions about how we should live—including questions about how we understand and live out our sexualities.

As much as I appreciate the general theological groundwork put forth by Otto, his application of that theology to the specific question of faithful sexuality is problematic.

Those relatively new to the conversation might find two aspects of the volume particularly helpful. First, Otto shares about his personal struggles as a gay Christian; and I believe hearing each other's stories always moves us in a faithful direction. Second, chapter 12 provides a gentle and clear discussion of the scriptures most often cited by those who oppose same-sex romantic relationships, and chapter 14 presents the biblical case for affirmation of sexual minorities in the church. Many of us have heard stories such as Otto's over and over again; many of us have read—and used—explanations of the so-called "clobber passages" until we can recite the Greek of Romans 1 in our sleep. But for those not already in the thick of things, Otto provides a helpful entry point.

Ultimately, though, Otto does not provide a model I am willing to adopt for "transforming the conflict over gay relationships." His key arguments about biblical sexuality are flawed. He claims that "Christianity declares that sex is not just a recreational activity, but is meant to *bring two different people together into a committed, loving unity*" (54), and goes on to say that a "Christian sexual ethic demands that we respect the unifying function of sex" (56). I agree with him up to this point, but he loses me when he argues that a "unitive understanding of sex poses a challenge to those who advocate for same-sex relationships" (56). Otto's argument here is that the difference of male and female are necessary for the unity. This understanding seems much more rooted in Eastern mysticism—with ideas of essential opposites, of yin and yang—than in a biblical Christianity. This understanding of unitive sex also becomes very complicated for those who are transsexual, and it leaves no room for those who do not claim an exclusively male or female identity. Otto does

provide some counter-arguments to the traditional notion of unitive sex, but he does not go far enough in pointing out the dangers of such a view.

Because Otto himself is a gay Christian, I was somewhat surprised to find harmful generalizations in this book. At one point he mentions the “permissive sexual ethic that tends to accompany the affirming position” (103). The reality is that those of us who affirm same-sex relationships do not all hold to the same sexual ethic any more than do those who condemn such relationships. Still, there are good conversations within the affirming community about what it looks like to be faithful in our sexual relationships.

Otto also mentions that “gay culture” does not promote healthy romantic relationships of love and fidelity (106). This seems like a gross generalization; if by “gay culture” he means secular/popular gay culture, he may very well be right, but the same could be said of “heterosexual culture.”

Finally, in the most problematic statement of the book, Otto writes: “Because the debate [over sexuality and marriage in the church] is about a *non-essential* aspect of the Christian faith, it might be a good opportunity for individuals who disagree with the denomination’s stance to practice what theologian John Howard Yoder calls revolutionary subordination” (116, emphasis original). Otto spent significant time articulating how and why our sexuality and sexual relationships are integral to our personal and communal lives of faith. For him to then name the question of gay marriage as “non-essential” sends a mixed message. For a gay or lesbian couple seeking to live fully into their God-created selves and to participate fully in the Christ-centered community of church, I would say “the debate” is definitely essential. For those of us who consider exclusion of (non-celibate) LGBTQ people a deep injustice within the church, “the debate” is certainly essential.

In addition, Otto’s use of the concept of “revolutionary subordination” is deeply problematic, as he is citing a theological principle espoused by a known sex offender. Recently published articles have shed light on the extent of Yoder’s sexual abuse against women,<sup>2</sup> and these abuses shed light on the potential danger of this concept.<sup>3</sup> One might, for their own reasons and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, choose to practice revolutionary subordination. I respect Otto’s personal choice to remain celibate. But those in power—in this case the dominant heterosexual (and/or closeted) denominational leadership—are acting unjustly when they ask those with less power to practice revolutionary subordination. As a theological principle, revolutionary subordination has a high danger of becoming spiritually abusive and

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2 See Rachel Waltner Goosen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015): 7–80.

3 Hannah Heinzekehr, “Can Subordination Ever Be Revolutionary? Reflections on John Howard Yoder,” *The Femonite* (blog), August 9, 2013, <http://www.femonite.com/2013/08/09/can-subordination-ever-be-revolutionary-reflections-on-john-howard-yoder/>.

can lead to—has led to—acts of emotional and physical abuse within the church and within Christian families.

I sincerely wish that Otto *had* written a book that would transform “the conflict over gay relationships,” but he has not. What he has done is present a range of theological, biblical, and philosophical arguments from various perspectives in the discussion about gay relationships. He has also given helpful study questions for each chapter and provided good resources on the book’s website. While not transformative, this book could be a relatively safe jumping-off point for those new to conversations about sexuality and the church.

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**Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014. 258 pp. \$65.00. ISBN: 9780231163064.**

I’ve spent the last couple of months reading *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India*. This text has accompanied me on the bus, in hotel rooms, and squeezed into many cracks and spaces in my life. It’s an informative read but not an easy one. My prior knowledge of India is likely over-informed by Bollywood movies or by books like *Eat, Pray, Love*. It’s been eye-opening to consider the politics of power and exclusion in India, and the learning has encouraged me to reflect on my Canadian context.

The book is written by Rupa Viswanath, professor of Indian religions at the University of Göttingen in Germany. It is a well-researched academic text that zeroes in on overlooked political realities about the Dalit people, also known historically as *untouchable* or *Pariah*. The aim in this book is to “search for the authentic Pariah” (10), to tell a more accurate story. “Caste” is the name for the historical social hierarchy in India, and Pariah persons are outside of caste—excluded entirely from the social order (8). The term “Pariah” is seen as the cruelest, ugliest reference to Dalit peoples—making for a very provocative book title. Viswanath doesn’t intend to offend; she intends to paint an accurate picture.

Caste elite and government have succeeded in presenting an image of Dalit history that is prettier than reality, so the book reads like an academic and political exposé. The various regional names for Pariah are also, not coincidentally, the name for “slave” (3), which is what Pariah communities were historically: landless laborers, unfree peoples, resources more than persons (24, 29, 33, 34). Pariah communities were “entrenched [in] servitude” (25). The text examines how caste hierarchy and government policy maintained reliance on slavery long after much of the world was

changing these practices (4, 6, 38, 39, 63, 80). This text is an attempt to humanize Dalit communities and reframe their historic experience in not only accurate but also just ways.

Viswanath emphasizes human rights, which seems to be a helpful way forward in healing the wounds of oppressive policies (and decolonizing Indigenous experience) worldwide.<sup>4</sup> She also takes a social-constructionist approach to examining the history of caste and out-of-caste (“outcast”) in Indian history. Her research and writing sharpened my awareness of the ways in which we are routinely indignant about injustice from afar while being blind or accustomed to similar stories in our own backyards.

While reading, I recalled a Winnipeg visit I had a few years back with pastors from Soweto, near Johannesburg. This visit was facilitated in part by Canadian Mennonite University’s Outtatown program. The Soweto pastors recalled being in their hometown and having many conversations with justice-minded Canadian young people who were learning close-up about South African Apartheid. In response to the aghast, indignant responses among the Canadian young people, these wise pastors encouraged them to go back home and “re-see your place...re-see Canada’s First Peoples. Notice how many are treated; hear their stories, pay attention to their history. Pay attention at home.” Their message: don’t persist with local blindness while decrying global injustice. Reading Viswanath has not only helped me understand India a wee bit better, it has also given me tools to see my own backyard more clearly.

The text comments frequently how communities like the Dalit were scripted into perpetual powerlessness by those with influence (37–39, 43, 54–55, 61, 64, 79–80). Dominant discourses were contradictory, saying both that there was no problem and that nothing could be done about the problem (56). Viswanath points out that power relationships within our systems inform governance, not only in India but throughout the world. Prevailing thought, dominant discourses, and interpretation are actually more powerful than policy or law, and she exposes the illusion of neutrality that is rarely acknowledged.

As a therapist, one of my first counseling explorations with each client is to query the person’s understanding of the location of the problem. I often learn that people have come to see problems as located within themselves, within their lives. Practices that externalize serve to separate persons from problems in helpful ways, creating space for new possibilities. Similarly, when we locate social problems within people or groups rather than in structures that are broken and damaging, we limit options for well-being. In mental health and in political discourse, we routinely

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<sup>4</sup> See the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP): [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf).

expect persons to “uplift themselves,” while ignoring the oppressive influence of destructive systems (44, 66, 68).

There are many intersections between Viswanath’s telling of Dalit history and the stories of Indigenous peoples around the world, including in my Canadian context. Self-determination was not available to Pariah communities (256), and neither is it widely accessible to Indigenous communities in Canada. The reasons for this are complex and frequently tied to government protection of economic resources, as was the case in Dalit history (36).

Christian evangelism has been a historic companion to the European colonial enterprise. Interestingly, what Indian missionaries called “conversion” was actually more of a political alliance from the viewpoint of the Dalit. The Dalit did not “accept Christ,” though they did accept the benefits of Christian allegiance offered by the missionaries. Ironically, “turning to Christ” was a form of resisting the political and social realities that governed Dalit people’s lives; it was a way to gain agency when their own context offered none. The conversion transaction was more political than spiritual (69, 75). Viswanath’s research also highlights that Christian missionaries, through their correspondence with the sending churches and groups, accidentally provided vast historical data about Pariah peoples that would not otherwise exist (10–12).

I’m grateful for what this text taught me about historic India, which is beneficial for its own sake. But I’m also grateful for how this text taught me to look at my own Canadian backyard, providing fresh reminders of how power operates. The more power/influence/privilege we have, the more we are afforded the ability to see a problem or situation as small; as located in a small space; as having little relevance. The more power we have, the more we are able to deny the existence or validity of another’s experience and get away with it, as has happened to Dalit peoples and Indigenous peoples worldwide.

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**Peter M. Sensenig, *Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia*, Pickwick, Eugene, OR, 2016. 260 pp. \$25.60. ISBN: 9781498231015.**

What happens when sincere disciples of different faiths meet in weakness? That’s the question Peter M. Sensenig explores in *Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia*. In this volume, he documents the story of over sixty years of Mennonite witness and service in Somalia. Working from primary sources, Sensenig docu-

ments the relationships between Somali Muslims, pacifist Mennonite missionaries, and Mennonite Central Committee workers.

Drawing on the work of many who have taught conflict transformation and world religions, Sensenig often cites John Paul Lederach and Mark Gopin. He embraces the just peacemaking theory and practice pioneered by his mentor Glen Stassen at Fuller Theological Seminary, and he echoes the missiology of David Shenk; keeping one's identity in Christ clear while welcoming and valuing the contribution of the other is a constant theme.

Mennonites in North America have long struggled with how to understand the calling of the Great Commission in relation to the Sermon on the Mount. Should we emphasize evangelism or service? In his strongest chapter, "Salt, Light and Deeds," Sensenig uses the Mennonite experiences in Somalia as a lens to help us better understand Matthew 5:13–16. He argues that Mennonite peacemaking work in Somalia followed the mission Jesus gave his disciples to be a community of salt, light, and deeds. Mennonite peacemakers used these terms to describe their commitments: salt refers to communal practices that witness to Jesus the Prince of Peace, light points toward God's saving work and elicits the cultural resources that will glorify God, and deeds refer to acts of service that reflect God's concern for the well-being of people. The community that embodies these traits embodies an alternative to the violence of the powers. As Sensenig states, "In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus initiates a family whose means and ends are peace—in Somali terms, a *peace clan*" (92).

"What can it possibly mean when someone identifies as a Somali Muslim Mennonite?" Sensenig asks (220). He then argues that such a label is not an oxymoron if Mennonites are understood as a peace clan that provides the imaginative framework for Muslims and Mennonites to partner together. In this argument, he makes a distinction between the peace clan and the church. The peace clan centers its identity on peacemaking, while the church centers its identity on Jesus crucified and resurrected. If we understand Mennonites as a peace clan, then it is quite reasonable to think that it is possible to be a Somali Muslim Mennonite.

Sensenig quite rightly suggests that Mennonite peacemakers should draw on any and all sources for peacemaking. He makes a strong case for the resourcefulness of Sufi peacemaking traditions and encourages us to draw on Quranic sources, even as we return to biblical texts.

Peacemaking is something lived, even by Jesus. It is not singularly based on his teachings. From my Anabaptist theological perspective, however, peacemaking without Jesus, the one who returned grace and mercy even in the face of death, is powerless to bring forgiveness and reconciliation. Mennonite peacemakers in

Somali lived what Dr. Larycia Hawkins calls “embodied solidarity”:<sup>5</sup> knowing their suffering Lord, they were empowered to enter fully into the lives of their communities.

Mennonite institutions should consider making this text required reading for anyone engaged in theology, missiology, peacemaking, service, or witness in their many forms. Peacemakers from other traditions will also benefit from this research. Why? “Mennonites have understood rightly that the seeds of peace are sown in relationship, founded on the hope that God is calling out a peace clan who can teach one another how to walk in the light of the Lord” (235).

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**Roberta R. King and Sooi Ling Tan, eds., *(un)Common Sounds: Songs of Peace and Reconciliation among Muslims and Christians*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2014. 348 pp. \$38.00. ISBN: 9781625644886.**

In *(un)Common Sounds*, editors King and Tan set out a bold claim: “Where barriers between people have come to exist, they are torn asunder through musical performance of common musical traditions” (2). Focused on case studies from the Middle East and Indonesia, the book examines how music has been used to foster dialogue and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians; the title’s play on words derives from the rareness of such endeavors as well as from the many musical styles that are often treasured across religio-ethnic boundaries, like rock and rap among youth globally. Anchored in the specific, the authors try to avoid representing the members of either religion as a homogenous block with unitary beliefs and practices. Rather, they provide localized examples of lived faith.

This is a work of applied ethnomusicology, following “consultations” in Lebanon and Indonesia, where musicians and academics gathered to discuss music and social activism and listen to local examples. As the editors state, “Our ultimate goal became to suggest an initial framework (model) for implementing sustainable peacebuilding through music and the performing arts” (25). They expressly hope that other religious practitioners will follow their example by using music to reach across barriers of distrust and misinformation. Though scholarly in tone, the book includes discussion questions for each chapter. A website with some multimedia examples and information about the accompanying one-hour documentary also helps to make the project more accessible to lay audiences.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://drlaryciahawkins.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.songsforpeaceproject.org](http://www.songsforpeaceproject.org).

In framing the theoretical basis of their approach to peacebuilding, the editors draw heavily on John Paul Lederach's "moral imagination," which involves describing and then realizing a future that answers present challenges. Ethnomusicologically, they are indebted to Christopher Small's "musicking," a concept encompassing any kind of activity connected to musical creation or consumption, and Thomas Turino's penchant for participatory musics—those involving all present in some kind of direct physical or creative capacity. In brief, the authors believe that music's apparent "transcendence" can lead "musickers" (audiences or performers) to imagine a type of community where religious differences are characterized by dialogue and human rapport, and to then go about actualizing that vision.

After an extensive introduction, the book features chapters contextualizing the relationship of the two faiths, followed by a set of theological considerations. James Krabill's Anabaptist-inspired argument for peace centers on the calling of Christians to take part in God's work of bringing shalom to all of creation, while Sahiron Syamsuddin's interpretation of Qur'anic "war" verses concludes that force is only justified Islamically in self-defense. Nidaa Abou Mrad takes a careful look at a form of chanting shared by sectors of all three Abrahamic faiths, but also helpfully concludes that deep interreligious dialogue must come from a firm grounding in one's own tradition, from finding internal motivation to extend past the boundaries of the circle.

The bulk of the book consists of seven case studies, including studies of a Moroccan festival devoted to "world sacred music"; of individual musicians serving as "peace catalysts"; and of an Indonesian youth peace movement that strategically utilizes rock festivals. A central claim, argued by King, Jared Holton, and Mustafa Said, is that the act of musical participation—necessarily based on careful listening, dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration—offers a kind of behavioral model that can be extended to other types of encounter. As musicologist Christopher Small puts it, mutual participation becomes a metaphor for ideal relationships; this vision then inspires Lederach's "moral imagination."

In Holton's case, the musical collaboration was a long-standing one (between a Christian and a Muslim) that led to respect and affection after rehearsing and performing together in Libya on many occasions. He describes five ways in which musicians can potentially dialogue across religious barriers: through shared listening, performing for each other, learning music from the other, playing together, and performing together for an audience. But King also notes that even non-performing audience members can experience moments of "affective simultaneity" in the course of an emotionally powerful concert that can potentially bond strangers into a shared "community of interpretation." Extending the notion of collaboration to include "musickers" who organize interfaith rock festivals, Tan describes the strong relationships that develop over months of intensive planning.

Other case studies focus on “peace catalysts.” Marcel Akiki describes his decades of work in Lebanon promoting peace through music, and Rithaony Hutajulu examines two well-known Indonesian musical ensembles characterized by hybridity and pluralism in style, repertoire, and membership. Inwansyah Harahap’s oral history of a single accomplished performer of Indonesian “saman” asserts that artistic practice can create inner peace, which is then practiced with and communicated to others.

In their conclusion, King and Tan identify five ways in which music can contribute to peace: in the arena of the musical event, which can draw very different kinds of people together for the shared purpose of enjoyment; in music-making itself, modeling ideal or desired relationships; in musical “convergences” or moments of heightened experience and solidarity; through the work of musical “peace catalysts” who use their success and influence to promote peace; and through musical dialogues and collaborations that are ongoing, eventually leading to other forms of interaction and dialogue. This last point is crucial: people may leave a concert whistling new tunes and even reconsidering worldviews, but achieving true shalom requires deeper, continuous relationships.

Critics might find some of these conclusions a trifle optimistic: does music really have the power to inspire such relationships, at least on a scale large enough to effect meaningful change in interreligious encounters? Does deep spirituality necessarily lead to a peacebuilding orientation, as some of the chapters imply? From my perspective, both music and spirituality can be turned toward destructive or life-affirming ends, with potentially enormous effects on individuals, the building blocks of all social movements. The introduction and conclusion lay out this potential in a conceptually accessible way (despite some diagrams that are so detailed as to become confusing), while the case studies may well give direction to individuals living or working in zones of conflict—the book’s ideal audience.

Krabill references the Dominican Father Yves Congar, who lists five types of interfaith engagement on a continuum of increasing interpersonal complexity: personal relations, social justice projects, devotional activities, prayer, and theological discussion. Music can do some of these things directly (devotion/prayer), while its texts can reference justice and theology. But as the authors in this book attest, it can also slowly help to turn strangers into friends, which is the foundation for any kind of effective “witness” however we interpret that command.

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Samuel J. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*, Herald, Harrisonburg, VA, 2015. 872 pp. \$88.68. ISBN: 9780836199086.

*In Search of Promised Lands* is the forty-eighth volume in the Studies in Anabaptist Mennonite History series, sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society and initiated by Harold S. Bender. Encyclopedic in scope, Steiner's book is the result of years of research in his position as archivist at Conrad Grebel University College. At well over 800 pages in length, the volume is certainly the leading work on the topic, surpassing *A Brief History of Mennonites in Ontario* (1935) by Lewis J. Burkholder, and the more recent and less geographically specific series *Mennonites in Canada*.<sup>7</sup>

In the preface, Steiner states that his method is neither social history nor intellectual history but rather religious history, as the subtitle indicates (18). This methodology is evident not so much by any confessional language or apologetic tone but by the collection of stories chosen to represent the historical trajectory of Mennonites in Ontario. Taking a chronological approach in its sixteen detailed chapters, the book tracks the history of Mennonite groups in Ontario from the 1680s to the present day. The comprehensive nature of the book makes summary in this space difficult, and so a list of highlights will have to suffice.

Throughout the first few chapters, Steiner captures the early movements of the Mennonites and Amish and covers Mennonite-Aboriginal relations, mentioning that "Mennonite economic development deprived the aboriginals of access to their traditional lands and resources" (73). Although he doesn't reflect upon this historical fact in detail, it is reassuring to see Mennonite complicity in colonialism reflected in an authoritative history text. In the early chapters, Steiner also explores other inter-cultural relations and includes a section on the beginnings of women in ministry in the 1870s (138–39). Further notable themes include the history of David Martin Mennonites in the Wellesley area (184–87), the Russian Mennonite immigration experience, and a brief section on the Plymouth Brethren.

As the book begins to turn its eye closer to the present day, events and names may become more familiar to the reader. Steiner covers the experience of nonresistant Ontario Mennonites during World War II, charts the beginnings of several Mennonite educational institutions, and describes the negotiation of separation and assimilation in Ontario Mennonite life. Importantly, chapter 12, "Identity Preservation through Institutions, 1945–70s," provides helpful and interesting historical

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis J. Burkholder, *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario* (Toronto: Livingstone, 1935); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786–1920: The History of a Separate People* (Altona, MB: Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, 1974); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1982); T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939–1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1996).

snapshots of Mennonite institutions, including retirement homes, historical societies, credit unions, and camps as well as Conrad Grebel College and Mennonite Central Committee Ontario. Moving even closer to the present, the concluding chapters address ways in which Mennonites have assimilated into the cultural milieu of Ontario, touching on much more contemporary theological issues (homosexuality, Jesus, and Salvation), and the recent histories of Mennonite institutions such as Rockway Mennonite Collegiate and Conrad Grebel University College.

In reflecting upon the book, I found that *In Search of Promised Lands* intersected with my own context and perspective in both helpful and problematic ways. On one hand, I valued the opportunity to learn more about the history of my ancestors. Steiner's narrative focus allowed me to see continuities and connections that I would never have had the chance to learn about otherwise. On the other hand, I found the overarching narrative of providence troublesome, even though Steiner works descriptively and does not appear to directly endorse the self-understanding of settler Mennonites as people bound for a promised land. Perhaps it is my philosophical bias, but I found myself looking for more methodological and historiographical reflection in the book. For example, Steiner's fascinating description of how Ontario did not contain all of the economic promise expected makes me wonder how Mennonites have understood God's promise—is providence economic, spiritual, social, all three, or something else? Given that the title of the book suggests that Ontario was or is a Promised Land for Mennonites, the book does little to engage with the possibility that the land (particularly the Haldimand tract) could well have been promised to someone else....This raises a larger question about the role of a historical book: should history be written as a collection of facts, dates, and stories alone; or should historical writing be required to justify what it values?

In conclusion, *In Search of Promised Lands* is both comprehensive and accessible, although its comprehensiveness may be a barrier to continuous reading. Both scholars and individuals interested in Mennonites will doubtless find the book to be a valuable resource and reference work. Reservations aside, as historical reflection on Mennonite groups continues, Steiner's proposed spectrum "from traditionalist withdrawal to conservative boundary maintenance to evangelical renewal to progressive assimilation" should serve as a helpful framework for further research and thought (15).

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Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2016. 336 pp. \$26.99. ISBN: 9780801048494.

Alan Kreider in his new volume, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, proposes that the shaping theme of early Christianity was “Patience,” understood as an attribute of God, a characteristic of Jesus’s life and teaching, and a defining aspect of a Christian lifestyle within the pagan Roman empire.

Well-known for his scholarship on the early church, Kreider did some incredible research for this book and liberally quotes such luminaries as Justin Martyr, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Cyprian, Tertullian, and many others. Drawing on eighty ancient sources and twenty-eight modern compendiums (the book contains seventeen pages of bibliography), he makes an excellent case that commitment to Jesus for believers in the first through fourth centuries CE meant, above all, a faith and lifestyle based on patience. The latter two luminaries above, along with Augustine of Hippo, wrote treatises on patience as a prime virtue. “In the strongest terms, Tertullian states that patience is at the heart of being a Christian. To be a Christian means that one has accorded to patience ‘pre-eminence in matters pertaining to God’ ” (21).

But neither Cyprian nor Tertullian stop with the heavenly. Just as Jesus was revered for actually living out a Good News message, Christians were called to adopt a new lifestyle—or “habitus” as Kreider calls it, borrowing a concept from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The “corporeal knowledge” of the early Christians—that is, the group-and-individual-shaping culture that set them apart from pagan Roman society—provided the necessary strength to endure severe suffering and become an attractive alternative community. “It is habitus that constitutes our profoundest sense of identity; that forms our deepest convictions, allegiances, and repulsions; and that shapes our response to ultimate questions—what will we live for, die for, and kill (or not kill) for” (40).

So, while theological belief was part of the picture, being Christian was essentially about the physical nature of faith—it was internal (posture during prayer, proper way to perform the sign of the Cross, the essentiality of the Kiss of Peace) and external (choosing one’s occupation, patience in business, radical nonviolence, caring for the poor and sick). And such strongly-shared habitus came about not by accident but through careful nurturing by the baptized gathering, local congregational leaders, and the prolific church “fathers.” In describing the formation and playing out of habitus, Kreider examines worship, Christian response to plague and martyrdom, gender roles and sexual mores, and, of course, the extended and complicated process of catechesis. Habitus of the Christians was what pulled outside observers toward this peculiar people and, when contrasted with the habitus of Roman-Hellenistic society, pushed pagans toward the church.

It is common knowledge that the early church grew rapidly, even in the face of suffering. Counterintuitively, it does not appear that fiery preaching or exhortation

to convert was the impetus for growth. Rather, it was the very “strange patience” and habitus inculcated during the frequent gatherings of the community that drove the rapid church growth during these centuries. While pagan onlookers were not welcome at most Christian worship services, friends of the Christians “out in the world” could see that these people behaved differently—and in a very attractive way. Believers didn’t necessarily share aggressively much about what their faith entailed, but they certainly lived out visibly what their mysterious faith taught. And the friends and onlookers were drawn to it. Two North African church leaders, Minucius Felix and Cyprian, both used the phrase “We do not speak great things, but we live them” (14 and 296).

But all good things come to an end. In two final chapters, one dealing with the Emperor Constantine and the other with Augustine of Hippo, Kreider describes in graphic detail how the concept of patience was redefined (by Augustine) and ignored (by the Emperor), leading to a huge shift of mentality within the Christian family. Kreider identifies the shifts of the period that most Anabaptists know well: Christian leadership becoming part of the “powers” in society and eventually taking on the mantle of “state” authority; Christian theology accepting state violence and even violence against fellow believers (as in disputations about theological heterodoxy); a shift to a Christendom mentality that included a 180-degree reversal to accept the swearing of oaths as “the bond that held society together”; and, of course, a shift to focus on inward motivation and away from outward habitus—so that individuals could become Christians without having to change their outward behavior. (This is also the era when expectations of “ordinary” laypersons diverged from those of the monks and clerics.)

Kreider adroitly explains these shifts, concluding with a rueful summary of how Christian mission became “an exercise in imperialism.” If we, as inheritors of this aggressive faith, wish to reconnect with the patience that characterized that earliest church, we might be tempted to “make facile generalizations or construct how-to formulas—those would be impatient responses!” (296).

Ending his tome there, Kreider does not give much more help to us as mission leaders. He points to reforming our own habitus. But still, there are several obvious implications for mission today in Kreider’s thesis:

1. Christian lifestyle is *the central construct* for mission. While institutional Christianity seems to focus most energy on proper scriptural interpretation, precise theological definitions, and institutional authority, Kreider helps us see that the early church had a rather simple idea of faith: formation of a conscious, faithful, alternative lifestyle with the help of the Holy Spirit, and careful Christian education rooted in the teaching and way of Jesus (296). Rev. Glen Guyton interprets the current Mennonite Church USA convention theme

for 2017, “Love is a Verb,” in terms reflective of Kreider’s heroes Minucius Felix and Cyprian: “Love is shown not in simply paying homage to some ancient text, but that love is shown through our actions. Love the verb models the example of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. This theme is so much bigger than one corporate entity. *‘Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.’*—1 John 3:18.”<sup>8</sup>

2. Mission should focus on establishing a productive culture/habitus parallel to the destructive conventional human cultures. Far from pulling new believers out of their native society, mission should instead help them find new freedom, new meaning, and new ways to enjoy and practice God’s love in relationship with their neighbors in their native society. This means providing both free choice and a new option. Surely this must be good news for our relativistic and anti-mission-minded millennial culture. Dr. Myron Augsburger, writing in *The Mennonite*, urges Christ’s followers to a new understanding of ecumenism and evangelism: “We need to rethink the nature of evangelism to more properly engage in evangelistic work, for such is to be a witness of grace. Evangelism is never to be manipulation or coercion, but is seeking by life and word to make faith in Jesus a possibility for persons!...One [problem] is that in mission work we may be seen not as clarifying options for people, but simply as proselytizing.”<sup>9</sup>
3. Surely if patience was underappreciated during the Roman Empire, it must be far more endangered today. If maintaining the traditional patience of the early church was impossible for one of the greatest of saints, Augustine of Hippo, how can we as mission leaders steer our churches and mission efforts back to the ideal? Should we question the tough realities of “efficiencies” built into modern mission structures? Do we need to eschew the time-saving features of modern communications, technology, and transportation? Must we abandon such modernistic methods as goal-setting for world evangelism efforts? If such suggestions are impossible to fully implement in the faster-faster twenty-first century, at the very least Kreider implies that we should work to re-instill a mentality of patience into our Christian (missional) habitus. The resulting ferment should be worth the attempt!

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<sup>8</sup> Glen Guyton, “Love Is a Verb: Don’t Get It Twisted,” *The Mennonite* (blog), May 25, 2016, <https://themennonite.org/love-verb-dont-get-twisted/>.

<sup>9</sup> Myron Augsburger, “Anabaptists: Ecumenical, Radical and Prophetic,” *The Mennonite*, May 20, 2016, <https://themennonite.org/feature/anabaptists-ecumenical-radical-prophetic/>.

Finally, I was impatient with two small matters of *Patient Ferment*. Where is discipleship in all of this? While we might forgive the Mennonite Kreider for not wanting to over-do the obvious comparisons with Anabaptism, I was a little puzzled to not find this familiar word even once in the index. Isn't discipleship just a fancy way to say habitus?

While Kreider makes a strong case for the patience theme throughout the book, and especially as he shows how the church's commitment to it was essentially sabotaged by Constantine and Augustine, he seems to spend even more time making the case for habitus. It seems to me that habitus has more to do with ferment than patience does. So while the title is not incorrect, the ubiquity of habitus in this story certainly justifies a prominent place for it in the title credits.

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**Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX, 2014. 466 pp. \$49.95. ISBN: 9781481300278.**

Many denominations face deepening polarities as they engage in the social issues of our day. This isn't new. In the modern era, these polarities have been splitting along the lines of fundamentalism and liberalism. It is easy to blame the source of these polarities on secular political campaigns of the recent decades. It is rarer to assign responsibility for these divisions to the religious communities themselves. In his book, *Contesting Catholicity*, Curtis Freeman demonstrates the formative influence of the Baptist tradition in North America on disagreements that occur in the town square. Citing Carlyle Marney, Freeman suggests that fundamentalists have "stuck the window shut" while liberals "have stuck it open." In both cases, "one loses the use of the window" (56). In most organizations, the tendency is to compromise in managing these polarities. The third way is cast in terms of hope for a "middle" way. But there is "an invisible wall between liberalism and fundamentalism" that will not allow a way forward to emerge "without a paradigm shift" (86–87).

In his reading of modern church history, Freeman rightly names fundamentalists and liberals as "siblings under the skin." Both "inhabit the same type of theology (i.e., modern) even if they operate within different paradigms (Scripture vs. experience)" (86). Neither of these "possess sufficient resources for the constructive theological work that lies ahead" (87). In coming to terms with its own alterity (i.e., otherness), the church will find that the third way is not a compromised middle way but a *different* way.

Following in the furrow plowed by James McClendon, Freeman boldly explores the possibility of recovering and reclaiming the oneness of church for "Other Baptists,"

particularly where sectarian tendencies contribute to fragmenting that oneness. For Freeman, Other Baptists can contribute something essential to the church's self-understanding. "The church catholic stands ever in need of such a tradition of radical contestation to call into question the Christendom assumptions that inhibit the church from being the church" (52). By "engaging the otherness at its borders, the church may come to terms with its own alterity and in so doing come to understand its true identity" (52). Freeman offers a careful and well-documented reading of significant Baptist scholar-preachers from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries—teachers and preachers who have opened the field for Other Baptists to recover and reclaim their catholic identity.

A hopeful future in which Other Baptists recover and reclaim their oneness with the church catholic will not be conservative, liberal, fundamentalist, or an identity in between. Freeman hopes that "pilgrims who are sturdy enough to follow a new vector might regain the use of their windows by moving beyond fundamentalism and liberalism toward a liberal orthodoxy" (92). This is the preferred vocation of Other Baptists. Other Baptists are those who embody this different way by affirming "beliefs and practices characteristic of identity and mission of baptistic communities" while locating their primary identity within the historic Christian tradition (92).

Appealing to the sixteenth-century reformers Martin Luther and Dirk Philips (38), Freeman argues for abandoning attempts to define the true church in a set of foundationalist doctrinal propositions. Instead, the third way is embodied by recovering Christian practices that are the marks or signs of the faithful church—practices that cause Christians to become Christian.

In the last chapter of Part 1 of his book, Freeman describes the five signs of generous liberal orthodoxy that constitute *contesting catholicity*. These signs are (1) confessional faith, (2) regulative guidance, (3) ecclesial Christianity, (4) ecumenical communion, and (5) discerning belief. Several of these signs will bring Other Baptists and Anabaptists into important conversations as pilgrims of two traditions seeking to recover and reclaim their identity as part of the church catholic.

Confessional faith and regulative guidance, for example, will be points of generative conversation not only within the community of Other Baptists but also for Other Baptists in conversation with Anabaptists who follow John H. Yoder's ecclesiology. Freeman argues that those who are seeking a third way will need to practice a confessional faith that recites the ancient creeds of the church as the unifying witness of the church catholic. As regulative guidance, Other Baptists will adopt the "inclusive purpose" these creeds play in articulating a centered-set of beliefs more than the "exclusive purpose" of "keeping some people and their ideas out" (106–7). Yoder affirmed that "creeds tell the story of how 'God has chosen to lead his confused people toward perhaps at least a degree of understanding

of certain dangers, certain things not to say if we are to remain faithful' ” (107). Freeman's point is that the “regulative aspects of the creeds, to be sure, ruled out heterodox notions that arose, but more importantly they ruled in orthodox ones” (106). This is an example of the many ways Mennonites and other Anabaptists will find in Freeman a helpful and provocative conversation partner as they consider their place in the church catholic.

In Part 2 of his book, Freeman teases out the implications for how Other Baptists will practice these signs as they emigrate from a place of self-imposed exile back into the landscape of the church catholic. Of particular interest to Anabaptists who may feel stuck by divisive polarities, Freeman's chapter on biblical discernment, “More Light from the World” (chapter 7), will provide significant grist for thinking about the role and authority of Scripture for third-way people. Here we see an insightful story where church leaders found more light from the Word in the credentialing of a female preacher in the 1960s. Freeman describes this hermeneutic as having the following qualities: “every voice is heard and none is silenced, no outcome is predetermined except that all are seeking the mind of Christ”; the necessity that “advocates and adversaries are essential to the search for new light”; “all participants must listen and be heard”; “dissenting voices cannot be trumped by majority opinions or the loudest voices”; “the ruled readings of the community are listened to carefully and the community attends closely to the plain reading of the text”; and, all of this is done in the hope of finding “a path to the reconciliation envisioned in the text,” not reducing the process to “shortcuts of authority or autonomy.” Reassuring as this idealistic vision is, it will be a mature community of believers indeed who can embody the final necessary ingredient: “patience to wait for the coming of the full light that shines from the horizon of the future” (308–9).

Reading *Contesting Catholicity* from beginning to end, one can feel as though one is eavesdropping on a family dinner conversation. All good book introductions provide a roadmap so the reader can anticipate the author's argument and methodology as well as gain a grasp of the specialized terms framing the author's argument. Freeman, however, doesn't explicitly define his terms as they are introduced; one is deep in the book before grasping what he means by “Other Baptists,” what is being “contested,” and what definition of “catholicity” he has in mind. It isn't clear what role the word “liberal” plays in his “generous liberal orthodoxy.”

Overall, Freeman makes a refreshing contribution to the question of Christian unity. One looks forward to a further installment from him when he might be more explicit in describing how alterity helps the church reclaim its identity not only as the church catholic engages the gifts of the churchly “Other” but also as the whole church engages the gifts and challenges of the worldly “Other.” This would place Freeman's quest to recover and reclaim the church's missional identity.

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Rosalind I. J. Hackett, ed., *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets, and Culture Wars*, Equinox, London, 2008. 480 pp. \$36.76. ISBN 9781845532284.

“We have shown you the mountain, and now it is up to you to climb it.” So spoke Commissioner Murray Sinclair as he and the other Commissioners made their preliminary report at the close of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) last June. There was a sense that this was an unveiling, a revealing of a mountain that had dominated the landscape for so many indigenous peoples in this land but had previously been hidden from the view of the rest of Canada. There was in the Commissioner’s invitation a sense that non-indigenous Canadians would need to practice keeping this mountain in view if we had any hope of climbing it. It is in fact this task of shifting perspective that is so critical in the work of decolonizing and pursuing just and right relationships. *Proselytization Revisited* provides an international lens through which to look at some of the Calls to Action set forth for the church by the commissioners, particularly the recommendation that asks all faith groups in Canada to formally adopt and comply with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation. For evangelical and post-evangelical faith communities, this may prove to be one of the most challenging of the recommendations. Hackett’s book helps to stretch non-indigenous paradigms for engaging this path for reconciliation and gives global context for the concerns of indigenous people here and abroad.

The focus on proselytism in this book is an examination of a method gone wrong. The authors choose to focus on proselytism, rather than conversion, in order to look at the methods that are employed “to bring about a significant change in the pre-existing religious commitments, identity, membership or lack thereof of others” (77). Proselytization is the term used in human rights conversation to delineate where sharing one’s own beliefs comes to infringe on the rights of another person or group.

The three questions I believe will serve the discussion in the church regarding the adoption of UNDRIP are: How does religious freedom play out in situations of unequal power? What are the circumstances that can cause evangelism to become coercive? And finally, what might be the markers of a decolonized and authentic evangelism?

While religious freedom has been promoted in the West as a basic tenet of democracy, it is experienced by many in other parts of the world and those on the margins in the West as an arm of Western imperialism. Jean-Francois Mayer raises the issue

that the US promotion of religious freedom, especially in South America, has been perceived as an ideological invasion aimed particularly at undermining the struggle for indigenous social justice. Religious freedom in other contexts is not seen as a pluralistic freedom so much as a privileging of Christianity and Islam over traditional or non-evangelistic spiritualities, as raised by De Roover and Claerhout in their examination of the context in India. This concern seems to be at the root of the protection of traditional spiritual practices in the UNDRIP. The issue is even more poignant when we consider the Canadian context of the churches' collusion with the state in order to erase cultural identity and ties to the land through the residential school project. These authors encourage us to ask the question of how power and privilege are playing into Christians' desire to "share the gospel."

Another aspect of power potentially corrupting evangelistic practice within Christianity is the issue of coercion. Kao and Elisha raise important questions about what those inside of Christianity would call "holistic mission," where one could argue that the gospel is preached not only with words but also (and perhaps more importantly) with actions. Kao and Elisha elucidate the potentially coercive nature of this sort of mission work where there is power inequity and the withholding of benefit based on required adherence to an ideology, set of behaviors, or participation in religious activities. Further, Elisha raises a concern that "faith-based activism has the potential to reinforce hegemonic conditions in particular social contexts." He bases this concern on observations regarding language around missionaries' work in situations of poverty. "Welfare activists talk about the 'transformed lives' and 'softened hearts' of welfare clients, evoking the conversionist language of evangelical revivalism, rather than dwelling on the systemic roots of poverty as they might do when speaking before liberal audiences" (450). His issue is not with revivalism but with a reluctance to challenge systemic oppression by spiritualizing the problem and the solution.

The longstanding history of colonization in Canada has created inequities of power and has institutionalized a deep racism that perpetuates these inequalities. Such realities then require serious work around decolonizing our attitudes and structures. Much will need to shift in terms of power and control. On this topic of shifting power, the book offers some global encouragement as well.

As Africa and India are not only decolonizing (explored by De Roover and Claerhout) but also recovering their precolonial history as birthplaces of early Christian movements (Freston), and as the site of sending missions is shifting to the global south (Freston and Kovalchuk), there seems to be a new dynamic emerging. These shifts mark a return to the early Christian reality of a message coming from the grassroots margins, which then speaks into the seats of power rather than the other way around. With the exception of Kao's chapter, in which she raises concerns about some culturally unreflective forms of Pentecostalism emerging in South America, the general sense is that this shift will serve Christianity better than its

colonial/imperial forms.

This book triggers important questions that we need to consider in Canada: What would fully contextualized indigenous forms of following the Jesus Way look like? What if Indian Country finally was the sending site of Christian mission rather than the perpetual mission field? What might the non-indigenous church in Canada have to learn from loving our indigenous neighbors as those neighbors are asking us to love them rather than how we think they should be loved? The mountain is ours to climb.

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**Qwo-Li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 2016. 224 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780816530489.**

Teaching a course at Bible college, I asked a class what the historical context of Creation was. There was some murmuring and a bit of nervous laughter. When speaking of origin stories, either the beginning comes later or the beginning is a pure event untainted by the messiness of life.

This tension between the newness of creation and the flow of history surfaced as I read Qwo-Li Driskill's *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*. The subtitle is suggestive. Queer is a broad and somewhat fluid term addressing anything from variant sexual practices to political stances. Two-Spirit remains enigmatic to many non-indigenous (as well as indigenous) people and is here used to "describe someone whose gender exists outside of colonial logic" (5).

I was hopeful and curious about whether the author's *memory* would include neglected or lost texts and stories recounting expressions of Cherokee gender and sexuality prior to colonial contact. Unconsciously I wanted a *pure event*, a literal creation account of how the Cherokee people expressed themselves. There is no such account. Driskill, perhaps a little like the Jews in exile crafting their origin story, is attempting to weave a story for hir<sup>10</sup> people that is true to their past and empowering in the present. But as with the Jewish exiles in Babylon, much of the materials have passed through the language and influence of colonizers. The result is that the creation account is both indebted to and in conflict with the accounts of the colonizer.

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<sup>10</sup> It is my understanding that in identifying as Two-Spirit the author uses the pronouns "s/he" and "hir" respectively. I have employed these terms in the review. See author bio at <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/users/qwo-li-driskill>.

The term *asegi* carries the connotation of strange or *queer*—that which deviates from or is unaccountable to and unassimilated by dominant forms. These *asegi* forms must be drawn out as fragments or threads from the dominant expressions that appropriated them into their own logic. These extracted threads then can be “woven” (the author’s guiding metaphor) creatively to imagine possible pasts and consider different futures. What this means for Driskill is that every aspect of his work—from critical methodology to choice of sources—must be attentive to and reflect an *asegi* style. For instance, “scientific objectivity” is discarded in the way it objectifies lives, cutting up and classifying them by dominant logics. “This book does not attempt to argue for cultural ‘truths,’ but, rather, argues for radical disruption of master narratives....This is a political and activist project” (7).

Because there is no documentation of gender or sexuality (the terms themselves being anachronistic) among Cherokee people prior to colonial contact, Driskill begins after contact. It is clear from these sources that Europeans “thought that *all* of our genders were ‘variant,’” as seen in their criticisms of overly “feminine” men or “masculine” women as well as differing forms of commitment and kinship models (19, see also 41). Driskill spends time picking up the threads within these accounts that both suggest *asegi* forms, and then uses them to imagine what might have been and what could still be.

The bulk of Driskill’s historical work traces two broad trajectories. First is the early historical accounts of contact between Europeans and those in traditional Cherokee territory. As mentioned, these accounts reflect broad criticism of how Cherokee people expressed gender and sexuality. Cherokee sexuality as a whole was encountered as deviant. Some of the criticisms included matriarchal authority, mutual “divorce” among couples, instances of cross-dressing, and gender roles in conflict with colonial norms. The second trajectory traces how colonizers implemented policy and laws that would bring Cherokee forms in line with colonial aims. This included attempts at having Cherokees incorporate chattel slavery as an economic practice as well as sending missionaries to enculturate Cherokees in colonial languages and values. All of these economic and religious reforms had the effect of molding Cherokee gender expressions along colonial lines.

Driskill does not consider historical accounts as the most “accurate” understanding of past expressions. For instance, early accounts of the Cherokee ritual of “perpetual friendship” (which could be performed between members of the same or opposite gender) are passed through colonial values and terms leaving the reader unclear as to the meaning of this ritual (see 140–47). Driskill’s methodology can prove frustrating for the reader formed by modern standards of historical criticism. S/he concludes each chapter by *imagining* how *asegi* and Two-Spirit expressions *may* have existed in those accounts. In a reflective response to doubts over his chosen approach, s/he concludes one chapter, “No doubt, this doesn’t just have to be imagining. We survived. Look at our hands: we are reweaving” (136).

In resistance to how the body of the colonized was a malleable and expendable tool of the colonizer, Driskill reclaims and draws on the integrity of the body as a living memory revitalizing the present (123). The past must always remain accountable to the present. “Our memory and practices are always *now*, even when we draw from older practices and memories” (149). Every account of the past, whether scientific or intuitive, is an act of the present.

Driskill *queers* the practice of memory and history. S/he works as an exile within colonial logics, creating origin stories that find their significance in the present. The question that should be raised for settler Christians and those wrestling with the theology and practice of missions is whether the missionary encounter with the Cherokees (most of whom are Christian today) could have been different. While Driskill finds room for asegi imagining within some missionary encounters (particularly the Moravians, see 121) these must again be drawn out from the dominant colonial logic that is the guiding missionary logic.

So again, the question remains, are we able to extract threads from *our* history and theology of missions that could imagine Christians encountering asegi or queer forms among non-Christians, where we remain open and attentive, witnessing what resonates, challenges, or expands our understanding of the gospel, the message that brings freedom from colonial logics? To shift Driskill’s metaphor from Cherokee to Mennonite practice, such a quilt has yet to be crafted or acknowledged.

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