

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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Cover design: Matt Veith

Cover image: Pastor of the National Presbyterian Church of Aleppo Rev. Ibrahim Nseir stands and gestures toward a pile of rubble where his church once stood.

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Editorial

As I glance out of the window of my office at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana), I'm tempted to imagine that I'm participating in a form of witness far from the realities of conflict that birthed the Anabaptist movement. This sunny spring day is, for me, untroubled by fears of imminent bodily harm, of suspicion that a government or other opposing group is hunting me, of an urgent need to flee for my safety. Whereas many early Anabaptists suffered torture and execution, that is not a serious possibility for me or for most of my colleagues and students. Whereas many early Anabaptists met in secret, if at all, the seminary announces its presence with signage on nearby roads and highways. Moreover, the seminary community has been settled in this location for sixty years and confidently plans for a long future here.

This glance to the world I inhabit raises questions for me that are often asked by and about Anabaptists during peacetime: Is our safety a function of our compromised convictions? If we were really dedicated to Anabaptist witness, wouldn't we be persecuted? Or, alternatively, does the reality of peaceful North America (and Europe and elsewhere) suggest that "pacifism" doesn't mean much today, that Anabaptist proclamations about nonviolence are hollow and cheap?

By exploring the character of Christian mission in specific conflict zones, the articles in this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* help us move toward a response to these questions. Elias Ghazal learns from Jesus about resisting tyranny non-violently in Yemen, and Alain Epp Weaver sees signs of Christ's ascension in the two-thousand-year witness of the Syrian church. Andrew Bush and Johannes Reimer each offer theologies of mission for "a world at war," with Bush reflecting on his long experience on the West Bank and Reimer on recent work in Ukraine.

Retired medical missionary Wally Shellenberger reflects on his experience during the Biafran War in Nigeria in the late 1960s. Shellenberger draws from letters and diaries to offer a portrait of mission under conditions of conflict. Kathryn Smith Derksen in turn investigates issues raised in her current mission assignment in South Africa; in particular, she shows how Anabaptist conceptions of "peace" must be shaped in conversation with local victims and survivors of racialized conflict.

The final three articles emerge out of the Latin American context. Daniel Moya and Peter Wigginton both look at the aftermath of the Colombian conflict. Moya utilizes a framework shaped by restorative justice and conflict transformation to investigate possibilities for communal restoration. Wigginton examines the highly politicized setting in which the Colombian church responded to the 2016 referendum on the peace accords. Luis Aránguiz Kahn

and Elvis Castro Lagos focus on the Chilean government's ongoing conflict with indigenous Mapuche communities, suggesting that Anabaptist theology might provide guidance for Pentecostals caught up in the violence.

These articles might prompt one to respond to the "hard questions" about Anabaptist witness today by emphasizing how Anabaptists around the world are engaged in costly mission in conflict zones. Some of these Anabaptists—as in Colombia and also Nigeria and elsewhere—face the threat of death, kidnapping, and rape. These articles might also bring to light that many living and working in conflict zones find Anabaptist and Mennonite theology a helpful aide to their understanding and practice of Christian mission—and, furthermore, that Anabaptist and Mennonite theology is changing in response to the realities of mission in these contexts. In other words, I may not face violence in northern Indiana, but my Anabaptist witness is, at its best, intertwined with and accountable to those who do.

The book reviews included in this issue also raise the possibility of an additional kind of response—one that attends to egregious violence within seemingly peaceful settings like my own. As the reviews indicate, indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, and the earth itself are under attack throughout the world.

Considering these realities leads me to take a look outside my window again. I see that this land the seminary is settled on is colonized land, land taken from the Potawatomi. I see the neighborhood to the immediate north of the seminary, home to black and Latino communities who experience regular harassment and violence at the hands of the police. I see nearby land and rivers poisoned by decades of chemical dumping and spills. As I look again, I realize that I and anyone reading this in similar zones of conflict have much to learn about Anabaptist witness from the voices in this issue.

Jamie Pitts, editor

Confronting Tyranny, the Jesus Way

ELIAS GHAZAL

A deliberate war waged against Yemen has killed more than ten thousand people and displaced millions.¹ The situation on the ground is appalling.² More than 1.2 million suspected cholera cases have been documented since April 2017—one of the worst outbreaks in recent history.³ Polio, an easily preventable disease and once thought to be eradicated, has re-infected Yemen.⁴ A blockade on Yemen puts more than five million children at risk of starving to death.⁵

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1 “Yemen Could Be ‘Worst Famine in 100 Years,’” *BBC News*, October 15, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-45857729/yemen-could-be-worst-famine-in-100-years>.

2 Jane Wharton, “Skeletal Child Is Just One of Five Million at Risk of Death in War-Torn Yemen,” *Metro*, September 21, 2018, <https://metro.co.uk/2018/09/21/skeletal-child-is-just-one-of-five-million-at-risk-of-death-in-war-torn-yemen-7965973/>.

3 “Health Workers in Yemen Reach More Than 306,000 People with Cholera Vaccines during Four-Day Pause in Fighting—WHO, UNICEF,” *World Health Organization*, October 5, 2018, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/05-10-2018-health-workers-in-yemen-reach-more-than-306-000-people-with-cholera-vaccines-during-four-day-pause-in-fighting-who-unicef>.

4 World Health Organization, “Yemen: Polio Eradication Initiative,” accessed February 4, 2019, <http://www.emro.who.int/polio/countries/yemen.html>.

5 Agence France-Presse, “More Than Five Million Children in Yemen Risk Starving to Death as Food and Fuel Prices Soar,” *Telegraph*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/09/19/five-million-children-yemen-risk-starving-death-food-fuel-prices/>.

If nothing changes immediately, ten million people will face the same fate.⁶ Already, people are feeding on boiled tree leaves to survive!⁷

What heart can see the images from Yemen and not quiver? Who can hear of the atrocities committed against civilians and not be outraged? Warring factions have their own reasons for fighting, but do not perpetrators of crimes against innocent children lose any justification for whatever they are fighting for (one in five children killed is under the age of eighteen⁸)? More importantly, what should be done about violent autocratic rulers?

I think this is the attitude that a few people had when they approached Jesus and told him that Pilate had mixed the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1). Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, committed a barbaric and sacrilegious act by slaughtering what appears to be random people practicing their right to worship. Of course, we cannot be sure of the victims' innocence, but if leaving them nameless and specifying that they were from the periphery of Palestine may indicate something, it is that they were unimportant and harmless.

All the same, this event had the potential to ignite an uprising against the Romans—if only Jesus would mobilize the crowd of many thousands that had gathered to hear him (Luke 12:1). Here was the chance to avenge the death of the innocent, depose of the tyrannical Roman regime, and end the suffering of the Jews—if only Jesus would claim the role of the Messiah that the people imagined for him.

Jesus's response to the evocation sounds impertinent at first. He says, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:2–5).

In the preceding verses, the context is about the gospel causing division, not peace, among people, and the need to recognize that and choose a side. But which side? If you committed a felony against your adversary and he filed a lawsuit against you, would you try to settle the matter outside the court or

6 "Yemen: Tackling the World's Largest Humanitarian Crisis," *UN News*, September 24, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1020232>.

7 Maggie Michael, "Isolated and Unseen, Yemenis Eat Leaves to Stave Off Starvation," *AP News*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/5a4645766b414fe59b-5f00ca3e543bd9>.

8 "UN Child Rights Panel Urges Saudi Arabia to Halt Strikes against Civilian Targets," *Press TV*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/10/11/576716/Yemen-UN-Saudi-Arabia-children-airstrikes>.

wait for the judge's sentence? Jesus taught his hearers to follow the same logic when determining which side to choose.

But what about ruthless Pilate and his accomplices? How could the people negotiate a settlement with such a brutal regime? The people who reported the onslaught against the Galileans possibly wanted Jesus to revolt against Pilate because they could not accept being reconciled to Pilate. They could not remember Pilate without recalling his heinous acts. Like many people suffering under authoritarian rule today, they found it difficult to forgive their ruler.

Jesus's response is instructive in many ways. First, he affirms that sin is not an abstraction. Death and suffering in the world, regardless of how they come about, are the result of sin. That is, at the root of all wickedness and wrongdoing is sin. More importantly, this sin is a personal issue. Everybody has been infected by it, and therefore everybody has a responsibility to deal with it. Before judging Pilate and the like of evil-doing, each person should repent of his or her sins and plead for God's mercy. From God's perspective, it is a hypocrisy to demand the punishment of a sinner—despite how vile the sin is—before receiving absolution for our own sins.

Second, when outraged by injustice, we should not be driven to respond by anger but by grace. The motivation behind our actions is important because it determines how far we go and how we go about it. If we are driven by anger and a sense of revenge, our response will be dehumanizing and self-destructive. It will lead to focusing on short-term solutions at exorbitant costs. On the other hand, a response to injustice that is driven by a deep comprehension of our sin and how God forgave us will overflow with love and humility. It will help us to take injustice not personally but as an offense against God's kingship.

This leads to the third point. God is sovereign, and he will judge injustice in his own time. God's silence over wrongdoing is not a sign of weakness or apathy, but a reflection of his patience and mercy. Jesus tells the people angered by Pilate's injustice that God does not immediately chop down the fig tree that does not bear fruit. He gives it a chance to produce fruit, and if it does not, then he will cut it down. Similarly, God gives people more time to repent, but the time will come when all people will be brought to judgment before God. Trusting in God's sovereignty helps us endure injustice.

But a troubling question still lurks in the background: what about modern-day Pilates? How should we respond to violent politicians after we realize our sin, repent from it, and trust God's sovereignty? Or is Jesus insinuating that we should refrain from political activism?

Following his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was brought before Pilate for questioning. On several occasions, Pilate reasoned with Jesus and tried to exonerate him from the accusations of the Jews. Strangely, Pilate was reluctant to execute Jesus. Indeed, he believed that Jesus was innocent, but why

would a man who has a reputation for cruelty and continual murders stumble to issue one more death sentence?

Jesus's words to Pilate caused him to pause and examine the situation carefully. I think we can learn lessons from their exchange about how to deal with the Pilates in our world. First, Jesus did not try to discredit Pilate's authority or delegitimize his rule. In fact, he affirmed both, but not without placing them in their proper place. Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). We should never forget that God is sovereign over the whole earth. We may find it perplexing, but despots are in power by permission from God.

Second, this does not mean that we should turn a blind eye to their aggression. On the contrary, we should hold all leaders accountable. Few people would disagree with this, but how one holds a leader accountable is where Christians diverge from the most-frequented path. Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). While people are generally predisposed to use any means necessary, including violence, to have their political way, it is not so with followers of Jesus. Disciples of Jesus are governed by a heavenly kingdom, and that should be reflected through their political activity on earth. Christians superimpose a heavenly order on the earthly one. The misalignment causes suffering, but it ought to be endured until the heavenly eventually prevails upon Jesus's return.

Third, this is not a call to passivity or escapism but a call to humble confrontation. When Pilate exclaimed that Jesus was king, Jesus said, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). It is fascinating that when Jesus summarizes the purpose of his incarnation in one sentence, he speaks these words in the ears of the highest political authority he could come across. This underscores the importance of witnessing to the truth as the motto of every Christian, not least in political affairs. Jesus is the truth. Proclaiming the truth of the gospel in every situation and to every person should drive our political activism.

Finally, this comes at a cost. People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil and they do not want the truth to expose them. Despite his innocence and the nobility of his mission, Jesus was punished with the most excruciating death. Testifying to the truth will not always lead to death, but those who take on the call to such testimony, especially in violent contexts, must be ready to pay that price. The good news is that Jesus did not stay dead, and so it will be for those who die for the truth; they will be resurrected with the truth.

The Mother of the Belt, and the Church's Witness in Syria: An Ascension Sermon

ALAIN EPP WEAVER

Jesus's ascension to heaven is traditionally a time when the church remembers and celebrates Christ's lordship—Jesus's rule over all earthly powers. It's a celebration that God, in the words of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, has raised Christ "from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the name to come" (Eph 1:20–21, NRSV). The resurrected Christ's departure from his followers at the end of Luke's Gospel, to sit at God's right hand, sets the stage for Luke's sequel of Acts. In the continuing story, Jesus's disciples are sent out into mission, spurred by the confidence that the crucified and resurrected Jesus stands above all rule and authority, including the imperial authority of Rome. From Jerusalem, the apostles go out to join God's mission under God's rule: Paul travels multiple times around the Mediterranean to proclaim even in the heart of imperial power that Jesus is "above every name that is named"; Mark takes the good news to Egypt; and Thomas, according to Syrian Orthodox tradition, goes to India to tell of what God has done in Jesus.

The Feast of the Ascension lends itself to triumphal sermons. The Western church's Ascension hymns certainly strike a triumphant note: "Sing We Triumphant Hymns!"; "Rejoice, the Lord Is King!"; "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, Let Angels Prostrate Fall!" Speaking for myself, however, Paul's claim that Jesus is now "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" can sometimes feel less like assurance of God's rule over the powers of sin, death, and destruction, and more like absence or abandonment.

This sense of God's absence felt particularly acute to me in February 2018, when I was visiting Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) partners and disaster response projects in war-torn Syria. On the third day of our visit, I was

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asked to sit with a group of women in a village in central west Syria. These women receive monthly cash allowances from MCC through the Syrian Orthodox church. Some were Christian, others Muslim. They spoke quickly and with an intense desperation in hope that that someone would relay their stories to people who might make a difference. My dormant Arabic skills were taxed to the limit as these women shared about how husbands, uncles, or sons had been kidnapped, never to be seen again, with no corpse to bury, no finality of a funeral.

“There can be no peace in Syria until there is truth and justice for families whose loved ones were kidnapped,” one woman stressed, imploring me to communicate her message back to politicians in America. I fumbled for something that might resemble a coherent answer. Finally, another woman took pity on me and interrupted my hopelessly inadequate response, saying: “What you must understand is that every family in Syria has stories like these.”



Syrian Orthodox Bishop Selwanos walking through the destroyed Wadi al-Sayegh neighborhood of Homs. February 2018. MCC PHOTO/EMILY LOEWEN.

The sights of destruction and the stories of death, kidnapping, and displacement kept accumulating during our week in Syria as we traveled from Homs to Hama to Aleppo to Damascus. The scale of the devastation in Syria is hard to process intellectually, let alone emotionally. Over half of Syria’s pre-war population has been uprooted, with over eleven million people ending up either as refugees outside of Syria or as displaced persons within the country. Inside Syria, some families have been displaced two, three, or four times by ongoing fighting. More than two-thirds of the eighteen million people now living in

Syria rely on humanitarian assistance to survive. Over six million Syrians face acute food insecurity. Less than half of Syria's hospitals and clinics are fully functional, while a third of all schools have been damaged or destroyed.

This torrent of grim statistics felt unrelenting, and what we saw and heard gave disturbing reality to these numbers. In Homs, we drove by shelled-out and destroyed apartment buildings for kilometer after kilometer; entire sections of the city had been turned into mute ghost towns. We walked through the badly damaged Christian neighborhood of Wadi al-Sayegh in Homs, looking up at the remnants of a family's kitchen, the cupboards still clinging to ruined walls.



Destroyed home in Wadi al-Sayegh neighborhood, Homs. February 2018.

MCC PHOTO/ALAIN EPP WEAVER.

In a village in the Qalamoun Valley, we visited with families who had fled to the village from all across Syria seeking safety. One woman, whom I will call Amina, shared how she had fled from Raqqa with her six children after Islamic State forces had taken over the city, which the self-proclaimed Islamic State declared the capital of its caliphate. Her oldest son, an eleven-year-old-boy, is the family's only source of income; he dropped out of school and began working odd jobs to provide for his mother and younger siblings. The family receives a monthly food parcel from MCC through the village's Islamic Relief Committee. Asked if she hoped one day to return to her native city of Raqqa, the mother replied with resignation: "There is nothing for me there."

After visiting with Amina, we traveled to a nearby Christian village, home to a church founded in the third century and decorated with stunning eighteenth-century murals. It was in this village that I heard a story from the

church's history that became a touchstone for me throughout my time in Syria, a story I kept coming back to as I searched for signs of God's rule within a landscape of devastation. As I studied the murals, I was able to decipher most of the figures and the stories from the Bible and church history they represented, but one image stumped me. I turned to the local Syrian Orthodox priest to ask who these figures were, and he proceeded to tell me the story of the *zinaar*, or "belt."



Eighteenth-century painting of Thomas's encounter with Mary, the Mother of the Belt, in a Syrian Orthodox church in a village in the Qalamoun Valley.
February 2018. MCC PHOTO/ALAIN EPP WEAVER.

The story goes like this: Jesus's mother, Mary, had passed away in Jerusalem. Most of the disciples were in Jerusalem and present for the burial. Thomas, however, was in India proclaiming the gospel when he heard the news. He headed as quickly as possible to Jerusalem, fearing he would miss the burial. As he approached Jerusalem, distraught that he had missed saying farewell to Mary, Thomas encountered her in the air, accompanied by chariots and horses, being assumed into heaven. (Orthodox churches hold to the doctrine of Mary's assumption, teaching that Mary was bodily taken, or assumed, into heaven following her death.) Thomas cried out to Mary, begging her for a tangible sign that he could take to the other disciples as proof that he had, in fact, encountered the Virgin Mother. In response, Mary gave him her *zinaar*, and Thomas continued on to Jerusalem, where he joyously shared with the other disciples about his encounter with Mary, showing the belt as proof.



Bishop Selwanos (r.) in the Syrian Orthodox Church of the Belt in Homs.
February 2018. MCC PHOTO/ALAIN EPP WEAVER

Since then, according to Syrian Orthodox tradition, the belt has been guarded in the Church of the Belt in Homs. Bishop Selwanos of Homs hosted us in the church, which had sustained damage from shelling during fighting between government and rebel forces a couple of years ago. For the Syrian Orthodox Church, its guardianship of the belt stands as a symbol of God's faithfulness to the church over nearly two thousand years. For me, the story of the belt opened my eyes to the tangible signs of God's enduring rule in Syria.

Over the course of my week there, I witnessed numerous ways that the Syrian churches continue two millennia of joining God's reconciling mission.

Throughout Syria, God's rule is manifest as churches continue to gather to worship and give thanks to God. The number of Christians in Aleppo may have fallen from two hundred thousand before the war to thirty thousand today—with Syrian Christians joining Syrian Muslims in fleeing the country for safety—yet the Sunday we worshiped at the American Evangelical Church, the large sanctuary was full, and fifty children presented their monthly program of praise songs.



Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II presides over Lenten mid-day prayers in the Old City of Damascus. February 2018. MCC PHOTO/ALAIN EPP WEAVER.

In Damascus, shock waves from the Syrian government's bombardment of Eastern Ghouta were rattling the walls and windows of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate in the Bab Touma neighborhood of Old City, but that did not prevent the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II, from leading Lenten noon prayers, with the Patriarchate's priests continuing the church's centuries-long worship in Jesus's language of Aramaic. "The war has brought out the worst in us but also the best in us," the Patriarch told us. Acknowledging the church's dwindling numbers, he nevertheless insisted that "there is also little salt in food, and here we are, living as salt in this world."

God's rule in Syria is manifested in the embodied witness of those who protect the vulnerable. In Homs, Sister Valentine, a Catholic nun who directs a Presbyterian home for the elderly, told of how the home found itself between Syrian army and rebel forces, with shells lobbed over the home. Before the fighting began, when it became clear that the home for the elderly would be

near the center for the fighting, Sister Valentine gathered the home's staff. "I have decided to stay with the home's residents who are unable to leave and who have nowhere to go," she told her colleagues. She then gave the rest of the staff five minutes to decide whether to stay or leave: all stayed. Throughout the ensuing weeks of the fighting, Sister Valentine and the home's janitor would head out during ceasefires to stock up on bread and other basic provisions for the home, all-too-aware that snipers routinely violated ceasefires.

In Damascus, meanwhile, Rima and Lina, leaders of the L'Arche community for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, fretted about what would happen to the community's members. Would the community's caregivers choose to stay as shells fell regularly in the Old City? Or would they understandably choose to flee? Lina and Rima gathered with the caregivers to tell them there was no shame in leaving, that they should do what they felt called to do. The response from the caregivers was unanimous: "We will stay here until the end, every one of us."



Sister Valentine, Presbyterian Center for the Elderly, Homs. February 2018.

MCC PHOTO/EMILY LOEWEN.



Kamal (r.) and Jamal (l.), in basement of a Greek Orthodox church in central Syria. February 2018. MCC PHOTO/J. RON BYLER.

God's rule in Syria is revealed in Syrians reaching out beyond their communities to care for their neighbors, regardless of religion, ethnicity, family connections, or other differences. So, for example, in a primarily Christian village in central Syria, we met two displaced neighbors who care for each other and who testify to the church's outreach beyond itself. In the basement of the town's Greek Orthodox church, Jamal (on the right) told his story while standing next to his Christian friend and neighbor from Raqqa, Kamal. When Islamic State forces were approaching Raqqa, Jamal went to Kamal with the urgent plea that they both gather their families and flee for safety. Together, Jamal, Kamal, and their families made their way to their present refuge, a town where over the course of the war the original twelve thousand residents have opened their homes to thousands more Christian and Muslim Syrians displaced by the fighting. In this village, MCC has supported the churches in distributing regular food packages to the many displaced families in the village. Jamal underscored: "This is a good village, where the people give without discrimination between Christians and Muslims."

In Aleppo, meanwhile, the Presbyterian church distributes monthly cash allowances along with MCC comforters and relief buckets to displaced Syrians, with some uprooted families—including Syrian Muslim families—housed in church buildings.

"This is not only *our* congregation's ministry but also the ministry of the global church," the Presbyterian pastor Ibrahim Nseir told us. "When we receive these comforters," he continued, "we can feel not only their warmth but



Rev. Ibrahim Nseir on ruins of the Presbyterian church building in Aleppo.

February 2018. MCC PHOTO/EMILY LOEWEN.

also the prayers sent with the blankets.” Many of the Presbyterian congregation’s own members have been displaced multiple times, Reverend Nseir noted. Asked why he had stayed in Aleppo during the worst of the fighting, as rebels almost completely encircled the city, Reverend Nseir responded: “Faith makes you do crazy things.”



Volunteers with the Umm al-Zinaar Relief and Development Committee in a village near Homs. February 2018. MCC PHOTO/ALAIN EPP WEAVER.

In Homs, the Syrian Orthodox Church’s outreach arm is called the Umm al-Zinaar Relief and Development Committee, or URDC. URDC takes its name from Mary, the Mother of the Belt, or, in Arabic, *Umm al-Zinaar*. Most of URDC’s volunteers are university students. Sawsan, the woman on the left, shared that her family had lost their home during the fighting in Homs, and now she felt called to reach out to other displaced families. The man on the right, Amir, told of the uncertainty he faces as he prepares to graduate: should he stay in his homeland and face mandatory conscription, or flee the country, like so many other Syrians? Yet while his future contains stark decisions, in the present he is dedicating himself to serving in Christ’s name.

In the lives of Sawsan and Amir, of Sister Valentine and Reverend Ibrahim, of neighbors Jamal and Kamal, I saw tangible signs of God’s rule in Syria. Paul’s proclamation that the risen Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” calls us to see the devastated world—from which we can at times feel that God is all-too-starkly absent—with new eyes. Like Thomas clinging to the sign granted him by the Mother of the Belt, so we cling amid the world’s devastation to signs of God’s rule that is greater and more profound than the power and might of death-dealing militaries and militias.

The church in Syria has been discerning these signs now for nearly two thousand years, going out to join in God's reconciling mission. In a sermon I preached the first Sunday of Lent in Aleppo, I asked the Armenian Evangelical congregation to pray for the church in the United States, that we might faithfully join in God's mission just as the Syrian church has done. After the service, person after person told me they would keep our churches in their prayers.

Let us keep the Syrian churches in our prayers. And together with them, let us pray that we might be granted the vision to see God's hidden rule amid the powers of death and sin, the grace to be conformed to that rule, and the courage to go out to join God's reconciling mission. Amen.

The Complexity of Mission in Contexts of Conflict

ANDREW F. BUSH

Introduction: The World Is a Conflict Zone

Today, in early June 2018, I was en route to Ramallah from the village of Jifna on the West Bank—which, with East Jerusalem and Gaza, comprises the Palestinian Territories¹—about nine kilometers away. I had decided to take the shorter route that wended its way past an Israeli settlement rather than the longer route through a few Palestinian villages. Cresting the hill near the settlement, the road was blocked by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Military action was underway nearby, a common occurrence as the Palestinian Territories have been under Israeli military occupation since the 1967 war.² The drivers ahead of me turned right onto a dirt road. Alone in my car and

Andrew F. Bush has served internationally for more than thirty years. He and his wife Karen spent twenty years in the Palestinian Territories, where they founded Living Stones Student Center with the Palestinian Bible Society (PBS) in the village of Bir Zeit north of Ramallah. They remain active in PBS. Andrew is also chair of the Global Studies and Service department at Eastern University in St. David's, Pennsylvania. He speaks widely concerning Christian mission. Andrew and Karen have five adult children.

1 Since 2012, the Palestinian Authority—the governing body over the Palestinian people—refers to these areas as the geographical expression of the “State of Palestine.”

2 Israel disputes the designation of being an occupying power, arguing that the Palestinian Territories are not a sovereign state and so cannot be occupied. Rather, Israel argues, the Palestinian Territories are a disputed territory over which Israel has as much claim as the Palestinian people. Israel often refers to the West Bank as “Judea and Samaria.” The United States recently dropped the term “occupied” in referring to the Palestinian Territories; see Gerard Horton, “How the U.S. State Department Deleted the Occupied Territories,” Haaretz online, May 8, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-u-s-state-department-deletes-the-occupation-1.6069726>.

Regardless of what term one uses, Israel exerts paralyzing control over Palestinian life, including movement on roads to work, schools, and hospitals; control over natural resources; annexation of Palestinian-owned land; etc. This is elaborated by Jeff Halper, an Israeli, in his description of Israel’s “matrix of control” over Palestinian Society. See “The Key to Peace: Dismantling the Matrix of Control,” accessed January 10, 2019, <https://icahd.org/get-the-facts/matrix-control/>.

not knowing what else to do, I followed their lead. Trailing them through a cluster of Palestinian homes and fields, our motley caravan progressed until it reached an intersection of sorts where the road divided into three smaller routes. Our convoy splintered into different directions. I had no idea which road to take. Guessing, I veered left. After ten minutes of bumping along, I merged with the paved road to Ramallah. Yes!

I was glad the road had been blocked. Too many times during the past twenty years of living and working on the West Bank, my family had been caught in sudden clashes between the IDF and Palestinians. These kinds of clashes could flare up without warning because of, for example, an incursion by the IDF into a Palestinian neighborhood or rock throwing by Palestinian youth at IDF checkpoints.³

The conflict is a result of the ongoing occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territories. This occupation negates the realization of a sovereign Palestinian state.⁴ The violence that arises from the conflict is difficult to avoid. It takes many forms, including unpredictable lethal clashes between the IDF and Palestinian militants; disproportionate force used by the IDF against non-violent Palestinian protestors; the psychological terror suffered by Palestinians from the destruction of their homes for various reasons; the traumatizing search of Palestinians homes; the destruction of agricultural lands; etcetera. On the other hand, Palestinian militants have not helped the cause of their community internationally by their sporadic terroristic activities—such as the random acts in recent years of stabbing Israeli civilians and soldiers—acts which, regrettably, are widely published and become for many the face of Palestinian society.⁵

3 See descriptions of such clashes in my book *Learning from the Least: Reflections on a Journey in Mission with Palestinian Christians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), passim.

4 An elaboration of the history of this conflict is beyond the scope of this discussion. An important source for understanding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006) by Israeli historian Ilan Pappé. Many other Palestinian Christians have described their life under Israeli occupation, such as Lutheran cleric Mitri Raheb in his book *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014).

5 For example, see Isabel Kershner, “Israeli Dies as Palestinian Attackers Stage Assaults in Jerusalem,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/world/middleeast/israel-palestinians-attack-jerusalem.html>. Sadly, even Palestinian civilians mistaken to be Israelis suffer such attacks by their fellow Palestinians. This occurred to Nashat Filemon, who suffered a severe stab wound to his thigh while sitting in his parked car in Jerusalem with the window open. His car bore Israeli license plates.

Our family—especially through the years of the Second Intifada—was threatened by violent actions of both sides.⁶ For example, because we drove a car with Israeli license plates, when we drove from Ramallah to church in Jerusalem, we lived in fear that we would be injured by Palestinian snipers firing upon Israeli vehicles. (A Palestinian member of the Palestinian Bible Society was, in fact, wounded in his car by such action.) We also experienced the trauma of IDF soldiers searching our building with the threat that the door of our apartment might be blown off by explosives; the verbal threat by the IDF at a checkpoint that we would be permanently separated from our children; and more.

In this paper, violence refers to human destructive physical or psychological force intended to hurt or kill someone. The prevalence of such violence in all human societies is a conundrum to secular anthropologists but explained by Christianity as the outworking of the corruption of human nature that began with humanity's fall into sin. Shortly after this fall Cain murdered Abel (Gn 4). Violence lurks in the corrupted human heart. In seeking peace and justice, it is insufficient for a society to claim that their violence is justified, or that by murdering less than their antagonists they are more just. Rather, what is required is deep national repentance. Such repentance seems chimerical, but we find it in the unlikely example of Assyria's response to hearing the warning of the reluctant prophet Jonah (Jon 3).

The incident described above—on the road to Ramallah—is an apt metaphor for mission in conflict areas. Mission in contexts of violent conflict poses unexpected risks and unpleasant surprises. The cross-cultural missionary as an agent of the mission of God in such a context may very well experience isolation from customary support systems. To find a road to relevant and meaningful ministry, Christian workers may need to leave the path of popularly held assumptions concerning the context in which they serve. In fact, as this brief discussion of the experiences of missionaries in contexts of conflict underscores, mission in such contexts brings unexpected complexity to every dimension of the mission task: the preparation and ongoing care of mission workers, the formation and delivery of relevant and effective contextual witness, and the complications that arise for the missionary when the conflict affects the home church.

⁶ The Second Intifada—in Arabic, the “shaking off” or “uprising”—which occurred from approximately October 2000 to late 2004, was an often-violent reaction by Palestinian society against the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territories and loss of their human rights, including freedom of travel and access to medical care and education. In addition, the land they had intended would be part of the future State of Palestine they lost to the expansion of Israeli settlements.

Important questions to explore that arise from the effect of conflicts on missions include: What should be components in the training of missionaries who intend to serve in conflict zones? What resources do they need to prepare for the spiritual, cultural, theological, and strategic dimensions of their service in conflict zones? What are the factors that must be considered in developing a contextual witness? What are the implications for the missionary if their home churches become entangled with a distant conflict to the extent that the mission worker experiences some degree of alienation? How should a missionary and sending agency measure the success of their efforts?

In discussing these large questions as concisely as possible, I will draw upon important missiological writing as well as the experiences of the following persons: my wife, Karen, and myself in the Palestinian Territories; veteran missionaries Luke and Dorothy “Dot” Beidler, former Mennonite missionaries in Vietnam and Indonesia; and Barbara Rowe, a long-time missionary in El Salvador, first with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and now with Christ for the City International.

As these are American missionaries reflecting on their *own* experiences, their comments necessarily reflect a Western perspective. However, each missionary also draws attention to the critical steps taken by their national co-workers to support them. Such steps were steps of faith and grace by those co-workers, since the missionaries in each context could be associated with the nation—the United States—that was a source of, or a contributing factor to, the conflict that oppressed their lives.

Facing Up to a World in Conflict

The pervasive violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is but one example of the conflict and upheaval that is ubiquitous in the world, such as the bloodshed of the apparently unwarranted shooting deaths of African Americans by police officers; the expulsion of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar; the abduction of female Christian students by Islamic extremists in northern Nigeria; and the ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq that have drained the US military and cost thousands of American lives. Conflicts may be driven by economic disparity and social stagnation, gender oppression, ethnic tensions, religious intolerance, and national rivalries, among other forces.⁷

Some conflicts are obvious and widely known; others are more hidden and insidious. The former is exemplified by the Palestinian and Israeli conflict today

⁷ Peter Maurer, “What are the triggers for global conflicts, and what can we do about them?” Speech given by the president of the International Committee for the Red Cross, at the 19th Annual Asian Investment Conference in Hong Kong, April 8, 2016, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/what-are-triggers-global-conflicts-and-what-can-we-do-about-them>, accessed December 16, 2018.

and the Vietnam War (1955–75); the latter by social and economic structures that engender brutal poverty such as in the Philippines and Gaza.⁸

Agents of the mission of God—wherever they are geographically located in mission service and regardless of the primary focus of their ministry—will most likely find themselves encountering significant conflict, and, to one extent or another, be obliged by necessity or conscience to respond to it. Fully considering and responding to the realities of mission in conflict areas is critical for missionaries and sending churches if they are to be effective.

Awareness of conflict and its implications for missions is not important just for mission to be effective; such awareness also is vital in equipping the North American church for a more meaningful engagement with North American society. Both locally and denominationally, a church’s “wokeness” to conflict and conviction to be on the “right” side in the conflict establishes its authenticity for many—and especially for millennials.⁹ From this perspective, a heightened awareness of social injustice, and particularly oppression of the weak, is a mark of the real Christian life. Christians should do what they can to bring reconciliation and peace in places of conflict, even if this means merely posting information on social media to inform others.

Mennonite communities have long worked for social justice, peace, and reconciliation and are well positioned to respond to a world of heightened conflict and to millennial Christians seeking Christian communities that are living out their faith. MCC has indeed maintained a ministry in the Palestinian Territories that has drawn attention to the effects of the occupation.¹⁰ Such an effort to promote social justice is an important witness to the Palestinian Muslim community, which often associates local Palestinian Christian ministry—especially Protestant ministry—with American Christian Zionism.

8 Working within these two conflicts has occupied the majority of the adult lives of my wife and myself. We resided in the Philippines from 1987 to 1998 and on the West Bank from 1998 to 2005. We are now “non-residential missionaries” based in the United States and traveling several times annually to both of the ongoing ministries in which we have served.

9 This I have discussed in-depth in *Millennials and the Mission of God: A Prophetic Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017) with my co-author, Carolyn C. Wason, a millennial.

10 See “Palestine and Israel,” MCC, accessed January 12, 2019, <https://mcc.org/learn/where/middle-east/palestine-israel>.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: A Spirituality for Mission

Missionaries share the frailties of their brothers and sisters in Christ in their home or host churches. The missiologist David J. Bosch quotes mission historian Stephen Neill:

What [Stephen] Neill says about missionaries has been true of missionaries of all times, from the great apostle who boasted in his weakness to those who still call themselves “missionaries”:

“They have on the whole been a feeble folk, not very wise, not very holy, not very patient. They have broken most of the commandments and fallen into every conceivable mistake.”¹¹

When ordinary people serve in extraordinary circumstances, they will necessarily be stretched in their spiritual lives. Spirituality for mission has unfortunately been one of the neglected areas of missiology in recent decades. As I wrote in *Learning from the Least*, a concern for strategy, cross-cultural skills, and contextualization has instead been given priority.¹² It has been assumed that missionaries would simply be good Christians. This simplistic assumption has left missionaries ill-prepared to face the unique spiritual challenges of serving in the midst of violence in which they will experience vulnerability and fearfulness; the temptation to be caught in the riptides of hatred that fuel the conflict; and, for some, the unpleasant experience of their home church’s rejection—to some degree—of the views they have gained in their mission service.

My wife and I were shaken by the violence we encountered as new missionaries in the Palestinian West Bank. In October 2000, Palestinians lashed out violently, venting their frustrations with the oppressive occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territories and the continual loss of the land that Palestinians expected would be part of a future sovereign state. The four-year conflict known as the Second Intifada (Uprising) pitted militant Palestinian groups against the Israeli Defense Forces. Clashes were deadly and pervasive. Every village was affected. Living on the West Bank in the Palestinian village of Bir Zeit north of Ramallah, my wife and I with our youngest daughter experienced the distancing effect that the violence of the conflict had on our relationship with our friends in the United States. When we most needed spiritual support, such as words of encouragement and prayers, we found it least forthcoming. We found ourselves increasingly isolated after the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001. At that time, not only did a

11 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1966), 222, quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 365.

12 Bush, *Learning from the Least*, 27.

wave of Islamophobia sweep the United States in the aftermath of the attacks, the label of terrorist was also widely applied to Palestinians and other Arab peoples.

Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn 14:27).¹³ That peace, though, was not so easy to realize. Crossing military checkpoints was always an uncertain experience. When the Israeli military searched our apartment building, we were deeply fearful. Would a clash break out right on our doorstep? After two years of the Intifada, we decided our daughter had been exposed to too much violence, and she transferred to a Quaker boarding school near Philadelphia for her final two years of high school. My wife and I persevered for two more years of the Intifada to its end in 2005.

During those years, we were pressed into a deeper relationship with Christ that transformed our spiritual lives. As Evangelicals, much of our spirituality had been formed around external practices of lively worship, fellowship, evangelism, and such. In the conflict, we were stripped of support for this externally driven spirituality. Travel was dangerous from Jerusalem, and even at times into Ramallah, so we were limited in our ability to access Protestant congregations that would have reinforced our external spirituality. Our identity as Evangelicals meant nothing to our friends in the local Roman Catholic and Orthodox congregations. Increasingly, we were reduced to a quieter, more internal spirituality as we worshipped in liturgical churches and learned to embrace an identity as merely Christians, encouraged by the persistence in hope of our Christian neighbors.

This journey was unsettling. Were we backsliding, we wondered? As we reflected on our experience, we concluded that far from losing our grip, we were pressing deeper into fellowship with Christ Jesus. This conclusion was supported by the encouragement of the example of our Christian neighbors, co-workers in the Palestinian Bible Society, and even converts from Islam, who demonstrated a life of servanthood in love to us. As I describe in *Learning from the Least*, the spirituality of non-Western Christians—and specifically, for us, that of Palestinian Christians—gave us fresh insights into the crucifixion of Christ Jesus.

13 All Scripture references are taken from the New International Version.

As we were experiencing a stripping away of sources of spiritual support—friends in the States, even some family, and access to other Christians in Jerusalem—I was drawn to the apostle Paul’s account in Philippians 2:5–10 of the stripping away of all things from Jesus:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth . . .*

Whereas we were experiencing an involuntary emptying of superficial securities, Christ was voluntarily emptying himself of the prerogatives of glory, even the prerogatives of position and personal safety. In the crucifixion, Christ embraced the vulnerability of the human experience. My idea of spirituality had formerly embraced an ethereality formed by the apparent unworldliness of the Spirit of God. The incarnation, however, makes clear that true spirituality does not shun the human experience in this world; on the contrary, it is defined by it.

The incarnation of Christ—unto death on the cross, no less—affirms the value of humanity to God. From this perspective, to be spiritual is to enter into the joys and sufferings of the human experience of one’s neighbors. War dehumanizes: I often heard in the conflict either that Palestinians or Israelis were—euphemistically speaking—less than human. The spirituality of Christ does the opposite; it affirms people’s humanity. Love is saying to one’s enemy: You are human; you are my sister; you are my brother.

It is well that the biblical story begins with creation. In the midst of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we began to realize that the gospel begins not with the proclamation that “God loves you” but rather with “You are a human,

created in the image of God.” This journey to a transformed spirituality proved to be vital for us as we sought to develop a meaningful contextual ministry.

Mennonite Missionaries in Vietnam and El Salvador

Luke and Dot Beidler were Mennonite missionaries in Vietnam with Eastern Mennonite Missions from 1966 to 1975 and are well acquainted with the complexities of missions in areas of conflict. During their years of service, they taught English to Vietnamese students in their home as well as in universities in Saigon and Can Tho, about an hour south of Saigon. The Beidlers with their children persevered in their service through the height of the Vietnam War and all of its uncertainties. By volunteering as caregivers on a flight evacuating Vietnamese children, they were able to depart on one of the last flights out of the country before the fall of Saigon. Luke says:

Just our daily living among the people and hearing the stories of the war made us feel very vulnerable. We had a young man who was in the ARVN military. He was in the army. On leave, he would come to Can Tho where we lived and stay overnight with us. His stories were out of the ordinary. He wanted to stay overnight in our home. We didn't know if we should stay awake to guard our home. We didn't know whom to trust.¹⁴

Dot adds that in spite of the vulnerability they felt, they enjoyed a certain spiritual assurance. At the same time, however, they had to contend with family in the United States who questioned their decision to stay in Vietnam during the war:

Our parents worried that we stayed there with our kids. We were not plagued with concern for our physical well-being, because so many other people had no choice in being there; we were identifying with them. We felt whatever happened to them we would experience it too as part of a bigger story, as part of God's purpose.

Barbara Rowe has been a missionary in El Salvador periodically during a period of thirty-four years.¹⁵ She served with Mennonite Central Committee during the Salvadoran Civil War in the years 1984, 1987, and 1990 to 1995. During these years, she was seeking to support Christians in El Salvador,

¹⁴ Luke and Dorothy Beidler, personal interviews, June 25 and July 2, 2018. These interviews occurred in the Beidlers' home in Norristown, Pennsylvania, and at Methacton Mennonite Church near Norristown. All quotations from the Beidlers are taken from these two interviews with their permission.

¹⁵ Barbara Rowe, personal interview via social media, July 11, 2018; during the interview, I was in Pennsylvania, and Barbara Rowe was in El Salvador. All quotations from Rowe are taken from this interview with her permission. Their father was the noted late Mennonite missiological anthropologist Paul G. Hiebert, who is cited in this essay.

who were working to protect human rights against the oppressive Salvadoran government. Rowe returned to El Salvador in 2013. Since then, she has served with Christ for the City International, trying to protect young people from joining street gangs, and working in the youth detention centers to evangelize active gang members.¹⁶ During the Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992),¹⁷ she said:

I was in several dangerous situations. Mainly I felt threatened from the Salvadoran government, who spied on Americans who were against the United States' support of the Salvadoran government and its repressive policies. At the time, there were paramilitary forces who were called death squads. They were paid by military and government officials. There had been pastors who had been picked up and murdered by these death squads.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Resisting the Riptides of Hatred

Cast into the cauldron of hatred and conflict, missionaries may yield to the temptation to hate the oppressor—and in so doing become part of the problem. My wife and I were subject to some of the same ill-treatment by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as was directed toward our Palestinian neighbors and friends. It was difficult to watch them being bullied and hurt. Even with our attempt to grow in a spirituality that affirmed the humanity of the “other,” it was difficult not to be reactive. It was our Palestinian Christian friends who, by their honesty and courage to forgive, led us out of the dangerous temptation of bitterness and resentment. Labib Madnanat, a leader in the Palestinian Bible Society, helped us with this honest confession about his own journey: “As a typical Arab Christian, I grew up hating Muslims and Jews. I needed two more conversions: to love Muslims and to love Jews.”¹⁸ His daily life demonstrated that he had received such conversions: he was a rare Palestinian Christian who would pick up Israeli settler hitchhikers on the West Bank and greet

16 For more information on Christ for the City International, see <https://cfci.org/about/aboutus>, accessed July 12, 2018.

17 The Salvadoran Civil War was a conflict between the military controlled government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a coalition, or “umbrella organization,” of several left-wing groups. The coalition was characterized as being communist by the US government. See “Salvadoran Civil War,” Wikipedia, accessed July 12, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvadoran_Civil_War.

18 Personal interview recorded in the author’s *Learning from the Least*, 98.

the Muslim elders of Palestinian villages as long-lost uncles. We needed to be converted from hatred again and again to such a love without boundaries.

Dot Beidler acknowledges how unprepared she and Luke were to face the realities of life in the violence of Vietnam:

We were naïve as young missionaries. We were recruited in 1966 by Eastern Mennonite Missions during our last year at Eastern Mennonite College [now University]. At that time, the civil rights movement was getting started. We understood a bit about war protest. We wanted to have a peace presence. Prejudices were pretty high in Vietnam against the American effort. All these young American men were being sent to war. We saw our going as a counter-effort, to go and bring a loving and compassionate presence.

Concerning their spiritual frailty and tendency to fall into hate during the intense violence and abuse of the Vietnam War, Luke Beidler also says:

We had personal experiences of questioning who could be trusted. We often felt anger at the American effort. For example, once we were on a scooter following a truck of American soldiers. When it stopped, we saw them pushing motorbikes of Vietnamese off the road into the water. Seeing Americans acting like this was hurtful. We also pitied young Americans sent to do fighting in Vietnam.

Sometimes we laughed so we wouldn't start to hate. With teammates on the mission team, we got together and talked to help each other. Sometimes we sent articles back to our mission board. We made statements of protest at different times in the war. We had to ask forgiveness when we were not justified in our rash judgments. We just couldn't control anything in Vietnam. It was easy to criticize and blame somebody, but many people were contributing to the problem.

The greatest spiritual resource for us was the missionary team of five or six couples. To be able to get together with them, to pray together, to play games, to talk, and share what we were experiencing supported us.

During the Salvadoran War, one of Barbara Rowe's responsibilities was to translate the reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Salvadoran government. Describing that task, she reports:

I actually became physically sick reading them. It was very sickening to read what people could do to other people. The government did not have a personal face, so I was not tempted to hate, but anger toward the situation? Yes, I would be very angry.

Recently with the work with gangs there has been a person whom I knew who intended to do harm to me and my household. It involved a direct threat. I definitely felt hatred toward this specific person. I asked God to remove this hatred from me. I believe that God has answered my prayers.

Asked what she did to try to maintain her spiritual health—her peace of mind and love toward others—Rowe states:

Prayer and fasting. I have become a great believer in fasting. I was drawn to Jesus's statement to his disciples after their failure to exorcise a demon, that "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Mt 17:21).¹⁹ Why? I don't know. But it is something I have learned. I asked God to replace hatred with His presence. God cannot be present where there is hatred.

Mission in conflict zones has an intense emotional and spiritual impact on the missionary. The harmful effect of the conflict may be with the missionaries and their children for years after they have left their mission assignment.²⁰ Sent to be peacemakers, missionaries are in great danger of being pulled into

19 Since the NIV is the source of the Bible quotations in this article, it should be noted that this verse is placed in the footnotes with the explanation, "Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 9:29."

20 Discretion dictates confidentiality about the effects of my family's living in a traumatic context; suffice it to say that we have firsthand experience with the reality of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

partisan biases and prejudices. Somehow the missionary must find a way to be renewed in the love of Jesus for all the peoples in the conflict. This task is made more difficult by both the worry—or indifference or hostility—of extended family at home.

Sources of spiritual strength may be found in people who have been victims in the conflict and in colleagues who are close at hand and experiencing the conflict with you, as well as through the direct influence of the Word and Spirit of God. In any event, the spiritual struggles of the conflict will certainly heighten the challenge of developing and implementing meaningful and effective contextual ministry.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: As Unexpected Prophets at Home

A certain romanticism colors the global Christian mission enterprise. It is expressed most frequently and succinctly with the use of the term “mission field,” in such phrases as “The Lord has called me to the mission field,” or, “There are many challenges living on the mission field.” This term is no longer used in missiological writing, because it has long been recognized that the West—America . . . yes, even Pennsylvania!—is deeply broken spiritually and in need of the redemption and healing that is the goal of the mission of God. In short, the mission field is not “over there.”

Nevertheless, the term and its attendant worldview persists. Consequently, important and timely discussions concerning mission in conflict zones may be colored by this perspective. Conflict zones are reckoned as “over there”; they are tied to a specific, remote context. As Christians, we may incorrectly calculate that because we are outside that (distant) context we are not connected to it. This sense of discontinuity has the illusory effect of reducing the conflict to a manageable scale, like a jigsaw puzzle of the image of the globe that we can handle, shift on the table, and find the missing pieces to it; in other words, the conflict may be objectively analyzed, plans made, solutions dispatched as if selling cars.²¹ From this perspective, missionaries go into the conflict zone, give a witness for Christ pertinent to that context, and return home where they can rest, disentangled from the conflict. It is popularly understood that

21 This approach, especially in American and European missions, is what the missiologist Samuel Escobar characterizes as “managerial missiology”—the application of corporate management principles to the mission task, which ignores the complexity of mission, not to mention the role of the Spirit of God, who does not work according to our strategies (*The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 167).

their witness as missionaries concerning this conflict is limited to the remote context.

This false sense of discontinuity from conflict areas is generally undelineated—a long-held perspective, a holdover from an era in which the world was divided into the Christian West and the heathen rest. This was also an era in which it was understood that witness was primarily evangelistic. Although the tidal wave of globalization has reduced the world to a global village in all areas of our life—my phone has parts manufactured in China, Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and Singapore—the culture and worldview of many local churches are still formed by an era of great cultural divide between peoples.

For the missionary, this persistent erroneous perspective that the conflicts to which they are called are limited to the “mission field” is contradicted by the reality that distant conflicts may well entangle the missionaries’ home communities. This was certainly true of the Vietnam War—which polarized Americans—and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict especially after the 9/11 attacks. The deep firsthand experiences the missionary may have of injustices in the remote conflict may place them in a difficult situation, as their home communities may have a very different perspective of who is the oppressor in the conflict. On a return visit to the United States, in front of a five-thousand-member congregation, I was introduced as ministering to “Philistines,” with the pejorative connotation fully intended. And while I was delivering the Sunday sermon in a large congregation in Denver, a man stood up and started yelling that I was promulgating propaganda.

Luke Beidler describes similar painful encounters:

When we came home and told people like how we saw the situation, people were shocked. We tried to give a straightforward witness, but we had ugly confrontations with people who merged God and country. We shared that all Vietnamese want peace; communism is not the big concern. One stood up and said, “If you talk like that, you are against God.”

With tears in his eyes, Beidler advises congregations concerning their missionaries:

Listen to them. Listen to what they are experiencing firsthand. Pay attention to what they are advocating and calling for and asking you to pray about. Trust your missionaries. They should have insights that politicians don’t always get.

Concerning mission agencies, he adds:

There were churches here that listened to us, but sometimes the mission agency heard something (from the missionary) and then they passed it on slightly differently because they were trying to protect the level of support. Mission agencies should listen to the boots on the ground and tell as much

truth as they can.

Barbara Rowe had been involved in the Sanctuary movement in her church in Seattle, Washington, before her first mission trips to El Salvador. The Sanctuary movement gave refuge to Salvadorans who were coming to the United States illegally to escape the violence of the civil war in their country. This movement was controversial in the United States, so Barbara was accustomed to opposition before her mission involvement in El Salvador. What she found most painful was when Salvadoran refugees were opposed by some American Christians:

One woman, a Salvadoran refugee who had endured horrible torture, spoke in a church that we visited. She described being tortured, having her fingernails pulled out, and being left for dead. One of the people in the audience during the question-and-answer time after her talk asked why, if her nails had been pulled out, did she now have nails? He was essentially saying, “I don’t believe you.” It was very cruel. The refugee was really hurt by this response to her open vulnerability in sharing.

When the mission worker is willing to speak honestly from her or his experience, even though there may be some rejection, other hearts will be open to receive new insights not only of the conflict but also of the vastness of the love of Jesus. Once, after I described how a Muslim who had been part of former Palestinian president Yasser Arafat’s personal guard, had come to faith in Christ, a pro-Israeli Texas farmer shook my hand and said that he could listen all day long to such witnesses of Christ’s faithfulness to reach by the Spirit of God beyond the limits of our love to the “other.”

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Contextualization—Making the Gospel Relevant

The complexity of a conflict is often a surprise to missionaries. As a cross-cultural worker lives in a context of violence, they will soon see that though one side may appear to be the worst actor in conflict, evil is perpetrated by both sides. Also, conflicts are not stagnant. Those caught up in the conflict may take new positions and develop new alliances. The mission worker must constantly be an anthropologist, studying the cultural shifts in the conflict. I was surprised to learn, for instance, that even in the worst days of the Intifada, a strong percentage of Palestinians stated they were willing to be citizens of Israel if they could then have a normal life.²² Cultural stereotypes must continually be

22 David Pollock, “Half of Jerusalem’s Residents Would Prefer Israeli to Palestinian Citizenship,” The Washington Institute, August 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/half-of-jerusalem-palestinians-would-prefer-israeli-to-palestinian-citizen>.

debunked in one's thinking in order to appreciate the subtleties involved in a conflict. To be a student of the cultural context and the contributing factors of a conflict is also critical if we are to bring meaningful, relevant ministry—a process known as contextualization.

Luke and Dot Beidler had to work through the complexity of living and serving in the Vietnam War in order to bring effective ministry. Luke states:

I think our expectations were typical missionary—that we were going to be part of the mission of God in some way. We weren't well prepared, but trusting that God would use us in some small way as a part of a much larger mission of God.

The difficulty of our assignment became much more apparent as we began learning the language. The missionary work was more complicated than just taking what we knew of the Lord and his word and sharing it. Cross-culturally we had to do the homework. Where had Vietnamese culture come from?

The war was even more difficult. As Americans, we were entering an old culture, a much more refined culture than the American dream. The American presence militarily complicated everything for us as American missionaries. We were identified by the local Vietnamese as being with the American effort in ways that we didn't want to be. We came thinking of ourselves as gospel bearers—"good news people." But there was so much bad news going on. The Vietnamese people were being divided. Their culture was being attacked by the United States. Teaching students who had different loyalties had the effect of showing us that both sides had to be served. The relationships we established—sometimes with both sides—were very stretching. To stay with it and hear both sides is what we had to do.

We were often tested and baffled by how to share the biblical message, to share the gospel in a different culture in a time of war. We read the Bible through new eyes because we sensed the cultural situation was very different. Our interpretations of many things changed. Rather than preaching a lot—although the mission team did end up establishing a Mennonite church—we sought to bring a witness through presence, through our service by teaching English. We struggled with that. Was it right? Wrong? Was it faithfully representing the gospel? Each of us missionaries struggled with this question. We struggled with how to approach the Vietnamese culture and the history we were living through.

Dot Beidler adds:

The Vietnamese thought that all Americans were Christians, and so they associated the US military's actions with Christianity. So, we felt it was important to demonstrate the love of Jesus through service.

In order to respond meaningfully to their context, the Beidlers met a need and desire of the Vietnamese people to learn the English language. Barbara Rowe makes the important point that the activities of their mission during the Salvadoran Civil War were decided by the Salvadoran Christians:

During the war, there was a lot of crisis management. The ministry was accompanying the local church. So, we let them determine what the ministry should be, because it was their context. They were the ones to suffer the consequences.

For my wife and myself serving with the Palestinian Bible Society, our task was to establish a coffee house that would reach out to students of Bir Zeit University. As the Intifada raged, the question we faced was, What would possibly make the gospel meaningful in a context of hatred and violence, where religion had become hijacked by ethnic and political loyalties? We felt that the student center could bring a meaningful witness of Christ if we were willing to empty ourselves of superfluous religiosity—including our predilection toward overt evangelism. Our spiritual journey led us to become convicted of the need to reaffirm the basic humanity of all who came into Living Stones Student Center in Bir Zeit.

With this emphasis, Muslim students, who comprised ninety percent of the university student population, felt especially comfortable. The local Christians had difficulty understanding the lack of overt Christian symbolism and the presence of so many Muslims. “Are you a Muslim center,” they asked?

Trying to forge a neutral ground in a conflict is a challenge. It can be easily misunderstood or resented as minimizing the concerns of one community or the other. The long-term fruit, though, is worth the effort. Last night in Living Stones, the Christian students cooked a sumptuous meal for the Muslim students to break their daily Ramadan fast. Christians and Muslims having fellowship together, affirming the value of one another’s humanity . . .

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Developing a Theology of the Mission of God

A mission worker will be severely limited if she or he approaches mission service in a conflict zone without developing a robust theology of the nature of Christian mission, of contextualization, and of culture. Christian mission is the participation of the church in the mission of God; understanding the mission of God, therefore, is fundamental to all mission activity, especially for those serving in contexts of conflict.

The mission of God is God’s full-orbed redemptive and restorative work in the world. As I often comment to university students, the goal of the mission of God is to fix everything that is broken in the world: our inner spiritual lives, communities, national societies, the natural environment, etcetera. David

Bosch emphasizes in *Transforming Mission* that mission involves “the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world.” There is no area of life that escapes the mission of God. We cannot divide the world and service into “spiritual” versus “secular.”²³ The cosmic and holistic scope of the mission of God is reflected in Paul’s description of God’s redemptive work through Christ:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col 1:19–20)

Jesus taught that God’s transformative work should be so broad and deep that the earth and all that is in it will reflect the glory of God’s heavenly kingdom: “So then, this is how you should pray: . . . Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

It is fortunate that the mission of God is so wide and deep and high, affecting every sphere of life, because everything needs fixing. As Bob Dylan sang, everything is broken, from bottles to dishes, to words.²⁴

As intense conflict will wound society in a multitude of ways; consequently, mission in places of conflict must take many forms, bringing the restoration of God to every broken aspect of a society. For example, a conflict may entangle political forces on a national level, restrict the humane treatment of the weaker “other,” intensify the plight of the sick or the homeless, or hinder access to food, clean water, etcetera. Mission agencies may focus on specific areas of brokenness and need such as the International Justice Mission, which addresses social injustices and related legal issues;²⁵ Mennonite Central Committee, which concentrates on relief and development; or Youth with a Mission, which is more evangelistic in its focus.²⁶ Ultimately, a missional response to intense conflict must be holistic, bringing the fullness of the mission of God. Such fullness, in turn, necessitates the inclusion in mission of a wide range of personal gifts, callings, and mission organizations across denominations.

It is worth noting that when evangelical Christians encounter a description of the mission of God that includes the social dimension, they often refer to it pejoratively as the “social gospel,” non-conversionist mission that emphasizes social justice *instead of* evangelism.²⁷ From this perspective, evangelism and

²³ Bosch, *Transforming*, 423–24.

²⁴ Bob Dylan, “Everything is Broken,” 1989 Special Rider Music.

²⁵ See <http://www.ijm.org/>, accessed on July 7, 2018.

²⁶ See <https://www.ywam.org>, accessed July 9, 2018.

²⁷ Kayla Kolotshy, “John MacArthur Claims Social Justice is Threat to Gospel, Russel Moore Responds,” *Christian Headlines*, September 14 2018, <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/john-macarthur-social-justice-threat-gospel-russel-moore-responds.html>, accessed February 23, 2019.

social justice are mutually exclusive pursuits. For example, the journalist Cal Thomas recently wrote, “Religious liberals long ago stopped preaching a gospel of personal salvation in favor of a social gospel that is more social than gospel.”²⁸ Conversely, Christians more oriented to social action as mission often regard evangelism of the adherents of other religions as nothing more than present-day colonialism that seeks to privilege the Western person, ministry, etcetera at the cost of non-Western people.

In response, it is important to emphasize that pitting evangelism against social action—contending which has priority—is an erroneous dichotomy. The verbal message of Jesus was intertwined organically with his acts of mercy. Whether Jesus emphasized one or the other, or both in particular contexts, he ministered *life* (Mt 14:13–21, Jn 4)! So, ministry in contexts of violence must allow for both social action and the message of God’s salvation in Christ. In a context of violence, there may indeed be an even greater urgency for evangelism while not neglecting social action, in view of the drastic needs of people in contexts of violence where access to education, medical care, transportation, and so on may be blocked.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Developing a Theology of Contextualization

Just as developing a theology of the mission of God is vital, so is cultivating a theology of contextualization—the process of making the message and ministry of Jesus culturally relevant in a particular context. Aspects of contextualization continue to engender extensive missiological research. A critical question in doing contextualization is where the first decisions should be made. Should they begin *outside* of the mission context or from *within* it? What should be the primary sources for developing meaningful contextual mission? Should contextualization begin with the study of biblical scripture, or should it take its cues from the culture of the conflict?

The missiologist Stephen B. Bevans in his important *Models of Contextual Theology* articulates five paradigms in developing contextual mission.²⁹ These paradigms are characterized by the degree to which authority is given to scripture and tradition or to culture and experience as sources of information in contextualization. Bevans suggests that the “synthetic model” is the most successful paradigm of contextualization.³⁰ It attempts to synthesize the input of the Bible, personal experience, the local culture, and insights from

28 Cal Thomas, “The Corruption of Faith,” *The Washington Times*, November 13, 2017.

29 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), *passim*.

30 Bevans, *Models*, 89.

action for justice in doing contextualization. This is a tall order that demands a high tolerance for holding different ideas in tension. Paul Hiebert in his *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* refers to such an effort as “critical contextualization,” in which the local culture is neither accepted uncritically nor rejected out of hand when it seems to contradict our interpretation of biblical principles.³¹

Another important direction for theological enquiry in contextualization is developing a clear theology of culture. One cannot give authority to a local culture as a source of information in contextualization if one has an intractable opposition to a given culture, considering it to be only sinful. Similarly, if we deem a culture to be perfectly in harmony with the kingdom of God—that God is just like us—this will be problematic.

From more than thirty years of mission experience, I’ve observed that most missionaries, and even mission agencies, have done very little work to understand their theology of culture. The classic discussion of this topic is H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*.³² Niebuhr also develops five paradigms of how Christians have answered the “enduring problem” of how a Christian should relate to culture if they are faithful to Christ. Without some basic agreement concerning a theology of culture, significant divisions may occur between sending churches, mission agencies, and mission workers.

Similarly, it is important to understand the ethics of a particular culture. Although certain values may be shared with other cultures, how those values are expressed may be very different in each culture. In a situation of conflict, this difference in how values are enfolded, so to speak, may cause tremendous confusion. The peace that we envision may look very different from what the participants may have in mind in a conflict in a cultural setting other than the United States. And reconciliation also may be expressed entirely differently. Bernard T. Adeney in *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* says:

Christians believe that what is good is determined by the will of God, not by culture. The goal of ethics is not cultural conformity but transformation into the likeness of Christ. All Christians in every culture are invited to have the mind of Christ, to humble themselves and be servants to others (Phil 2).

But how virtues are expressed and how they are prioritized may be very different in different cultures.³³

31 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985), 171.

32 H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), *passim*.

33 Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 15. In chapter 10 of this book, Adeney provides a com-

In this matter, again, the agent of mission must be a student of the culture in which they serve. Luke S. Martin, a Mennonite missionary in Vietnam contemporaneous to the Beidlers, subsequently wrote the invaluable book *A Vietnam Presence: Mennonites in Vietnam during the American War*, in which he describes his experience of learning cultural ethics from the Vietnamese:

While we missionaries sensed our calling to guide the believers in the way of Jesus, we were also learning from them. In a letter home, I told how Tranh had been summoned home to Nha Trang because his eleven-year-old daughter was at the point of death. Some relative had given her medicine, which caused severe hemorrhaging. She fortunately recovered. When we asked Tranh what medicine had been given, he said he did not ask because he did not want to make the woman feel badly. Such forgiveness! The deed was done and could not be undone, so why probe and further hurt the relative who was already feeling badly about it.³⁴

Cultural studies are important for understanding the values of a culture. After the Beidlers' first three years as associate missionaries, they returned to the United States for one year, during which time Luke pursued graduate studies in cultural anthropology. The Beidlers said the studies proved most helpful when they returned for five more years of service as full missionaries.

Another vitally important aspect of developing a relevant and meaningful mission in a conflict zone is to have an historical perspective not only of the conflict but also of the history of Christian mission. Centuries ago, Christians encountered the same difficulties in mission as today and developed unique contextual responses—the fourth-century Desert Fathers in their Egyptian desert hermitages, the vital missions of Celtic Christianity from the fifth century onward, the contextualization of Francis Xavier in China in the sixteenth century, Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravians in the eighteenth century, the first aggressive Protestant mission, the Quaker John Woolman and his efforts to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century, and the living veteran missionaries today, who carry decades of experience and insight collectively in their memories.³⁵

So, studying models of contextualization, theologies of Christ and culture, multicultural ethics, and mission history will provide the mission worker invaluable resources with which to enter a conflict zone for the sake of Christ.

elling illustration of the relationship between personal ethics and social action.

34 Luke S. Martin, *A Vietnam Presence: Mennonites in Vietnam during the American War* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof, 2016), 179.

35 There are negative examples of mission in conflict zones as well, which are also instructive in their failure. Such would include the militarized mission of the western and eastern Crusades in the 11th through 15th centuries, and missions that became entangled with colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

My wife formerly attended a Bible study in New Mexico with Billy Graham's sister-in-law, Rosa Montgomery. Rosa had been raised as a missionary child in China. One of her favorite adages was that whereas it is often said God doesn't need our education . . . he doesn't need our ignorance either!

After all our study, all our preparation, all our efforts to be contextually sensitive, we finally, though, must stand on our convictions of truth forged in the fires of personal spiritual journey fueled by the Word of God, the Christian community, the mysterious revelation brought by the Spirit of God, and experiences of human life. Luke Beidler declares:

Some students who wanted Vietnam to be unified had sympathies for the liberation of the south. Some were supportive of the South Vietnamese government. Everybody was trying to figure everybody out. We were not in favor of the war effort. We believed that Vietnamese overall wanted peace more than anything else. We spoke the truth as we saw it. If we were going to be shot, we wanted to be shot for the right reason.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Is There a Measure for Success?

When a contextual ministry is developed, when familiar patterns of ministry are abandoned through faith—as the Beidlers did in letting go of their evangelistic impulses to focus on teaching English—it is difficult to avoid the question of how to measure success in one's mission. Just as a context of conflict affects methods of mission and the spirituality of the missionary, so it also affects how one's efficacy is evaluated. Luke and Dot Beidler describe their concept of success as not being measured by numbers of Vietnamese converted to Christ—though they rejoiced when this occurred—but in the quality of the relationships they developed. Luke says:

We were all tempted to think our efforts were too small. But we were more concerned about doing what was right than if it was successful. We measured our success by our relationships with Vietnamese, with those we were doing Bible study with. Not necessarily with the numbers of persons who became Christians. But more whether they were able to feel and hear the good news in our times together, singing peace songs and sometimes gospel songs. We rejoiced when there was in-gathering, when there was a change of attitudes on the part of our students. Occasionally someone said because of what you said we will become Christians. We could count the people who made authentic choices to become Jesus followers to about ten in nine years. But hopefully lots of people became closer to the possibility of believing the good news about Jesus. Jesus was a hero to many people who were Buddhists or traditional Vietnamese. The person of Jesus was always attractive because of the life he lived and the truth of the gospel.

Similarly, on the West Bank we could not count the number of converts as significant, but during the years of the Intifada hundreds of students took copies of the New Testament, desiring to know more about the teachings of Jesus. Also, Living Stones Student Center became a resource for all sectors of the society. We launched summer camps for youth in remote villages, developed arts programs for the local schools, conducted conferences that brought together government leaders to discuss religion and peace efforts, and more. Perhaps the best statement of the value of these efforts to share the hope of Jesus was a parent of a Muslim child in one of our summer camps who said, “Thank you for keeping our children from activism [throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, which could result in imprisonment and a permanent mark on their record].”

In the violence of the Second Intifada, though, these efforts seemed so small. Hatred and violence raged on. Ultimately, mission in contexts of violence has a prophetic quality. Such mission points by its demonstration, however feebly, of God’s righteousness to the future reign of the kingdom of God—that the peace and righteousness of God, so slightly seen in society today, will one day fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Hb 2:14). Christian mission declares by faith that evil will not reign, that violence will bow its knee before the Prince of Peace. Such mission takes its stand by faith. The apostle Paul declared, “For we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). The missionary is therefore by necessity a prophet in conflict.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: Do You Ever Return Home?

The missionary’s final departure from service in a place of conflict does not necessarily bring relief from the vulnerability they encountered there, the temptation to bear ill-will toward perpetrators of violence, or the isolation they may experience in their home communities. The suffering of the people they leave behind may be the heaviest load they carry. As Dot Beidler states:

We came home in 1975; and spent a year very broken emotionally. Leaving our Vietnamese friends behind was very difficult, even though they urged us to leave. Four Mennonite personnel stayed after the fall of Saigon, leaving only after they were asked to do so by the new government.

For some, a final departure never occurs. My wife and I have remained deeply involved with ministry on the West Bank and in Manila, the Philippines, traveling to both several times a year. Barbara Rowe returned to El Salvador in 2013, where she continues her service to the Salvadoran people. Friends of the Beidlers who were also missionaries during the Vietnam War have recently returned to Vietnam for three years to work on a specific project with the Mennonite Central Committee.

Whether one leaves their place of service completely or returns intermittently, the impact of becoming deeply immersed in another culture—especially in a place of conflict that intensifies the experience—will leave the mission person deeply impacted for life. As I advise university students, deep cross-cultural service is like Alice stepping through the looking glass: the cross-cultural worker in a conflict area will never return as they once were, never see the world with the same naive eyes as they did before.

Conflict and the Missionary Experience: The Importance of the Call of God

A continuous thread in the Beidlers' account, as with Barbara Rowe, is the importance of the call of God on one's life to the mission of God. It is the certainty of that call that enables the believer to stand and persevere in even the most difficult of circumstances. Paul stated without apology, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . ." (Rom 1:1). Dot Beidler states emphatically, "We never questioned God's call."

For those who have such a call to mission in a place of conflict, Luke Beidler advises:

If you feel called, certainly go. Trust God to take care of your physical being. By all means, try to be a peacemaker. Stay as neutral as you can. Love your enemy because you respect the image of God in every person.

Barbara Rowe adds:

Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. Find the people you can trust—it's not everybody. In the US, we are a very open society. Put that aside. Find the people you can trust, and listen to what they have to say.

My wife and I also have been encouraged that in spite of the brokenness of the world, Jesus said:

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:14–16)

The Mission of the Church in a World of War

BY JOHANNES REIMER

1. The Mission is Back—We Will Not Die

It's February 2018, and a small group of peace builders from the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the Worldwide Evangelical Alliance is visiting the war zone in Eastern Ukraine. After months of negotiations, we are finally here to run our first Christian reconciliation conference in the Druzhkivka, Donetsk, region. Both sides of the conflict—Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking—are invited to spend quality time discussing their situation and to work for practical solutions.

Skeptics in politics and church had discouraged us from going. “The church can do nothing in such zones,” they had argued. “You are only endangering your own lives and are creating a greater misery for those living in the zone. Stay out of this. It is not your business.” We went anyway.

Prior to the conference in the city of Druzhkivka, our team visited the frontlines near Donetsk. A local mission team that frequently visits the villages and towns along the frontlines had agreed to bring us there. So, we loaded up our vehicle with food supplies and off we went. Would the soldiers let us enter the neutral zone between the two armies? Would they perhaps arrest us Westerners for going where no one is allowed to go? Many questions stirred in my mind as we approached the frontline. At the first checkpoint, soldiers stopped our car. “The mission has come!” one of them shouted. “There is fresh bread again. Thank you, brothers!” His eyes were shining. This guy was obviously not enjoying the job assigned to him. And he welcomed our mission bringing bread.

We passed all checkpoints successfully. Now, we were in the gray zone. Daily shooting made this place dangerous. Our driver obviously knew his way, though. Soon, we entered the first village. Within seconds of our arrival, our car was surrounded, mostly by older people.

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“The mission is back!” they shouted. “Our brothers have brought bread. Thank God!” Faces marked by suffering and hardship now showed signs of joy and thankfulness.

One of our guides explained, “Only a few of these people are Evangelical Christians. Most of them were atheists before the war started. This war has robbed them of everything they believed in. For them, our visit is the only glimpse of hope they receive. It is much more than bread; it is a sign of life beyond war.”

We visited a number of villages that day. People started telling us their stories. Some of them cried tears. Others seemed to have dried out of tears long ago. We distributed bread and some winter clothes, sang a number of songs with the people, prayed a prayer, and journeyed on to the next village. The villagers, however, remained standing on the street as we drove away, as if they wished to freeze in place the little moment of comfort they had just experienced.

“The villagers call us brothers. We did not introduce ourselves like this. They decided to name us members of their families themselves. Most of them have lost family in this war. Now, we missionaries are their family,” the brother tells us.

We entered the city of Avdiievka, a famous industrial suburb of Donetsk. Wherever one looked, there were marks of war. Just months before, this had been a battlefield. When we arrived at the Baptist church, we were told, “Every building here was hit by a missile, except this Baptist chapel. The neighbors come here for peace and rest because this is a God-protected place, they say.”

The pastor was inside the building, expecting us. The sanctuary seemed like it had been turned into a thrift store; used clothes, household utilities, and many other useful things filled the room. One corner had been cleared, so we placed the bread there.

Explaining the scene before us, the pastor said, “Neighbors have lost everything in the bombing. We try to provide them with what we find here and there. And our brothers help us. No one knows how long this war may continue. We just know what our Christian duty is—to be a helping hand to those in need.”

We asked the pastor how many church members had remained in the city. “Most of the former members left us,” he replied. “But our church has even grown in membership. We do not evangelize aggressively as we did before the war. Loving and caring for people is evangelization enough in our situation. People come to us because they find comfort here. No one else seems to care. We do, because God does. And seeing us, they discover God.”

What a testimony! I left the place deeply touched by his words. And more testimonies like his—many more—would follow during our conference in Druzhkivka. No, the churches have not lost their hope in the midst of war and

conflict. They have discovered that such a missionary life is worth living even in the face of the danger of losing one's own life.

2. The Church in a World of War

The opening story of this article encourages us to think creatively about mission in zones of conflict. What are the main parameters of such a mission? What might the most crucial missionary task of the church in such zones be?

2.1 *The Mission of the Church is Reconciliatory by Nature*

Nowhere does it become more evident than in zones of conflict that the church's mission is principally a mission of reconciliation. The church follows the mission of Jesus. He himself commissioned his disciples, saying: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21 NIV). The church has no other mission than to do what Jesus did! And Jesus was sent to reconcile the world with God (2 Cor 5:18) and to bring peace on earth (Luke 2:14)—a state of shalom in which conflicts are solved, hope is generated, and convicence becomes a reality.

The church is Christ's ambassador of reconciliation (1 Cor 5:19–20). The heart of Christian mission is to reconcile those in conflict with God and one another. Craig Ott consequently defines mission as "the sending activity of God with the purpose of reconciling to himself and bringing into his kingdom fallen men and women from every people and nation to his glory."¹ Together with other authors, he grounds his conviction in Pauline theology.²

It is the current condition of the world in relationship to God that brings reconciliation to the table.³ The world has become godless by having forsaken and forgotten what God's plan for the world originally was. Dishonoring God, humans have fallen into a self-destructive mode of life. We live in a conflict-laden zone! Where is this more visibly obvious than in situations like the one described in our opening story?

2.2 *Reconciliation: God's Way toward Peace in the Community*

The loving heart of God seeks renewal and restoration. God does not want sinners to perish (Ez 33:11) and, therefore, sent his only begotten Son to save and reconcile the world with himself (2 Cor. 5:18). To reconcile means to bring

1 Craig Ott, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Backer, 2010), 155.

2 See in this regard Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament* 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989).

3 Reimund Bieringer, "2 Kor 5:19a und die Versöhnung der Welt," *EthL* 63 (1987): 295–326.

God's plan of life back to the table, ignite the original vision, and determine a way toward a life in peace. This is the message of God's revelation in Scripture. "From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God's total mission 'to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven' (Col. 1:15–20). The fullness of reconciliation is friendship with God in Jesus Christ."⁴ And with this friendship, peace enters the conflict zones of the world. God desires peace with his creation, and, therefore, peace is at the heart of his mission.⁵ Pope Benedict XVI writes:

Reconciliation, then, is not limited to God's plan to draw estranged and sinful humanity to himself in Christ through the forgiveness of sins and out of love. It is also the restoration of relationships between people through the settlement of differences and the removal of obstacles to their relationships in their experience of God's love.⁶

And Robert Schreiter summarizes properly:

What we see in these Pauline passages is how reconciliation is a central way of explaining God's work in the world. Through the Son and the Spirit, God is making peace—between God and the world, and thus also within all of creation itself. When this insight is brought together with the concept of the *missio Dei* developed a few decades earlier in missiology, we see the biblical foundations for reconciliation as a paradigm of mission, a paradigm that began taking on a particular poignancy and urgency in the last decade of the twentieth century.⁷

God's people are invited and sent to participate in his mission. The church is "a people in God's reign," says the German theologian Leonard Goppelt.⁸ Does this mean that all missionary activity of God's people must intentionally follow a spirit of peace and reconciliation? Yes, says the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 we read:

4 Chris Rice, *Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Christian Witness in the World of Destructive Conflicts* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2005), 11.

5 Johannes Reimer, *Missio Politica: The Mission of the Church and Politics* (Carlisle, England: Langham, 2017), 69.

6 Pope Benedict, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*," http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html (1.12.2), 8.

7 Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen, eds., *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 16 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 14.

8 Leonard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 254.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God's people have been given a mission of reconciliation and peace. They are sent as their Lord was sent. With the same intention. Theologically speaking, all Christian mission must be transcended by a spirit of peace and reconciliation. Christian mission can never intentionally promote conflicts and war. Instead, it will move into zones of conflict, introducing peace and reconciliation. As Christians, we are invited to go to those troubled by conflict and offer them God's hand to reconcile with those they fight against. At the conference in Druzhkivka, this very truth opened hearts and minds of people on both sides of the conflict. God offers help—divine help—to assist a process of ending conflict. The way toward peace is reconciliation!

2.3 Recovering the Missionary Task of Reconciliation

In our opening story, few Evangelical Christians understood the reconciliatory role of the church in a community in conflict. The “world of war,” as John Howard Yoder once called it,⁹ appeared to them to be a place they would rather leave behind. Inward and outward emigration instead of active participation ruled their agendas. What do Christians contribute to a more peaceful living in communities around the world? Do they see peacebuilding as their mission? In Ukraine, the majority did not. And the Ukrainian Evangelicals are in no way an exemption.

A quick overview of positions shared among Christians of different denominations reveals a deep divide between Ecumenical and Evangelical Christians. While the first clearly identify peacebuilding as a vital part of the mission given to the church,¹⁰ most Evangelicals distinguish between evangelism and social responsibility and include peacebuilding in the latter. Christians are called to both, they argue, but social responsibility—and, with it, peacebuilding—is not part of the core mission of the church. This approach is evident, for example,

⁹ John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 17.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland, Eds. *Frieden und Mission: Eine Arbeitshilfe für Gemeinden* Materialheft 6 (Hamburg: EMW, 2011); Das Position Papier der Assemblies of God aus dem Jahr 2015: Church Mission and Peacemaking, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Church-Mission-and-Peacemaking>, accessed January 9, 2016; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 411; and Johannes Reimer, *Die Welt umarmen: Theologie des gesellschaftsrelevanten Gemeindebaus*, Transformationsstudien Bd. 1 (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2009), 147ff.

in the Lausanne Covenant.¹¹ In missionary praxis, as Rick Love, a missionary to Muslims, rightly observes, “Peacemakers don’t do evangelism and evangelists aren’t known for being peacemakers. Peacemakers focus on social issues, while evangelists save souls. Peacemakers fear that evangelism among Muslims increases conflict, while evangelists believe that peacemakers compromise the gospel.”¹² Consequently, peacebuilding and reconciliation are not subjects in most evangelical works on mission. Love even speaks of a *missing peace* in evangelical missiology.¹³

Anabaptists, of course, differ in this regard. Since the publication of Guy F. Hersherberger’s book on the Mennonite theology of peace, in which he clearly states the responsibility of Christians for peace in the world,¹⁴ the issue has been intensely discussed among Mennonites.¹⁵ Of great importance in this regard are the works of Mennonite theologians John Howard Yoder¹⁶ and John A. Lapp.¹⁷ In all their publications, there is a distinct confession of peacebuilding as an integral part of the missionary calling of the church. However, the mission of reconciliation and peacebuilding is, as a rule, separated from evangelism. Alan and Eleanor Kreider’s book *A Culture of Peace* puts all of the life of the church under peace witness. This includes evangelism as attraction. Evangelism as proclamation, on the other hand, is not even mentioned.¹⁸ Gary B. Miller gets to the heart of the struggle of North American Anabaptists, stating:

11 *Lausanner Verpflichtung*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Lausanner Bewegung Deutschland, 2000), 4.

12 Rick Love, *The Missing Peace of Evangelical Missiology: Peacemaking and Respectful Witness* (Baltimore, MD: Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, 2008), 2.

13 Love, 2.

14 Guy F. Hersherberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1944).

15 See, for instance, the list of Mennonite publications on the subject of peace in Willard Swartley and Cornelius J. Dyck, eds., *An Annotated Bibliography of Mennonite Writings on War and Peace, 1930–1980* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1987).

16 John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Cooperative Bookstore, 1983); *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); *The Original Revolution* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1972); *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1971); and others.

17 John A. Lapp: “The Peace Mission of the Mennonite Central Committee,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44 (1970): 281–97; John A. Lapp, ed., *Peacemakers in a Broken World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1969).

18 Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, und Paulus Widjaja, *Eine Kultur des Friedens: Gottes Vision für Gemeinde und Welt* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag), 165–83.

One of the biggest struggles on this journey is our “peace position.” I’m not trying to walk away from it; that’s far from the truth. But in our society and even in our congregations, this is a loaded conversation. We have dichotomized Jesus’ call to be people of peace and to share the Good News as though either or both of them are optional.¹⁹

Somewhat different is the position of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Since 1975, the church has expressed an integral view of the relationship between evangelism and peacebuilding.²⁰ This does not mean that local churches automatically subscribe to such a view, however. One has the impression that church leaders feel they are forced to decide between the two—for engagement in evangelism or peacebuilding, as Hans Kasdorf rightly observes.²¹ Douglas Heidebrecht laments a principal disability of the majority of church leaders among the Mennonite Brethren to correlate evangelism and peacebuilding.²²

The situation in other countries and churches in the world is not much different. The separation between mission as evangelism and peacemaking as mission is a universal problem.²³ Is this why conservative Christians tend to leave the conflict zones rather than stay and introduce peace to society? I suggest that yes, it is. In Eastern Ukraine, the vast majority of Christians left the conflict zone. The absence of a proper integral theology of evangelical peacebuilding leads to withdrawal from the conflict zones of the world.

In contrast, a missional church will find herself in the midst of the world of war, in all those conflict zones, offering peace to those in trouble. It is fascinating to see that the issue of reconciliation has become one of the central themes in mission circles since the beginning of the 1990s²⁴ and has developed rapidly to a vividly discussed model of mission.²⁵ Some authors even postulate that

19 Gary B. Miller, “Can We Embrace Both Peace and Evangelism?” Accessed August 28, 2016, *The Mennonite* (April 15, 2008), <https://themennonite.org/feature/can-embrace-peace-evangelism>.

20 See, for instance, Ray Harms-Wiebe, “Mennonite Brethren Mission: A Brief Assessment of Its Mission Theology and Praxis,” *Mission Focus* 20 (2012): 44–46.

21 Hans Kasdorf, “Centrality Instead of Priority: An Emerging Philosophy of Mennonite Brethren Mission,” *Direction* 16 (1987): 32.

22 Douglas Heidebrecht, “Mennonite Brethren and the Gospel: A Theology of Mission on the Way,” *Direction* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 217.

23 Johannes Reimer, “Evangelisation und Frieden,” in Lukas Amstutz and Hanspeter Jecker, eds., *Fit für die Welt: Beiträge zu einer friedenskirchlichen Theologie und Gemeindepraxis*. Edition Bienenberg Bd. 6 (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2017), 133.

24 Schreiter and Jørgensen, *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, 13.

25 See, for instance, an overview of the debate in Jacques Matthey, “Versöhnung im ökumenischen missionstheologischen Dialog,” *ZfM* 3 (2005): 174–91.

solving the disturbing factors and eliminating sources of conflict in society—aiming for a meaningful convivence—will determine the future of Christian mission.²⁶ Robert Schreiter, then, speaks of reconciliation as the paradigm of mission.²⁷ The Lausanne Movement²⁸ and the mainline churches,²⁹ the Ecumenical Movement³⁰ and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)³¹ all reclaim mission as reconciliation for their future operations.

The church moving into the conflict zones of the world with a message of reconciliation and peace will make a difference. How does this happen practically? What is a genuine contribution of the church to peace and conflict resolution?

3. The Church: God's Agent in Conflict Zones

The church is called to step into the mission of Christ. She has no other call, no other vision, no other methodology. The church is invited to join the people, incarnate into a given culture, serve and converse with the people, confront them with their sin, lead them to divine healing and reconciliation, and invite them to join God's mission in the world. What does a mission of reconciliation include? Following the example of Jesus, it will include five basic dimensions:

1. Witness: living a reconciled life
2. Diaconia: serving troubled people
3. Dialog: engaging in conversation for peace
4. Prophecy: naming the hard issues
5. Evangelism: healing the wounded

26 Theo Sundermeier, "Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute," *Ökumenische Existenz Heute* 1 (1986): 86–90; Johannes Reimer, "Der Dienst der Versöhnung—bei der Kernkompetenz ansetzen: Zur Korrelation von Gemeinwesen-mediation und multikulturellem Gemeindebau," *Theologisches Gespräch* Heft 1 (2011): 19–35.

27 Robert Schreiter, "Reconciliation and Healing as a Paradigm for Mission," *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (Jan. 2005): 74–83.

28 LOP 51, in <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-51-reconciliation-as-the-mission-of-god>, accessed January 13, 2018.

29 Chris Rice, *Reconciliation as the Mission of God*, 18–19.

30 World Council of Churches, "Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict," Faith and Order document 201 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), accessed January 12, 2017, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/Faith-and-Order-201?set_language=en.

31 Pope Benedict XVI, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*," http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html.

3.1. Witness: Living a Culture of Peace in the Midst of conflict

A mission of reconciliation begins where the church joins the people in a zone of conflict. Living among those who suffer in conflicts—as salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13–15), as God’s people, his divine family, “a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reign of God,”³² a kingdom of peace, and, therefore, a sign, instrument, and foretaste of peace—marks the entry point into a mission of reconciliation.

Kingdoms are recognized by culture, their “way of life,”³³ “the design for living”³⁴ in the kingdom. Cultural anthropology speaks of a four-story house describing culture: (a) the material, (b) the social, (c) the cognitive, and (d) the religious levels of life.³⁵ The material includes everything people have, the social involves all they do, the cognitive includes the way they think, and the religious encompasses all they believe. In a culture of peace, all levels will be shaped by peace and justice. In fact, peace transcends all life, becoming the way to be.

- (a) *Materially*, the church—where peace reigns—will never take advantage of conflicts, never engage in producing poverty among her neighbors. Instead, it will be involved in caring and serving those who lost all their possessions through the conflict around them. Poverty is consciously reduced among those who share with one another. Bringing bread and clothes (etc.) to the needy, as described in our opening story, is an important step toward reconciliation and conflict resolution.
- (b) *Socially*, the church of peace is shaped by love. Christian neighbors love each other as they love God and themselves. Love never harms the other. In fact, in the kingdom of God, anger cannot hold longer than sunset (Eph 4:26). Community is here defined as reciprocal fellowship in which everybody has something to give as well as to take from the community. In the New Testament, such fellowship is called *koinonia*. It is somatic community, a body in which every part plays its crucial role. The church, the body of Christ, demonstrates to the community in conflict her *koinonitic* nature, inviting everyone to participate in sharing and giving.

32 Lesslie Newbigin, “*The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

33 Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2012), 8.

34 Luis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 59–60.

35 Gary Ferraro and Susan Andreatta, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009), 18.

- (c) *Cognitively*, the church of peace is a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9–10). Societal life in such a context is shaped by a mind of service. Meekness is the ideology of a thriving, peace-centered society. The well-being of all is its agenda. As a true priest, the church brings the world in conflict, in which she lives, to the throne of God in her daily prayer. And as a true king, the church will engage in meaningful action toward transformation of conflict and rebuilding of community.
- (d) And, finally, *on the religious level*, in a church of peace, God rules. All religion is God-centered. God rules through his Spirit, granting to the church spiritual gifts such as a word of revelation, of knowledge, of wisdom, and of prophecy that enable her to listen to his voice. Members of the church receive gifts of discerning the spirits, new tongues, and interpretation of tongues. They are gifted for strategic leadership and teaching, helping and serving. No institution on earth has ever been as qualified to live in prosperity, justice, and peace as the church of Jesus Christ. And by this richness of her gifts and competences, by her life under the direct leadership of God's Spirit, she will do works by which the people around her will recognize her father in heaven, the God of peace (Mt 5:16).

Jesus referred to the Jubilee Year—the fiftieth year in the lifecycle of God's people in the Old Testament—when he displayed the kingdom to his disciples (Luke 4:18). “The good year of the Lord is literally shaped by peace: the captives are set free, the poor are given a new material and social beginning, the nature is left to rest, and even the natural and unequal enemies, lamb and wolf, find peace with one another (Is 65).

The mission of peacebuilding of the church of Christ is first and foremost a lifestyle, a culture she promotes—a just, loving, and serving culture. In order to be such, the church must incarnate into the given local community and consciously become one of the society's social agents. Only where she incarnates into the local culture, where she becomes a Jew to the Jew and a Greek to the Greek, might she save some for God's kingdom (1 Cor 9:22). This includes all local communities—and conflict contexts are no exemption but rather a priority.

3.2. *Diakonia: Serving the Troubled*

Living amid a culture offers millions of chances to act justly, lovingly, and peacefully. The kingdom is displayed in a community by a missional church, who accepts her priestly role to serve the world around her. Doing works of compassion, she introduces hope to a troubled world. Diakonia becomes a crucial instrument of peacemaking in the world.

It is diaconal service that removes the roots of conflict and trouble. The Jubilee Year, for instance, required Israel to return all land to the original own-

ers. People might have lost their property due to bad management and for fifty years others participated in their source of income, but now, at Jubilee, things were supposed to change. The return of property was to give everybody a new start. The dangerous divide between those who have and those who have not—which is responsible for much economic and political unrest in the world—was never to develop. Shared economy was to be celebrated as justice, good neighborhood, and national pride. In other instances, people ended up in slavery, selling their strengths to the rich and well-off. In the Jubilee paradigm, serving these people in slavery meant setting them free from their owners. Peace, to them, was marked by freedom and independence. For the sick, caught in their pain and disability to care for themselves, it meant treatment and health, assistance and help. For the demoniacs, it meant freedom from the spirits occupying them. This is how we see Jesus introduce peace to people. He came to serve those in need.

The church is called to serve those in need, free those in bondage, heal the sick, and set the captives free. Her service displays the glory of God in society, brings light to the dark places of the world, and shares minerals for the fruitless soil of culture. Wherever she serves, reconciliation and peace with the world, society, the neighborhood, and oneself may come with justice and restoration.

The mission of peacemaking has a diaconal dimension that is crucial to peacebuilding. In a conflict zone, this might mean active engagement in naming the sources of conflict and opposing angry politics and social injustice.

3.3. *Koinonia: Engaging in Dialog*

The culture of God's kingdom is a culture of welcome that promotes *koinonia*—a spirit of participation and reciprocal assistance in daily life. Promoting the kingdom requires working with, instead of just for, the people.³⁶

The mission of God is inclusive, as is peacemaking. Peace is not simply offered by the church to the people; it is a joint communal experience of those who come and offer and those who accept and share peace, as Jesus seems to suggest in his commissioning words to his disciples in Matthew 10:11–13.

The grand story of God with the world reveals to us many examples of this principle. God has his people for peace in places we might not expect them to be. There is Melchizedek, for instance—the just, royal priest of the High God in Salem/Jerusalem (Gen 14:18–20), who blesses Abram and becomes a prototype of a godsend priest forever (Ps 110:4). The city he rules will turn into the capital city of God's chosen nation, Israel, and become the city of peace (Is 26:1–3).

³⁶ See the discussion on inclusive mission in Johannes Reimer, “Inklusive Mission—Widerspruch oder Notwendigkeit,” *Theologisches Gespräch*, Heft 3 (2016): 111–25.

Another outstanding person is Cyrus the Great, who becomes king of Persia in 559 BC—a Gentile king who allows the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt and orders the Jews to return to their land. The prophet Isaiah praises Cyrus as God’s anointed servant saying:

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things. (Is 45:1–7 NIV)

A Gentile king, who does not know God yet, is chosen to bring peace to Israel?! Or a city-known prostitute in Jericho, Rahab—who saved the Israeli spies from being captured and opened a way for Israel to enter the promised land (Jo 2:4)—is praised for being a hero of faith (Heb 11:31) and named among the forefathers and mothers of Jesus (Mt 1:5)? Other examples could be mentioned. Working for God’s kingdom together with those who do not know God yet but are willing to do His will is in no way a problem. Rather, it is a rule. To find a person of peace and stay in his/her house opens opportunities to bring peace to the whole community.

3.4. Prophecy: Speaking God’s Truth

Peacemaking presupposes truth-telling. It is impossible to reconcile conflicting parties without revealing the source of their rivalry. The church has a prophetic voice in the world to name the issues of conflict, strife, and war. The church can never stay quiet about injustice in the world. She must, and she will, speak out for and side with the oppressed and the poor, the victims and weak. She will expose the oppressor and the oppression, knowing where God wants her to be.

This is what the prophets of the Old Testament did. They exposed those who trampled the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth (Am 2:7). They raised their voices against the unjust and oppressive rulers of the day (Am 3:9–10), blaming the ruling elite of their time for their evil practices (Jer 6:7–10; 8:8–13; Is 58:5–7). And the church of Christ “stands on the shoul-

ders of the prophets.”³⁷ She is God’s prophetic voice in the world.³⁸ And the prophetic task of the church prohibits her from conspiring with the powerful and mighty. She will never become a political party but, rather, will be a critical companion of rulers and governments.

The different prophetic gifts of the Spirit allow the church to see the truth. In conflicts, this is an outstanding asset. Reading cultures, contexts, and situations in their entanglement with conflict and oppression is a necessary presupposition to any meaningful conflict resolution. A prophetically gifted church is enabled to analyze the context properly and then name the issues creating unrest. Peacemaking presupposes prophetic insight—a gift to discern the spirits involved.

3.5. *Evangelism: Healing the Wounded*

Peacemaking leads to reconciliation of those in conflict. The reconciled will experience the newly granted peace as GOOD News, as *evangel*. Reconciliation is, therefore, an active part of what is traditionally called evangelism. Evangelism derives its meaning from the Greek *euangelion*, which stands for good news. Representatives of different theological traditions have defined the term differently,³⁹ but in this they all find a common ground: evangelism brings the evangel to the people. The way you define the gospel will, therefore, basically determine your definition of evangelism. Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom of God that brings peace to humans. And his proclamation included life, deeds, and words, as we have seen above. He modeled good life, offered good life, and spoke about good life. And people accepting his offer were healed from sickness, demonic possession, and loneliness. When the disciples of John came to ask Jesus whether he was the promised Messiah, Jesus replied:

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me. (Mt 11:5–6 NIV)

Evangelism in the words and praxis of Jesus was truly integral. In fact, the entire New Testament teaches nothing else. Martin Werth reflects this in his definition of the gospel as “message of salvation about the death and resurrection of Jesus to our risqué and restored fellowship among each other and

³⁷ Paolo Suess, “Zur Prophetie im Horizont der Menschenwürde,” in *Mission und Prophetie in Zeiten der Interkulturalität*, eds. Mariano Delgado and Michael Sievernich (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2011), 46.

³⁸ See more in Reimer, *Missio Politica*, 57–59.

³⁹ See the discussion in Johannes Reimer, *Leben-Rufen-Verändern: Chancen und Herausforderungen gesellschaftstransformierender Evangelisation heute*, Transformationsstudien Bd. 5 (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2013), 27–29.

with God.”⁴⁰ This message proclaims God’s kingdom as a renewed existence, renewed practice and inviting words, and establishes the reign of God in the lives of individuals and in community.⁴¹

David W. Shenk reflects on the experience of the church healing the wounds of ethnic conflict after the genocide in Rwanda, stating that it was exactly the peaceful lifestyle and the fullhearted engagement of Christians for both the victims and the perpetrators in the darkest hour of the Rwandan tribes that brought hope and healing to the whole nation.⁴²

Back to Ukraine

Churches in Eastern Ukraine are troubled by war. Many of their members have left the conflict zone. Others are staying. More and more of them are discovering their missionary task of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The situation might not allow them to do more, but what they do brings to the neighbors food and clothing, glimpses of hope, and trust and forgiveness. Because of this, the church grows naturally. “We have united to rebuild our village differently, when all of this here is over,” one of the villagers we spoke to stated. “We will stop dividing among ourselves, forgive those who harm us, and reconcile with one another. And in our new village there will be a church, such as yours.” I was moved by such words in the midst of misery and war. The villager was no Christian yet, but you could feel a growing hope for the future—a future in a reconciled community.

The conference in Druzhkivka united many Christians around this new mission. Months later, a center for counseling and trauma therapy was started, a community rebuilding office came into being, and many other initiatives toward a reconciling practice are on the way. Mission of the local church has gained new momentum by accepting a new paradigm—the paradigm of mission as reconciliation.

40 Martin Werth, *Theologie der Evangelisation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010), 8.

41 Reimer, *Leben*, 30ff; Werth, *Theologie*, 7.

42 David W. Shenk, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1997), 134–36.

Bombs, Bullets, and Bread in Biafra

Ministry in the Midst of War and Kwashiorkor

WALLY SHELLENBERGER

It's the morning of September 4, 1968, at Ebem, Biafra. Hundreds of people—mostly women and children—are seeking help but mostly hope. A young mother walks toward me holding the hand of a child who waddles along as a drop of serum from an ulcer on her ballooned-out feet falls on the dusty road. The child is gradually dying from lack of protein in her diet. What can we do? We give her seven vitamin tablets, then move on to the next dying child.

When I get back to Abiriba, as I walk from the hospital to our home feeling helpless and desperate, I hear a voice from beyond. I know it is not my thought, but I also know I did not hear it with my ears, so what is it? The voice says, “These are my children; I hold them in my hand.” (It seems quite absurd, but these words have given me an assurance and peace that is available to me even now, fifty years later.)

Becoming Medical Missionaries in Nigeria

In 1960 Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain, and five years later, one week after being married, we went to experience this new country. Our Norwegian freighter ploughed across the Atlantic, nosed in at ports along the West Africa coast, and dropped us off at Port Harcourt. In September of that year, my wife, Evie, and I began serving as medical missionaries at the Akahaba Abiriba Joint Hospital, which was administered by the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC), the precursor to Mennonite Mission Network. Our work took place over the course of three and a half years in the midst of what would become intense and sometimes deadly conflict. Several groups of people were involved: the Nigerians and Biafrans and different tribal groups among them, the mission workers—both medical and church-related,

Wally Shellenberger and his wife, Evie, worked in Nigeria and Biafra during the late 1960s through the joint efforts of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Mennonite Central Committee, and American Friends Service Committee. They retired from their medical work in southern Indiana in 2001 to work with the MCC student exchange program in Iran through mid-2004. They now live in Paoli, Indiana.

including Mennonites and Scots Presbyterians—the North-American-based mission administration personnel, and the soldiers.

This account is of our personal experience with the interaction of these groups. We are not claiming to speak authoritatively, except for ourselves as on-site medical mission workers. However, what we have to relate can readily apply to other similar situations. The following is an account of what we experienced, mostly as recorded in personal letters and reports to which we had personal access. At the end of this article, we share some of our general conclusions about mission and ministry in conflict zones.

Serving in Biafra

We're eight months into our term, taking the morning to enjoy some time off in Enugu, the nearest large city, when Nigerian soldiers occupy the streets and we learn of a coup by left high-ranking Igbo generals who have taken control of the government. A Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) volunteer service worker from the north, Ken Yoder, tells us that five hundred people have been killed in Kano and that the Igbo and Hausa tribes are fighting each other. Earlier, the British had drawn boundaries that enclosed ancient tribes of many long-standing rivalries, the largest being the Hausa in the north—who are mostly Muslim—the Yoruba in the southwest, and the mostly Christian Igbos in the southeast, where we live.

Within a couple months, another coup removes the Igbo leaders. The talented, well-educated, and aggressive Igbos, working in top jobs in the north, are targeted and many thousands killed. Abiriba, a town of seventeen villages and a population of fifty thousand, has been home to many Igbo traders working in the north, who now begin streaming home. Several of these persons with high-ranking governmental jobs are fearing for their lives and plead with us missionaries to write out medical statements saying that because of health reasons they must stay in Eastern Nigeria. In the midst of life-threatening conflict, how does a missionary respond to very personal requests like this? Does extending God's shalom include helping to safeguard another's livelihood?

The political situation becomes more and more tense, and Evie writes:

I worked out a disaster plan for the hospital, which really impressed a visiting doctor from the Ministry of Health, but being in the "bush," we won't get casualties like the city hospitals. And we are not big heroes and will do whatever the Mission Board and the Consulate recommend.

Little did she know that within six months we would be two of just a few expatriate medical people left, with hundreds of war casualties staggering through Abiriba's hospital. Fortunately, we were able to hire an additional doctor, Dr. Udoji, who fled from Lagos. He ended up working with us through the difficult next two years.

In May 1967, the eastern region of Nigeria seceded, calling itself Biafra, which prompted the Nigerian government to block all services to Biafra, such as air flights, mail, and commerce. This action also cut off all sources of protein for the Biafran diet, including beef, beans, ground nuts, and vegetables from the north; fresh fish from the sea; and a staple of imported dried fish. This led to severe protein malnourishment and death.

MBMC's primary work in Nigeria had been with churches in the southern part of the Eastern Region.¹ Because of the political unrest, however, their work ground to a halt and the schools were no longer functional. This left the missionaries, the MCC teachers, and the Peace Corps volunteers with no jobs.

On June 3, 1967, Evie writes:

Last night about 6 p.m., a big white U.S. AID car drove into our driveway, and I knew right away what that meant. The U.S. man (from the U.S. Consulate) told us we must prepare for evacuation, and all dependents were to leave the country. The government employees' dependents were required to leave, but the mission people could choose. So the people on the compound (the Mennonite missionaries staying near the hospital) met right away, trying to decide what should be done. We decided to send the Hertzlers—Mrs. and the children—home on the first evacuation. Anyone on the field with children are leaving the region.... Lloyd Fisher (the country coordinator for MBMC) came over today and said he would go to the Ministry of Health to see what he could do about the hospital.

About six weeks later, in a letter dated July 20, 1967, Evie writes:

About two and one half weeks ago, the Americans were advised to leave, so about half of our missionaries left the country. Then two weeks ago today, Fishers came down from Enugu and said we must all leave and that things were really bad. Well, we all packed to leave and kept thinking we'd go any day, but things are quiet here and we just couldn't leave the place without a doctor. Dr. Hertzler left about three weeks ago so we're alone again. The weekend when everyone was leaving, Wally had three emergency surgeries, etc., so he didn't even think about leaving at such a time. As a result, we are presently the only Mennonites (expatriate) in Biafra, us along with the Gingeriches and Martha.... I guess this is really the time for us to be here—the people are so anxious, etc. We have two different tribal groups on our hospital staff, and the tension between them is high. The minority group feels safe as long as the Bekees (the local vernacular for expatriate whites) are here.

¹ Missionaries from the MBMC were invited by these churches to work alongside them in their growth and development. The growing Mennonite Church Nigeria has recently celebrated its sixtieth anniversary. For information see Monday Ekpo, "Mennonite Church Nigeria Turns 60," *The Mennonite* 22, no. 2 (February 2019): 29.

From this time on, only an occasional letter finds a circuitous way in and out of Biafra, and we have no dependable communication with home for a nine-month period.

In September 1967, Evie writes:

With the help of the British and the Russians, the Nigerians are sending over bombers, trying to alarm everyone. The people are really scared of airplanes—many have never seen one before, and I'm beginning to be a little affected myself. When one goes over the staff, patients who can, run for the bush. A few handmade bombs have been dropped some places but have not done much damage.

And then in December she writes:

Last week we received news that the Biafran Army is taking over part of the Abiriba Hospital as they had to evacuate their hospital in Calabar, eighty miles south of us, due to bombing, and so today we got our first batch of wounded soldiers, and ever since this place has been impossible! It is really something to get anywhere from five to fifteen seriously wounded people at once. I have been working primarily in the operating room assisting with all the amputations and suturing of wounds. The army sent their own doctors to care for the soldiers, so we are relieved about that, but our staff are helping them. We are now running low of drugs and don't know when we will ever get more.

By March 1968, everyone's nutrition is severely stressed, and we've run out of powdered milk needed for some infants. Evie makes up a milk substitute with the main ingredient being the few beans we can find in the market. Needless to say, we are running low on surgical supplies and medications. Evie writes:

Planes still come over every once in awhile, but the air raids haven't been as plentiful lately. The war will set this country back ten years or more with so many schools, hospitals, etc. being destroyed. And what are the styles for Easter this year?? Mini skirts still in style?? What are the hair styles?? Can I come home with my boy cut!!?? Do Mennonites still wear coverings???

The following month, several people with strange wounds come to be seen. One man with a huge, two-day-old slice through the muscles in his neck and still walking describes the wound as an attempt to kill him. Gradually the story comes out: There are several villages of the Ibibio tribe about ten miles south-east of us, where we make regular supervisory-consultative visits to a dispenser and midwife at a village health center. Igbos have accused them of assisting the Nigerian army in infiltrating the area and have killed hundreds, wounded dozens, and burned the villages. Evie writes:

It was a terrible thing. As a result, we now have many refugee camps nearby, each with thousands of refugees. There are many motherless children now, and many injured children who watched all the killings. All of our Ibibio staff were taken to Umahia for questioning, and so far only one has returned. It is a disgusting and tragic situation.

One of our letters gets through to North America via Evie's parents to MB-MC's Secretary for Overseas Missions, Wilbert Shenk. After reviewing our situation, Wilbert writes this in a letter dated May 22, 1968, to Evie's father:

(This situation) raises in a new way the question of how the Christian can continue to be present in such a situation and still maintain the integrity of his witness. This plus the fact that it is apparent their medical supplies are running lower and lower (not to mention the fact that their vehicles have now been commandeered) has led us to encourage the group at Abiriba to leave Biafra unless they know of some compelling reasons to the contrary...I am reporting this to you in confidence since we do not want to make this public as of now. Ultimately, of course, only those right on the spot can decide how important it is that they stay...We are attempting to get this message to them in a special way via the Church of Scotland office.

The Mission Board was in a tough place—worrying about “integrity of witness,” worrying about how the Nigerian government would view their work in the southern part of what was the Eastern Region, pressure from families and concerned individuals, and finally the pleading of Evie, reflected in her July 1, 1968, letter to Wilbert:

I don't know if you are receiving our letters or not, but we'll continue to write....The malnutrition problem is really getting terrible. I'm sure ninety percent of the children here are malnourished and many severely malnourished. There just isn't any food anymore, and hundreds are dying daily. We got some powdered milk and eggs last month from WCC, and we are giving out a mixture daily to two hundred children, but our supply is almost gone and each day we keep hoping the Red Cross will fly in more. We are wondering if the church at home couldn't do something to get food into the country. It would really be appreciated. We can hardly stand to see so many people starving.

A few erratic relief flights come in May 1968. Evie writes:

The Nigerians are asked to shoot down any relief planes landing in Biafra. The airstrip, once a road, also used to bring in ammunition, is only half as wide as needed, and with the rains, pilots are very reluctant to fly in—especially since everything must be done at night. Last week a Red Cross plane carrying four passengers crashed as they were landing, and all were killed....A man visiting from England who is in charge of programs for starvation in India said this is worse than anything he has seen in India or

anywhere else. Last week only one out of four flights was able to land.

About this time, Wilbert received a letter from a Mr. Bernard who had heard the following from Mr. Somerville, a Scots Presbyterian missionary who lived about ten miles west of us:

Even though the group (at Abiriba) has completed three years, they give every evidence of not wanting to leave their work.

And Wilbert adds:

This communication also give assurance that there is a close working relationship between the group at Abiriba and the other missionaries in Biafra and that they look out for the welfare of each other in a commendable way.

About this time, David Duncan, an engineer with the mission from the Church of Scotland, came to live with us, giving invaluable help in keeping our generator going for surgery and for two hours each night. In addition to this, he taught us how to play hearts, and from him I took my one and only puff on a cigarette. Yes, we enjoy good support and fun with other missionaries in the same boat.

On September 3, 1968, Evie writes:

They are starting their terrible bombings again. Last week another hospital and refugee camps were bombed. It is really terrible. We can sympathize with the fears of the Igbos that they will be slaughtered if the Nigerians come in....Supplies have been coming in fairly well the last several weeks. This past month we have been better off for supplies than we have been for months.

By mid month, we hear that a Swedish Red Cross team is available to give us a break. To prepare for Evie, Wally, and Martha to get away for a few months, we appoint Dr. Udoji as medical superintendent of the hospital to manage the inpatient and outpatient care. The Swedish doctors will cover emergencies and surgeries, and the others of the Swedish team will continue the nutritional feeding programs, of which many are in process. Unfortunately, supportive visits to the village health centers will have to stop. With these preparations, the three of us fly out through the night, sitting on the floor of a shaky DC-7.

Martha arrives home before us and debriefs with MBMC. James Kratz, Associate Secretary for Overseas Missions, writes five summary comments. Two are listed here:

(1) It seems very important that as a Church and as a people committed to a ministry of reconciliation, that we remain open to help people regardless of their political position.

(2) There is already considerable interest among our constituency to re-

spond in compassion and loving service to this tragic situation. We do anticipate participating in relief and reconstruction when this is possible.

Evie and Wally arrive in Goshen on October 11, 1968. Among the opportunities to share about our experience is speaking in the chapel service at Goshen College. After the service, six students—who are ready to return with us to Biafra to help—call a meeting for that evening, and twenty students meet to consider their involvement. On November 8, James Kratz writes in a report:

Some twenty-five students at Goshen College have become intensely interested in the Nigeria/Biafra question. Dr. Wallace Shellenberger has been in contact with this student group, and Vern Preheim (MCC Director for Africa and the Middle East) and I met with the students two weeks ago. A level of spiritual commitment has come out of this, for which we are grateful and which must be taken seriously. There are some who have deepened their long-term commitment to Christian service, and there is also a group who would be ready to abandon their present study program to offer their personal services in a relief program if and when such a need arises. We have been in contact with the leaders of this group and with Atlee Beechy, who has served as a contact person between MBMC-MCC and the college students.

...We solicit your prayers, support, and counsel as we try to discover the next move in this very complex and difficult situation.

The “complex and difficult situation” for MBMC is further born out by the next step—meeting with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Since MBMC, MCC, and AFSC have mutual interests in being involved in service to Nigeria and Biafra, the eventual agreement is that MBMC-MCC will loan personnel to AFSC for work in Biafra, and AFSC will assume the responsibility for the medical work at Abiriba. This will keep MBMC and MCC in the background, addressing the fear of some possible detrimental effect interfering with the Mission Board’s ability to continue working with the Mennonite Church in Nigeria.

The tension experienced by MBMC and MCC is further illustrated in a letter dated November 26, 1968, from Vern Preheim to the team:

We want to avoid big headlines even in Mennonite publications, and we want to try to avoid any publicity in the general press. The reason obviously is that too much publicity on these efforts would jeopardize our ongoing program in Nigeria, including the relationship of the mission board to the Nigeria Mennonite church.

Within the next three weeks, this plan is implemented. MBMC and MCC loan Evie, Martha, and Wally to AFSC, and MCC recruits another physician—Linford Gehman, who has just completed three and a half years of ser-

vice with MCC in Viet Nam—and loans him also to AFSC. The Goshen College students, MBMC, and MCC ask Atlee to accompany the team into Biafra and bring back a firsthand report of what assistance is needed.

Airline tickets are secured for December 15. Bouncing on bags of the nutritional supplement, powdered eggs, and milk, we ascend into the darkness, flying from the Portuguese island of Sao Tome toward Biafra. Thirty minutes later, we descend into Biafra in total darkness to be greeted with ten seconds of airway lights as we hit the ground. Evie, Martha, Atlee, Linford, and Wally then make their way to Abiriba for what awaits them.

Two weeks later, Atlee left Biafra in a similar manner as his arrival. In the book *Seeking Peace: My Journey*, he writes of his visit to Biafra and feeling “overwhelmed by the suffering, my emotions overloaded and numbed.” Continuing to speak of his departure from the Biafran airstrip, he adds:

To break the numbness of overloaded emotions, I try to keep open to the human and humorous in my peace journey. It was midnight. I was on the darkened Uli (Biafra) airstrip waiting for the supply plane to be serviced for my flight out to the island of Sao Tome. Someone cried, “Hit the trenches, the Nigerian bomber is coming.” I jumped into the nearest one only to discover I had landed on top of a Catholic priest. He graciously said, “Welcome to my humble shelter. Please excuse my crowded quarters.” The shelter was two feet wide, four feet long, and four feet deep. We agreed that God’s Spirit creates ecumenical gatherings in unusual settings! The friendship bond was strong. The Nigerian bomber’s aim was good from our perspective, his bombs falling some distance from us.²

Soon after our arrival at Abiriba in January 1969, Evie writes:

The Kwashiorkor (medical term for severe protein malnutrition) isn’t so obvious, but I’m sure many of the children have died. As we walked through Abiriba, I was struck by how few the children were. The hospital is really crowded. There are about one hundred in-patient civilians and at least two hundred soldiers. That is pretty good for a one-hundred bed hospital.

Four of the Swedish Red Cross staff remain, working with the feeding programs in the surrounding villages, and we resume visits to the outlying village health centers, distributing much-needed medications. We now have a good supply of medications and dressings, but the army is very short on both and continually pleads for things. Evie writes:

We hardly know what to do, as the drugs and dressings are sent for “peace interests only”! They are not to go to the army, but you can hardly see wounded people suffering from lack of drugs and dressings and refuse to

2 Atlee Beechy, *Seeking Peace: My Journey* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 2001), 99.

give them some when your own supplies are overflowing.

Evie relays an interesting story:

Apparently while we were gone and the Red Cross people were living in our home, some people stole our radio, dishes, Tupperware, buckets, etc. When we wrote back and said we would be coming back, the chiefs of the villages ordered a big search of the town to find the things that were stolen. Nearly everything was returned to us. That's pretty good I think, and shows how over the years the hospital personnel have won the respect of the local people.

Later, Evie writes:

We were in Umuahia for a World Council of Churches meeting, and I was sorting out food with five other women when we heard that the Nigerians were sending their planes over. We heard this thing above us, and we all automatically ran for the bed. I was the last one there and could only manage to get my head under since it was so crowded. The bombs exploded about one fourth of a mile from our building, killing eleven people. Afterward I had to laugh to think of us all under the bed, with legs sticking out on every corner and one lady squatting behind a door. No one appreciated the humor of the thing as I did.

The military doctors are becoming a headache. We try to co-operate with them, but sometimes it isn't so easy. They have been crying on our shoulders about how all their wounded soldiers are starving and asking us for relief supplies. We told them our supplies are only for civilians, but as I walk through their ward, I don't have a clear conscience to see all their skeletons there, so we decided we would prepare meals for one hundred twenty wounded soldiers within the hospital, but they said no, they wanted the raw supplies. Well, something sounded pretty fishy about that, and we said meals or nothing. They finally decided to let us feed the patients like we wanted, so now I have had to try to find ways to feed one hundred twenty extra patients. Another thing about the military is that the other day the maternity building in a village about five miles from us was strafed several times and several people killed. The military officers here got on their high horse and said we have to keep people away from the hospital. In talking to them, I said God has protected this hospital from air raids for the past one and one half years and will probably continue to do so. The major replied: "God, who's God!?" It really is amazing that we haven't been disturbed. This must now be the only hospital in Biafra which has not been attacked by the fighters.

On February 28, 1969, Linford writes:

I was in the operating room doing a skin graft on a thirteen-year-old boy who had been in traction for over a month with a broken femur from

a shell wound, when in the distance we heard sounds of explosions followed by the noise of engines. About two hours later, one of the staff came to inform us that a lorry full of casualties had arrived from Ozu Abam, about ten miles south of Abriba, where a busy market had been bombed. The lorry indeed was full—full of shattered victims and full of blood. We worked for thirty-six hours—the military doctors repairing the abdominal wounds and we the amputations and lacerations. It was so massive—the loss of life, the loss of blood, and when I saw a bucket full of amputated limbs, I despised the chiefs of staff who sit at their desks plotting war. I walked to an operating table, and there was a seven-year-old girl who greeted me half fearfully, yet trustingly. I could hardly see for a half minute. She calmly took the Fluothane mask and went to sleep for me to fix her mangled leg.

Following this episode, Nigeria denies that their planes did this bombing, and Evie writes:

We had reporters from N.Y. Times and several European magazines here at the hospital taking pictures and can testify that the planes weren't "grounded." We now have four hundred patients in the hospital, and they are lying everywhere. The last days I have been out trying to find food to feed them properly. We are continually amazed that the hospital has so far been unharmed and contribute it to the fact that many people are praying for the safety of the place.

There is a lot of work, a lot of agony, and a lot of empathy for the people, but once in a while we have a change of pace, as Evie notes:

We have been having a lot of guests since we returned. Word has gotten around the relief workers that this is a nice place to "get away." So each weekend someone has been asking to come and visit. We enjoy having people, but it is so difficult to prepare meals.

It's March 30, and the Nigerian forces are within shelling distance of the hospital. Some shells have exploded within sight, so we will move the hospital to a school near Ohafia, about ten miles east of Abiriba.

Needless to say, it was a long and tedious task moving non-ambulatory patients, staff, and equipment. Linford and Wally stayed in Abiriba to finish up, but the next morning when shells "came whizzing by," as Evie says, we joined the rest at Ohafia. The army doctors, in the meantime, moved their patients toward the center of what remains of Biafra.

Two days later, the Nigerians were nearing Ohafia, and shells were falling nearby, so we moved again, this time more into the bush to a school in Ozu Abam. We repeated the same agonizing steps we had taken just a few days earlier. Linford writes:

We are in the process of setting up a functional bush hospital replete with operating facilities. With the army doctors gone, this leaves the whole region east of the capital, where the hard fighting is going on, devoid of military medical facilities. At the present time, we are sending wounded soldiers to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Umahia for definitive treatment.

A week later, the direct route from our hospital to Umahia, the center of what remains of Biafra, was cut off by Nigerian forces, leaving open only a long, circuitous route to the south. The four of us decided to move near the center. Evie writes:

We are now living with about twenty World Council of Churches (WCC) expatriate workers who have come out from our area. It is most interesting to be living with people from so many different countries. The surroundings are very primitive, and a modest person would find the conditions most embarrassing! There are four women and twenty men sleeping on air mattresses—I am sleeping between Wally and Herman Middlekoop! There is a pit latrine outside in the open, and in the morning you greet people as they pass by while you sit on the latrine! No one seems to mind, though.

So by mid-April, Evie and Wally are doing outpatient clinics among the many refugee camps and villages while Martha and Linford spend a couple days going to the hospital at Ozu Abam; it takes most of a day to get there because of bad roads, rains, and breakdowns. Dr. Udoji, the Nigerian doctor who worked with us in Abiriba, along with Dr. Odim, a native of Abiriba, are working daily at the hospital and its outpatient clinics. This hospital is the only civilian hospital functioning in the eastern part of Biafra.

Linford joins Evie and Atlee in celebrating humor at a time like this. He writes to the AFSC office:

I received a very interesting memo from Gertrude Schorle, bless her, requesting information regarding liability insurance: "Address: ____ It has changed several times recently and likely to change some more. Our present house has about 1200 square feet of floor space, is neither rented nor owned by us, sets about 100 yards of palm trees and cassava shoots from the highway, and has no elevator. You may add, however, that the compound has been twice bombed and is within clear sound of the war front.

We continue working, as noted above, until late May when we (Evie and Wally) leave Biafra. Martha and Linford continue to regularly visit and work at the hospital at Ozu Abam in addition to working at refugee clinics in the central area. The last letter we have—dated December 28, 1969, from Martha—is when they return from their final visit to Ozu Abam, unable to go back because of the bridge over the Imo River being blown up. Dr. Udoji and Dr.

Odim were staying on at the Ozu Abam hospital while Martha and Linford were continuing to work in the refugee clinics in the western part, near the airstrip, in what remains of Biafra. Within a week of writing her letter, Martha and Linford return safely home, shortly before the Biafran army surrenders on January 7, 1970.

Held in the Hand of God

Several years ago, Evie and Wally met with a Mennonite physician in Iowa who had worked at Abiriba with AFSC in 1975. While our memories of Abiriba were of starvation, death, and destruction, his pictures showed a neat, functional hospital and people with round, smiling faces. This is perhaps a vindication that these people, whether in pain or in health, are indeed held in the hand of God.

Reflections:

Mission, War, and Culture within the Nigeria-Biafra Conflict

In the midst of mission in conflict areas, there is a place for compassion and passion as well as careful deliberation.

Since the church, through MBMC, inadvertently directed the witness of Christ on both sides of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict, it had to enable the work on the rebel side while maintaining a working relationship with the Nigerian side. Through sporadic communication, Evie, Wally, Martha, and Cyril Gingerich, who served as the hospital administrator until June 1968, made impassioned pleas to MBMC for help. As the Mennonite constituency and college students became aware of the plight of the Biafran children, they also pled with MBMC to find ways of ministering. Added to these pleas were the worries that families of those in Biafra shared with the Board. On the other hand, MBMC was not primarily a relief agency and did not want to jeopardize its ability to work with the Nigerian government to assist the Mennonite Churches on the Nigerian side. So what was one to do?

It seems to us that one needs to respect both the impassioned pleas for help and the careful deliberation of the Board. From our perspective fifty years later, it seems this was well done. At the time, in the midst of the pain, suffering, and death of those around us, we were not so generous in our assessments of the situation.

In the midst of conflict, different groups have an enhanced opportunity to focus on common goals.

The medical mission workers and the church mission workers all had the same broad goal of promoting the shalom of God, but in the midst of the conflict between Biafra and Nigeria, the differences—attending to physical health needs

on the one hand and more church-related needs on the other—were amplified. We, as medical personnel, felt the support and friendship of those working with the Mennonite and Presbyterian churches.

Ministry in conflict areas may result in serving those once thought most unlikely to merit service. We must be alert to this and accept the opportunity when it comes.

To assist in physical aid to needy civilians is obviously important. Less obvious, and fraught with complex dynamics, is supplying aid to wounded combatants. Certainly the medical supplies and nutritional supplements sent by European and North American churches and organizations were intended for civilian usage. To share these supplies with wounded soldiers who were starving and in pain could jeopardize the relief program with the Nigerian government.

Working in a conflict area, one always needs to be aware of the complexity of a situation and be careful not to be too judgmental.

The supply of aid to Biafra was problematic because the same section of road that served as an airstrip was used both by planes bringing in arms and planes bringing in humanitarian aid, and the Nigerian air force treated them all alike.

Those serving in conflict areas must be aware of and respect the many-layered, complex differences among groups and be a presence that allows God's shalom to surface.

As we experienced in the relationship between the Igbos and the Ibibios, latent, generations-old conflicts between tribes can become active as social, cultural, and religious norms crack during times of stress.

God has given us the gift of laughter.

And finally, in the midst of terror, we are invited to laugh—at legs sticking out from under the bed during an air raid, at leaping into an air raid shelter and landing on top of a priest, and at addresses that include the description “...one hundred yards of cassava shoots from the highway.”

In the End

All in all, despite the challenges and difficulties, we are pleased to have been a part of the Mennonite Church's witness, in the midst of conflict, to the shalom of the Holy One.

Nonviolence as a Call to Creativity: Anabaptist-Mennonite Reflections from Peace Work in Africa

KATHRYN M.L. SMITH DERKSEN

How does the church witness in conflict spaces? What is the relationship between mission and conflict, and the church's responsibility in addressing conflict? Reflecting as a Mennonite peacemaking practitioner in international settings, I hold these timely questions up against a backdrop of pacifist Anabaptist tradition and practice and listen for answers from my African colleagues.

When my South African friend Nicole Joshua said, "The concept of nonviolence is actually a violent act for those who have been silenced," I took notice. Nicole, a colleague of mine from the Anabaptist Network in South Africa, was repeating what young Xhosa participants had said at a recent international workshop on nonviolence. These young people, disenfranchised even now as they live with the structural and systemic violence in the current South Africa, quickly identify the problems with limited definitions of violence. Nicole added her own concern with the White church not listening to or affirming the painful stories of those living in daily violence; our theories sounded limiting and judgmental. "We must redefine nonviolence so that it is an invitation to be creative," she said.

Isn't that what we are doing? I wondered.

How have we lost this key message of the Good News of reconciliation? I am a Mennonite missionary who has worked in five countries as a peacemaker, and this direct challenge gave me pause to reflect on the North American Mennonite Church and its message in global conflict arenas, and my own input. Through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), my husband and I served alongside Bishop M. B. Ochola in northern Uganda, supporting the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative mediating with the Lord's Resistance Army and bringing child soldiers back home. Our second MCC term was with the

Kathryn Smith Derksen and her husband, Daniel, work in South Africa with the Conflict Transformation Program of SADRA, the South African Development and Reconstruction Agency, through Mennonite Mission Network. Kathryn is Program Manager with SADRA, focusing on peer mediation, community relations, and election violence prevention.

Association for Non-violence in Chad, training leaders in community mediation across the Muslim/Christian divide. We do not plant churches but intentionally work with and support people of different faiths; we feel we are living the mandate to simply serve in the name of Christ, fitting Lesslie Newbigin's definition of mission as "the crossing of a frontier of strangeness."¹

Surely this modern peacebuilding work was avoiding the pitfalls of early church missions—the colonizing and politicizing of the church to support the status quo. We shudder reading Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible* and watching denominations tied to the state struggle when liberation theology takes root in the grass and conflicts with staid church authority. But thinking we are not supporting the status quo is far from dismantling it. Is there a neutral space between these two? It is possible that the way we teach and practice peacemaking is primarily for individual conflicts and that, even when it is contextualized in social justice and speaks to forms of structural oppression, we are missing the bigger picture, to our global neighbors' detriment.

As an urban North American Mennonite, I grew up in inner-city California and discovered that my dad's conscientious objection to the Vietnam War was radical in a cool way. Studying politics, I thought my Mennonite roots were responsible for my activist spirit. But I heard discontent from my peers—why didn't Mennonites support Martin Luther King and play a more prophetic role in the fight for civil rights? I reluctantly agreed—Mennonites don't fight; they run away. Born out of violent persecution, we bought peace with our silence. While we rejected Luther's dualism, we were still figuring out how to be submissive to authority when we disagreed with it. Thus, "submission to ruling authorities did not include obeying them. It meant only accepting the punishment the rulers meted out."²

South Africa has a painful history of the church supporting the oppressor and the oppressor's state, and we can learn from this. Theologians such as Louise Kretzschmar have studied both mainstream and Pentecostal denominations in South Africa and found that dualism and individualism were correlating dynamics that led to the church distancing itself from social and political concerns. As Kretzschmar says, faith becomes privatized in this way: "Religious authority is first opposed by the growing secular powers, then becomes more and more alienated from social affairs and is, finally, limited to the existential realm of individual persons."³ As the apartheid state came under increasing

1 David A. Shank, *Mission from the Margins: Selected Writings from the Life and Ministry of David A. Shank* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2010), 272.

2 Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, *The Anabaptists Are Back! Making Peace in a Dangerous World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1991), 61, 68.

3 Louise Kretzschmar, *Privatization of the Christian Faith: Mission, Social Ethics, and the South African Baptists* (Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers, Christian Council

criticism, dominant Christians felt their very identity and way of life threatened by church leaders such as David Bosch, who said that Jesus's way was an "alternative community" embodying its prophetic message—an idea he borrowed from Anabaptism.⁴

Early European Anabaptists intentionally lived in radical community that denied both state *and* economic authority. This way of life was part of what made them seem dangerous and an enemy to those in power. "The church is an alternative community that embodies kingdom values. It is not a chaplain to the state, blessing the current order . . . not merely an association of people interested in spiritual things, but a community that embodies an alternative economics and politics."⁵ Living in "common purse" connection with each other was one way to prevent individualism and perversion of wealth accumulation, encourage contentment with what one had, and acknowledge one's relationship and interdependency with others. But most importantly, by sharing their possessions with those among them in need, Anabaptists were taking on justice as an economic and spiritual act, not merely a charitable one.⁶

North American Mennonites helped introduce Anabaptism to Africa, and specifically South Africa.⁷ While their contribution was small-scale and didn't counter apartheid directly, they taught and modeled allowing space for imagining the church, Christian values, and confronting "the powers" of this world in a different way. Andrew Suderman, a theologian and former fellow Mennonite service worker in South Africa, succinctly summarizes what Anabaptist teachings brought:

Put simply, Anabaptism offered a theological and ecclesial vision that rejected apartheid logic, encouraged the struggle against the injustice and oppression of the apartheid system, and called upon those who embraced such a faith—e.g., Mennonites living in that particular context—to be

of Ghana, 1998), 19.

4 Andrew G. Suderman, "Mennonite Experience in South Africa: An Alternative Imagination," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (April 2015): 270–72.

5 Jamie Ross and Andre Gingerich Stoner, "What Anabaptists Bring to the Inter-church Table," in *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice*, eds. Stanley W. Green and James R. Krabill (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2015), 259.

6 Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2010), 121–22.

7 For more, see John de Gruchy, "Radical Peacemaking: The Challenge of Some Anabaptists," in *Theology and Violence: The South African Debate*, ed. Charles Villa-Vincenzo (Johannesburg: C. Skotaville, 1987); David Bosch, *The Church as Alternative Community* (Potchefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1982); and also Cobus van Wyngaard, "The Public Role of the Christian Community in the Work of David Bosch," *Missionalia* 39, no. 1–2 (April 2011): 151–67.

present alongside those who were suffering and struggling. It also challenged apartheid in a way that did not lead to or justify counterviolence against the apartheid state, thus stepping outside of the ongoing cycle of violence.⁸

South African theologians, practitioners, and activists have picked up on this vision and are molding a South African Anabaptism that takes the best of these teachings and makes it their own, such as through the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANiSA). There are many ways that their engagement with the principles of Anabaptism in the broken South African context speaks even more effectively to the violence of our modern world. The 2018 ANiSA Conference, the majority being people of color, discussed Anabaptism in relation to race, gender, love, and power. Young theologian and activist Nkosi Gola talked about the need to decolonize Jesus's parables: for example, Nelson Mandela was the "prodigal father" giving the whites what they didn't deserve, and the two "brothers" are still not reconciled.⁹

Nonviolent responses are needed for the violence caused by global capitalism, environmental degradation, mass migration, and widening gaps between rich and poor. Early Anabaptists experienced personal persecution, but their stand for justice usually did not extend to the Other and so was limited in scope. This may help explain why modern American Mennonites have largely moved from being marginal to mainstream, from radical to pluralistic, and have become willing to incorporate civil religion. Many believe they are responsible citizens rightly supporting a system that gave them freedom of religion, not realizing that "when the status quo is accepted and the operations of a system of government are seen as givens, the violent coercion which underlies those systems is adopted as given."¹⁰

This capitulation is known innately by those abused under the current global power structures, and they are calling out this hypocrisy of the church. When peacemaking is made primarily about the individual, that limitation is oppressive and difficult to apply in broader contexts. If privatization of faith results in missing the call to social justice because of tunnel vision, surely privatization of peacemaking does the same thing?

Early Anabaptists shared material possessions with their brothers and sisters as a point of justice, and this reminds me of what I have seen in several

8 Andrew G. Suderman, "Believers' Church and the (Counter) Political: The Promise of Anabaptist Ecclesiology in the South African Context," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 92 (Oct 2018): 511.

9 Nkosi Gola, "Black Pain in All Its Manifestations in a Modern Day Parable," Anabaptist Network in South Africa Conference (Johannesburg, South Africa, September 20, 2018).

10 Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist*, 45.

countries in Africa—caring for your neighbor-in-need as a matter of communal responsibility, not as pity or an act that takes away dignity. At a recent peace training for church leaders, our partner Oscar Siwali said, “There is an isiXhosa saying: ‘When your neighbor is hungry, you give him your cow so he can milk it, and he milks it but while looking over his shoulder as he knows some day you will come to take it back.’ This is what we need to teach white people—you cannot just drive your big car when your neighbor is hungry. Capitalism has failed us, and we need to find ourselves as Africans to find peace as a nation.”¹¹

The developing world has been critical of capitalism, especially as the global dynamics of the system oppress and dehumanize so many. Christians in places like South Africa see the need to decolonize the church and understand how it has gone wrong supporting the oppressor instead of the oppressed. The mission era in South Africa was fundamental in the subjugation of indigenous people into the colonialists’ structures—removing pastoral people from the land and distorting identity and culture, for example.¹² The South African church, across the range of denominations, has historically contributed to the degrading of people of color and is still trying to find its prophetic voice against the current status quo of structural and economic injustices. When state administrations such as South Africa mimic the US governing systems by privatizing health-care and dehumanizing immigrants, where is the Christian voice to care for the “least of these”?

Church and state supporting the oppressor is not new to Mennonites; in fact, North American Mennonites can claim some of our own history of being recipients of violent persecution and forced emigration as parallel experiences. However, it has been too easy to hide behind this history and let it blind us to the situation of our brothers and sisters living with daily violence and to our own contribution to their painful story.

Mennonites in North America took land from indigenous people who, as a result, have suffered economically, socially, even spiritually. Mennonite teachers in indigenous schools supported the breakup of families and jarring isolation of broken identities and lost language.¹³ This largely unacknowledged history is something we are beginning to learn and mourn, apologize for, and seek to make right. As we do so, we are offering a relevant nonviolent response; we are peacemaking. As one ANiSA member and theologian, Alan Goddard, responded recently to a friend posting his personal confession on Facebook,

11 Oscar Siwali, “Church Leaders Conflict Mediation Training,” SADRA Conflict Transformation (Durban, South Africa, August 28, 2018).

12 Crain Soudien, *Realising the Dream: Unlearning the Logic of Race in the South African School* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2012), 103.

13 For resources such as study guides and Bible reflections on this topic, see *Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* materials, <https://www.dofdmennon.org>.

“Thanks for publishing your prayer of repentance and of petition for a restitutional discipleship! Millions of white South African Christians need to do the same, to be set free from the shame of apartheid, and to walk into the freedom Christ gives us to live restitutionally.”

Global capitalism has damaged traditional community frameworks, including those of Mennonites, and I believe this has affected us across the world. “It is important to understand globalisation because, in addition to all its other effects on identity-making processes, it has reconstituted traditional systems of trust . . . it has broken the protective frameworks provided by community and tradition and replaced these with larger and more impersonal frameworks.”¹⁴ As we strive for understanding, we might discover that those of us living in postmodern locales have also been adversely affected by the “impersonal frameworks” that break community; perhaps our early Anabaptist identity and values have even been affected? We must be careful to not simply restructure the same unjust paradigm. Reflecting deeper, we might find that our desire for community is actually a desire for control.¹⁵

Becoming a reconciling church at home is directly related to our being a church of reconciliation in mission. Doing our homework and admitting our part in economic and racial oppression is essential to defining conflict and injustice and our role in addressing it. Beyond our individual confessions, those of us in the dominant culture are also part of systemic injustices that cause daily conflict for our neighbors.

As North American Mennonites today, we need to clean up our own house. Can we revise and rebirth the early Anabaptists’ ideas of mutual aid, radical communal living, and a shalom that “encompasses both a grace that nurtures and wrath that insists on justice”?¹⁶ As Suderman asks, do “Mennonites themselves remember or recognize these characteristics as part of their own faith identity? Do contemporary Mennonites continue to seek ways of living according to these characteristics?”¹⁷ With a log in our own eye, how can we define violence and nonviolence for others? Because of our own brokenness and blindness, it is more important than ever to listen and let others lead the way forward, even in helping us develop appropriate responses to injustice and conflict in North America.

Anabaptism is now a global phenomenon, and North Americans can take the humble posture of listening, learning, and unlearning from our cousins

14 Soudien, *Realising the Dream*, 48.

15 Cobus van Wyngaard, “Exploring Theology and Desire: Power and the Risk of Love,” Anabaptist Network in South Africa Conference (Johannesburg, South Africa, September 21, 2018), 6.

16 Ruth-Heffelbower, *Anabaptists Are Back*, 38.

17 Suderman, “Mennonite Experience in South Africa,” 274.

who are grappling with how to apply Anabaptist principles to current times, including care for the Other. Africa has not only spaces of conflict but also a more holistic vision of peace and understanding of the centrality of relationships.¹⁸ We must listen and learn so that, among other things, we can redefine nonviolence as an invitation to be creative.

18 John Paul and Angela Lederach, “Let Us Talk: African Contributions to Peacebuilding,” in *Building Peace from Within: An Examination of Community-based Peacebuilding and Transitions in Africa*, eds. Sylvester Bongani Maphosa, Laura DeLuca, and Alphonse Kearsley (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2014), 50.

Justicia restaurativa y transformación de conflictos

Enfoques para la reflexión y acción comunitaria¹

DANIEL MOYA

Resumen

La justicia restaurativa ofrece una metodología para propiciar procesos comunitarios de reconocimiento de los daños causados por la violencia y emprender el arduo camino de la restauración y la reconciliación social. Promover este tipo de justicia y mantener los procesos restaurativos en medio de la violencia cotidiana requiere combinar esfuerzos de transformación de conflictos y una cultura de paz. En este artículo se recogen experiencias comunitarias desde una pedagogía en justicia restaurativa y transformación de conflictos, con comunidades afrodescendientes, jóvenes de iglesias, y jóvenes vinculados a pandillas.

Justapaz es una organización anabautista que ha trabajado por más de 26 años en la construcción de paz y la defensa de los derechos humanos en Colombia. Brinda acompañamiento a comunidades socio-eclesiales, víctimas del conflicto armado, campesinos, mujeres, jóvenes y líderes sociales para fortalecer sus capacidades para la acción no-violenta, la construcción de paz, la reconciliación y acceso a derechos.

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Introducción

Los nuevos escenarios del postacuerdo² en Colombia exigen repensar qué tipo de justicia buscamos para restaurar lo que la violencia quebró, para evitar volver a ella. ¿Cómo contrarrestar la lógica de la retribución atada a la cultura intergeneracional de la violencia? ¿Cómo fortalecer las iniciativas locales restaurativas y mantenerlas a largo plazo? Promover una justicia restaurativa y sostener los procesos restaurativos, incluso en medio de la violencia, requiere combinar esfuerzos de transformación de conflictos y una cultura de paz.

En este artículo partiremos con una mirada a la justicia restaurativa (JR) y la transformación de conflictos (TC), empleando estos enfoques pedagógicos para la acción y reflexión comunitaria en contextos de violencia. Luego, como ejercicio práctico, examinaremos cómo fue el acompañamiento brindado por Justapaz y Edupaz —organizaciones basadas en la fe anabautista— en comunidades afrodescendientes, jóvenes de iglesias, y jóvenes vinculados a pandillas; escenarios donde el conflicto armado y la violencia urbana son vivencias cotidianas, pero donde existe el compromiso y la esperanza de construir la paz.

1. La justicia restaurativa

La justicia restaurativa (JR) es una filosofía sobre la justicia que sirve como marco ético para la paz y la reconciliación en contextos de violencia. Tiene una escala de aplicación amplia, diversa y compleja. En la práctica, la JR son procesos a nivel personal y colectivo, que buscan transformar los conflictos y romper las cadenas de violencia y venganza, centrándose en la restauración de las relaciones quebrantadas por la violencia. La JR es, por lo tanto, una contrapropuesta a la justicia retributiva, la cual sostiene y da vida a la lógica de la venganza.

Bajo la lógica de retribución, se castiga al ofensor de acuerdo al daño cometido. A nivel cultural, es el «ojo por ojo, diente por diente». A nivel jurídico, es la cárcel y la pena de muerte. La lógica de retribución es la fuerza motriz que pone a girar descontroladamente la espiral de violencia. La justicia retributiva, y más precisamente la justicia penal, también puede afectar la dignidad de la víctima pues tiende a privarla de la verdad y la reparación. Así mismo, la dignidad del ofensor se ve afectada al arrebatarle la oportunidad de reconocer sus errores y redimirse frente a la víctima y la comunidad. Adicionalmente, la justicia penal establece una distancia entre víctimas y ofensores; estas no se relacionan direc-

² El postacuerdo es una fase del conflicto en el marco de un proceso formal de paz, que inicia al momento de la firma oficial de un acuerdo de paz entre dos grupos armados. En el caso colombiano, el postacuerdo inicia a partir del 23 de noviembre de 2016, fecha de la firma oficial del acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto, entre el gobierno de Colombia y la guerrilla subversiva FARC. La firma se dio después de cinco años de negociación entre las partes.

tamente, su nexo se da solamente a través de un juez. Esto hace casi imposible la reconciliación entre las partes, pues se eliminan los espacios para la verdad y la reparación. En contextos de conflicto armado, donde los daños de la violencia han afectado a comunidades que claman por verdad y reparación, la justicia retributiva y penal puede ser un obstáculo para el proceso de paz, la sanación personal y comunitaria, y la reconciliación social en Colombia.

La JR ofrece una luz al complejo proceso de paz en Colombia, pues es una apuesta de reconstrucción del tejido social, el cual ha sido gravemente afectado por la violencia intergeneracional. Gracias a que su enfoque es el reconocimiento de la verdad, la reparación de los daños, y el involucramiento de todas las personas afectadas por la violencia, la JR puede abrir el camino hacia la construcción de una paz justa y sostenible, y hacia la reconciliación social.

1.1. La justicia restaurativa como camino para la paz, la reconstrucción del tejido social y la reconciliación

¿Qué horizonte propone la JR para una sociedad que por generaciones ha vivido, y sigue viviendo, en una espiral de violencia? En sociedades divididas por la violencia y el conflicto armado, ese horizonte debe ser la reconstrucción del tejido social y la reconciliación social.

El conflicto armado afecta el tejido social porque genera carencias de identidad, liderazgo, poder, familia, pertenencia, protección, salud, futuro, empleo, tierra, entre otras. También ha generado vivencias o experiencias de violencia, muertes, exclusión social, desplazamiento, reclutamiento forzado, limpieza social, confrontaciones armadas, entre otras. En contextos de conflicto armado se generan luchas por el reconocimiento étnico, cultural y territorial. Reina también la desconfianza, la indiferencia estatal, la corrupción y otros factores económicos. La gente, como respuesta, busca salidas a estas afectaciones sociales, algunos integrándose a grupos armados para buscar esa seguridad³, otros trabajando para reconstruir el tejido social. Y es precisamente ahí, en la comunidad, donde surgen iniciativas de construcción de paz, restauración y reconciliación.

La JR puede aportar a esa reconstrucción del tejido social porque se centra en las relaciones. Según Howard Zehr⁴, la JR busca, prioritariamente, enmendar las ofensas y los daños al centrarse en los daños y necesidades, atender las obligaciones, involucrar a todos los interesados, y usar procesos incluyentes y colaborativos. Si la reconciliación es, como la conceptualiza John Paul Leder-

3 Juan Pablo Lederach, *Tejiendo relaciones. Procesos de diálogo y negociación en contextos de conflicto armado* (Bogotá: Clara, 2003).

4 Howard Zehr, *El pequeño libro de la justicia restaurativa* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007).

ach⁵, el espacio donde se encuentran la verdad, la justicia, la misericordia y la paz, entonces la JR es el instrumento para realizarla por su enfoque especial en la verdad y la justicia para construir la paz.

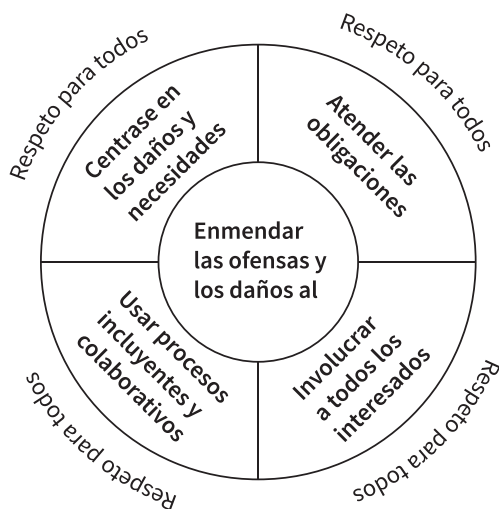


Gráfico «El lente restaurativo»⁶

1.2. Justicia restaurativa y transformación de conflictos

¿Qué son las prácticas restaurativas y cómo aportan a la transformación de los conflictos? Las prácticas restaurativas son acciones y procesos que surgen de las comunidades en contextos de violencia para fomentar una cultura de paz y reconciliación a través de la restauración personal y comunitaria. Las prácticas restaurativas locales ayudan a transformar los conflictos porque buscan atender las afectaciones de la violencia, contribuyendo al reconocimiento de los daños causados y de los daños sufridos, identificando las relaciones quebrantadas, y promoviendo el diálogo sobre ellas en la comunidad, como rutas para enmendar esos daños.

⁵ John Paul Lederach, *Construyendo la paz. Reconciliación sostenible en sociedades divididas* (Bogotá: Códice, 2007²).

⁶ Tomado de Howard Zehr, *El pequeño libro de la justicia restaurativa* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007), 41.

En su obra *El pequeño libro de transformación de conflictos*⁷, John Paul Lederach expone que los ejes claves para visibilizar la raíz del conflicto y las oportunidades para su transformación son: a) los principales «episodios» de conflictos que han marcado la vida de las comunidades y barrios; b) el sistema de relaciones sociales en el que los conflictos se han desarrollado; y c) los aspectos estructurales y culturales del contexto. Teniendo esto en cuenta, la JR contribuye a la transformación de los conflictos porque ayuda a: a) la memoria histórica y reconocimiento de los hechos de violencia en una comunidad; b) expone el sistema de relaciones sociales e involucra a los actores en el diálogo; y c) fomenta una cultura de paz y reconciliación. En la siguiente tabla se contrastan los enfoques mencionados:

Enfoque analítico del conflicto	Enfoque restaurativo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Los episodios del conflicto que han marcado la vida de las comunidades y barrios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atender las afectaciones que la violencia ha dejado en la vida de las personas y comunidades. • Ayudar a reconocer los daños causados y los daños sufridos.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sistema de relaciones sociales en donde se desarrolla el conflicto 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identificar las relaciones quebrantadas y diseñar rutas para la restauración de esas relaciones entre ofensores, víctimas y comunidad. • Ayudar a que los ofensores asuman responsabilidad y verdad.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspectos estructurales y culturales en donde se desarrolla el conflicto 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acompañar procesos que ayuden a transformar la cultura de violencia y venganza en una cultura de paz y reconciliación.

Tabla 1: Enfoque analítico del conflicto y enfoque restaurativo⁸.

El reconocimiento de los daños causados y la toma de responsabilidad por parte de los ofensores, es un momento obligatorio para el proceso de una justicia restaurativa. Para sanar y ser restauradas, las víctimas necesitan saber la verdad de lo ocurrido y ser reconocidas como tales. Esto incluye la necesidad de reparación y la no repetición. La JR pone en el centro del proceso de justicia a la víctima y la necesidad de verdad, ofreciendo una metodología para que las víctimas se empoderen y reclamen justicia, verdad y reparación. Howard Zehr lo explica así:

Las víctimas necesitan reconocimiento que lo que les pasó estuvo mal, que no fue justo y no fue merecido. Necesitan la oportunidad de hablar la verdad de lo que les ocurrió, incluyendo su sufrimiento. Necesitan ser

⁷ *El pequeño libro de transformación de conflictos* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2009), 34-37.

⁸ Tabla elaborada por el autor.

escuchados y afirmados [...] Como parte de esta experiencia de justicia, las víctimas necesitan saber qué pasos se están tomando para rectificar el daño y reducir las oportunidades de que vuelva a ocurrir [...] pueden querer la restitución, no sólo para la recuperación material sino para la afirmación moral implicada en el reconocimiento que el hecho fue indebido y en el esfuerzo de arreglar las cosas.⁹

Es en el contexto relacional donde pueden surgir procesos de restauración y reconciliación, tanto a nivel personal como colectivo. Por eso la comunidad puede, a través de procesos restaurativos, construir la paz desde su vivencia, desde lo local, y en medio de la violencia. Interpretando a Zehr, Lederach explica:

[Las iniciativas de justicia restaurativa] son intentos de explorar el impacto de las relaciones rotas en el contexto de las relaciones interpersonales y comunitarias específicas. Para muchas personas, estos modelos pueden parecer microorientados en su aplicación, pero ahí precisamente está su genialidad. La fuerza que impulsa a los enfoques restaurativos no es una que permanezca a la espera de la política y las decisiones de las más altas instancias, ni que presuponga que su acción concreta suministra una respuesta comprehensiva a los problemas del conjunto del sistema. Por el contrario, estos esfuerzos pintan un cuadro diferente del cambio social, que depende de las prácticas de accesibilidad, de reconectar a las personas en relaciones reales, y de responsabilidad local.¹⁰

Los procesos restaurativos son procesos de reconocimiento social y personal del sujeto victimizado y crean espacios para escuchar la voz de las víctimas y reconocer su historia de vida. Esto es un gran aporte para la reconciliación. Así lo expresa Lederach:

Las personas necesitan la oportunidad y el espacio para expresar el trauma y el dolor provocados por lo que se ha perdido y la ira que acompaña el dolor y las injusticias que han sufrido. Que las partes implicadas admitan y reconozcan la legitimidad de esa experiencia es determinante para la dinámica de la reconciliación. Una cosa es conocer, pero reconocer es un fenómeno social muy diferente... La reconciliación como encuentro plantea que el espacio para admitir el pasado e imaginar el futuro son los ingredientes necesarios para reconstruir el presente. Para que esto suceda las personas deben descubrir formas de encontrarse consigo mismas y con

⁹ Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 28.

¹⁰ John Paul Lederach, *La imaginación moral. El arte y el alma de construir la paz* (Bogotá: Norma, 2008), 219-220.

sus enemigos, sus esperanzas y sus miedos.¹¹

Haciendo énfasis en la naturaleza relacional de construir la paz y la reconciliación, Lederach propone que «la construcción de la paz debe estar arraigada en las realidades subjetivas y empíricas que determinan las necesidades y expectativas de las personas, y responder a esas realidades».¹² Por lo tanto, las iniciativas de justicia restaurativa que puedan surgir de las experiencias locales aportarán enormemente a la construcción de la paz en Colombia, como mecanismos para la transformación de los continuos conflictos territoriales, que en muchos lugares del territorio nacional se han exacerbado por la nueva configuración de actores en los nuevos escenarios del postacuerdo.

1.3. Escala de prácticas restaurativas

No existe un solo tipo de intervención o práctica restaurativa. El siguiente diagrama propone que las prácticas restaurativas pasan de ser informales a formales a medida que existe más planificación, tiempo e involucramiento de más personas en los procesos. Las prácticas formales son más completas en responder a los daños, son más estructuradas, y pueden tener mayor impacto sobre el ofensor.



Escala de prácticas restaurativas¹³

Una práctica restaurativa informal puede ser una simple respuesta afectiva en donde el que ha sufrido el mal informa al victimario cómo se siente sobre el

¹¹ John Paul Lederach, *Construyendo la paz. Reconciliación sostenible en sociedades divididas* (Bogotá: Códice, 2007), 60-61.

¹² Lederach, *Construyendo la paz*, 60.

¹³ Tomado de Ted Wachtel, «¿Qué es ser restaurativo? Justicia restaurativa en la vida cotidiana: Más allá del ritual formal» en *Ser restaurativo*, Gaceta 01 (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar/Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, Diciembre 2016), 13. Disponible en: http://www.icbf.gov.co/sites/default/files/Ser-Restaurativo_Gaceta_N1.pdf.

incidente¹⁴. Otras prácticas restaurativas informales pueden invitar al ofensor a reflexionar sobre el daño causado. En el centro de la escala se sitúan las reuniones espontáneas restaurativas; éstas ocurren sin planificación, donde puede haber pedido de perdón. Las reuniones de grupo, siguiendo la escala, son espacios formales sin ser una reunión restaurativa formal. En estos espacios grupales se les puede preguntar a los ofensores sobre la ofensa, sobre sus pensamientos y sentimientos, para ayudarles a identificar cómo y quiénes han sido afectados por sus acciones. La reunión de grupo también puede ser un espacio para que los que se han visto afectados expresen sus sentimientos. Por último, se pueden dar reuniones o rituales formales restaurativos.

2. Prácticas restaurativas comunitarias: la experiencia de acompañamiento a tres comunidades en contextos de violencia armada y violencia urbana.

Utilizando los enfoques pedagógicos de TC y JR, se brindó acompañamiento a tres procesos comunitarios en el marco del programa «Liderando la paz: justicia restaurativa y transformación de conflictos», iniciativa de Justapaz y Edupaz en tres diferentes comunidades en Cauca y Valle del Cauca durante 2017-2018. Como resultado del acompañamiento, se generaron prácticas restaurativas informales y formales.

El proceso de acompañamiento a las tres comunidades fue, en sí, una práctica restaurativa formal por la metodología de convocar reuniones grupales con regularidad, buscando crear espacios de diálogo y reflexión para identificar los daños causados y sufridos, y los actores involucrados y afectados por la violencia. Fue a su vez un proceso de fortalecimiento comunitario en cuanto a cómo acompañar a niños, niñas y jóvenes en riesgo por conflicto armado y violencia urbana, desde la fomentación de una cultura de paz. Cada comunidad, como producto del proceso, diseñó e implementó una propuesta restaurativa relevante a su contexto. Las propuestas restaurativas se orientaron a continuar los procesos comunitarios de reconocimiento de daños.

Recogemos ahora algunas reflexiones del proceso de acompañamiento realizado desde un enfoque pedagógico en JR y TC.

2.1. Líderes y lideresas afrodescendientes

El conflicto armado ha dejado su huella en las poblaciones del Cauca. El departamento del Cauca registra 292 662 víctimas del conflicto armado, según los datos más recientes de Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV, 2018)¹⁵. El incumplimiento del gobierno frente al Acuerdo de Paz, y el abandono en los territorios,

¹⁴ *Ibíd.*, 14.

¹⁵ <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>. Acceso del 12 febrero 2019, el conteo más reciente fue el 1 enero 2019.

según líderes comunitarios, ha intensificado la violencia y las afectaciones a la sociedad civil en el territorio. Problemáticas como minería ilegal, presencia de multinacionales, presencia de grupos armados ilegales, bandas criminales, pobreza, desigualdad y violencia doméstica, también han sido identificadas por líderes y lideresas de la región.

El acompañamiento a líderes y lideresas afrodescendientes en Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, dejó profundas reflexiones en cuanto a los daños que las comunidades han sufrido y cómo llegar a la restauración. El profundo sentido de identidad como víctimas y sobrevivientes del conflicto hace que la justicia se entienda en el ámbito de lo colectivo. En este sentido, los conceptos del perdón y reparación colectiva son pilares fundamentales para la justicia restaurativa comunitaria. La comunidad, por lo tanto, alza su voz frente a la invisibilización sistemática por parte del Estado, que muchas veces les niega el derecho a ser reconocidos como víctimas del conflicto armado. El sentido de comunidad y su reconocimiento como víctimas es, por lo tanto, un recurso local fundamental para la construcción de la paz. En palabras de los líderes y lideresas:

Se está pensando en una justicia restaurativa desde otro nivel. La comunidad quiere que se les reconozca que sí son víctimas. La Unidad de Víctimas lo que hace es entregarle una resolución declarando que no son víctimas, cuando a ellos sí les tocó vivir en carne propia los hechos violentos. Si hay indemnización, debe ser para que encontremos a nuestros desaparecidos, que poco hablan de eso. Hay muchos desaparecidos en nuestras comunidades (Lideresa comunitaria, Santander de Quilichao).

Otra lección aprendida del proceso con comunidades afrodescendientes, es la necesidad de enfrentar los conflictos interétnicos y territoriales desde un enfoque restaurativo. El grupo de trabajo analizó cómo utilizar un lente restaurativo frente a un conflicto comunitario:

Conflicto identificado: Conflicto entre comunidad indígena y comunidad afrocolombiana por la propiedad de la finca «Las Pirámides».	
Desde la justicia retributiva/punitiva	Desde la justicia restaurativa
<p>Infracción: Constitución de un consejo comunitario dentro de otro consejo ya establecido.</p> <p>Acción: Acciones jurídicas para anular la existencia del consejo comunitario de Afro-Lomitas.</p>	<p>Estrategia: La Asociación de Consejos Comunitarios del Norte del Cauca debe jugar un rol mediador para fortalecer internamente el liderazgo afrocolombiano.</p> <p>Observación: No será fácil reconstruir las confianzas internas de la propia organización.</p>
<p>Infracción: Ocupación de comunidad indígena en la finca.</p> <p>Acción: Desalojo legítimo, dado que están invadiendo un predio privado.</p>	<p>Acción: Es necesario llevar esta situación a la Mesa Interétnica y revisar los acuerdos previos establecidos entre la comunidad indígena y la afrocolombiana.</p>

Por último, se analizó con el equipo de líderes el punto 5 del acuerdo de paz, el Acuerdo sobre las Víctimas del Conflicto, y cómo contribuye a la justicia restaurativa. Se presentaron los principios orientadores de la justicia restaurativa y se contrastaron con los principios orientadores del acuerdo sobre las víctimas:

Principios orientadores de la justicia restaurativa:	Principios orientadores del Acuerdo sobre las Víctimas:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participación de la víctima• Responsabilidad del ofensor• Encuentro con la víctima y la comunidad afectada• Esclarecimiento de la verdad• Reparación a la víctima• Sanar relaciones y construir comunidad• Preparar las bases para la reconciliación	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• El reconocimiento de las víctimas• El reconocimiento de responsabilidad• Satisfacción de los derechos de las víctimas• La participación de las víctimas• El esclarecimiento de la verdad• La reparación de las víctimas• Las garantías de protección y seguridad a las víctimas• La garantía de no repetición• Principio de reconciliación• Enfoque de derechos• Reparación integral para la construcción de la paz

Como resultado del proceso, se crea la iniciativa local «Artistas por la paz», para «crear un espacio de sanidad para jóvenes víctimas del conflicto armado en el que puedan reconstruir a través del arte la memoria de su comunidad» (Propuesta restaurativa Artistas por la Paz). Con ese objetivo, líderes y lideresas realizan un taller de reflexiones sobre la justicia y la paz, un taller sobre la identificación de riesgos y acciones preventivas, un video conversatorio sobre el conflicto y los daños que las comunidades han sufrido, y una exposición artística.

2.2. Jóvenes de iglesias

El acompañamiento a jóvenes de iglesias responde a una necesidad de transformar las dinámicas de violencia en el barrio Manuela Beltrán en la ciudad de Cali, uno de los barrios que conforman la comuna 14 y donde está situada la Iglesia Peniel, de los Hermanos Menonitas. La comuna 14 es una de las comunas con más altos índices de violencia en la ciudad de Cali. Pobreza, desigualdad, violencia urbana, microtráfico y violencia intrafamiliar han sido problemáticas que la comunidad identifica como las que más afectan sobre todo a sus niños, niñas y jóvenes.

Los jóvenes de iglesia del barrio expresaron sus deseos de vivir libres del miedo que causa la violencia en su entorno. La paz existirá, expresan algunos jóvenes, cuando la gente se pueda desplazar a cualquier lugar sin tener temor. Una lideresa juvenil lo expresó así:

Me imagino un futuro diferente a lo que estamos viviendo ahorita. Poder salir sin miedo, que no haya la necesidad de robar, que todos los muchachos puedan estar trabajando y estudiando. (Lideresa juvenil, Iglesia Peniel, Cali)

Durante el acompañamiento desde una pedagogía en JR y TC, los jóvenes de la Iglesia Peniel organizaron una acción pública por la paz en el parque del barrio. Los participantes elaboraron un telar por la paz donde pintaron un mensaje por la paz con el propósito de ubicarlo fuera de la iglesia. Los mensajes fueron: «La paz estable, verdadera y duradera sólo en Jesús la podemos encontrar» y «Una paz sin fronteras», haciendo alusión a las fronteras invisibles que existen en el barrio por causa de las pandillas.

Por último, los jóvenes de la iglesia realizaron «Desayunos por la paz», como iniciativa de acercamiento a jóvenes de pandillas del barrio, con charlas grupales facilitadas en torno a temas de dignidad humana, cadenas de violencia, perdón y restauración. Los jóvenes expresaron:

Los jóvenes, como iglesia, queremos trabajar con los vecinos de nuestra comunidad, con jóvenes vinculados a pandillas que roban y hacen daño a los miembros de la comunidad. Este ejercicio exploratorio se propone como un espacio de construcción de confianza para reflexionar con ellos sobre el propósito para sus vidas (Justificación de la propuesta «Desayunos por la paz», jóvenes de la Iglesia Peniel).

Estas actividades son los primeros procesos de transformación de conflictos y de cultura de paz en el barrio, emprendidos por los jóvenes de la iglesia, quienes buscan restaurar las relaciones comunitarias que han sido quebrantadas por la violencia urbana.

2.3. Jóvenes vinculados a pandillas

Siloé, como se le conoce a la comuna 20 de la ciudad de Cali, es el sector con mayor número de homicidios al año. En Siloé se cometen aproximadamente cuarenta y cinco homicidios por año (según la Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali, 2017). Este sector ha sido impactado por serios problemas de violencia, pobreza, presencia de múltiples pandillas, tráfico de drogas y de armas, entre otros. En Siloé existen 19 pandillas, entre las cuales está la pandilla «La Mina». Es allí, en el sector de «La Mina», donde la Iglesia Cruising for Jesus, de los Hermanos Menonitas, ha llevado a cabo una célula semanal desde el año 2013 con la comunidad del barrio. Edupaz y Justapaz acordaron junto con los líderes de la iglesia y del barrio utilizar este espacio de encuentro semanal para reflexionar con los jóvenes vinculados a esta pandilla sobre temas como la venganza, el perdón, la dignidad humana y la restauración.

Como metodología pedagógica se capacitó en elaboración de artículos de cuero y se realizaron charlas grupales facilitadas desde un enfoque en JR y TC.

El reto es enorme en este contexto, pues la reflexión sobre la justicia restaurativa está abriendo un camino espinoso para estos jóvenes que, en diferentes momentos de sus vidas, han causado daño y violentado a sus prójimos.

Durante el proceso se pudo observar que el concepto de justicia de los jóvenes está ligado a la venganza y la violencia. Esta «justicia armada» se alimenta también de los sentimientos de rabia hacia la autoridad, pues se percibe a la policía como una institución que comete actos injustos hacia los jóvenes del barrio. En Siloé, la lógica de retribución es la norma de vida:

La justicia de nosotros es la violencia. Ni la misma autoridad se encarga de hacer justicia. Si la autoridad viene y te quita un arma de fuego que está bonita, él no te va a enjuicializar, él se la coge para él y se la vende a los bandidos de la contra, y así viceversa. La justicia de nosotros es un arma, un cuchillo, rocas, la maldad, la violencia, esa es la justicia de nosotros. La justicia de la Biblia ya no funciona. Ojo por ojo, diente por diente. Un diente no, túmbele las muelas completas. (Líder de pandilla, Siloé)

En las condiciones de violencia cotidiana, la muerte es algo normal para la comunidad, pero las heridas que deja son profundas y visibles. El perdón es casi inconcebible en una cultura de violencia:

El encuentro con víctimas es a diario. Es normal ver una muerte. El encuentro entre víctimas, ofensores y comunidad, es algo que necesita mucho tiempo. Cuando hay sangre de por medio esa venganza nunca cesa. Ni yo ni nadie entramos en diálogo cuando hay sangre de por medio. Es muy difícil uno perdonar a una persona que se ha llevado a un ser querido (Líder pandillero, Siloé).

Frente a estos grandes retos, el acompañamiento brindado desde una pedagogía en JR y TC tuvo impacto en algunos de los jóvenes.

La que más me marcó fue una vez que la facilitadora trajo un jarrón, un jarrón que lo habían quebrado y lo habían tratado de armar otra vez. Contó la historia del hijo pródigo, entonces yo me sentía identificado por lo que estaba pasando por ese momento... Ese día me impactó mucho y me identifiqué, y participé, me desahugué, conté el problema y todo, y me empecé a sentir mejor. En un papelito echamos nombres dentro del jarrón de personas que había que pedirle perdón (Líder pandillero, Siloé).

El proceso de acompañamiento fue el primer acercamiento a los jóvenes vinculados a la pandilla, con esfuerzos para una restauración inicial entre estos jóvenes que han sido víctimas convertidos en victimarios. A continuación se recogen las reflexiones de un ejercicio de memoria y restauración:

Círculo de escucha sobre las muertes en la comunidad

Reacciones frente a la realidad de muerte en el barrio:

No hay mucha unión en el barrio, cada uno piensa en sí mismo.

Falta diálogo.

Las cosas se resuelven con armas y violencia.

Uno está esperando que le llegue la noticia de que le pasó algo a uno de los pelaos [jóvenes].

Lo triste es que hasta una de mujer lleva del bulto por intentar que no se agredan.

Si a uno lo van a matar, toca matar.

Como ejercicio de memoria, y continuando la reconstrucción del jarrón, el grupo recordó a personas de la comunidad que han fallecido por causa de la violencia:

Jaime era un joven que pertenecía a la pandilla y fue asesinado en un enfrentamiento con la policía.

Susana era como mi hermana, mi mamá la llevó a casa, pero cuando se enamoró de un joven de la pandilla, alias «salchicha», comenzó a consumir bazuco [potente droga, mezcla de pasta base de cocaína que se fuma con mariguana], se volvió otra persona. Ella murió de cáncer.

Ana está viva, quiero recordarla porque sufrió mucho, cuando la abusaron a sus 14 años y comenzó a consumir sacol [pegamento que se usa para inhalar y drogarse]. Vive en las calles.

Dos jóvenes que fueron contratados por la guerrilla para volar dos torres de energía y el ejército les disparó y murieron.

Dos compañeros (maridos) que he tenido los han asesinado, al primero le dieron seis tiros.

Juan, primo de uno de los participantes, fue asesinado en Brisas de mayo.

Carlos hacía parte de la pandilla, consumía vicio y un día llegaron a su casa y comenzaron a disparar.

Un amigo de Jenny, por robarle la moto lo asesinaron.

Líderes de la comunidad diseñaron e implementaron una propuesta restaurativa utilizando como metodología las charlas grupales desde la JR y la TC, junto con capacitación en elaboración de artículos de cuero. Justificaron la propuesta de la siguiente forma:

La justicia restaurativa se entiende como la posibilidad de los ofensores de reconstruir sus vidas, reconociendo su valor como personas y desarrollando nuevas habilidades. Esta propuesta es restaurativa en tanto reconoce la dignidad de las personas y su posibilidad de cambio. Es restaurativa en tanto impulsa valores como el trabajo en la juventud (Propuesta restaurativa Cruising for Jesus).

Reflexiones finales

Utilizar los enfoques pedagógicos de la justicia restaurativa y la transformación de conflictos permite la reflexión comunitaria en torno a identificar y reconocer los daños causados y las relaciones quebrantadas por la violencia, ofreciendo a su vez posibilidades para transformar los conflictos y construir la paz a través de prácticas restaurativas locales. La restauración es un proceso a largo plazo

que para una Colombia que quiere salir de la guerra tiene que ver, inicialmente, con el reconocimiento de los daños causados. Además, se requieren herramientas de transformación de conflictos para lidiar con esa violencia cotidiana que continúa imperando en el territorio. El éxito del actual proceso de paz tendrá que ver en la capacidad para que éste se arraigue en las comunidades en medio de la violencia y se construya ahí, en la cotidianidad y en la localidad.

The Colombian Peace Accords and the Church

PETER WIGGINTON

A Colombian refugee here in Quito—let's just call her Valeria—who is connected to the Quito Mennonite church where I work, recently told me that the conflict in Colombia can be summed up as an injustice. It is neither just nor fair, she said, stating the reality of her own life situation, that one must leave everything one had only because some people think their ambition for power gives them the right to take a person's life.

According to most sources, Colombia has entered a post-conflict, or post-peace, period since the November 24, 2016, revised peace accords were signed between the *Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común* (Common Alternative Revolutionary Force, or FARC) rebels and the Colombian government. The agreement was later ratified by congress on November 30, 2016. Since the signing of the peace accords, there have been many more stories like Valeria's, told by people who, likewise, have left Colombia, or who have moved to other parts of Colombia to start new lives. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of Colombian refugees entering Ecuador has continued to hold relatively steady over the past few years, and the number of internally displaced people within Colombia has actually increased. One of the main reasons for this is increased violence in the parts of the country where rebels had controlled territory. Now these territories, which are ideal for growing coca and poppies for drug production, are being occupied by criminal gangs.¹

The Mennonite church in Colombia has been deeply committed to the work of spreading Jesus's commandment of peace, and the Mennonite churches in Ecuador and Venezuela have given a loving embrace to Colombian refugees over the years. This being said, what has been the voice of the Christian church, and particularly the Mennonite church, through Colombia's political process

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1 Alma Guillermoprieto, "The Healing of Colombia," *National Geographic* 233, no. 1 (January 2018), <http://libproxy.bridgeport.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?>

and now in the time of post peace? This essay reflects on this question by reviewing the contentious peace process and listening to the voices of Colombian Mennonites. As I will show, these reflections teach us that our hope in the midst of the transition from violence to peace is in Jesus.

The Peace Accords and the October Plebiscite

The talks that produced the peace accords in Colombia started officially in August 2012. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos's government and the FARC had had preliminary talks beginning in 2011. Over the next four years, talks in Havana, Cuba, would generate a 297-page document delineating a peace deal and subsequent disarmament, and a pathway for guerrillas to reenter society and the political sphere. Steps were also laid out to consider victims and others who had been affected by the violence and to deal with the perpetrators of crimes against humanity. International peace and negotiation experts took part in the entire process. A noteworthy point is that there were no women included in the process until September 2014 when a Sub-commission of Gender was appointed even though the majority of victims from the conflict have been women.²

The final peace agreement was presented in Havana in August 2016. To allow the Colombian people to decide to ratify the proposed peace accords, President Santos proposed a national plebiscite, or referendum, on October 2, 2016. The question posed in the plebiscite was, "Do you support the accord that puts an end to armed conflict and constructs a stable and durable nation?" The "no" vote won by less than half of a percent. Complex issues and misinterpretations surrounded the actual vote. There was also very low turnout—less than 40 percent; on the day of the vote, many areas that had been most affected by violence experienced harsh rains and flooding that likely kept people away from the polls, which closed at five o'clock p.m.³

Subsequently, a modified version of the peace accords was ratified by the Colombian congress in November 2016. Between then, when the peace accords went into effect, and January 2018, only 18 percent of the actual accords were advanced. In that short window of time, however, substantial changes took place in Colombian life. Almost nine thousand weapons were turned over to

2 Donny Meertens, "Gender and Land Justice in Colombia: Challenges for the Post-peace Accords Era/Justicia de Genero y Tierras en Colombia: Desafíos para la Era del 'Pos-acuerdo,'" *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 102 (October 2016): 89–100.

3 "Qué dice de Colombia que haya habido 62% de abstención en el histórico plebiscito por el proceso de paz," BBC Mundo, October 3, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37539590>.

UN forces,⁴ and in 2017, Colombia saw its lowest homicide rate in the past thirty years.⁵ As pastor Peter Stucky of the Mennonite church in Teosquillo, Bogotá, puts it: “When you look at wards of military hospitals completely empty, and no longer having victims of war and also being able to travel, these are huge benefits.” Stucky also points out that during this entire post-accord process, the FARC have largely upheld their part of the deal, and now it is up to the government to uphold their side. Even though they may have done little so far, it is a start.⁶

The Mennonite Church as It Works for Peace

Since Valeria and her family have come to Ecuador, they have received food rations, school supplies, and other support from the Refugee Project at the Quito Mennonite Church. Valeria told me that the mission and work of the Mennonite church in Quito is a great help for people in her situation, because in addition to providing material assistance, the church is offering spiritual support—a wonderful refuge for people who are disoriented.

This is just one of many ways that the Mennonite church in Colombia has been an incredible example of peace over the years. In 1987, the church started working toward formalizing the option of conscientious objection to armed military service. In 1991, they worked to incorporate conscientious objection into the constitution.⁷

The Mennonite church has also worked with mediation in formal and informal settings. Formal mediation has taken place in partnership with the National Council of Peace, *Consejo Nacional de Paz*, “and in a context of public, open and participatory peace policies.”⁸ Oscar Herrera from the Colombian Mennonite Church (Iglesia Menonita de Colombia, or, IMCOL) Mission Committee expresses how the Mennonite church has been working with dia-

4 “La ONU Revela Cuántas Armas Han Entregado Las FARC,” CNN, August 15, 2017, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/08/15/la-onu-revela-cuantas-armas-han-entregado-las-farc>.

5 “Tasa de Homicidios en Colombia en 2017 Es la Más Baja en 30 Años,” *elcolombiano*, December 26, 2017, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/tasa-de-homicidios-en-colombia-bajo-en-2017-GX7918080>.

6 Peter Stucky, personal interview by the author, October 26, 2018, Quito.

7 Esperanza Hernández Delgado, *Intervenir antes que Anochezca: Mediaciones, Intermediaciones y diplomacias Noviolentas de Base Social en el Conflicto Armado Colombiano* (Bucaramanga: Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 2012).

8 Hernández, *Intervenir antes que Anochezca*.

logue and bringing together the rebel fighters and the Colombian government for many years, even before the peace accords started to be formed.⁹

The Mennonite church, together with other actors, also lobbied intensively for the “yes” vote in the October plebiscite to ratify the peace accords. The Mennonite church joined other voices in praising the signing of the peace accords and organized forums and talks and participated in marches supporting the peace accords and the “yes” vote. Herrera explains that “the Mennonite church supported the Yes [vote] . . . but there were some churches of other denominations that supported the No [vote], supporting the leadership of [the previous president], Uribe Velez.”¹⁰ Officially, the Mennonite church in Colombia put out a statement urging fellow Christians and all citizens to vote “Yes.” The National Committee of the Mennonite Christian Church of Colombia recognized “that peace is built with long-term commitment and that war, as described in James 3, only responds to a diabolic wisdom that feeds confrontations and all kinds of evil; [we] affirm that God will reward those who seek peace among people, giving them peace and justice.”¹¹

Yes or No

Many people supported the “no” vote, including many Evangelical Christians. Evangelical leaders stated that the peace accords promoted values they were opposed to, such as gender and LGBTQ issues, and that the accords put their ideals of traditional family at risk.¹² Some of the disputed sections of the accord included the following:

That the implementation be made taking into account the diversity of gender, ethnicity and culture, and that measures be adopted for the populations and the most humble and most vulnerable groups, especially children, women, people in condition of disability and victims, and especially by the same territorial approach.

That gender equity be promoted through the adoption of specific measures

9 Oscar Herrera, personal interview by the author, November 11, 2018, Quito.

10 Herrera, personal interview, November 11, 2018.

11 “Manifiesto del Comité Nacional frente al Plebiscito: Iglesia Cristiana Mennonita de Colombia,” 2016, <http://www.imcol.org/index.php/2014-12-28-21-35-21/noticias-imcol/94-manifiesto-del-comite-nacional-frente-al-plebiscito>.

12 Meertens, “Gender and Land”; Natalio Cosoy, “El Rol de las Iglesias Cristianas evangélicas en la victoria del “No” en el plebiscito de Colombia,” BBC Mundo, October 5, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37560320>; “Las FARC no Retrocederán en Enfoque de Género,” *Semana*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/las-farc-no-estan-dispuestas-a-retirar-de-los-acuerdos-el-enfoque-de-genero/498710>.

to ensure that women and men participate and benefit on an equal footing from the implementation of this Agreement.

Recognize and take into account the needs, characteristics and economic, cultural and social peculiarities of territories and rural communities—children, women and men, including people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity—and guarantee social-environmental sustainability.¹³

CEDECOL (The Evangelical Conference of Colombia) released a statement with specific objections to the text; they agreed that the accords do not specifically contain the words “gender ideology” but that they do leave a focus on gender and other terms such as “*gender diversity, gender identity, and perspectives of gender . . .*”; thus overloading its application guaranteeing the right of women and generating ambiguity and confusion.”¹⁴

Many people repeated this perception of an imposed gender ideology, some even accusing the UN of insisting on it being in the peace accords. Others went as far as inventing things that weren’t in the accords, saying that the document supported abortion, for example, when the word abortion never appears in the text.¹⁵ The UN did support inclusive language in the document, and the idea of gender equity actually complies with many international accords and with the Colombian constitution, but there is no evidence of an imposed gender ideology in the accords.

Stucky points out that the “no” votes were not limited to conservative churches or Evangelicals. He cites the example of the city of Bogotá, home to many Evangelicals and conservative churches, as a case in point, where the “yes” vote won by a large margin.

The Catholic church in general had a more hands-off approach, not officially taking sides with the “yes” or “no” vote but still encouraging people to vote, although it was pretty clear to many that Pope Francis was openly supporting the peace accords.¹⁶ On the other side of the fence, many in Catholic groups were very much against the peace deal. For months leading up to the vote, some Catholic television stations ran advertisements supporting the “no” vote. And a

13 Cosoy, “El rol de las iglesias cristianas evangélicas.”

14 Pablo Moreno, Sandra Liliana Palacios, and Edgar Castaño, “Propuesta de Ajuste de los Acuerdos de Paz,” CEDECOL, October, 13, 2016, <https://cedecol.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PROPUESTA-MESA-NACIONAL-IGLESIA-EVANGELICA-FINAL.pdf>.

15 Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli and Cristina Camacho, “Debunking the Myths about ‘Gender Ideology’ in Colombia,” Washington Office on Latin America, October 25, 2016, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/debunking-myths-gender-ideology-colombia/>.

16 Katy Watson, “Pope Visits Colombia Seeking to Heal Divides,” *BBC News*, Bogotá, September 6, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41174077>.

conservative politician, José Galat, was even quoted as saying that the bishops who supported the pope were denying the truths of their faith, and “those who deny our faith are not Catholics.”¹⁷

Many people insist that conservative Catholics and Evangelicals tipped the vote against the peace accords. Francesco Manetto states, “Although there were no explicit pronouncements during the campaign, some sectors of the Catholic community and the votes of the Evangelicals, representing some 10 million Colombians, tipped the balance in favor of the No.”¹⁸

Others accuse Uribe, the ex-president, of using the Evangelicals and conservative Catholics for his political maneuvering. Uribe had been an outspoken opponent of Santos since the peace talks started. Then, Stucky states, Uribe used the October plebiscite to “link the Peace Accords with an entire discussion, what the Evangelicals call ‘ideology of gender,’ that had nothing to do with the plebiscite or the Peace Accords.” An entire religious conflict was created. As Lester Kurtz states: “Because of its significance, individuals and collectivities invest a great deal of themselves and their energies in a religious conflict. Ironically, however, what is highly personal is clothed in cosmic rhetoric: ‘It is not for my interests that I take this stand, but for God’s sake!’”¹⁹

Peace at Long Last

After losing the plebiscite, the FARC and others said they would not back down and would not change their stance on gender issues. They went as far as saying that the issue of gender was a fundamental part of the peace accords.²⁰ But the issues that people in the “no” camp had against the original peace document were not only about gender and sexual orientation. Many accused the accords of going soft on perpetrators of crimes against humanity, even though the accords explicitly state: “It is not allowed to amnesty crimes against humanity, or other crimes defined under the Rome Statute.”²¹

17 Francesco Manetto, “El Papa Francisco, la paz y la división de la Iglesia,” *El País*, September 8, 2017, https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/09/07/colombia/1504752541_375899.html.

18 Manetto, “El Papa Francisco.”

19 Lester R. Kurtz, “From Heresies to Holy Wars: Toward a Theory of Religious Conflict,” *Abimsa Nonviolence* (March/April 2005): 145.

20 “Las FARC no Retrocederán en Enfoque de Género,” *Semana.com*.

21 “Texto completo del Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera,” Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, August 24, 2016, <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/procesos-y-conversaciones/Paginas/Texto-completo-del-Acuerdo-Final-para-la-Terminacion-del-conflicto.aspx>.

Finally—after the October 2, 2016, vote—the government worked with different leaders and interested populations to make adjustments to the document and then presented them to the FARC negotiation team, who changed several points. The resulting agreement included making clear the penalties for perpetrators of war crimes; limiting the Special Peace Jurisdiction slightly; excluding certain crimes from the transitional justice system; not including the entire accord as part of the Colombian constitution; extending the rural development program five years; and, finally, adjusting language on gender equity to prevent misinterpretation.²²

What Now?

The current stance of the Mennonite church is to continue supporting and working toward the full implementation of the peace accords. According to Stucky, the churches believe that the “peace accords are good and have already produced huge benefits for our society.” But there is still a lot of work to do; many other churches in Colombia don’t necessarily feel the same way, and the Mennonite church, it would seem, is in a small minority. According to Stucky, other churches are no longer focused on the peace accords and do not see them as a priority to be completed. A huge gap exists between what is going on with the post-peace work in Colombia and what is being preached and shared from scriptures—“between the situation we are living and the interest of the churches in that situation.” Stucky goes on to explain that many other, especially Evangelical and Pentecostal, churches are focused on the traditional gospel, on “prosperity, growing, healing and don’t read the scriptures from Jesus, instead more from the old testament and spiritualistic emphasis.”

As previously stated, there are still many armed groups in Colombia, and they are now taking over territories where the FARC once had strongholds. Many of these groups are considered illegal, whereas the FARC and the still active *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN)²³ are considered to be involved in political warfare. The other groups might be paramilitary groups or also soldiers that disbanded from the FARC. There are also many delinquent groups involved in the drug trade or drug-related activities. The situation is getting more and more complicated as the years go by. Stucky states that the Mennonite church’s position on all of this is markedly different from other NGOs, especially since the church plans to be involved in Colombia for many more years—indeinitely, really.

Herrera highlights the Mennonite church program called “Bridges of Peace” that has striven to bring the ELN and the government together to have

22 Sanchez-Garzoli and Camacho, “Debunking the myths.”

23 Currently talks have completely broken down between the ELN and the government.

talks, although the initiatives have stalled at times. The church's Anabaptist theology requires that members be in contact with the society where they are living and worshiping, rather than staying only within the walls of the church. Stucky points out that the "church understands God's priority for peace for human kind, that it is not just an outer peace, it is an inner and outer peace." The Mennonite churches know that they must work for peace, that God's will is going to be accomplished, and that God's followers must pray and align themselves with God's purpose. In his closing, Stucky shares the following:

We need to keep on working and praying for peace, bringing hope to the country and being a factor of consolation and humanitarian aid to those who are suffering. The victims of the powers that be change, so at this point we have plenty of victims from Venezuela also. The other thing about the church is that one realizes that ideology from left or right tend to be bad counselors. They talk and promise and attack each other. The folks that get trampled are the common folks.

Nicolas, another Colombian refugee in Ecuador, agrees with Valeria. He tells me that the conflict in Colombia is a war of power, not so much of money. The various groups seek power in order to impose fear in the community and thus maintain submissiveness. Fear that is infused into the community is compounded by the authorities' complicity and lack of commitment.

Nicolas has also received support from the Mennonite Church in Quito and says that the missionary work of the church is a very great endorsement. He says, "all of us here come looking for hope and . . . the church improves things and God is the only one who gives true hope. The support of the mission of the church helps give us more strength to move forward."

These two final statements are powerful testaments to how the church leaders and political leaders could have responded during the October 2 plebiscite in Colombia. Groups pursuing political power could have offered hope instead of imposing fear. And the church, instead of listening to the left or right, could have been looking to Jesus to help them decide to vote "yes" or "no."

Chilean-Mapuche Conflict, the Role of Pentecostals, and the Alternative of Anabaptist Political Witness

LUIS ARÁNGUIZ KAHN AND ELVIS CASTRO LAGOS

The Anabaptist tradition has many distinctive theological contributions. One of these, which is especially relevant for this article, is its view of the political. In the United States, Anabaptists have had a small but strong presence, with prominent public theologians. There the spectrum of theological discussion is wide, thanks to the historical presence and significance of different Protestant traditions in the country. And Anabaptist theology, with its capacity to raise relevant positions on sensitive issues such as war and racism, has contributed significantly to the discussion. In this article, we propose that there is need to foster such dialogue between Pentecostals and Anabaptists in Chile, where Anabaptists are an even smaller presence among evangelicals, in order to enhance the Chilean Pentecostal theological view of politics.

In Chile, Anabaptist communities are few among a big evangelical community composed mainly of Pentecostals. Certainly there are other Protestant groups such as Presbyterians and Lutherans, but the evangelical social and political flag today is being waved by Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals. These groups are raising strong questions regarding Christians' role in politics, resulting in closer relations with rightwing politicians. This growing trend among Protestants of intervening in institutional politics, or, more precisely, of getting power, is also present in other countries in the region. This raises a very practical question: how to think and act as an Anabaptist in contexts where Anabaptist communities and thought are not influential? More precisely, how to be an Anabaptist witness beyond Anabaptists?

Let us mention a specific case. The Chilean state has been engaged in a long conflict in the Araucanía region, the territorial zone that has belonged to Mapuche people for centuries. There's an unpleasant history, starting at the end

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of the nineteenth century, regarding the occupation of this area by the Chilean army and the acquisition of Mapuche land by private buyers and the state. Today, the struggle for retaking lands has increased to an armed conflict between some rebel Mapuche groups and the Chilean state. In this setting, more than twenty rural church buildings have been burned in the past few years; many of these attacks have purportedly been committed to protest the imprisonment of Mapuche leaders. Many of the burned temples belonged to evangelical communities, largely made up of Mapuche people.

In this scenario, by the end of 2017 Chile held presidential elections, and rightwing candidate José Antonio Kast proposed to secure order by deploying the army in the conflict zone. Sadly, the result was as expected: some evangelicals supported the candidate under the promise that he could bring peace to Araucanía using military force. Matías Sanhueza, president of the Pastors Council (composed mainly of Chilean, non-Mapuche pastors) from Temuco, the capital of La Araucanía, issued a statement on behalf of the council supporting Kast publicly, even after he lost the election, praying for his “national leadership.”¹

As usual, the case has many complex branches. But there is one clear point: Christians have been harmed in an armed conflict, and some of them—specifically pastors—have taken the side of state violence. For them, this is the natural solution for resolving the chaos in the territory and establishing peace once and for all. During a trial of suspected church attackers in 2017, Sanhueza called the government to guarantee public order and condemn the offenders,² but no mention was made of the background conflict giving rise to the violent protest.

This position, however, is relatively new. In 2016, for instance, the Pastors Council signed a statement that said, “We must make a common effort, based on the truth, to recognize the historically vexatious treatment that Mapuche people have suffered from both the State and the national society.”³ Why is this statement so different from the 2017 declaration? The change in discourse from 2016 to 2017 might be explained by the national presidential elections and the growing number of church buildings that were burned in the conflict. But it is also important to note that in 2017, Sanhueza, who is a Pentecostal pastor, assumed the presidency of the council. It is possible—though by no means

1 Matías Sanhueza, Public Statement, La Araucanía Region Pastors Council. Digital document not available online. Temuco, Chile, 2018.

2 Matías Sanhueza, Statement. Digital Document not available online. Temuco, Chile, 2017.

3 Directory of the Pastors Council, Public Statement, La Araucanía Region Pastors Council on the Conflict Situation in the Region. Digital Document Temuco, Chile, 2016, 7–9, <https://www.camara.cl/pdf.aspx?prmID=64095&prmTIPO=DOCUMENTOCOMISION>.

certain—that the change reflects the new council presidency. This possibility raises an interesting question: what would the council say if the Pentecostal president had an Anabaptist viewpoint?

It is completely understandable that pastors and congregations from various denominations are angry about the situation and calling for justice (it must be noted, though, that many of them live and minister in the city, not in the affected rural areas). And, given their view of political power, it is also understandable that they are calling for stronger action by the state. So, it is not so easy to call them Constantinian and tell them they should abandon every attempt to obtain security. In fact, the idea of asking for military action is just the ending point of a larger theological problem that sometimes is not even on their radar, because theological education is not mandatory in some evangelical churches—especially not in Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal ones.

Given the fear and insecurity of the situation, there is no reason to consider the above reaction as odd. One may question whether fear and insecurity are satisfactory reasons to request military action but not whether those reasons are enough for requesting protection in a wider sense—with or without engaging the army. This latter, critical question can only be addressed theologically. Then, other questions can follow: What can the church expect from the state? Or, what's the role of the church when it is involved in an armed conflict? But none of the answers to these questions will take the fear and insecurity away from the people. In other words, the political reaction concerns an anthropological issue—the fear of death, of losing loved ones, of losing property, of losing the community's church building.

How can an Anabaptist alternative be offered to non-Anabaptist Christians who deal with armed conflict? There are two complementary areas to focus on when raising this question in the Chilean-Mapuche situation: (1) the contextual political conflict and (2) the theological understanding of the political.

Focusing first on the contextual political view, it is important to note that a given conflict has its own particularities stemming from where and when it takes place. But at the same time, every conflict has in common the fact that it is composed of two or more groups confronting each other to achieve a particular good. That is why it is necessary to understand what is mobilizing Mapuche people to fight against the state. It is not mere anarchical intention; it is not mere desire to do damage. There is a disputed good that must be understood in order to have a clear view of the conflict. Along with it, the Christian addition to the understanding of the particular conflict is theological. Christians must add the idea that conflict is a consequence of sin, and sin is present in all struggling groups. There is no simply right or wrong side, no clear friend-or-enemy

dichotomy.⁴ That's why Christians cannot simply trust in the state—not because it has the structure to bring legal order but because there is no guarantee that it will effectively bring justice to the possible rightful reclamation of those who have taken up arms against it when they see no other solution.

In fact, in this conflict there have been regrettable cases of unarmed Mapuche people killed or seriously injured by police forces, children included; the police have violently broken into Mapuche schools and communities. Many non-Christian Mapuche live with insecurity and fear as much as Christians do. Moreover, the state has consistently protected the economic interests of Chilean corporations, to the detriment of local communities. More than merely trusting the state, Christians should strive for and propose ways of reconciliation for the different sides, and remind the authorities that their state position is given in order to impart justice, which goes beyond merely punishing the offenders.

How might we clarify Christians' relation with the state from an Anabaptist theological perspective? Anabaptists have provided a rich insight that can nurture a critical and proactive position. In the view of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, Christians are called to a "critical witness" to those in power, a witness that takes as its primary example Jesus' teaching about "the sword."⁵ Jesus's call to nonviolence and to love the enemy is the basic principle used to define the relation between the Christian and the neighbor. Although a Christian "realist" might argue that these teachings cannot be applied to the political arena but rather only to a limited "social" arena, for Yoder the social and political are intimately related. The awareness of Christians about the nature of political power and its predisposition not only to rule but also to control, dominate, and take human life, should make them always stand in critical distance in order to obey first the commandments of Christ, the Lord of all powers of the earth.

These Anabaptist views can be useful for dialogue with evangelicals involved in situations of armed conflict. Moreover, they open other ways of reaction and action. The church itself as social agent can promote a culture of peace in the middle of conflict, helping damaged people, giving love where there is a lack of hope, and building community among the victims. These options may not establish order as military forces would, but they can bring meaningful change to the lives of the whole community. Embracing this culture of peace

4 German jurist Carl Schmitt conceptualized the political in terms of a friend-enemy distinction. See especially his book *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [German original 1932]).

5 See Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

means that Christians not only can, but must, walk alongside Mapuche people, especially in the current situation.

Fortunately, there are non-Anabaptist pastors and churches that have understood this gospel's commitment, even in the midst of burning temples. One poignant case is that of pastor Daniel Matus, whose church building was burned on July 10, 2018. Matus pastors in a rural Mapuche community, in a church mostly composed of Mapuche people who identify as such. They serve their community and are well regarded by non-Christian neighbors. While their building was still in flames, rather than pursue judicial action, the pastor addressed the unknown attackers, saying, "We love you so much anyway and desire that you may know this God of love."⁶ This is a first step toward a stronger action for justice.

Building Anabaptist witness beyond Anabaptists holds a twofold challenge. Although this challenge is focused in Chile, it can be useful for other contexts provided they focus on the following points. On the one hand, there is a practical need to establish or strengthen communication between Pentecostals and Anabaptists. It is possible and necessary. In Chile, the evangelical majority is Pentecostal. Given this fact and the interest that Pentecostals are increasingly showing in social and political issues, Mennonites can make a great contribution to them given that Mennonite communities in Chile have an interesting relationship with Pentecostalism. As Guenther and Loewen say, "Insofar as the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile (IEMCH) congregations share the core beliefs and much of the worship style of the Pentecostals, they hardly stand out from their Pentecostal surroundings."⁷ This closeness, however, does not mean that there are no differences between Pentecostals and Mennonites. Although there are liturgical and theological similarities given the particular Chilean context, a mutual recognition of these differences can allow for a fruitful exchange between Mennonites and Pentecostals. Mennonites might thereby learn to share their theological understanding of politics in a Pentecostal idiom.

Such theological exchanges have successfully been made in other places. For example, Swedish Pentecostal theologian Michael Grenholm has developed what he calls Charismatic Anabaptism—combining Pentecostal experience of the Holy Spirit with the distinctive Anabaptist commitment to peace

⁶ Video recording, <https://www.facebook.com/maida.francisco.7/videos/2003395586340121>.

⁷ Titus Guenther and Karen Loewen Guenther, *Churches in the Margins: Anabaptist Polygenesis in Chile*, 2018, https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21763/Guenther_Church_on_the_Margins_ENG.pdf, 15.

and justice.⁸ This kind of theological effort can be developed in other places like La Araucanía, according to contextual particularities. Maybe the model of Charismatic Anabaptism can be a strong idea in such a context.

Last, but not least, Pentecostals themselves have a forgotten pacifist tradition around the world that must be reclaimed and from which they can build a dialogue with Anabaptism.⁹

These proposals are a call to continue walking beyond the mind of Christendom along the path of Jesus.

8 Michael Grenholm, “Charismatic Anabaptism: Combining Signs and Wonders with Peace and Justice,” in *A Living Alternative: Anabaptist Christianity in a Post-Christendom World*, eds. Joanna Harader and A. O. Green (New York: Ettelloc, 2014).

9 For instance, see the work of Jay Beaman, especially his book *Pentecostal Pacifism: The Origin, Development, and Rejection of Pacific Belief among the Pentecostals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989).

Book Reviews

Walter Sawatsky, *Going Global with God as Mennonites for the 21st Century*, Bethel College, North Newton, KS, 2017. 110 pp. \$8.00. ISBN-10: 1-889239-12-7.

It is a privilege to review Walter Sawatsky's lecture series *Going Global with God as Mennonites for the 21st Century*. As an Indigenous Woman and a Mennonite, my history and experience of North American settlement runs counter to the dominant Mennonite narrative. It is refreshing to experience the invitation Sawatsky makes for inclusion beyond tradition and national boundary; for a shared, lived theology; for an anti-war movement of truth tellers; for worship where we pray for each other across tradition and national boundary. In the sermon "The Nevertheless of Love," which introduces the four lectures that follow, Sawatsky lays out the probing questions that arise for him in stretching toward a global understanding of church. In the sermon, he questions the exclusivity of the Mennonite identity, grounding himself in a fuller Mennonite story that includes participation in wrongdoing as well as the two-thousand-year history of Christendom.

Sawatsky's scope in this series is ambitious; he seeks to reframe the Mennonite ethos in the global imagination beyond one thread among "reformation traditions," questioning its exclusivity and what he terms a trendy shift toward "Anabaptism," and asking for the Mennonite church to abandon the hubris of a "third way" narrative in favor of accepting the entire Christian story. He presents a historical framework that includes the entire church—from its origins described in the book of Acts, through the genesis of the Catholic church and the narrative of reformation—and insists that the global church must include the entire body of Christ, "warts and all" (5).

Sawatsky presents the Russian Mennonite experience, with specific emphasis on Russian congregations during the cold war, as a theological paradigm for the Mennonite global church. He cautions that Harold Bender's *Anabaptist Vision* and Stuart Murray's *The Naked Anabaptist*—in their call to return to original Christianity or even original reform—present theology out of context, unrooted in time and place, building mythos in past martyrs whose consistency may or may not have been lived out in reality. As a historian, Sawatsky calls for a finer-tuned narrative that is informed by historical context, rejecting easy generalities. He identifies adherence to tradition; a dynamic, flexible spiritual tradition; an evolving peace theology; persistent contextual, creative mission; and a theology of church, state, and society that is responsive to changing conditions as the traits he envisions for a global Mennonite church. Sawatsky emphasizes the brilliance in the Russian Mennonites' ability to adapt creatively to an ever-changing world. Rather than

focusing on the exclusivity of the Mennonite tradition or the habitual desire to return to the essence of the differentness of the Mennonite tradition from the rest of Christianity, he emphasizes flexibility and adaptability.

Sawatsky critiques the position of duality where the pure early church—a church toward which the narrative of an Anabaptist remnant strives—is distinct from a “religion of empire,” i.e., the Christianity mainstreamed by Constantine. He finds this duality inherently destructive, as it villainizes other Christian communities, with whom we must find commonalities and unity of purpose. What good comes from finding the majority of the Christian story apostate, he asks, arguing that there has never been a pure church; discord among Christians was present even at the last supper. Sawatsky calls the church to common purpose rather than focusing on division—to *Missio Ecclesia*, the mission of the church, including theologizing together across boundaries, learning about each other and our diverse experiences across traditions, and praying for each other.

Opening the conception of mission to include migration and urbanization, Sawatsky provides a fairly detailed account of Mennonite movement across Europe in the sixteenth century and beyond, including migration to North America. He notes the evolution from an assumption that Mennonite cultural heritage, such as language and separation, was vital to the protection of the faith, to an understanding that inclusion based on ethnic traits and a shared historical narrative excludes people of color. In fact, Sawatsky explains, the body of the Mennonite church is now so diverse that a historical narrative cannot stand as the basis for unity. This analysis is fairly ironic given the emphasis on the European Mennonite story that comprises most of these lectures. Sawatsky goes on to say that if ethnicity and shared history do not provide solid bases for unity, theology does not offer a solid basis, either. He argues, “a relationship does not necessarily presuppose a common theology, but rather a narrative of establishing and sustaining relationships” (80). He criticizes Mennonite Church USA’s call for obedience to the “founding documents,” which he cites as another hollow and ineffective basis for unity, and he urges church leaders to examine past corporate sins, citing Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians to affirm “*semper reformanda*” for the church.

Sawatsky compares German Mennonites’ surrender to Nazi race theories during the third Reich to American Mennonites’ silence about nuclear armament. How can we be proud of global mission, he asks, if we (in the United States) are not willing to speak out about the violence perpetuated by our government? He calls for a movement toward shalom, holding up a slogan coined by the World Council of Churches (WCC) at the most recent General Assembly in Busan, South Korea: “A pilgrimage on the way to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation” (85).

The use of this phrase made me smile wryly—I was present in Busan when this slogan was adopted, with more than seventy Indigenous leaders from around the

globe. We had petitioned the WCC to make an institutional commitment to their own statements repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal and policy structure perpetuated by the church for centuries that has resulted in the genocide and ongoing discrimination against Indigenous Peoples by governments everywhere, including the United States. The historic peace churches, a constituency group within the WCC that includes Mennonites, rejected our request for their support in our petition. Their spokesman stated to me in a public meeting, “We cannot allow ourselves to be distracted, or our peace witness to be watered down, by focusing on one issue.” The slogan thus rings hollow, as does a call to save souls in the context of profound suffering among the Peoples of earth and creation itself.

Sawatsky introduces the Christian conviction that God is a missionary God, as captured in the Latin phrase *Missio Dei*. He returns to this supposition, claiming that God’s mission is to save the three billion non-Christians in the world, arguing passionately that we must move our thinking and praying to avoid being a hindrance to God’s mission. I advocate for a larger vision of mission than this—one that includes the whole of creation. Like Sawatsky, I believe we must acknowledge the whole history of the Christian Church, including the ill-gotten wealth and power controlled by a tiny minority that includes North Americans and enslaves the vast majority of humanity. This also includes Mennonites, who directly benefit—in land and wealth—from the dispossession of my people. The retirement funds of many churches, including Mennonite Church USA, are fueled by an extractive industry that enslaves vulnerable people around the globe.

Those of us who live in the West by the accident of our birth have the opportunity to make amends, not just symbolically but actually. Beyond Sawatsky’s call to positions of “justified but still a sinner” and “always reforming,” we Western Mennonites can acknowledge that we are on the hook to live justly. As the beneficiaries of injustice, we must resolve to dismantle the systems that perpetuate it. These systems include the whole economic development apparatus that result in decades of debt for developing nations and in displacement, disability, and death for the peoples of indebted nations and especially for vulnerable communities.

It is difficult for me to invest in an analysis of “reformation traditions” when my people are suffering at the hands of the mighty who remove us from our homes and lifeways, separate our families, militarize our communities and steal our traditional lands, and extract fossil fuels, minerals, timber, and other wealth, leaving behind environmental destruction that pollutes our bodies and those of our descendants for dozens of generations. If Christendom’s vision of God’s mission for the world is to convert three billion non-Christians to Christianity, as Sawatsky claims (44), then the Christian Church is just as apostate as he denies that it is. If the focus of mission is not seeking justice in solidarity with the vulnerable, then I have no energy for it.

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Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*, Fernwood, Nova Scotia and Winnipeg, Manitoba, October, 2015. 158 pp. \$18.99. ISBN: 978-1-55266-778-1.

I live on a berry farm in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia. I recall going for a walk around the property a few years ago and standing at one end, looking out over the fields and thinking, “I own this,” and then reflecting on what it must have been like before we moved there. Before we planted strawberries and blueberries. Before the previous owners cleared all the trees and turned it into a gravel pit, extracting hundreds and hundreds of truckloads worth of gravel from the land and then leveling it out again. Before that, when it was forest with a stream flowing through the middle of it, where no stream exists now. And I wondered what it would have been like a hundred or five hundred or a thousand years before.

And then I wondered who had lived or traveled through this area and what would it have been like to be in this place then. And I thought about the Indigenous people who lived and hunted and gathered on the land I now own. And then I reflected on what it means for me today to “own” this land—land that I have helped cultivate and take care of and make “productive.”

This was during the same time that a friend of mine was working for our denomination helping us think about how we might engage in the work of reconciliation with Indigenous neighbors. As he talked about being an Indigenous person, as he tried to help us gain understandings of Indigenous culture and worldview, and as he prepared us for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was coming to Vancouver, I found myself reflecting on “my land,” and I didn’t quite know what to do with that. How did we get here? Who “owned” it before us, or the others before them whose names had been registered in the land title office?

Lowman and Barker’s book has much to say about land, about our relationships to the land, and about folks like me. People whose parents came to Canada to make a new life, who came as refugees and “displaced persons” looking for a new home and some land they could call their own. It also has much to say about how things have gone terribly wrong in Canada and the ways in which we have come to own our land and to settle on it as if it had always been ours.

I’ve appreciated reading this book and being challenged by what the authors have to say about those of us who have settled here. They have helped me unpack the

term “Settler” and to take it on as a descriptor of who I am in Canada and those like me, who have come to this land as Settler Canadians. They use the term Settler not as a pejorative term but rather as a recognition of who we are in this country and our ties with the ongoing colonization project.

Like Indigenous, we are using Settler as an identity that connects a group of people with common practices, a group to which people have affinity and can belong either through individual identification or recognition by the group [in order to] articulate our efforts to understand ourselves as Settler Canadians, as colonizers, and as people with deep moral and ethical responsibilities to change our relationships to the lands that we call home. (13)

The authors’ aim is to get the reader to grapple with the fact that “Indigenous and Settler peoples are not defined by their distances and differences, but rather their relationships to each other and to the land,” and that “these two identities coalesce around an observable, general and crucial difference: relationship to the land” (17, 18).

My parents came to this country to find a home and to live on some land they could call their own. They had been forced out of their former lands during World War II and found a new place they could settle on. It happened to be in the Fraser Valley. My parents loved this land. The Indigenous people who lived on this land before we Settlers came loved this land too. But their relationships were much deeper and much different. Their relationships were place-based. Lowman and Barker explain:

Indigenous identities and histories are shaped by “place-thought,” the inseparable relationship between how Indigenous peoples understand and interact with the world as a living entity, with will and agency of its own, and how the living, intelligent elements of the world shape Indigenous thinking culture and social practice . . . a place-based identity, forged in longstanding and intimate relationships with particular lands and sacred sites that is common to Indigenous peoples across the continent (and the world). (51)

In the six short chapters that comprise *Settler*, one of the key points the authors make is the reality that colonialism is still very much alive in Canada and that Settlers still receive many benefits from it, even if we don’t recognize this to be so. Lowman and Barker address Settler fears and anxieties around acknowledging our participation in this ongoing structure of settler colonialism, including those expressed by people who are actively trying to build a more just and equitable Canadian society (but do not engage their work through a decolonization framework). By the end of the book, Settlers are called not only to acknowledge an identity that we necessarily inhabit (because of our participation in the settler colonial project) but also to embrace it as an identity that we need—something that can speak truth,

nurture deep moral questions, and change our relationships to the lands that we call home.

Of course, Settler identity is not something we do on our own. The work that needs to be done and the change that needs to happen must take place through communal effort. “We cannot change who we are as Settler people alone, so we must work to create a broad base, to build communities—with friends, our families, our colleagues—to undertake these efforts together” (110). And a central part of this communal engagement must be done with Indigenous peoples:

This requires being in relationship—respectfully—with Indigenous people and communities so we know their needs and expectations and are aware of Indigenous relationships to the land without seeking control of them. That is how trust is built. That is how we come to know that we are friends. That is how we achieve true and lasting peace. (119)

Many of the ways that Lowman and Barker point us forward are things we understand as Anabaptists. We know about the importance of relationships, we know about reconciliation, and we know about the power of community. And we also understand that the work of justice takes time. But most Anabaptists do not know much about Settler realities and identity. It’s something we must start grappling with and taking on.

Why say Settler?

We say Settler because it’s a place from which we can determine how we live on these lands. We say Settler to signal that we’re ready to do the work. We say Settler because we believe ethical and exciting decolonial futures are possible. . . . We say Settler because it is who we are. We say Settler because it is not everything we could be. (123)

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Joanna Shenk, *The Movement Makes Us Human: An Interview with Dr. Vincent Harding on Mennonites, Vietnam, and MLK*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR, 2018. 109 pp. \$18.00. ISBN: 978-1-5326-3529-8.

In the 1960s some US Mennonites began to shed their tradition’s historic hesitations about social involvement and joined movements agitating for peace, racial justice, and women’s rights. Their decision shook the church and shaped the direction of mainline Mennonite denominational institutions, churches, and theology for the past fifty years. At the same time, progress toward peace, racial and gender

equality, and related goals remains uneven within and outside the church. As social movements spring up again in the United States and around the world, it is worth revisiting the origins of Mennonite social activism and inquiring about its nature, potential, and limitations. Joanna Shenk's fascinating interview with veteran activist and former Mennonite pastor Vincent Harding is a necessary resource for this work of remembering and reevaluation.

Shenk, currently a Mennonite pastor in San Francisco, interviewed Harding in 2011 as part of her work with Mennonite Church USA's Interchurch Relations department; the interview was part of a larger project funded by Mennonite Education Agency. These origins reinforce the sense of US Mennonites' investment at an institutional level in the questions raised by Harding's activism. As for Harding, he was in the midst of research for a memoir (unfinished before his death in 2014) and was available for questions about his past engagement with Mennonites. Harding's availability is noteworthy insofar as he previously had declined a Mennonite researcher's invitations to discuss the topic.¹

Understanding why Mennonites would want to know and understand Harding's story and why Harding might have been initially reluctant to discuss it requires telling some of that story. Shenk's book helps us do so in more detail than was previously possible.

Harding was born in 1931 in New York City. An excellent student and budding church leader, he completed bachelor's and master's degrees before being drafted by the US Army. Although his black Seventh-Day Christian church traditionally required its military men to adopt noncombatant status, Harding was interested in a career in military intelligence; his church's emphasis on the Old Testament, especially the Ten Commandments, had not prepared him to think critically about military participation (57).

His church's devotion to Scripture, however, did make an impact—eventually. During his two years of military service, Harding began to wrestle with the contrast between the training in violence he was receiving and his growing understandings of the life and teachings of Jesus. When he left the military for pastoral work and graduate studies in Chicago in 1955, he was internally (not officially) a conscientious objector (60).

While in Chicago he met Mennonites whose understanding of Jesus and violence resonated with his own; he began pastoring among them after Woodlawn Mennonite Church invited him to help provide leadership for an intentionally interracial congregation. While at Woodlawn—part of the (Old) Mennonite Church de-

1 Tobin Miller Shearer, "A Prophet Pushed Out: Vincent Harding and the Mennonites," *Mennonite Life* 69 (2015), accessed March 11, 2019, <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-69/article/a-prophet-pushed-out-vincent-harding-and-the-menno/>.

nomination—he was introduced to Rosemarie Florence Freeney, a young African American member of Bethel Mennonite Church, a General Conference congregation also in Chicago. Vincent and Rosemarie married in 1960 and partnered in church and political endeavors until Rosemarie’s death in 2004.

Harding was also introduced by Chicago Mennonites to a heightened concern for social justice and an understanding of the church’s transformative role in its surrounding community (33, 38, 43, 49). He credits Mennonites with leading him to “take a deeper look at what Martin [Luther King] was doing” (23). This “deeper look” led Harding and others from Woodlawn to form an interracial delegation to tour the American South in 1958. Harding met King in Atlanta for the first time on that trip, an encounter that would bear much fruit. Taking up an assignment from Mennonite Central Committee, Vincent and Rosemarie moved into King’s Atlanta neighborhood in 1961 and started Mennonite House, an interracial guest house where Mennonite volunteers mixed with luminaries of the Southern Freedom Movement. Harding worked closely with King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during these years. Perhaps Harding’s most visible contribution to the movement—a contribution visibly shaped by his Mennonite connections (14, 17)—was his drafting of King’s famous “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence” speech of 1967, in which King came out against the Vietnam War.

In 1967 Harding also preached and gave a speech at the Eighth Assembly of Mennonite World Conference, in Amsterdam. Both statements are included in Shenk’s book as appendices, along with a later autobiographical reflection. At Amsterdam Harding called Mennonites to see that their peace witness and pursuit of justice must extend beyond their own communities to active solidarity with global nonviolent revolutionary movements.

According to Tobin Miller Shearer, Harding’s comments were largely well received as a necessary prophetic call, though he did meet some resistance.² This resistance had been building for years, especially after Harding’s arrest for civil disobedience in Albany, Georgia, in 1962. Many Mennonites saw Harding’s activism and language of nonviolent revolution as a betrayal of their historic stance of nonresistance. In Miller Shearer’s telling, Harding had, in response, largely disengaged from Mennonites by the time he spoke in Amsterdam and would subsequently work entirely outside of Mennonite circles—he was a “prophet pushed out.” Harding had already stopped his work at Mennonite House in 1964 and, after a year at Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago finishing his doctoral studies, had taken up a professorship in history at the historically black Spelman College in 1965. In 1968 he helped found the King Center and under its auspices began the Institute of the

2 Miller Shearer, “A Prophet Pushed Out.”

Black World in 1969, a think tank that contributed to the emerging Black Studies movement in the United States.

Harding tells Shenk a different, softer version of his “movement” (he rejects the language of a “shift” [48–49]) from the Mennonite church to activism and scholarship centered in the black community. Putting his personal movement in the context of burgeoning Black Power and Black Consciousness movements in the late 1960s, Harding says that he followed “the same God who had led me deep into Christian faith . . . deep into blackness” (48). Harding’s version of the story highlights his own agency as well as the continuity between his early work with Mennonites and his later work based in black institutions. This continuity is ripe for exploration by Mennonite theologians seeking an antiracist construal of historic Anabaptist convictions.

Yet, Harding does not flinch from describing the resistance he faced from white Mennonites. As he puts it to Shenk, his identification as a Mennonite “was a conscious choice to identify myself with those who did not always know how to identify with me” (43). In Harding’s view, Mennonites did not know how to identify with him, because his witness triggered their fear of persecution, because some Mennonite were racists, and because of the “terrible temptation white Mennonites had to hide behind their whiteness, and to thereby keep themselves separated from the sufferings of those who were not white in America” (6; see also 36).

Harding thus invites Mennonites to “really wrestle with how long they want to hide in this cloak of whiteness” (71), and—perhaps controversially—to see how their whiteness might be a “gift in the struggle to overcome white dominance” (72). Specifically, white Mennonites can examine their privileges and see how they might be put to use in and for the struggle. Mennonites as well as other US Christians can also recall their own histories of persecution, “their own experience of ‘underdogness,’” and seek solidarity with today’s underdogs (68–69).

Throughout the interview, Harding shares practical advice and inspiration for white Mennonites seeking to throw off the cloak of whiteness and embrace integrated community. For instance, he counsels white communities to educate themselves and seek counsel from outside mentors before attempting integration (77–78), and reminds those starting new initiatives that they need to include from the beginning all those they hope to be involved; asking later “How do we get them?” is a much harder task (81).

Harding’s reflections and story, ably summarized and placed in historical context by Shenk in brief introductory and concluding essays, continue to speak to Mennonites today, even in our somewhat changed context. US Mennonites are now less homogenous, in part because of the work of Mennonites of color who stayed in the church in spite of resistance and discrimination. More broadly, North American and European Mennonites are also beginning to grapple with Christianity’s his-

toric numerical shift to the global South; Africa, Asia, and Latin America are now the population centers of the global Mennonite body. These demographic shifts, moreover, occur in an era of global ecological catastrophe that was barely on the horizon during the activism of the 1960s. In spite of the changes, or even because of the changes, Harding's encouragement and challenge to white Mennonites remains of utmost importance.

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Andrew Cheon and Johannes Urpelainen, *Activism and the Fossil Fuel Industry*, Routledge, New York, 2018. 242 pp. \$31.94. ISBN: 978-1-78353-754-9.

It's not enough for the historic peace churches to oppose violence when it finally breaks out. Since we know that violence has its antecedents, peacemaking includes active work to erase conditions that increase the likelihood of conflict and decrease the full flourishing of life imagined by God. Climate change is a "threat multiplier," according to sound social science. Does that make climate change a peace issue?

As Anabaptists understand it, following Jesus manifests itself as peacemaking, in alignment with God's goals for shalom and the full flourishing of all. Therefore, a peace position normally leads us to oppose those things that increase risks to the more vulnerable of the world. If cumulative emissions from the use of fossil fuels are the largest contribution to changing climates, does our ordinary discipleship to the Prince of Peace imply opposition to expanding use of fossil fuels? And what is the role of activists—those people who contest the status quo and challenge others (us?) to consider that another way might be better?

Such are the questions I pondered as I read this book. Such questions are part of my professional work as a social scientist at a Christian university in the oil- and gas-focused economy and culture of Alberta. The latest major inter-governmental report on climate change documents the increasing effects of climate change, which most markedly affects the most marginalized people on the planet (IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, 2014). Heat, desertification, water shortages in some places, extreme weather in others, declining agricultural productivity, and other effects of climate change are degrading the efforts of international aid and accompaniment agencies—like Mennonite Central Committee, World Vision, and Christian Peacemakers Teams—to promote development and peace. That emissions from fossil fuels are the largest cause of climate change is increasingly clear according to both physical and social science.

The consequence is that well-paying jobs and caring for families in places like Alberta collide with stewardship of creation and the basic needs of the earthly poor. Or, “If economic development results in environmental deterioration, how much damage is acceptable?” (187). That is the sort of question activists ask—and if it sounds extreme, it is because we have normalized a socioeconomic system that relies on something that is magnifying damage to creation while providing a very advantaged lifestyle for a minority of global humanity. *For a while*. That’s not just this reviewer’s opinion; that’s the data, in study after study.

Besides being a researcher on environmental sustainability and justice questions, I write this review as someone who knows people who make their living from the oil and gas sector, including members of my own Alberta church. Lastly, I have friends who have been arrested at Burnaby, British Columbia, and spent time in jail due to protesting the Trans Mountain Pipeline and supporting Indigenous peoples. One of these friends is Anglican, another is Mennonite. They felt these activist stances were necessary commitments of their Christian faith.

Activism and the Fossil Fuel Industry is timely for these many reasons. We are probably beginning a major, necessary shift in energy sources. The shift will have many ramifications. The social and ethical implications of such phenomena are broad and confront many of our normal modes of living typical North American lifestyles. According to the book, activism presents counter-normal challenges that act as wedges to crack open alternatives to the normal ways of living or societal structuring. My Anglican and Mennonite friends occupy important but uncomfortable (for them too) places in the community of faith. “Jesus was an activist,” the authors of *Activism and the Fossil Fuel Industry* casually mention (41, in the context of Jesus’s overturning of the temple tables and thus challenging social norms of his own religious community).

Activism and the Fossil Fuel Industry is a secular academic book dedicated to exactly what its title indicates. The researchers focus on four case studies—Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline, divestment from fossil-fuel companies, anti-coal campaigns, and anti-fracking campaigns. The authors first contextualize the role of fossil fuels in contemporary society, the world economy, and theories of social change movements. They provide plenty of information, both in the early material about fossil fuels and their negative and positive effects and in the case studies. Only in the last chapter before the conclusion—about “global campaigns” against fossil fuels—are Indigenous, women’s, peasant, and other justice movements really mentioned. Faith groups are referred to very positively, especially in terms of the divestment movement in which religious organizations have been quite significant.

We learn that anti-fossil fuel activism has successfully employed a shaming strategy in which public pressure has led to weakening of what is called the “social license to operate”; fossil fuels no longer have the taken-for-granted support they

once had. Given this result, the researchers observe that “for the major fossil fuel companies, it would actually be in their best interest to acknowledge the reality of climate change” (15) and for activists to actively support and encourage any positive steps of genuine corporate social responsibility. Their research shows that the accumulation of “small wins”—each and every little victory—can motivate further activism by more people. That is, the “normal” is being shifted; a “new normal” is coming into place, albeit grudgingly. Again, other social science confirms these conclusions.

Overall, the tone of the book is academic. The authors believe that movement participants would benefit from reading the book, but they would probably best read the first and last chapters alongside the chapter that speaks to their particular form of activism. The book is also US-centric, barely mentioning the Canadian oilsands/tarsands and repeatedly referring to the KXL pipeline proposer as a Canadian company—as if that really matters in these days of transnational corporations.

The main point, however, is to address the question, What do we do in light of the challenges to the fossil fuel industry and in light of the declining benefit of fossil fuels *vis-a-vis* the global costs of these energy types? The tripartite system of “See – Judge – Act” would be useful to consider: SEE the evidence, as discussed in this book and plenty of other sources; JUDGE what to do; then ACT on such discernment. The activists in our own church communities have made their discernments and taken action, perhaps as a wedge toward a “new normal” of energy types that are less damaging to the planet and the world’s people. How do we See and Judge? How do we then Act?

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