

Charles E. Moore and Timothy Keiderling, eds., *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship*, Plough, Walden, New York, 2016. 226 pp. \$14.00. ISBN 13: 978-087486-704-6.

While it is no secret that Anabaptists have a complex relationship to the martyrdoms of the sixteenth century, the connection to persecution and martyrdom has not been as well documented in succeeding centuries. *Bearing Witness: Stories of Martyrdom and Costly Discipleship* attempts to provide a more comprehensive narrative with a global perspective on Christian persecution, particularly for those who proclaimed principles of nonviolence. Ably edited by Charles E. Moore and Timothy Keiderling, the book draws together pieces from a variety of sources to tell compelling stories that expand the narrative of those who have endured suffering for the sake of the gospel.

This book is not a collection of primary sources but rather contains retellings of stories either from historical sources or first-person interviews. Each of the narratives is accessible to a wide range of readers—from those casually interested in Anabaptism or Christian martyrdom to those who study the subject from an academic perspective. The book follows a chronological arrangement with four parts. The first two parts focus on accounts with which many readers may be familiar, including stories of persecution from the early church period, radical reformers, and many well-known martyrs like Stephen, Polycarp, and Perpetua. From the early modern period, the Anabaptist and Radical Reformation martyrs Weynken Claes, Anna Janz, and Dirk Willems will be familiar to the presumed audience. It is important to note, however, that the editors include not only Anabaptists but also William Tyndale and Jan Hus, again exemplifying an attempt to demonstrate the scope of martyrdom and persecution during these time periods.

Part Three of the text focuses on early modern witnesses beyond the immediate Reformation era of the sixteenth century, particularly in transatlantic and global perspective. This section stretches the early modern period into the first half of the twentieth century, including those who suffered during the World Wars at the hands of a variety of power structures. As such, it demonstrates the ongoing problem of persecution, particularly for those who composed minority groups, whether Mennonites in Russia, Moravians in the Virgin Islands, or Hutterites in America. This section indicates that while martyrdom of individuals happened, the suffering involved in these martyring incidents often extended far beyond an immediate individual to encapsulate whole communities that experienced lasting trauma. These events, however, also strengthened the community's witness and resolve to remain nonviolent in the face of persecution.

The final section of the book examines more recent witnesses from the mid-twentieth century to the present, again from a global perspective that includes stories from eastern Europe, Africa, South America, and the United States. These stories often demonstrate the challenges of living as part of a minority

Christian population. The accounts demonstrate what happens when Christian communities encounter challenging political or religious authorities who find their nonviolent witness upsetting to social structures. While many of these stories focus on individuals—such as Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand, Samuel Kakesa, and Katherine Wu—the inclusion of particular groups, such as the Meserete Kristos Church and the Ekklesiar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, demonstrate that not only individuals but also entire groups have suffered for their nonviolent Christian beliefs and practices.

The book has an accompanying website, *Bearing Witness Stories Project*, which can be accessed at <https://martyrstories.org>. While the website has not been updated regularly in recent years, it contains a variety of resources that expand on additional martyr and persecution stories, both historical and contemporary. Of particular note is a collection of recordings made at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly (Harrisburg, PA) in 2016 (<https://martyrstories.org/category/interviews/>) in which Mennonites told stories of their own experiences of persecution from all over the world. These recordings provide insight into the ways that peacemaking and nonviolence have continued to pose countercultural threats to other religious and political authorities. This resource provides additional tools that remind Christians, particularly in the United States, that persecution continues in other parts of the world on a regular basis.

Anabaptists in recent years have posed many questions about the continuing way that martyrologies have shaped Anabaptist identities, whether they actually glorify violence and whether they promote a sense of victimization while stigmatizing the descendants of those who were involved in the persecution. These are all important questions for reflection as we employ these stories in our ministry contexts. I teach a class that focuses on how to read historical primary source texts. One text I consistently use is *Martyrs Mirror*.¹ The last time I taught the course, a student living in Nigeria reflected on how difficult those texts were for her to read. For her, they were not texts from distant times and places but stories that closely resembled the current, often violent, persecution and displacement of her EYN² brothers and sisters at the hands of Boko Haram. Her reaction should alert us to the importance of context and how these stories impact readers in complex ways. While many of these stories seem far removed from the firsthand experiences of American and Canadian Anabaptists, for Christians in other parts of the world these stories form a living and breathing encouragement to continue to live their convictions faithfully and accept the risks of a nonviolent way of life.

Bearing Witness is a useful collection of biographical and group narratives that can enrich sermon preparation or teaching ministries in the academy or

1 Thieleman J. van Braght, ed., *Martyrs Mirror: The Story of Seventeen Centuries of Christian Martyrdom, from the Time of Christ to A.D. 1660* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1938).

2 Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

congregational settings. While the website could use further updates to reflect the ongoing issues of persecution, the written collection and website cover a broad time frame and convincingly make the case that nonviolent followers of Jesus have frequently suffered. This collection makes an accessible contribution to the available literature on martyrs from a particularly Anabaptist perspective.

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