

# Response: Elaine Enns and Ched Myers

We welcome this *Vision* issue's advocacy for better integration of intercultural and decolonization competences. As the editors point out in their editorial, each practice is key to the other's realization, and both are essential to Gospel relevance in these times.

The challenge of interculturality did not arise just from growing demographic diversities over the last half century. It has *always* been there for settlers on Turtle Island—beginning with English colonial alienation not only from Indigenous and enslaved communities, but also from other European immigrants (think of the ongoing marginalization of francophones in Canada, or Ben Franklin's 1751 screed against German immigrants). The current backlash/resurgence of white Christian nationalism underlines how urgent the challenge remains three centuries later.

White Mennonite settlers, with a tendency (based on past survival strategies) to insulate ourselves socially, have been slow to adapt interculturality. Fortunately, Mennonite Church USA began in 2013 to promote Intercultural Development Inventory trainings,<sup>1</sup> which contributor **Sue Park-Hur** helped animate and now coordinates, and in which Elaine participated in 2016. While this training is designed to help people see structural oppression and racism, however, it is our sense that the Mennonite church across North America has been slower to embrace decolonization commitments—likely because they call us more sharply to challenge both historical and contemporary racial constructs. This was one of the reasons we wrote, and have workshopped for a decade, *Healing Haunted Histories (HHH)*.<sup>2</sup> And why the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery was launched, which has grown into a church-wide (and increasingly ecumenical) network, as **Sarah Augustine** outlines in her response.

Still, efforts to integrate intercultural and decolonization approaches are rare, so we hope this journal issue will encourage and empower broader and deeper “convergence.” We are grateful for ways this issue of *Vision* is in conversation with our “Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines” (LBS) framework, and that some contributors found it helpful for their practices of intercultural and decolonial solidarity. Here are our thoughts about how each of their pieces examines important parts of the integrative puzzle.

We appreciate **Caleb Kowalko's** thoughtful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of *HHH's* “bio-genealogical” approach to wrestling with historical “entanglements” through Bloodlines. We too are wary of

---

1 Intercultural Development Inventory, <https://idiinventory.com/>.

2 Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* (Cascade Books, 2021).

ethnocentric fascination that can ensue, goaded by the “genealogical-industrial complex.” And Caleb’s “onto-epistemic” alternative can be especially helpful to the many whose ancestral continuity has been disrupted and disappeared by colonization. Indeed, “chosen” or “re-covenanted” family identities manifest culturally in diverse ways, from adoption to expanded clan boundaries to unity in common cause. “Fictive kinship” identities have deep roots in both the Hebrew Bible (Abrahamic ancestry and tribal confederacy) and the Second Testament. Kowalko then explores how solidarity through baptism might offer “decolonial and intercultural possibilities”—surely a compelling strategy for Anabaptists! We agree that a sacramental identity can and should transcend bio-genealogy, and that when rooted in the Jesus story can help wean white folk off racialized constructs that undergird ideologies of supremacy. Unfortunately, baptismal practices in Western Christianity—including among Mennonites—have been abstracted from their historical, place-based roots in the wilderness prophetic tradition. Yet onto-epistemic identities can overlook the fact that social and economic advantages of contemporary white settlers were constructed intergenerationally by passing down wealth and land through *bio-genealogical* legal conventions. A primarily *theological* identity (such as baptism) must also compel the progeny of privilege to face our implication in colonialism’s violent inequities, especially given our settler proclivities toward idealized individualism and historical illiteracy and disassociation.

We have long admired and supported the amazing work of **Sue Park-Hur** and *ReconciliAsian*. We delighted in the poetic and theological imagination Sue uses to describe her Landlines in Korea and Los Angeles. Her odes to mountains resonate deeply with Elaine (if geographically opposite), for whom the level horizon of the Pacific Ocean is so similar to that of prairie landscapes. Like Sue, Elaine endeavors to apprentice to Landlines of two different bioregions, both of which embody home, yet whose terrains and peoples have been profoundly disfigured by colonization. This is why we began and ended *HHH* by acknowledging sacred stonescapes, which anchor our souls today *and* are central to the covenantal faith of scripture (*HHH*, pp. 1–6, 306–309). We’ve had the privilege of exploring with Sue hidden intercultural histories around Los Angeles (where Ched’s ancestors have lived for four generations), as well as collaborating on many diverse programs of restorative solidarity. A “ReconciliAsian Cross” (pictured in Sue’s piece) hangs on our wall at home, and we are deeply grateful for her discipleship witness.

**Denise Climenhage’s** sermon is a compelling window into her embrace of a fractured Indigenous Bloodline, and illustrates in microcosm the ways in which language and culture were suppressed yet survived under colonialism. We commend her apprenticeship to both the Cree language and the TRC

Calls to Action. Her highlighting of the Cree concept of “wahkohtowin” as an intercultural framework is something we’ve learned from our mentor Harry Lafond (*HHH*, p. 314). And her mapping of congregations and colleagues doing intercultural and decolonization work, including reparations, is instructive and hopeful. As she reminds us, “there’s so much listening and learning to do.”

**Peter Haresnape** begins with a poignant description of how T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* accompanied his years of activist engagement, which have given him so many “fragments to shore against my ruins.” His exploration of Landlines in the Fens of East Anglia offers a concise overview of its colonial history and the marginalization of its waters and traditional inhabitants, and his decolonization work on Turtle Island has helped him see how “the same people making money on colonising and enslaving

**For many of us settler activists, it takes an intercultural and decolonial immersion in another’s place and struggle to see the truths of our own.**

around the world were doing the same a day’s ride from London.” For many of us settler activists, it takes an intercultural and decolonial immersion in another’s place and struggle to see the truths of our own. We agree with his conclusion that treaty is the best lens through which to understand both colonial histories and decolonial futures.

The Canadian slogan “We are Treaty People” is for us a discipleship call, whether in Treaty Six land or here in untreated, unceded Chumash territory (*HHH*, pp. 189–92). Treaty invites Christians back to the deep biblical substrate of *covenant* as a trinitarian commitment—to Creator, land, and people—to “tend and defend” just and equitable community in the places we inhabit.

**Brian Quan’s** study in intercultural advocacy demonstrates how intact cultures offer Songlines beyond their boundaries. He narrates what we can learn from a strong honor-shame culture’s “rules of engagement,” from clan-based mutual aid, and from traditional somatic practices including meal sharing. We would be interested in how he interprets Jesus’s challenges to his own honor-shame systems in high-context first-century Palestine, and how he reckons not only with how Chinese culture has been colonized, but also colonizing of cultural minorities. As he points out, intercultural projects represent a “complex puzzle.” His examples from Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church testify to the cultural riches that immigrant communities bring to church and society that illumine and embody the Gospel.

The conviction that decolonization is intergenerational work lies at the heart of **Leah Reesor-Keller’s** letter to her child. We admire her courageous attempt to introduce this child to “hauntings” by connecting dots between

her ten-year old “I.”; Bobby Bird, who at the same age disappeared after fleeing a residential school; I.’s grandfather, who was close to Bobby in age; and herself at Bobby’s age when the Timber Bay school closed. The Timber Bay story still demands reckoning and repair, *and* indicates how we settlers are damaged too—not least from the delusions that led to building such schools. How might the rising generation be different if from an early age our children engage “the truth part of reconciliation” and wrestle with the contradictions of their heritage? We appreciate Leah’s conclusion to this beautiful piece: framing the “journey of repentance and transformation” in terms of the costly discipleship innate to the Gospel tradition, and to Anabaptism.

**Jonny Rashid** addresses a phenomenon that inevitably arises among those who engage in justice work: conflict within one’s own family. Johnny traces conflicting Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines in his immigrant family. Like several of this volume’s contributors, he narrates an Evangelical formation and journey toward Anabaptism. Yet his vulnerable testimony keys on a struggle to learn empathy with his parents’ flight from religious oppression in Egypt, only to take refuge in the xenophobic faith of American conservatism, from Reagan to Trump. He understands how they would have been relieved to become “part of a religious majority,” though his own experience after September 11 was decidedly different. Jonny has found a home among Mennonites, but “the limitations of a predominantly white church have haunted” him as a queer, brown person. He draws thoughtful parallels between his parents’ “faith and social position as religious minorities” and his own as an ethnic and sexual minority, enabling him to remain open to them even as they reject his involvements. This poignant confession from a leader deeply involved in intercultural and decolonization work reflects how the personal and political always intersect in real life.

We were profoundly moved by **Mollee Moua’s** story of displacement and family fragmentation during the Indochina wars, and of her vision for how Mennonite churches might become spaces for intergenerational healing from trauma. (Elaine heard similar tales during her years of doing victim-offender dialogue work with Hmong families in Fresno, CA.) Mollee’s experience of how “healing can begin by naming unspoken pain” has led her Hmong church to experiment with holding spaces where grief can be communitized. And she recognizes that immigrants must be mindful of those traumatized before them: “To hear our own ancestors’ voices fully is also to recognize and respect the ongoing struggles of those whose lands we inhabit today . . . [and] must be accompanied by humility, listening and acting in solidarity with Indigenous communities.” Her story and practice exemplify decolonial interculturality.

**Joon Park's** piece maps the contested terrain of interculturalism in North American churches. He daylight the racist impacts of the “homogeneous unit principle” of church growth, which prevailed for too much of the last half century. Older, *de facto* congregational segregation by class, culture, and race was thus reproduced in contemporary megachurches. Park acknowledges that strategies of sociological homogeneity are driven by white anxiety about emerging demographic patterns of multicultural diversity, but we could add they are also the product of forces of conformity dictated by globally centripetal markets. We agree with him that ecclesial monoculture is decidedly unbiblical. Interculture, Park rightly insists, is *not* a recipe for church growth in face of decline, but a vocation of empowering *all* congregants to embrace their full identities in Christ: “true belonging” versus “fitting in.”

**Hyejung Jessie Yum** focuses on practical expressions of decolonizing mindfulness. Cognizant of how settler land acknowledgments have quickly become routinized and performative, Yum creates intentional classroom and curricular space for student experiments in decolonial pedagogy. Yum's example of a group's exercise in bannock-making powerfully showed rather than told an important Indigenous foodway. The presenters invited their audience into a communal intercultural experience, accompanied by critical and poetic commentary on forgotten family and cultural history. We concur that such “small gestures” of embodied acknowledgement as daily practice can transform the discourse of decolonization from mantra to meaning.

**Sarah** and **Pablo** experienced our focus on Elaine's LBS storylines as “limiting,” and another case of re-centering an exclusionary Mennonite ethnocentric storytelling. Yet their editorial rightly stipulates that both intercultural and decolonization work requires specific, contextual, incarnational approaches. The dilemma is this: One can only illustrate the LBS framework through a deep and rigorous dive into one's contextualized story, which can't be done without a degree of narrative centering.

We decided to explore Elaine's prairie Rusländer Canadian *particularity* rather than survey multiple different storylines, offering it as a microcosm of the work that all settlers need to embrace, in similar and different ways (HHH, pp. 18–22). But we also *problematize* her LBS through a decolonial lens, in order to identify concrete repair work facing her kin and community living on Indigenous land. We then offer queries and models through which readers can do their *own* work.

Mapping Ched's very different storylines—as an unchurched adult convert to Anabaptism with Californio, Portuguese, English, and Austrian ancestors in California for five generations—would have made the project too long. But he knows all too well Mennonite ethnocentrism and the insider/outsider dynamic, which several “convert” contributors also name

herein. We both share the frustration with Mennonite self-referentiality, and so throughout our book advocate the need to “transcend, critique, and transform ethnocentric Bloodlines and entitled Landlines” (*HHH*, p. 115). We wrote *HHH* to and for Christian settlers (and others of faith and conscience) across the ecumenical spectrum, because we share this issue’s editors’ conviction that an Anabaptist discipleship of decolonization is best realized in an intercultural ecosystem.

We warn settlers of European ancestry doing LBS work not to become *fixated* on exploring family histories they had either ignored or lost! Though such discoveries can help heal wounds among those orphaned of kin and culture by assimilation into colonialism’s homogeneous identities (including “whiteness”), we also have seen how giving primary energy to one’s own ancestral history can be a way of *avoiding* getting to the restorative solidarity work—which is the *point* of the LBS process. We also caution North American Mennonites not to take refuge in the community identity of “persecuted minority.” Chapter 6 explores how “egoism of victimization” blinds us to ways our immigrant ancestors *also* benefitted from (continuing) white-skin privileges (*HHH*, p. 96), which can lead to self-exoneration from colonial complicities or denial of moral injury. Family and communal hauntings can only be healed through the work of reparative justice.

We think the best way we can help decenter a romanticized North American white Mennonite narrative is to help decolonize it. Our church embodies a material legacy rooted in both marginalization and prosperity under colonialism, which require healing and reparation—as is true of every white-majority denomination and congregation on Turtle Island.

Since *HHH*’s publication five years ago, we have enjoyed learning from many integral experiments in intercultural decolonial workshops. One in particular comes to mind: a summer Canadian School of Peacebuilding course at Canadian Mennonite University, in which half the participants were non-white, non-Mennonite immigrant students. A cohort of Nigerians eagerly adapted the LBS model, applying it first to their intergenerational experience of classic colonial displacement in Africa, then bringing it forward to how they must engage the legacies of settler colonialism in Canada. Ukrainian, Greek, Pakistani, Jamaican, and Cree students followed suit. It was beautiful to see how diverse participants adapted *HHH* to their context.

We thank this volume’s editors and contributors for a similar gift. We hope it will advance the conversation around intercultural decolonization in the Mennonite church and beyond.