Editorial

Malinda Elizabeth Berry

On March 20, 1925, Frederick Lewis Donaldson, then Canon of Westminster Abbey, preached a sermon enumerating "seven deadly social evils": wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle. Donaldson's list is a variation on the seven deadly sins of Christian tradition: envy, greed, gluttony, lust, pride, sloth, and wrath. But I also think Dante's circles of Hell—described in the *Inferno* portion of his *Divine Comedy*—are apt as well. In addition to lust, gluttony, greed, and wrath, the poet names heresy, violence, fraud, and treachery as circles of Hell. What Donaldson's list rightly suggests is that spiritual trespasses have social implications; this connection, which is foundational for doing Christian ethics, is at the heart of the pieces collected in this volume.

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The organizing theme of this issue of *Vision*, "originating sins," is a complicated phrase. To some it signals the doctrine of "original sin," but to others it is a way of thinking theologically and morally about the roots and foundations of the institutions that are woven into the fabric of North American life. In either case, this phrase directs our collective attention to the truth of the biblical adage that "we reap what we sow." Using this imagery, we might think of critical theological and ethical reflection on the social and institutional manifestations of Christianity as comparable to the work farmers, botanists, and ecologists do to promote health and combat disease within an ecosystem like an orchard.

In late August, guided by staff from Mennonite Central Committee: Central States (Michelle Armster, Erica Littlewolf, and Karen Kauffman Wall), I joined a group of other church folk for two days of learning, listening, and conversing. Our topic was the Doctrine of Discovery—that doctrine promulgated by the church and European monarchies in the fifteenth century and inscribed into US law in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that blessed colonial powers to seize the lands of indig-

enous peoples and thereby to terrorize and massacre indigenous peoples in the process. We turned our attention to images as well as words, and one of the images we kept coming back to was something we called "the tree of death," producing genocide and femicide. In this image, developed by the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement–Ottawa (IPSMO) and titled "The Tree of Colonial Oppression," the tree's roots are colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Its trunk and branches are *terra nullius*, the Indian Act, intergenerational trauma, and other expressions of deadly social evils. In their work, IPSMO also refers to another tree: "The Liberation Tree." This tree is almost dancing in the soil and is full of life, nourished by love, respect, humility, honesty, wisdom, courage, and truth. This tree is sprouting diversity, coexistence, and harmony from branches of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being—what the biblical tradition considers to be God's *shalom*.

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The pieces in this issue of *Vision* engage the broader theme "originating sins" through the particulars of the Doctrine of Discovery. Each contribution is a piece of resistance to the doctrine's building blocks and strategies of enslavement, exploitation, extraction, extermination, and extinction. Each contribution is also a piece of affirmation that we humans, with God's guidance, can learn, grow, heal, and change. But the tree of life and liberation is still vulnerable, and we are too. Even when our hearts have changed, and we see things differently, we are still caught in the snare of social and systemic evils even as we oppose and resist them.

In her song "Greed," Bernice Johnson Reagon intones, "Greed is a poison rising in this land / the soul of the people twisted in its command." From our historical vantage point, I concur with Reagon that greed has incredible staying power and has played a powerful role in forming the nations of Canada and the United States of America, among others. To further paraphrase Reagon, greed and its siblings are virulent. They tirelessly infect everyone, never stopping and never giving up.

What is the antidote to such poison? The song doesn't answer that question, but a biblical response to such atrocity might include donning

a sackcloth and wearing ashes after we have torn our clothes made of (colonialist and imperialist) North American homespun.

We Anabaptists are not the first or only Christians who have been working to respond to the generations and generations of violence against indigenous peoples perpetrated by colonialist nations and their citizens. The Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition is one expression of the World Council of Churches' 2012 call to "reflect upon our own national and church history and to encourage all member parishes and congregations to seek a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples."

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As we Anabaptists deepen our commitment to the movement of Christians who consider the Doctrine of Discovery to be one of the originating sin of Western Christianity's westward expansion, my hope is that we will also find ways to affirm that Christianity is not a monolith. There has never been, nor will there be, consensus among all Christians on questions of biblical interpretation, doctrinal confession, or ethics. For all the defenders of the Doctrine of Discovery, there have also been opponents to this paradigm. Telling the truth about how European Mennonites benefitted personally from the doctrine in the past—and how the contemporary motley crew of Anabaptist-Mennonites that we call the Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA participates in the doctrine's cruel legacy in this moment—is difficult heart-breaking work. But when we begin to cut down the trees of death and oppression and cultivate trees of life and liberation, our mourning and pain begins to turn into joy.

My own journey with the Doctrine of Discovery is still young, and I have many questions, but I have been impacted personally by some of the writers featured here, especially Rich Hostetler Meyer and Katerina Friesen. As part of the ongoing commitment Rich has made to shifting all kinds of paradigms described in his article, Rich helped connect Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) to Potawatomi photographer Sharon Hoogstraten whose stunning portraits provide the AMBS learning community with a tangible, visual, and visceral sense of who tended the prairie before we arrived and how they have endured. A few years ago, AMBS exhibited Sharon's portraits in conjunction with our Rooted & Grounded conference. This conference, which Katerina helped plan, fo-

cused on Indigenous issues related to land. More recently, Rich helped area congregations purchase prints of the eight portraits for permanent installation on our campus. In June, when we celebrated their arrival in conjunction with the departure of the pilgrims who followed the Trail of Death (led by Katerina), Sharon remarked that the portraits seemed to her to be at home. I take her comment as a heartening word of encouragement. Don't misunderstand: buying portraits of Native Americans to hang on the walls of a seminary is not a magical transaction that erases history. Rather, these portraits help us begin to tell a story of acknowledgement—they are saplings of liberation I hope future generations of AMBS students and employees will experience as mature trees.

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I have chosen to lead with a sampling of these portraits because, in the pages that follow, the primary speakers and audience are descended from white, European settlers of the United States and Canada. As I serve in the editorial role for this issue of *Vision*, I am, among other things, a person of color moderating and brokering a conversation focusing on white colonialist patterns and history because I understand how important it is for white Anabaptists in North America to recognize their sociological, psychological, and spiritual identity as settlers. While I would have preferred to gather articles from various perspectives of red, black, white, and mixed Mennonites, it is too early for that conversation. Many white Mennonites are still learning what it means to be white and how to integrate sociological understandings about identity with confessional and religious identity. This is why I am grateful for the articles Sheri Hostetler and Marty Troyer have contributed chronicling congregational journeys through this complex geography of memory, identity, violence, ignorance, denial, and reparation.

I am also glad to include here pieces by current AMBS students and recent alumni who followed the Trail of Death this summer. The nine-day pilgrimage from June 3 to 13, 2019, traced the route the US military forced approximately eight hundred and fifty Potawatomi to take in 1838 when they were forced from their ancestral homeland in northern Indiana to present-day Osawatomie, Kansas. The course description states:

> *We will remember this expulsion by prayerfully walking several miles of the route each day and by reading journals and letters from the time of the removal. Potawatomi descendants of those who survived the Trail of Death will join our group to share their stories during meal times and ceremony. We will confront the theologies that contributed to white settler colonialism and will seek what new paths God opens for repair today as we journey in remembrance and lament.*

Peter Anderson, Andrew Hudson, Mara Weaver Boshart, and Katerina Friesen have contributed pieces of their course work that also represent their soul work. We can see there are many ways to engage the originating sins of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

These complex spaces are liminal and just big enough to step into, allowing us to sit down and get cozy with our discomfort. Where do I belong? Do I have a sense of being deeply linked to a group or being from a certain place? What is it that makes one indigenous? How do I renounce systemic violence and oppression? What is the meaning and power of acknowledgement in Native communities compared to those shaped by dominant culture? Can I (whatever my lineage) forgive myself and my forebears for our part in contributing to the colonial enterprise? I hope what is here helps you deeply ponder your humanity within the ecosystem of our ancient Earth. After all, if our work is to be theological, it is necessarily deep. Here the articles by Elaine Enns and Jonathan Brenneman give us some places to pause and consider what we each bring to the work of listening, learning, and healing—as do the poems by Kevin Ressler, a Mennonite writer of color, with which this volume closes.

Just as the seven deadly social evils do not rest, neither does the quest for justice, compassion, sharing, joy, innovation, harmony, and understanding that becomes wisdom.

About the author

Malinda Elizabeth Berry is both a theologian and a teacher. Her commitment to Anabaptism in the Mennonite tradition is evident in her approach to an array of topics, issues, and concerns of our day: Christian social responsibility, environmental stewardship—with an emphasis on human ecology, and renewing congregational life in its structural and spiritual dimensions. In addition to the research she does to support her teaching, Malinda continues to develop her contribution to peace theology: shalom political theology.