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Rethinking discipleship

Editorial

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People formed in the Anabaptist traditions tend to take discipleship for granted. We have heard the word as long as we can remember. It was part of our catechism or baptism classes, where we learned about the sixteenth-century martyrs, teased out the phrase *radical discipleship*, and thought about our commitment to be followers of Jesus. Pressed to articulate a faith statement, whether before baptism, as part of a small group exercise, upon coming to seminary, or just because someone asks, most of us include something about discipleship.

Precisely because discipleship is a commonplace among us, it is time to look again at this notion. Does it still inspire us? Does it demand anything more of us? Does it still serve? Has it become, in our rhetoric or in our practice, something twisted and less than full-orbed? Have we shaped the concept of discipleship rather than letting it shape us? Does the way we think about discipleship relate to Jesus and his disciples? Is there something about our context—with its wealth, privileges, and opportunities—that calls us to reevaluate our discipleship? Is there something about living in twenty-first North America that calls us to rethink discipleship *and* to ask for help in doing so from people who are not so wealthy, privileged, or flush with opportunity?

Precisely because discipleship is a commonplace among us, it is time to look again at this notion. Does it still inspire us? Does it demand anything more of us? Does it still serve?

The mission of this issue of *Vision* is not to answer these questions! They are important questions that call for many more voices to join the conversation. We need to hear from Anabaptists in all parts of the world and from many different strands of the tradition. There are many ways to be Anabaptist, many ways to understand this tradition, many ways to live out of and into

these commitments. But the writers in this issue are making a start toward those answers. Although no issue of *Vision*, no matter what the topic, claims to be the last word, we do want to contribute to the dialogue about what matters among thoughtful church leaders and other believers. This issue on rethinking discipleship does that.

We begin with two articles that help us look at where we have been and where we might be going. Norman Kraus has been thinking about discipleship since the 1960s when he was guiding college students to reflect theologically and ecclesiastically, and then through years of evangelizing in Japan that called him to rethink salvation and the atonement, and now into his productive retirement. Here he gives his take on our collective move from the notion of radical discipleship to missional discipleship. Rachel Twigg Boyce picks up where Norman leaves off. She is one of our newer voices, the pastor of an intentional community in Winnipeg. Their articles converge on the issue of economics, which both authors see as a significant challenge to discipleship. Kraus notes that the institutional church, including North American Mennonite congregations, has chosen "accommodation to the economic disparity in society as it organizes its life and ministry." Such accommodation makes it difficult to keep relations between established Mennonite churches and the movement Boyce represents strong and healthy.

Along with economics and economic disparity, the concerns of our contemporary context provide other lively testing grounds for following Jesus. The next three articles are quite different, but all help us think through our responses to some of those challenges as ways of living out our commitment. In my mind, these pieces cluster around hospitality. Jessica Mast engages biblical themes, principles, and stories to address immigration matters, and she formulates a stance on discipleship as hospitality. Paul Keim's sermon helps us break through the patina of earnestness and self-righteousness that tempts disciples, to move into a hospitality of the mind and heart where we can truly practice faith. César Moya, in his work with Latin American truth commissions and Anabaptist theology, challenges us to see hospitality to truth and justice as part of living out our commission as disciples.

In assembling this issue, I have learned how important ecumenism has been for our ongoing conversation and practice of dis-

cipleship. Part of that importance is the simple reality that we as Anabaptists have no corner on discipleship, as Allan Rudy-Froese suggests with an engaging turn on the parable of the good Samaritan. We may take discipleship for granted, but we by no means own it. We have much to gain from conversations with those of other traditions. The Lutherans have been particularly influential in our thinking. Kathryn Johnson (Lutheran) and André Gingerich Stoner (Mennonite) have worked together in their respective denominational roles. Here they offer companion pieces about what we have learned from each other about discipleship. Johnson makes a poignant comment about Menno Simon's definition of true evangelical faith, and Stoner asks an equally poignant question about whether an Anabaptist martyr mentality really serves our efforts to follow Jesus at this time.

Ruth Boehm, from her perspective as an experienced pastor, reflects with clarity and gentle wisdom on discipleship as it takes shape in church life. Ultimately, real congregational life in the context of real interaction with the real world that God loves is the concrete arena for following Jesus. In many ways, challenges raised earlier in the issue—economics, hospitality, and ecumenism, among others—resonate practically with what Boehm is doing in and with the congregations of her region.

Toward the end of the issue, we return to the Bible. The Sermon on the Mount has been an important text—maybe *the* text—for Anabaptist understandings of discipleship. Will Streeter and Katja Neumann provide two different and important perspectives on the sermon. Streeter insists that in the first place faithful discipleship is a matter not so much of doing but of seeing from the heart. Neumann's carefully reasoned thesis argues that intellectual work is also discipleship—and also requires heart. Using Bonhoeffer's work on the Sermon on the Mount (*The Cost of Discipleship*), she argues that discipleship needs not only revelation but also reflection on the recognition of revelation.

Thomas Yoder Neufeld concludes the issue with his article on a Mennonite view of grace. Our need for a sense of grace in serving our commission as Jesus' disciples has wound its way through many of the preceding offerings. Yoder Neufeld pulls these together in a way that is both chastened and much more useful. Thanks be to God.

From radical to missional discipleship

C. Norman Kraus

In 1950 Dean H. S. Bender offered his first seminar on discipleship for the advanced students in Bible at Goshen (Indiana) College. The basic text was Bonheoffer's *Cost of Discipleship*, which had recently been published in an English edition. I chose to write a paper for presentation to the class on E. Stanley Jones, the famous Methodist missionary to India. The word was already in common parlance among the Methodists. None of us at the time had any idea how central to Mennonite identity the term *discipleship* would become, and what twists and turns it would take.

With the recovery of an Anabaptist vision—and in the context of social upheaval, new biblical insights, the Vietnam War, and political protests—the challenge of radical response was aroused from its somnolent past.

Discipleship renewal in the 1960s

The concept of discipleship was strongly suggested at the time by the renewed interest in Anabaptism. Anabaptism gave us the precedents of radical protest against the accommodating reforms of the state churches. It took some of its inspiration from the monastic tradition, but it cast the monastic ideals in a lay and secular—that is, sociopolitical, nonviolent—movement. Its most radical form was the Hutterite community, which raised the question of radical equality and sharing of wealth.

Because of rejection and social exclusion, Anabaptism after the sixteenth century retreated into a separatist, more monastic and increasingly moralistic pattern. Its nonviolent challenge to society became nonresistance, spelled out in separatist terms, using the categories of church and world and the language of nonconformity. In the twentieth century in North America—with the recovery of an Anabaptist vision and in the context of social upheaval, new biblical insights, the Vietnam War, and political

protests—the challenge of radical response was aroused from its somnolent past.

The Mennonite denominations in North America were in the final stages of their institutional development, which had begun a century earlier. Change was in the air! But what kinds of changes were compatible with their nonconformist past? Evangelistic crusades patterned after Billy Graham had been introduced. The pastoral ministry was beginning to be professionalized, and Mennonite seminaries were talking of cooperative association. In the United States, Mennonite Central Committee was pushing for a more vigorous witness to Washington. Protests against the Vietnam War dragged on. The civil rights movement, which crossed the line between civil society and the church, was in full swing. The charismatic renewal movement, which was invading Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, was at its height. In the middle of a social revolution, the national Mennonite bodies were understandably cautious.

Fifty years ago, restless, visionary Mennonites challenged what seemed to them a denominational accommodation to the economic and military establishment. Now we need to reassess the nature and relevance of that movement.

This in a far too sketchy manner describes the setting for the radical discipleship movement pushed by restless, visionary small groups among Mennonites in North America. They challenged what seemed to them a lack of social witness and a denominational accommodation to the economic and military establishment. By political and social protest and the formation of intensive communal groups they radically challenged the moralistic, separatist, and fundamentalist spirit that threatened to overtake the Anabaptist vision. In this sense one might argue that theirs was a populist updating of Bender's Anabaptist vision. At the time the wave of "small group" intensive communities and social protest threatened denominational leaders. Now some fifty years later, in light of denominational developments and new discipleship slogans, we need to reassess the nature and relevance of the movement.

Discipleship ferment today

In the intervening years we have not, of course, dropped the concept of discipleship. Quite the opposite: it has become an

identifying slogan for progressive Mennonites, and has been espoused in diluted (less radical) form in evangelical circles. Among the more right-wing, fundamentalist evangelicals, "evangelism and discipleship" is now a catchphrase. In what is now referred to as Neoevangelicalism there is more emphasis on the significance of the life and example of Jesus, especially in the emerging church movement.

Does the concept of radical communal discipleship still hold a challenge for traditional churches? Are attempts at radical discipleship calling traditional churches to renewal and some modified form of Christian mutuality and radical justice?

In several megachurch settings, calls for a more robust expression of Christian values against racism, war, and individualistic extremes of affluent display have carried the label of discipleship. There are instances in liberal Protestantism of renewed emphasis (at least theologically) on significant inclusive racial, sexual, and cultural relationships, in the social gospel tradition. But little has been done to implement a prophetic alternative to our present culture, as explained by Walter Brueggemann or the more progressive biblical social vision of leaders like Ron Sider and Jim Wallis. And as we shall see, the latest attempt to adapt and embody it in the established congregations carries the moniker *missional*.

Alongside the established churches, individual pastors of note—including Brian McLaren of the emergent church movement, Greg Boyd and more recently Rick Warren, both from megachurches—have offered models of more radical discipleship. Still more radical patterns, such as Shane Claiborne's New Monasticism and Seth McCoy's Third Way Community, are seeking to follow a radical pattern of genuine mutuality and sharing, but their impact on traditional denominations thus far has been peripheral. Ron Copeland's Early Church and Our Community Place in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Rachel Twigg Boyce's House Blend Ministries, located in Winnipeg (of which more later), may present new possibilities for collaboration with established congregations. And of course, the earlier established groups such as Reba Place in Evanston, Illinois, and Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, have continued their significant witness to a more radical way.

Looking to the radicality of Jesus

One can appropriately raise the question whether—and if so, in what sense—the concept of radical communal discipleship still holds a challenge for traditional churches. Are these attempts at radical discipleship the "true church" calling the traditional churches to renewal and some modified form of Christian mutuality and radical justice? But before we speak to these questions, we need to look at the qualities we see in Jesus, which we as his disciples are attempting to imitate and initiate in our society. It is not obvious how we should adapt the message of Jesus to an individualistic, free market, and politically democratic society where socialism is seen as a dirty word.

The character of Jesus' message and example in its own sociopolitical setting has been explored and debated ad infinitum. We do not have room to review all these, but the following seem to be generally recognized as the essential characteristics of his life and ministry:

Jesus was not a Levitical missionary reaching out to the poor through a charitable temple program. He was one of the "accursed" multitudes among whom he lived and ministered without an independent source of wealth and economic security.

His ministry was based on agape (the New Testament word translated "love") in contrast to power or economic advantage. Agape may best be translated as compassionate respect for other persons without regard to their condition and situation. Love of neighbor as oneself was at the core of his ministry. Such respect called for genuine mutuality and sharing that is more than charity. It is the mutual respect and treatment of others that requires justice. This respect is also the tolerance we afford ourselves when we make mistakes. The other, even if she be opponent or enemy, is to be considered neighbor.

Such agapeic respect for the other as neighbor implies a radical inclusivism. Jesus' attention and compassionate respect was extended to people regardless of religious conviction, cultural identity, sexual identity, economic or political status, gender, social standing, and physical condition. In this regard he operated outside the boundaries of temple Judaism. He was not a Levitical missionary reaching out to the poor through a charitable temple program. He was one of the "accursed" multitudes among whom

he lived and ministered without an independent source of wealth and economic security.

His community was the people he taught and ministered to. His answer to the rhetorical question he posed about who his mother and brothers were identified the crowd who listened as his extended family (Luke 8:19–21). One of the major criticisms leveled against him was that he not only associated but also identified with the wrong crowd—tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners.

Why is it so difficult to be a radical disciple of Jesus within the confines of the institutional church? Sociologically, the church has been organized as a voluntary institution focused on the family and for the preservation of values of the middle class.

The boundaries of his concern and ministry were permeable! He explicitly ignored differences of religious identity when the ministry of others showed a genuine god-like character like the one he represented (Luke 9:49–50). He was not promoting a religious or a self-serving project. His concern was for the full realization of the image of God in human community, not in planting a religious community.

When one considers these characteristics, it becomes more clear why it is so difficult to be a radical disciple of Jesus in the world within the confines of the institutional church. Sociologically the church has been organized as a voluntary religious charitable institution focused on the family and for the preservation and dissemination of spiritual and moral values of the middle class. Christ's call to discipleship beckons us beyond the boundary of charity and requires compassionate social justice (agape).

Proclaiming the reign of God or organizing congregations?

Jesus spoke of the reign of God; he did not establish the religious organization we know as the church. That was the work of Paul and other leaders (soon to be called bishops) in the following decades. Jesus' followers were recognized as those who accepted him as messiah and followed his way of life in their Judaic culture. They were not called Christians until the Gentile churches were established several generations later.

This distinction between the reign of God and the organization of congregations following the pattern of the Jewish synagogue is

important to understanding the relation of radical communities of disciples to the organized congregations we call church. God's reign is not an ethical construct, a moral program, a religious institution, or a political movement. It is God's stirring, enabling presence as displayed in Jesus Christ moving among us to establish shalom in the human community. God's reign is recognized where the healing, transforming effects of God's presence are embodied in human response. This may, of course, also happen within the boundaries of the organized congregation, which we call church, but it is not limited to or necessarily dependent on such organizations.

Transformation of individuals and restoration of relationships are the signs of the kingdom of God. Where the creative, restoring word of God finds embodiment, there is the radical body of Christ.

If we think of God's reign in terms of its characterization in the Beatitudes; of God's power as God's energy enabling shalom; of God's authority as example and impulse rather than command; of God's rule as influence and enablement, not control and enforcement of commandments; of Jesus' presence as the spirit of Jesus in personal healing, reconciling dynamic; then we can begin to evaluate the authentic radicality of religious institutions—denominations, sects, congregations, societies. Re-creation and transformation of individuals and restoration of social relationships that have been destroyed by violence and death are the signs of the kingdom of God. In short where the creative, restoring word of God finds embodiment, there is the radical (going to the root) body of Christ.

Radical discipleship and the traditional congregation

We have found from experience that it is extremely difficult to transform a traditional Protestant congregation into a radical community. Radical disciples almost always break away from the structures of the established congregation to begin their communities. So what is it about the institutional church that makes it so difficult for it to become the broker for social change?

The root of the problem seems to lie in the traditional congregation's accommodation to the economic disparity in society as it organizes its life and ministry around the family unit. And this is not just a modern problem. First Timothy 5:8—"And

whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"—may reflect the early church's experience of this tension. We are willing to share wealth so long as it does not threaten our own and the family's security. We assume the virtue of self-preservation, and we see taking responsibility for the welfare of the family as a given, as primary. Radical community challenges these basic assumptions underlying the Protestant congregation. To share poverty as well as wealth seems counterintuitive! And yet this is precisely what Jesus challenges us to do, and it is this radical challenge that motivates the radical community.

Missional discipleship focuses on organized churches and asks how they can operate authentically as congregations of Christians. Communities of radical disciples begin with radical sharing, inclusivity, justice, and nonviolence, and let organizational patterns develop pragmatically.

How then might we deal with this tension and define an authentic, if not "radical" discipleship for local congregations that are focused on the Sunday morning programmed worship, pastoral inspiration, nurture of children, and social fellowship among its own members, along with a set of charitable projects? In an attempt to avoid the separatism that has been implicit in the church's social and evangelistic outreach programs in the past, the most recent denominational attempt has been dubbed "missional." Its thesis is that the church does not have a mission but is a mission participating in the missio Dei. The challenge is to be a part of God's mission in the local civil community. The congregation is not to be missionary focused (mission to) but missional. The obvious danger of such an approach without a commitment to radical discipleship is that the congregation will simply become the religious arm of the civic and political networks based on power politics and self-interest.

Missional discipleship focuses on the modern organized churches and asks how they can operate authentically as congregations of Christians. It is programmed for existing congregations that already have their own character and purposes. It does not call for a radical transformation in the organization and life of the congregation. It continues to rely on professional pastoral leadership with representative congregational decision making. This set

of characteristics may be understandable given the spiritual temperature of many congregations, but it avoids basic discipleship issues with which the radical communities wrestle. The missional model, as I understand it, has little emphasis on or structure for the development of deep spiritual relationships or local congregational discernment. It attempts to bridge the divide between church as worshiping congregation and programmed social action, and seeks to combine evangelism and social witness into an organic whole. In its evangelism ("missions") outreach it attempts to be sensitive to local cultures and to plant culturally appropriate "missional" expressions of Christianity. These are authentic goals, but the radicality of its local expression depends entirely on the spiritual temperature and vision of the individual congregation and its leadership.

It is unlikely that traditional congregations will morph into radical communities, or that such communities will cease their implied criticism and challenge to more seriously follow a Jesus model.

By contrast, communities of radical disciples begin with mutuality and egalitarian relationships, radical sharing in community, inclusivity, social justice, and nonviolence as the essential spiritual characteristics of discipleship, and they let the organizational patterns and community action develop pragmatically. Their goal is praxis, not theory. These are radical values, which simply cannot be imposed on existing congregations. They require intensive discernment and experimentation, and experience suggests that trying to introduce them in traditional congregations without careful study and discernment frequently causes schism. Little wonder then that intensive communities tend to break away from the mothering group.

It is unlikely that traditional congregations will morph into radical communities, or that such communities will cease their implied criticism and challenge to more seriously follow a Jesus model in church life. In light of this reality, we must ask in conclusion how such communities can be fruitfully related to traditional congregations in church strategy. While their impulses are not in conflict, and should not be competitive, the temptation of established congregations will be to depreciate the challenge of the radical community. Especially if the community is service ori-

ented, it may simply be considered a radical project essentially unrelated to the life of the congregation. Rachel Twigg Boyce states a real danger when in an e-mail message she confesses that "when I first started House Blend, I was concerned about either becoming a fringe movement in the denomination and/or letting others off the hook by giving the mistaken impression that they did not have a role to play because we were taking care of the poor."[1]

The New Testament goal is a complementary collaborative relationship in which the community can be an extension of the missional congregation, and the congregation can be a supportive encouragement to the intentional community.

On the other hand, if the radical community stresses a stricter ethic of equality and communal sharing, the implied criticism may threaten the mothering congregation, with the result that the authentic challenge of Jesus' life and teaching is depreciated. This has been the response to many earlier intentional groups that made communal sharing their goal. By contrast, the New Testament goal is a complementary collaborative relationship in which the community can be an extension of the missional congregation, and the congregation can be a supportive encouragement to the intentional community. The ultimate challenge for both is to find more authentic ways to fulfill their apprenticeship to Jesus as God's example of reconciliation and witness.

Note

[1] For more information about House Blend, see the article by Rachel Twigg Boyce, "Crazy. And Christ-like?" in this issue of *Vision*.

About the author

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Crazy. And Christ-like?

Rachel Twigg Boyce

House Blend Ministries was first formed when a group of people within the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba felt a growing sense that God was calling our denomination to engage the city of Winnipeg in new ways. This group began meeting biweekly to pray and dream. Eventually the group felt that rather than starting a new church or a new ministry, we should begin by forming a team of people who are passionate about the issues connected to inner-city neighbourhoods. Then we would allow ministry and mission to flow from the group that God had shaped and the particular individuals God was calling. It was at this time that I was hired on a part-time basis to help us move from dream to reality.

Beginning by forming a team of people who are passionate about the issues connected to inner-city neighbourhoods, we would allow ministry and mission to flow from the group that God had shaped and the particular individuals God was calling.

Interested people were invited to come together weekly to study *Sub-merge: Living Deep in a Shallow World: Service, Justice and Contemplation among the World's Poor*, by John B. Hayes.[1] This gathering eventually became a weekly potluck where we could get to know each other, learn more about the residents of Winnipeg's West End, pray, dream, and discern God's direction.

In the fall of 2009, at the end of a potluck one of our members said, "You know, I sometimes let homeless people sleep on my couch." No one knew how to respond to that comment. She was a single woman who lived alone. Surely inviting homeless people to sleep on her couch was crazy. And Christ-like? And crazy. And Christ-like? Our gathering ended awkwardly that night.

A few days later I had the opportunity to meet with author Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. He did not know what had happened to me that week, but he told me this story: "I know a single

woman who lives alone who encountered a homeless man and felt that she should invite him to stay on her couch. This seemed both dangerous and exactly what Jesus would do, and in that moment she asked herself two questions: "Why have I arranged my life in ways that make it so difficult to do good, and how can I rearrange my life in ways that would make it easier to do good?"[2]

In that moment she asked herself two questions: "Why have I arranged my life in ways that make it so difficult to do good, and how can I rearrange my life in ways that would make it easier to do good?"

That conversation and those questions created a light-bulb moment for me, and they changed the shape of our growing community's conversations. It is both crazy and Christ-like to invite a homeless person to sleep on your couch, but it would be easier (and significantly less crazy) if you didn't live alone. It would be even easier if these sorts of invitations were being made in the context of a supportive community of people who live within walking distance of each other.

Exploring ways of making it easier to do good

Over the next few months we continued to explore ways of making it easier to do good. We discerned that a key element we needed was a community home in the neighbourhood where some of our members would live and where some bedrooms would be reserved for guests in need of a place to stay. Other members of our community would live in the surrounding area as an additional layer of support.

We were excited about this opportunity, but I also thought of it as an impossible dream. Where would the money and other resources come from to purchase and maintain such a home? There is a longer and amazing story behind what happened next, but a few months after discerning that we needed to purchase a home, we had one, and after a few more months of renovations, three members of our community moved into their new home. Since then we have continued to renovate this home, and now we are looking forward to having eight bedrooms available for community members and guests.

We are still a very young community, and we are being formed largely by a combination of faith in Jesus Christ and trial and

error. We are excited about what God is up to in our community and our neighbourhood, and we are looking forward to what will happened next. We are inspired by Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you [have] become so dear to us."

Although we are being formed as an intentional community, we are also individuals, and while we share some distinctive practices and inspirations, I have also been formed by my own experiences and unique personality, and the following thoughts are largely my own.

My decision to participate in the formation of this Christian intentional community stems from my sense that this is the way Christ is calling me to live; it is intricately tied to my faith and my desire to live into the Great Commission. I think there is no better way to disciple others and to be discipled than in the context of a community that I can commit to being a part of for the rest of my life.

I am also inspired to live in community through my understanding of scripture and the example of those who have lived in community throughout history including monastics, Catholic Workers, and Anabaptists. In addition, I am inspired by my own experiences working for Mennonite Central Committee, by my friends in a local Benedictine monastery, and by the growing network of likeminded individuals I have had the privilege to meet in the past few years.

It is crazy and Christ-like to invite a homeless person to sleep on your couch, but it would be easier (and less crazy) if you didn't live alone. It would be even easier if such invitations were made in the context of a supportive community.

Several years ago I had the good fortune to spend some time with Reba Place Fellowship in the Chicago area, and it was there that many of the pieces of my dream for House Blend fell into place. It is exciting to see so many people, from a broad range of experiences and denominations, who are embracing this way of life. I see it as truly reflective of the image of the church as a body: the various parts may look different from each other, but when they work together it is a beautiful thing.

Sustaining practices

A variety of practices have given me life throughout this journey. Several of these, such as the practice of Sabbath-keeping, retreat, and regular visits to a spiritual director, have found their way into our community's Rule of Life. Gardening together and simply finding time to laugh and have fun with friends, both within our community and outside it, have been vital to ensuring that I can sustain this delightful but difficult way of life. Our weekly potluck and prayer evening is also a highlight of the week, giving me a chance to touch base with others in the community and to meet people who are interested in learning more about our way of life.

We begin our weekly gathering with a potluck meal at which we celebrate every item that is shared—from a bag of chips to Martha Stewart's latest masterpiece—as a gift for the community.

Once a week we gather at our community house for "potluck and prayer." This is open to anyone who wants to attend, so it usually includes a mix of committed House Blenders, neighbours, and newcomers. For most of the year we begin with a potluck meal (during the summer we simplify our format) at which we celebrate every item that is shared—from a bag of chips to Martha Stewart's latest masterpiece—as a gift for the community. After dinner a bell is rung to encourage people to finish their stories, clear their dishes, and retire to the parlour for prayer.

In theory, when we gather for prayer we are sitting in a circle, but in practice we are sometimes as many as twenty-five people crammed into a room that would comfortably seat ten—so function tends to trump form. After a brief explanation of what is about to happen (for the sake of newcomers), we go around the "circle," and each person shares her name and one high and one low from their week. "Pass" is also a perfectly acceptable way to participate. Following the sharing, we take a moment of silence to hold each other's stories and settle into a time of prayer. We follow a consistent liturgical format that includes times of singing, scripture reading, and prayers of the people. The prayer ends with a group blessing, a round of Happy Birthday (when appropriate), and then it's time for coffee, cake, and more conversation.

Our weekly gathering is not the only time we use the practice of highs and lows. We also use it during our weekly house meet-

ing, at special gatherings, and in informal conversation. Anyone who has been around House Blend for even a short period of time will be familiar with this practice, even if he doesn't know about its more traditional origin: highs and lows is really a basic version of the awareness examen. I regularly practice the more formal version of this prayer, and appreciate both its simple wisdom and its grounding in Christian tradition and theology. I also love that with minimal instruction anyone, from the theologically trained to the first-timer, can participate in this prayer. Everyone can identify the places in their week that were highs and lows, and everyone has the opportunity both to share and to be listened to. This simple practice has had a deep subversive power: our community continues to include those who tend to be ignored and who find it a rare gift to be able to speak about their highs and lows with people who are actively listening to them.

The simple practice of sharing our highs and lows has had a deep subversive power: our community includes those who tend to be ignored and who find it a rare gift to speak with people who are actively listening to them.

My participation in the House Blend community has stretched and shaped me into the person I am today, and I am looking forward to the ways it will continue to challenge me to grow into the person God wants me to be. I have experienced many highs and lows in my time with this community, but I can't think of a place I'd rather be than Winnipeg's West End, or a group of people I would rather choose to journey with than my House Blend community. It is, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, a delight to live in this way.

Notes

[1] Springvale, VIC: Go Alliance, 2002.

[2] I didn't realize this at the time, but I have since learned that these are the two questions that inspired Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day to begin the Catholic Worker Movement.

About the author

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"For you were aliens"
Discipleship in loving the other

Jessica Mast

The question of the alien, the stranger, the foreigner, the sojourner—the other—is a question any group seeking to maintain identity faces. For the Old Testament Hebrews seeking to maintain integrity as the people of God, the question of the alien was one of ethics. For North American Anabaptists today, this ethical question is crucial—as we live in a world where immigrants, documented and undocumented, are in our midst as those neighbors.

The question of relationship with the alien is one of discipleship. How did God's people, informed by their covenant relationship with YHWH, establish a healthy relationship with the stranger? How do Anabaptists today, informed by our covenant relationship and the complicated world around us, seek a relationship of integrity with our immigrant brothers and sisters? Powerful memories in our own heritage of persecution should compel us to seek this relationship.

The question of relationship with the alien is one of discipleship. How did the Hebrew people, informed by their covenant relationship with YHWH, establish a healthy relationship with the stranger? How do we?

We can learn from the relationship of covenant law and the alien, from Exodus's book of the covenant, the holiness codes of Leviticus, and the book of Deuteronomy. The law, integral to creating healthy community, provides security for marginalized groups within the Hebrew people. Trusting that God's favor often rests with the vulnerable, those who observe the law's mandates treasure the foreigner in their midst.

A discipleship that seeks relationship with the alien is built on a foundation of motivation. The motivation for healthy relationship with the alien comes from YHWH's character, and from Israel's experience as a once alien but now redeemed people. To our

relationships with aliens, Anabaptists bring our experience of a once persecuted but now redeemed people.

Five separate instances in Old Testament literature reveal a theology based on historical memory—the injunction that Israel is to treat the alien with justice, precisely because the people of Israel were once aliens in Egypt and were redeemed by God. This paradigm sounds familiar, and can be potent for Anabaptists as we seek to love our neighbors who may be strangers—because we were once oppressed and have experienced God's redemption.

Hospitality

M. Daniel Carroll, in his work on Hispanic immigration issues and Old Testament studies, begins his examination of law with the foundation of hospitality. "Hospitality to the stranger is a virtue" not just for the Hebrew people but in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Carroll sees an intensifying of this cultural norm within the laws that mark the people of God, as hospitality becomes valued for its spiritual significance and as an echo of the hospitality that YHWH manifests: "Whatever might have been the common cultural impulse to be hospitable to the stranger in ancient times is here given a more profound motivation. To be hospitable is to imitate God."

Hospitality, this imitation of YHWH, weaves its way into Torah law and becomes part of Israel's identity as a people. With Torah law seen not simply as a set of archaic legal codes related to sacrificial atonement (as we today can so easily assume), but instead as a tradition that helps define and describe covenant community, "the laws reflect something deeper: Israel's stance toward the foreigner was part of the larger fabric of its ethical life. It was part of the ethos of what it meant to be the people of God."[1]

The alien and the law

The aliens of whom the Old Testament speaks can be any number of different peoples, but they are all characterized by their vulnerable status and the special attention God asks that God's people give them. The English translations of the four Hebrew terms—*ger*, *nokri*, *tosab*, and *zar*—vary: alien, sojourner, stranger, resident alien. And they overlap in their usages. The term that occurs

most frequently is *ger*, used to describe both the identity and nature of what makes a sojourner a sojourner. Ethnicity is part of what defines a *ger*, but even more important is the dependent and vulnerable socioeconomic status of a *ger*, as we see when the patriarchs are referred to as sojourners.

The identity of the *ger* rests on two foundations: economic poverty and poverty of relationship. The lack of these two resources—the relational security of family ties and the financial security of land ownership—provides a contrast to what Israel as a community of people connected to their land holds dear. This alien is often grouped with the widow and the orphan in prophetic calls to do justice and especially attend to the needs of these categories of people. They are among the vulnerable who have a special place in God's heart. Recognizing the *ger* as lacking these two distinct resources can help us discover who that *ger* is in our land.

Old Testament literature reveals a theology based on historical memory—the injunction that Israel is to treat the alien with justice, because the people of Israel were once aliens in Egypt and were redeemed by God.

A quick glance at the alien's presence in the law codes reveals that much of the content is centered around a few key elements of Israel's social structure. Foreigners are specifically included in the provision regarding Sabbath rest from work (Exod. 20:10; Lev. 16:29; Deut. 5:14), mentioned in conjunction with Israelites or "native-born" people when subject to the same dietary and social regulations (Lev. 17; 18:16; 20; 22; 24:27), listed as beneficiaries of gleaning policies and rhythms of redistributive tithing (Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 14:19; 26:12, 29–31), and invited to celebrate in Israel's religious feasts and listen to the reading of the law and renewing of the covenant (Deut. 15; 26:11; 29:11; 31:12), among other interactions.

The alien identified as *nokri* is not allowed certain privileges retained for native-born Israelites, such as kingship and interest-free debt repayment (as recorded in Deut. 15:3; 17:15; and 23:20). The sojourner is both protected under Torah and expected to share in the responsibility of the societal order, but often the distinction of foreign-ness is maintained and the alien is not considered part of the majority culture.

For you were aliens

The most powerful call to live justly with the foreigner comes five times throughout the Torah texts. This motivation of former enslavement, and God's redemptive hand, is unmistakable as justification for treating the alien with mercy. These texts serve as our basis for continuing the conversation about loving the stranger among us, loving the immigrants even as we remember Anabaptist experiences of being immigrants: "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Exod. 22:21; NIV). "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt" (Exod. 23:9). "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:33–34). "And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). "Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there" (Deut. 24:17–18).

In conversation with Christian community development

My experience of discipleship the past few years has been one of synthesis—of two different communities interacting to form a more full view of God, and more full understanding of the praxis I am compelled to seek out. As a student at Fresno (California) Pacific Biblical Seminary as well as the Fresno Institute for Urban Leadership, my challenge and joy in this season has been to make connections between the two learning environments.

The principles of urban Christian community development can be understood, as articulated by pioneer John M. Perkins, as "practical biblical principles evolved from years of living and working among the poor." The development of these ideas by practitioners, and their birthing out of intentional listening to the "outsider" and to scripture, endows them with a holistic significance worthy of our attention. The three key principles are known as the three R's: relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution.[2]

Relocation

Relocation, as a commitment of urban Christian community development, encourages Christians to physically root themselves in the midst of poverty, set a personal stake in the neighborhood, and function as newcomers until settled into the culture. This choice to relocate—as many urban community development people are doing, in seeking to be good neighbors in a new context—expands the definition of who is the alien. In different contexts we discover different "others," an experience that reminds those from the dominant culture that it is not only the vulnerable one who is the stranger. The identity of the *ger* becomes our own identity, if we choose to root ourselves in an unfamiliar context for the purpose of transformation. The theological response is a choice to embrace an interdependent and culturally critical identity as the *ger*, an identity resonating with that of the *gerim*, who are both the sojourning patriarchs and the dependent marginalized.

Relocation, as a commitment of urban Christian community development, encourages Christians to physically root themselves in the midst of poverty, set a personal stake in the neighborhood, and function as newcomers until settled into the culture.

As Anabaptists, we often find ourselves blessed with a strong communal identity. Whether the connection is through physical proximity or through congregational intimacy, we know who we are as a people. The challenge to relocate—voluntarily entering unfamiliar territory—means letting go of that identity security. To be in relationship with our immigrant brothers and sisters means meeting them in their homes, perhaps outside our home. It means we may meet documented and undocumented neighbors outside our places of theological comfort, outside our places of cultural familiarity, and outside our everyday interactions. We enter into another world to become the *ger*, to become the sojourner and seek mutual transformation. Relocation calls us to venture into another's home territory and risk experiencing marginalization.

Reconciliation

The second principle, reconciliation, means that God's redemptive work is able to break down barriers of race, ethnicity, culture,

theology, and economics; disparate groups are called to witness together across boundaries for kingdom justice. The commitment to reconciliation creates cross-cultural partnership as a priority, and recognizes the challenge in witnessing effectively together. It is apparent that any kind of community development or transformation must be the work not of one dominant monoculture but of varied groups who have a stake in the future of the community. The theological response, born from clear calls in Leviticus, may be to intentionally include the *ger* in our contemporary "religious feasts" and celebrations of covenant renewal, crossing boundaries with hope for reconciliation.

If we understand the *ger* today as a vulnerable immigrant, and understand our call to do justice as we remember our own story of oppression and redemption, it should be Anabaptist voices leading the movement for justice for the foreigner.

Our Anabaptist church today has a vibrant and diverse momentum—giving us a glimpse of the reconciled kingdom where monoculture does not exist and embrace across boundaries is the norm. As people of God, we seek covenant community with one another, and we choose the "one anothers" we seek out for community. An intentional pursuit of reconciliation pushes us to look for "one anothers" in new places, flinging open the doors of community to make space for God's Spirit to move powerfully. We can also, perhaps more importantly, begin to listen more closely to the voice of the other already living within our community. Cross-cultural or racial reconciliation does not end with an invitation, but discipleship continues as we place value on relationships and on the good fruit that comes from intercultural, antiracist fellowship.

Redistribution

The third principle, redistribution, has to do with understanding both the needs of a community (felt and real) and the resources present in the community that can be brought to life and shared. The assumption is that God's people are present and rooted among those with poverty of varying kinds, able to put skills and resources to work as the community is empowered. The *ger* is marked by a poverty of wealth and relationship, and Christian

community development reminds us that poverty or lack of resources can be manifested in different forms—financial, relational, educational, spiritual, and others. The freedom and flexibility of organic redistribution means that different methods will be used to engage the foreigner because of differing needs, echoing the variety of protections and expectations placed on the alien in the Pentateuch.

It seems undeniable that the immigrant, documented or undocumented, lacks certain resources. A response of discipleship birthed out of commitment to redistribution, and commitment to honor Old Testament values, is to provide resources to the under-resourced, especially those who are vulnerable immigrants in our midst. Our Anabaptist heritage is one of peace and justice—one often of advocacy and action—and values the hard work of discipleship. Redistribution is a manifestation of that hard work, a practical and tangible way to live out the hospitality and generosity that we hold dear. Redistribution means sharing the financial and relational resources that are present in our community, from the intimate act of housing a stranger to the pursuit of systemic immigration reform.

Historical memory

Let us revisit one of the most powerful primary texts around the very foundation for justice in relationship with the alien—Israel's historical memory, the identity of being once oppressed but now redeemed. These few rich statements hold elements of ethics instruction, reminders of Israel's identity, and assertion of God's authority and character: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:33–34). The bold suggestion here is that, if we understand the *ger* today as a vulnerable immigrant, and understand our call to do justice as we remember our own story of oppression and redemption—it should be Anabaptist voices leading the movement for relationship with the alien, justice for the foreigner, and immigration reform for the sojourner.

In a world where Christianity has become a dominant, powerful, and secure faith practice, and where the church has become

Constantinian (to use John Howard Yoder's term),[3] the responsibility to remember redemption from oppression falls on those groups whose persecution or hardship still remains strong in their historical memory. As Anabaptists, we remember our hardship. Our persecution is ingrained in our identity, our story, our memory as a people. We have not forgotten what it is like for God to liberate the oppressed and bring redemption. This memory is a gift. It can enable us to speak prophetically against mistreatment of immigrants who are now in our midst, because the recollection of our own persecution has not disappeared into complacency; it is not too far gone to compel us to action.

For Anabaptists, memory of persecution and liberation is a gift. It can enable us to speak prophetically against mistreatment of immigrants who are now in our midst.

Our identity as a people once persecuted but now redeemed should powerfully direct our discipleship. Without this collective memory, we are hardly Anabaptists. But without action in response to it, we are hardly disciples. How much do our Anabaptist narratives of flight, refuge, persecution, and redemption mirror the struggle of today's immigrant communities? How much, if we have experienced God's redemption as a people group struggling to survive, should we be advocating for the redemption and survival of another vulnerable people group? How much do we love the story of Dirk Willems's conviction and his mercy crossing of the icy pond at Asperen to rescue his pursuer who had fallen through the ice?[4] How much do we wonder what powerful stories will arise from our brothers and sisters crossing La Linea, the U.S.–Mexican border, in the scorching desert?

For you were immigrants

What we read in the Exodus book of the covenant, in the holiness codes of Leviticus, and throughout the book of Deuteronomy is that the presence of aliens is not a thing to be ignored. Studying the presence of the foreigner in the law codes, and understanding the relational and financial poverty that makes the *ger* a marginalized person are imperative in our quest to establish a healthy relationship with the alien today. Justice for the foreigner is a key element of the law that seeks healthy community for the Hebrew

people who were oppressed and then redeemed. Principles of Christian community development can equip us to engage our urban and complex world, and a more full embrace of our identity as now-redeemed Anabaptists should propel us to action. We are called to engage the Old Testament as a source that is living and vital for discipleship: justice for the sojourner is not to be ignored. Quite the opposite: justice for the alien is a clear call to those of us who know what it is like to be strangers in a strange land.

Our identity as a people once persecuted but now redeemed should powerfully direct our discipleship. Without this collective memory, we are hardly Anabaptists. But without action in response to it, we are hardly disciples.

Knowing that God has bought liberation to our Anabaptist community—and trusting that God will bring liberation to today's immigrant community—we can creatively craft an alternative narrative to the Leviticus passage that calls Israel to remember their foundation for loving the sojourner: "When an *immigrant* lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The *immigrant* living with you must be treated as one of your *own heritage*. Love her as yourself, for you were *immigrants persecuted in Europe*. I am the Lord your God" (adapted from Lev. 19:33–34).

Notes

[1] M. Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, Church, and the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. Carroll focuses on immigration to the United States, but his discussion has wider applicability.
[2] John M. Perkins, *Restoring At-Risk Communities*. Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1995.
[3] The label *Constantinian* identifies shifts in church-state relations (and in theology and practice) associated with the Roman emperor's legalization of Christianity in 313. Eventually membership in the church came to be associated with citizenship in the state, and Christian religion began to legitimate the exercise of political power and the maintenance of a social order.
[4] Dirk Willems, a Dutch Anabaptist, had escaped from prison. His merciful act led to his recapture. He was burned at the stake in 1569.

About the author

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The legacy of Sarah and Abraham
A sermon on Genesis 17 and Romans 4

Paul Keim

Has anybody here seen my old friends, Sarai and Avram? Can you tell me where "the Princess" and "the Exalted Ancestor" have gone?

Maybe they moved without leaving a forwarding address. Or perhaps they changed their names. It happens. People come to be called by informal variations of their more formal given names, or by nicknames derived from diminutives, titles, social position, personal characteristics, or other associations.

You're probably looking for Sarah, the PrinCESS, and Avraham, the Ancestor of Many Nations. These "new" names actually represent regional or dialectical variations of the same names—as Bob is to Robert, as Patty is to Patricia. The renaming here is a form of word play called paronomasia. Ancient literature, including the Bible, is full of such popular etymologies whereby a poetic bond is formed between memory and identity. In this case, a promise of progeny has been made all the more confounding in the face of chronic barrenness. No need to overinterpret here. It's like a joke. Seriously.

So on this second Sunday of Lent, incongruously reclaimed from the Mother Church by the wayward children of the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation, we evoke the carnevalesque echoes of our congregation's own wry appropriation of this most sober season. You want irony? You want paronomasia? You want paradox? Read Genesis 17 in Hebrew and you can have it all. Imagine a treasure house of gems hidden beneath the rich topsoil of the text, and we the gardeners, sifting the loamy fields with grammar, syntax, and vocabulary as our rake and hoe and plow. And with each soiling of the hands in this hermeneutical horticulture, that which was hidden is emerging. Yes, sisters and brothers, you can have it all. Taste and see that the Word is good! Can I get an Amen?

And it isn't just the business of the names. As we dig further we find that Avram's response to the promise of many descendants is the very same as Av-raham's reaction to the news of Sarah's impending motherhood: He falls on his face and he laughs [*yitshaq*]. He says to himself, "Can a hundred-year-old man become a father, or a ninety-nine-year-old woman have a child?" In the rarified echelons of higher literary analysis, we call that a rhetorical question.

The Yahwist's grand iteration of the promise of numerous descendants to the childless couple in Genesis 15 presents us with a patriarch who "believed YHWH and it was credited to him as righteousness" (or as Ted Hiebert translates in the Common English Bible, "Abram trusted the LORD, and the LORD recognized Abram's high moral character"). But here in Genesis 17, Abraham's faith response to the assurances of El Shaddai takes the somewhat odd form of a desperate appeal: "If only you would accept Ishmael!" No, God replies [chuckling?], your nonagenarian prinCESS will bear the child, and you will name him [godly guffaws?] Yitshaq—"God laughs" [thunderous peals of belly-busting hilarity?].

We say "Isaac" and miss the point entirely. But I think it was intended to be funny, and theologically normative. God laughs. And if that's true then we need an incarnational Christology of humor.

We say "Isaac" and miss the point entirely. But I think it was intended to be funny, and theologically normative. God laughs. And if that's true then we need an incarnational Christology of humor. Parody and paradox permeate the biblical text, delivered by incongruous twists in stories from Balaam to Jonah, as well as many examples of subtle wordplay that defy the translator's craft. Surely the politically charged atmosphere of first-century Palestine was not only dangerous but full of delicious ironies. There's not much of that in your text of the New Testament, you say? Ah, but you must consider the subtext. Or watch Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, which shows us Jesus-wept Christians what we can't allow ourselves to perceive. That piety and blasphemy are not opposites or enemies, but siblings of the same mother.

So Sarah and Abraham laughed and lived "as if," and it was credited to them as righteousness. The child of promise is born

and named. [One can just imagine the exclamations of the exasperated teachers at the local yeshiva: Isaac, wipe that smile off your face! But I can't, Miss. It's almost as if God is laughing within me!] And what is the substance of faith that emerges from this patriarchal and matriarchal legacy?

Whatever else it might be, I suggest to you that in this tradition, faith is not about giving verbal ascent to certain creedal formulations. Biblical faith is about living as if something were true, not blindly, not irrationally, but in the absence of empirical proof. Biblical faith is about loyalty, trust, devotion—about durative commitments lived out over time, and thus not easily reducible to creedal scrutiny. Biblical faith, according to most of the narratives, and the laments and the prophecies, is about failing, about acknowledging responsibility, about receiving forgiveness, about starting over. Biblical faith is mostly about human failure, and the possibility of redemptive transformations.

Nor is the lack of faith to be equated with an inability to give verbal ascent to creedal formulations. If faith is not reducible to creedal testimony, then neither should the absence or rejection of a creed or its parts be equated with faithlessness. What we really believe is the way we live.

Creeds do have their place in the life of a community of faith. Their uses may include the following: a shorthand description of who we are, naming the virtues toward which, together, we strive; a mechanism by which we pledge our devotion to God, expressed in our service to one another and the world; a strategy of centeredness, inclusion, and embrace, whereby the estranged are reunited and the stranger is welcomed. But the provisional truths of our creeds should never be reified or equated with the actions to which they point. Nor should they become instruments of exclusion, marginalization, or control.

Paul's theological rationale for the inclusion of Gentiles in Romans 4 is admittedly convoluted and tortuous. But here he makes an astute observation of the patriarchal tradition that "Abra'am [the Greek form of the name] believed," and Paul turns it into a momentous metaphor of spiritual solidarity. It's a skillful little Midrash on a deeply familiar piece of scripture that Paul turns inside out and rides like a pretty pony. Though the Genesis narrative is focused on the promise of descendants in the face of

biological barrenness—thus the fanciful folk-etymology of Avram "Exalted Ancestor" to Av-raham "Father of a Multitude"—Paul rightly points out that the ancestor of the faith is declared righteous before he has a chance to obey the command to circumcise. And so he can become an ancestor of faith for the uncircumcised as well as for the circumcised, for the foreigner as well as for the native.

Outsiders have a way of getting in, actually or figuratively, and proving their worth. It is a point made over and over in the biblical narrative. It is the story of the brave Canaanite women Rahab and Tamar, and the Moabite Ruth. In each case a foreign woman exhibits loyalty and devotion that surpasses and outshines that of the native born. It is the same point that brought Jesus' promising ministry to an abrupt hiatus just as it was beginning—and almost cost him his life (Luke 4). By evoking Na'aman the Syrian and the widow of Sidon before the adoring crowd in the hometown synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus fails the ethnocentric litmus test and must flee the bloodthirsty crowd.

Paul points out that the ancestor of the faith is declared righteous before he has a chance to obey the command to circumcise. And so he can become an ancestor of faith for the uncircumcised as well as for the circumcised, for the foreigner as well as for the native.

And this Paul (remember his name was Shaul/Saul before he fell off his horse on the way to Damascus)—he advocates for inclusion from the position of privilege. He is a circumcised insider pleading with his fellow insiders to throw open the gates, because that is the true religion of Abra'am.

Is there perhaps a message here for us as fellow insiders? This congregation is a great place. I know you wouldn't be here this morning if you didn't agree. I can't think of any community of faith where I'd rather worship, or drink coffee. But you know, we can also be smug. We don't mean to be. And intentionality is three-quarters of righteousness, right? I fear, however, that our many virtues are mirrored by vices that we can't see very well. *For we know whom we have believ-ed, and are persuaded that we are able to keep that which we've committed unto him against that day.*

Frankly, I think I feel so comfortable here because many of you share my kind of "benign" smugness. It is invisible to most of us

most of the time. But it is evident to some outsiders, and painfully obvious to insiders among us who are marginalized. We're smug about all kinds of things, from our brilliant biblical exposition, to our integral small-group structure; from our creative freedom and quirky eccentricities, to our great music and eclectic preaching; from our progressive politics and evident fecundity, to our sustainability and our erudite profundity.

As sins go, it scarcely rises to the level of serious malfeasance. Nothing compared to what *those* Christians perpetrate (and we know who *they* are). One might even begin to suspect that we have earned our way, that we are declared righteous not as an act of grace but as the wages of a job well done. But perhaps we can ask ourselves why our embrace of diversity has produced a rather peculiar homogeneity. We do not have to be all things to all people in the city of Goshen or in Elkhart County or the world. But how might our embrace be extended beyond its current parameters of class and race and education?

Another chapter in the faith legacy of Sarah and Abraham is found in what is likely a less familiar text, the 2nd Sura of the Qur'an:

> *As Ibrahim and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed]: Our Lord, You who hear all and know all, accept this from us. Make us* Muslims *(i.e., those devoted solely to you). Make our descendants into a community of* Muslims *(i.e., a community of those devoted solely to you). Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Compassionate and the Most Merciful. Our Lord, raise up a messenger from among them, to impart your message to them. Teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them, for indeed you are mighty and wise.*
>
> *Who but a fool would forsake the faith of Ibrahim? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter. His Lord said to him,* Aslim *(i.e., devote yourself). Ibrahim replied,* Aslamtu *(i.e., I devote myself solely to the Lord of the universe). And Ibrahim left this legacy to his children. As did Jacob, saying: My children, Allah has chosen this faith for you,*

so make sure you remain Muslims *(i.e., those devoted solely to God), until your dying moment.*

Were you there to see when death came upon Jacob? When he asked his children, What will you worship after I am gone? they replied, We shall worship your God and the God of your ancestors, Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Isaac. And we shall remain Muslims *(i.e., those devoted solely to the one God).*

They say, Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided. But say to them: [Ours] is the faith of Ibrahim, the monotheist, who did not worship any god but Allah. Say simply: We believe in Allah and in what was revealed to us; revealed to Ibrahim, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes; revealed to Moses, Jesus and to all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we remain Muslims *(i.e., those devoted solely to God). So if they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be the ones who have deviated. The God who hears all and knows all will protect you from them.*

And say also: Our life takes its colors from God. Which colors could be better than those of the One whom we worship? (2:127–38)

Let our lives reflect the colors of God insofar as our eyes reflect our love for each other, our devotion to this Assembly of small groups and the wider community of faith of which it is a part. Let our lives reflect the colors of God as we acknowledge the grace that sustains us every day, as we confess our smugness, and as we continue to do the work that flows from hearts of flesh. Let the hidden things emerge in this fast before the feast. Amen.

About the author

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"If these were silent, the stones would shout out"
Truth commissions and Anabaptism in dialogue

César Moya

Societies divided by high-intensity conflict pose challenges to the church in its understanding and practice of discipleship as a political responsibility. The church has often chosen to avoid this responsibility by keeping silent before victims' justice claims. Such silence contrasts with ethical proposals articulated outside religious institutions, yet the contents of these proposals—such as those found in truth commission reports—are close to those of Christian discipleship.

My intent is to demonstrate that fundamental aspects of following Christ are implicit in truth commission reports, and that their ethical content is linked closely with discipleship as seen in an Anabaptist perspective. I have taken into account the reports of truth commissions in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Peru, and have compared them with the Anabaptist ethical-theological perspectives of John Howard Yoder, John Driver, and John Paul Lederach.

Fundamental aspects of following Christ are implicit in truth commission reports, and their ethical content is linked closely with discipleship as seen in an Anabaptist perspective.

The first part of this article will identify in summary fashion some general convergences between these truth commission reports and the thought of the Anabaptist writers named above. The second will compare the practical contents of discipleship in these two sets of sources. In the last part, I will identify some challenges for the church in the area of discipleship as a political responsibility in divided societies. My hope is to contribute to dialogue about rethinking discipleship.

Convergences in ethical perspective

Before noting convergences between truth commission reports and Anabaptism, we should bear in mind two things: First, the

truth commission reports are not written explicitly from the perspective of Christian faith, although they contain some ethical elements that align with biblical understandings of the God of life, peace, and justice. Second, Anabaptist ethics is explicitly Christ-centered; Yoder, Driver, and Lederach regard as relevant—to our world, in this time—the social and political ethic of Jesus as that ethic is described in scripture.

A first convergence I discern is that these two sets of ethical perspectives promote and defend life, peace, justice, truth, freedom, human rights, and reconciliation. They thus reject oppression, exclusion, marginalization, militarization—and all action rooted in structures, systems, and powers that violate human dignity.

A second convergence is that the two sets of perspectives respond to violence and arise from post-war contexts. The truth commission reports deal with social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of specific diverse and heterogeneous societies. For this reason they understand reconciliation as a complex process, ranging from the individual and the group to the collective. They seek the establishment of a society founded on a new social and political pact. Anabaptism reinterprets its ethical principles of the sixteenth century for today by emphasizing the concept of an alternative community—an ecclesial community, in particular. In this community a certain homogeneity of thought and a commitment to the ethics of Christian discipleship and peacemaking are evident.

A third convergence: the two sets of sources put forward nonviolent ethical proposals that come from groups who are uncomfortable with the status quo, and who initially looked for social transformation through the use of force. The strategy of seeking justice through violent means, both in the context of sixteenth-century Anabaptism and in the context of the respective countries of these truth commissions, failed and generated more violence, leaving countless victims.

A fourth convergence: the two sets of perspectives build their ethical proposals with reference to the state. In the truth commission reports the state is identified as a direct perpetrator of the majority of acts of violence and violations of human rights. The Anabaptist writers make a clear distinction between the state, as

part of "the world," and Christians ("the church"); the state (in their view) is incapable of having a full-fledged commitment to nonviolence and reconciliation, although the state (like everything else) is under the sovereignty of God.

A fifth convergence: in both sets of sources violence is taken as the starting point for the ethical proposal. The ethics of the truth commission reports grows out of a commitment that emerged in the context of war, as part of an agreement between the parties to the conflict. The ethics of Yoder, Driver, and Lederach arise from the experience of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, who suffered cruel violence inflicted by the state with the assent of other Christian groups. The two sets of proposals see not only war but also other forms of violence as enemies of peace; for the truth commissions, violence violates human dignity, and for Anabaptism violence is seen as contrary to the teachings and life of Christ.

Convergences on the practical contents of discipleship

Anabaptist sources and truth commission reports have similar understandings about truth: truth is based on facts, which—although painful—need to be known not only by the victims and offenders but by the community as well. The community, using moral discernment, exposes the truth. This process brings catharsis—release—for those who live with the aftermath of violence: it helps in identifying and assessing society's values; it helps uncover the causes of violence; it is paradoxical, which means that it articulates ideas and lifts up seemingly contradictory forces in order to bring to light what really happened. For Anabaptism, perjury has no place in the community. Truth is not to be manipulated; letting one's yes be yes is characteristic of Jesus' disciples.

The community, using moral discernment, exposes the truth. This process brings catharsis—release—for those who live with the aftermath of violence.

In addition, telling the truth brings risks to one's life and integrity. This is an intrinsic part of the cost of discipleship—as in Anabaptism—and of an ethic that promotes reconciliation—as in the commissions. Telling the truth, even in the course of taking statements about victims in ordinary courts, sometimes brings disastrous consequences.

Discipleship, justice, and reparation. The truth commission reports and Anabaptism seek to strengthen community through the practice of justice. They respect the life and integrity of others. For Anabaptism, it is justification in Christ that establishes a new humanity.

The two sets of sources see truth as necessary to achieving justice and reconciliation. For Anabaptism, the practice of justice is also linked to mercy and forgiveness. Both for the truth commissions and for the Anabaptist sources, justice has to do with restoration and with the sociopolitical realm. Anabaptism does not explicitly emphasize reform of institutions, but the practice of solidarity in social relationships takes into account the sociopolitical context.

Furthermore, reparation is closely related to the practice of justice. While the truth commissions emphasize justice as punishment of offenders and reparation and restoration for victims, Anabaptism emphasizes restoration of the offender. While the truth commissions see the state as responsible for reparations, Anabaptism considers the whole community the locus of the restoration process. The church, as a community where Christ is proclaimed and obeyed as Lord, has authority to restore offenders and speak words of forgiveness and reconciliation to them. And as we noted with respect to the search for truth, the search for justice is costly; it has a price.

Also, the two sets of ethical proposals coincide in seeing justice as entailing an appropriate redistribution of goods in the community; both value social justice and equity. In addition, the practice of justice is linked to the covenant the community makes.

The most notable difference between the two sets of ethical proposals is that in the truth commissions the judicial element establishes the concept of justice. For Anabaptism, on the other hand, human societal justice is understood in relation to divine justice. In this sense, justice has to do with acts of liberation and protection, freedom from slavery, and care for people who are weak or in poverty. It also has to do with generosity and honesty between brothers and sisters. It has to do with salvation, which is expressed tangibly in a new reality. In other words, it is a restorative justice that does not condemn but instead restores and frees both the victim and the perpetrator.

Discipleship, repentance, and conversion. For the truth commissions and Anabaptism, repentance and conversion have to do with transforming a way of thinking. This process entails changes in attitudes and actions. These changes involve recognizing the harm that has been done, asking for forgiveness, assuming responsibility, and seeking the restoration of victims. The differences between the two ethical proposals are also in focus: truth commissions look primarily at institutional actions of the state and of those who were guerrillas. The weapons on all sides must be put down, reforms in the state apparatus must be instituted, and charges or penalties against or all who were involved in the violence must be dismissed. For the Anabaptist thinkers, the process of change involves social and personal dimensions; focus on these aspects of the process is crucial to moving from destructive and violent conflict to constructive conflict, to peace and reconciliation, and to following Christ in a restorative community.

In the truth commissions the judicial element establishes the concept of justice. For Anabaptism, on the other hand, human societal justice is understood in relation to divine justice.

Although the truth commission reports do not explicitly mention following Christ as the way to repentance and conversion, we can see a resemblance between the actions required of institutions (assuming responsibility and making reparation to victims) and the practice of Jubilee, as a political platform of Jesus, which is emphasized by the above-named Anabaptist writers.

Discipleship and forgiveness. The two sets of proposals have a similar understanding of forgiveness: It is the opposite of condemnation. It is a grace given by the victim to the perpetrator. It is different from reconciliation but is an important path to reconciliation, because it is focused toward the future and looks to remedy past wrongs and restore relationships. It is an act of internal health and release.

Neither set of perspectives wants to promote the idea that people can do wrong with impunity, but there are differences between them. The truth commissions grant amnesty—elimination of criminal responsibility—as a pardon, but they do not neglect the damage offenders have done. In this way amnesty

contributes to reconciliation. For Anabaptism, amnesty has value within the act of forgiveness, but this is distinct from granting exemption from any penalty. In this sense, amnesty enables a new beginning for individuals, groups, and society. In addition, Anabaptism, in contrast with the truth commissions, emphasizes forgiveness as part of the grace and mercy of God: it shows a deep concern for the offender, because the reconciliation process is focused on relationships and looks toward the future more than the past.

Discipleship and reconciliation. The two ethical proposals agree on the importance of the links between people. But for the Anabaptist, reconciliation also means restoration of relationship with God and creation that comes through the work of Christ on the cross. Despite this difference, the truth commissions recognize that reconciliation has to do with the abolition of social, economic, political, racial, cultural, and gender discrimination. This ethic finds parallels in an Anabaptist interpretation of Ephesians 2:14–16.

Reconciliation for the truth commissions is focused on relationships within society and with the state. For the Anabaptist writers, in contrast, Christian ethics are for Christians and do not apply directly and immediately to the state as an institution.

The two sets of sources agree that reconciliation produces some new links: the truth commissions emphasize that state reforms are needed as well as a new social and political pact, and Anabaptism conceives of a rearrangement in the social, economic, and political worlds—a new humanity and a new creation through the work of Christ. For both sets of ethical proposals, reconciliation is evident in community. The absence of community for the truth commissions is presented as one of the constraints on reconciliation. For the Anabaptists, the community is evidence of reconciliation; in it there should be no discrimination of any kind, and goods should be shared. Within the community there should be no people in poverty and no distrust of one another, and the community should give attention to the social demands of those who are in need. The main difference is that while for the truth commissions reconciliation is limited to the social arena, for Anabaptism it is a comprehensive event, which includes environmental justice. On the other hand, the truth

commissions are explicit in saying that discrimination against women and gender inequity limit reconciliation, while Anabaptism is not explicit on this issue.

Discipleship and sustainable peace. The concepts of peace and reconciliation in the reports of the truth commissions are always integrated. They cannot deal with one concept without taking the other one into consideration. The two concepts are separate in Anabaptism. Peace is understood by Anabaptism as a holistic event, but at the same time it is a dynamic process in which justice can be achieved without violence. This peace is expressed in economic conversion, absolute renunciation of war, liberation from fear, and as a new social order. Also, for Anabaptism, peace is a mystery and a vocation that has costs for those who work for it. To build peace requires a structure, an analysis of the conflict process, attention to relationships, and resources and coordination of efforts to support it.

Ethical proposals for reconciliation, such as those found in the reports of these truth commissions, challenge the church to consider its responsibility in societies divided by conflict.

Discipleship implies political responsibility

We have seen that fundamental aspects of following Christ are embedded in ethical proposals of the truth commission reports, and that the contents of these reports are closely related to discipleship understood in an Anabaptist perspective. Still, we should keep in mind that the ethical proposals of these truth commissions emerged as a political responsibility arising out of high-intensity conflict that divided their respective societies.

Ethical proposals for reconciliation, such as those found in the reports of these truth commissions, challenge the church. In particular, they challenge the church to consider its responsibility in societies divided by conflict. They challenge the church to reconsider and revitalize its understanding and practice of discipleship. They challenge the church to promote a discipleship of political responsibility in divided societies. They challenge the church to be permanently vigilant in compliance with truth commission peace agreements and to participate actively in reformulating the social and political pacts of society. They

challenge the church to invite its members to conscientiously object to war while serving the state in ways that are based in practices of nonviolence. They challenge the church to raise awareness in society about current events. They challenge the church to guide the present and the future, to be a prophetic voice every time governments proclaim a false peace. They challenge the church to do away with notions of cheap grace and a gospel of prosperity. They challenge the church to practice solidarity, to maintain its independence from the state, and to promote a culture of peace.

Practicing truth and reconciliation, justice and reparation, repentance and conversion, forgiveness and peace, among other constituent aspects of Christian discipleship, does not guarantee a comfortable life. On the contrary, those who follow this path—whether in a conscious way or not—have suffered persecution, exile, torture, disappearance, and martyrdom. This is the cost of a discipleship that takes political responsibility. Christians following Jesus dare not neglect the realm of politics. If they are silent in the face of this responsibility, God will use others: after all, if these are silent, the stones themselves will shout out (Luke 19:40).

About the author

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Three R's of our common discipleship

Rejoicing in recent relations between Lutherans and Mennonites

Kathryn L. Johnson

We have delighted in the ripples! During my recent years with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we found ourselves repeatedly and joyfully surprised by the expanding circles of new relationship following our 2010 action toward reconciliation with churches of the Anabaptist family. How could this action speak so powerfully to people in so many contexts? I believe it is simply because this act draws its strength from the heart of the gospel—from God's gracious will that we should be healed and united.

For Lutherans and Mennonites to tell our story together, in a spirit of mutual accountability, is itself both a healing act and a constructive resource for the future.

"We must think anew about our next steps; this action can change our churches more than we have imagined." This message was brought home from the 2009 Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay, by Dr. Ishmael Noko, then LWF general secretary. He had told the assembly that the LWF, representing about 95 percent of the world's 75 million Lutherans, intended to ask forgiveness for the legacy of our having persecuted Anabaptists in Reformation times.

The response was simply overwhelming! Until that moment this action was seen primarily as a matter of ecumenical affairs—important, to be sure, in addressing historical wrongs and inviting improved relations, but much less than the renewal God's Spirit continues to offer us from these events. This renewal invites us at all levels—from world and national bodies to local communities and individuals—to walk more closely with each other, as together we follow Christ.

By our own international assembly in 2010, the LWF saw more clearly what we were about. Because this act was offered for the healing of the entire body of Christ, the "Mennonite Action" was

scheduled when other Christian bodies would be most fully represented. As these guests joined Lutheran participants in kneeling or standing, this resolution was affirmed:

> *Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, we ask for forgiveness—from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the harm that our forbears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day.*
>
> *We pray that God may grant to our communities a healing of our memories and reconciliation.*

In this act, three healing streams flowed together: right remembering, repentance, and reconciliation.

1. Right remembering

Already in 2004, US Lutherans and Mennonites took up the task of remembering rightly, and an international Joint Study Commission continued it. Their report provides the first shared history of the Reformation era's painful events. To tell our story together, in a spirit of mutual accountability, is itself both a healing act and a constructive resource for the future.

Lutherans' flawed remembering began this process. In 1980, Lutherans invited Anabaptists to an ecumenical celebration of the 450th birthday of the Augsburg Confession—without being mindful of that document's condemnations of Anabaptists.

It had been Lutherans' flawed remembering that began this process. In 1980, Lutherans invited Anabaptists to an ecumenical celebration of the 450th birthday of their honored Augsburg Confession—without being mindful of that document's condemnations of Anabaptists. This began a sorrowful and costly process for Lutherans—both to acknowledge the continuing power that memories of persecution have for Anabaptists today and also to make a place for this persecuting in our own memories. Even with all mitigations

allowed, it is undeniably true that the emerging Lutheran movement's most treasured teachers defended persecution, even unto death. Moreover, their condemnations have continued in Lutheran teachings about Anabaptists ever since. But fundamental trust in God's grace, which allows and compels us to look searchingly at ourselves, is one of the fruits of God's working in our lives. We know this power individually—but it is amazing to see it at work also for global communities.

2. Repentance

Honest remembering leads to another gift: repentance. For Lutherans, it became clear that the only faithful response was to ask forgiveness "from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers." The petition is first to God. So it must always be: sin is first against the One who gives us life. But also we wanted to be clear that we asked forgiveness from our own need to repent; we were not intending to create an obligation for Mennonites to rush in with forgiveness. Those experienced in pastoral care were especially concerned about this "second burden" which asking forgiveness can impose on whose who have borne a wrong.

Grace comes to us not only in God's own forgiving but also when others meet repentance with gracious forgiveness. And in the Mennonite response we met just such long-prepared grace.

But that understandable hesitancy is not at all what happened! We were in relationship with Mennonites who were ahead of us in forgiving, even as we came to repentance. Here again we see a familiar shape of discipleship: as the parable of the prodigal son shows us and the cross makes clear, our repentance is made possible "before the fact" by God's mercy. We know God is ever more eager to show mercy than we to ask it. But grace comes to us not only in God's own forgiving but also when others meet repentance with gracious forgiveness. And in the Mennonite response we met just such long-prepared grace.

It was "grace upon grace" that we experienced not only forgiveness but repentance also in our Mennonite sisters and brothers. In the service of repentance at the LWF Assembly, I had to insist that the subject of the verb "repent" would each time be "we Lutherans"! We needed to emphasize that the guilt of violent

persecution lay on our side. But our Mennonite partners insisted that they also needed to repent, if not for exchanging violence, then for unloving and sometimes misleading ways of teaching about Lutherans—which, as for us, had both persistent internal consequences and implications for Christian unity. This spirit of repentance was expressed in a prayer offered by the assembled Mennonite participants this spring at the new Mennonite Church USA offices in Elkhart, Indiana, as a tree was planted to honor growth in Lutheran-Mennonite relations: "As Mennonite Christians, help us enter deeply into a place of transformation. Release us from clinging to a sense of being victims and from a false pride that keeps us too often separate and of small faith."

3. Reconciliation

In this prayer we are moving to the third R—to reconciliation. Already at our LWF Assembly, this was the note sounded by the Mennonite World Conference in its response. They spoke of new freedom when the restraints of unresolved memories of persecution are at last broken by forgiving. Giving thanks that "today you have heard and honored our story," the MWC officers gave us a footwashing tub and prayed that, following "our Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ," we would "serve one another from this time forth."

In this exchange there is so much hope that we can be emboldened to explore more roads to other reconciliations, strengthened by all the gifts of the Spirit that have been shed abroad in all our communities.

The ripples of this reconciliation keep spreading, reaching places distant from the wounds of sixteenth-century Europe. Our world has so many cycles of sadness, sin, and destruction. But in this process of reconciliation we see that grace-filled actions also have spiraling effects, offering hope and healing even beyond the communities in which they began. Two examples:

The LWF manages the city-sized camp in Dadaab, Kenya, which houses refugees from the hunger in Somalia. While there is wide collaboration, the LWF is responsible for the peacemaking operation of security within the camp—calling out and equipping from among the residents themselves unarmed leaders for conflict resolution. When Mennonite Central Committee joined as an

additional partner, there was great joy. As the operation's director said, "It is a symbol and an expression of the beauty that grows out of reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites. It makes us free to serve the neighbor and contributes to a wider reconciliation."

Already in 2010, the upcoming action was resonating deeply in Colombia. In the midst of a culture of rampant violence, here was a different path. Two years later, when the LWF governing body met in Bogotá, eight leaders of separate Anabaptist-Mennonite communities attended. They have made a commitment to seek reconciliation among themselves, and they requested that the local Lutheran church accompany them in this process.

For my own life, the blessings that come as we open ourselves to one another's gifts have been rich. Last April I spoke about Lutheran-Mennonite relations at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Framed on a wall was a 1533 statement of Menno Simons—beloved to my hosts but new to me:

> *True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant.*
> *It clothes the naked.*
> *It feeds the hungry.*
> *It comforts the sorrowful.*
> *It shelters the destitute.*
> *It serves those that harm it.*
> *It binds up that which is wounded.*
> *It has become all things to all people.*

These affirmations, I thought, could easily be made by any Lutheran—with perhaps one exception. We have been less likely to stitch into our samplers words like "It serves those that harm it." Yet now, in our deepening relationship, we Lutherans can attend to the wisdom of those who make this pattern of service central to their discipleship. How, I now ask myself, can Anabaptist witnesses help us Lutherans better to be formed as Christians who are prepared to offer forgiveness and to be active peacemakers?

At the same time, we Lutherans can rejoice if our trust in God's forgiving grace has helped to bring gifts of release and reconciliation to those we have wronged. In this exchange there is so much hope that we can be emboldened to explore more roads

to other reconciliations, strengthened by all the gifts of the Spirit that have been shed abroad in all our communities. May God, who has given us the ministry of reconciliation, give us wisdom and courage to draw strength from one another for these next steps.

Web resources

A study resource designed for congregational use prepared jointly by Mennonite Church Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada: http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/2/12978.

The 2004 statement from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Mennonite Church USA, "Right Remembering in Anabaptist-Lutheran Relations": http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Bilateral-Conversations/Lutheran-Mennonite-Church-USA.aspx.

The report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission "Healing of Memories: Reconciled in Christ": http://www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Report_Lutheran-Mennonite_Study_Commission.pdf or from the Mennonite World Conference.

About the author

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Becoming unbound

André Gingerich Stoner

The stories of Anabaptist martyrs are at the heart of Mennonite identity. I am increasingly convinced that the way these stories have been told has distorted our vision and misshaped our understanding of discipleship. Recent steps of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation with Lutheran brothers and sisters open possibilities for Mennonites to move beyond a victim mentality, find healing, and more fully become who God intends us to be.

The impact of the martyr experience on Mennonite identity

My first formal involvement in interchurch work was on a Mennonite Central Committee assignment in Europe in the mid-1980s. As I was pondering the hesitation of Mennonites to become members of ecumenical bodies, a colleague repeated a comment which he attributed to John Howard Yoder. "You have to remember," he said, "the first case of ecumenical cooperation was the persecution of Anabaptists." This trenchant observation might in fact hold truth. But beyond that, what strikes me today is how deeply I embraced and even celebrated this story line. It affirmed a posture I had imbibed as a congenital Swiss-German Mennonite.

Acts of repentance and forgiveness with Lutherans and others are preparing the way for Mennonites to let go of a victim mentality that has scarred and bound us for so long.

Even if hardly a person cracks open the *Martyrs Mirror* these days, the martyr experience is part of the Mennonite creation myth.[1] The Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society web-site observes that "historically for Amish and Mennonites, the Martyrs Mirror has been the most important book next to the Bible." *Martyrs Mirror* continues on the MennoMedia bestseller list. In some more conservative branches of the Mennonite family, it is a common wedding gift. *Martyrs Mirror* etchings—like that of Dirk Willems returning to rescue his pursuer, who had fallen

through the ice—hang on the walls of Mennonite churches and homes. At some Mennonite youth gatherings, children play "persecution," with Catholics and others identified as our tormentors.

I fear that the dominant narrative about Anabaptist martyrdom is "That's what those people did to us." We need to be careful not to make generalizations too quickly for all Mennonites, but the martyr stories have seared into the psyches—especially of those of us of Dutch, Swiss, or German descent—a sense of being persecuted victims. This perception shapes us in profound ways which often remain hidden to us.

The martyr legacy has affected us in multiple ways. We have long assumed a separatist posture. Persecution banned our Anabaptist ancestors to villages above a certain elevation in the Swiss Jura Mountains or led to emigration and settlement in Russian colonies or out-of-the-way Kansas towns.

Sometimes Mennonites can't quite imagine others being good enough to live up to our standards, while at the same time we can't quite imagine that we are interesting enough for anyone else to want to hang out with us.

Organizationally we have generally maintained a careful distance from interchurch associations. In only a handful of places across the globe, for example, have Mennonites become members of national church councils. In the United States, it was a significant new chapter when delegates at the 2007 San Jose convention voted for Mennonite Church USA to become a full participant in Christian Churches Together and signaled our desire to be in relationship with the broader body of Christ.

Theologically we have often maintained something of a separatist mentality. We describe commitments like discipleship, peace, and community as "Mennonite distinctives" which we own, rather than as a natural part of a Jesus-centered life. We are surprised, and skeptical, when we discover these commitments in other Christian traditions. In an over-against posture, we may neglect or resist important themes such as grace, the role of the Spirit, or cultural fluency for communicating the gospel.

We have long recognized the links between strictures on Anabaptist preaching and teaching and a Mennonite quietism. We have come to claim this reservation about sharing our faith as a virtue which values "the walk" more than "the talk."

A victim mentality can also lead to a strange combination of self-righteousness and low self-esteem. Sometimes Mennonites can't quite imagine others being good enough to live up to our standards, while at the same time we can't quite imagine that we are interesting enough for anyone else to want to hang out with us. We can engage in service, and even extend hospitality, but it's hard for someone to become part of the family.

This victim mentality is a major barrier to making progress in antiracism, because it makes it difficult for white Mennonites to understand and be honest about the power and privilege we have.

This sense of being a victim seems especially incongruous in a North American context where many of us have become affluent and carry white privilege and power. Despite the evidence, because of the martyr legacy we may still feel like victims. Iris de León–Hartshorn, director of transformative peacemaking for Mennonite Church USA, has worked on anti-racism within the Mennonite context for years. She has come to the conclusion that this victim mentality is a major barrier to making progress in this area, because it makes it difficult for white Mennonites to understand and be honest about the power and privilege we have.

These are just some of the repercussions of the martyr legacy and the victim mentality which we carry. Other implications wait to be uncovered. At the same time, it should be underscored and repeated that there are many beautiful, creative, powerful, life-giving dimensions to Mennonite theology, practice, and culture.

Chosen trauma and group identity

How is it possible, we might ask, that events that happened nearly five hundred years ago and that none of us experienced personally can still have such a powerful grip on us? Perhaps an analogy can help. If a child is traumatized and never does the deep and hard work of healing, he may still act out of that hurt decades later.

The same is true for a community of people. If as a people we don't do the hard work of forgiveness and letting go, we continue to act out of a sense of being victims. Other experiences remind us of that original trauma and reinforce it. Stories of a great uncle who was tarred and feathered for refusing to buy war bonds underscore the original trauma. Further, the way we tell our

martyr stories can also retraumatize us and nurture an ongoing sense of being victims.

From her studies in peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Iris de León–Hartshorn draws on the work of Vamik Volkan, a political psychologist, who emphasizes the role of "chosen glories" and "chosen trauma" in group identity. Chosen glories are events in the group's memory, such as a victorious battle or a famous leader, that bolster the group's self-esteem. But chosen glories are not as powerful in group identity as chosen traumas. When a group suffers severe loss of people, prestige, or land, the extreme humiliation keeps the group from successfully mourning its losses, and they are passed on from generation to generation in myriad ways.

Using more the framework of generational sin and spiritual warfare, Janet Keller Richards in her book *Unlocking Our Inheritance: Spiritual Keys to Recovering the Treasures of Anabaptism*[2] examines strengths of the Anabaptist tradition as well as strongholds that have roots in the martyr experience and that still bind. Some themes she highlights include a "spiritual introversion" and an inability to witness, a pattern of rejecting and dividing from others, bitterness toward authority and a false peace of silence toward one another that doesn't deal well with conflict. She advocates a process of individual and corporate repentance and cleansing.

Telling the martyr stories in new ways

A critical step in breaking the negative grip of the martyr stories is telling them in new ways. The witness of the martyrs is important, and we should tell these stories. But if we continue to tell their stories to show "that's what those people did to us," it only reinforces our false victim mentality. Rather we should tell these stories as examples of what it means to follow Jesus and let ourselves be challenged by them. To help us keep that focus I propose that whenever we tell an Anabaptist martyr story, let's pair it with a martyr story from a different tradition. Next to the etching of Dirk Willems, let's hang a picture of Oscar Romero or Jean Donovan (Catholics), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Baptist), or any of a multitude of martyrs from other Christian groups.

In the past two decades, a new chapter is opening up for Mennonites. Reformed, Catholics, and Lutherans who once condemned and persecuted Anabaptists have sought out Mennonites for dialogue and reconciliation. These developments were unthinkable a little more than a generation ago. I believe this is one of the powerful things God is doing in our day. The most profound steps have been taken by Lutherans. Acts of repentance and forgiveness are preparing the way for Mennonites to let go of a victim mentality that has scarred and bound us for so long.

When a group suffers severe loss of people, prestige, or land, the extreme humiliation keeps the group from successfully mourning its losses, and they are passed on from generation to generation in myriad ways.

Formal statements and gestures at national and international levels[3] are being followed by local Lutheran-Mennonite conversations, worship services, and celebrations. These events can help us as a people move into the new place God has prepared for us.

This past April, for example, Mennonites and Lutherans gathered in Elkhart, Indiana, for a full day of lectures, worship, meals, conversation, and a tree dedication. This gathering included area pastors, bishops, conference ministers, and local lay leaders—Lutheran and Mennonite.

During an evening lecture, Kathryn Johnson, who had served as staff for the Lutheran World Federation, recounted the events of the historic gathering during the LWF assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010. Much prayerful and profound preparation had taken place for an anticipated LWF vote asking forgiveness from Mennonites.

Bishop Mark Hanson, who was presiding, sensed that something other than a voice vote or a show of hands was called for. In the course of the gathering he found himself inviting all the Lutherans who wanted to affirm a request for forgiveness to kneel at their seats. Mennonites present were deeply stirred as hundreds of Lutherans knelt around them. On behalf of the broader Mennonite family, representatives of Mennonite World Conference extended words and gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation. A deep healing was beginning.

As Kathryn recounted this story in Elkhart, those of us present were also deeply stirred. Let us continue our hard work of letting

go of the victim mentality, both as a community of faith and at a personal level. As we hear and accept the invitation to be unbound, may we more fully become the people God intends us to be.

Notes

[1] The *Martyrs Mirror*, written by Thieleman J. van Braght and first published in Dutch in 1660, includes stories, testimonies, and etchings of Christian martyrs, especially Anabaptists. The full title of the book is *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians who baptized only upon confession of faith, and who suffered and died for the testimony of Jesus, their Saviour, from the time of Christ to the year A.D. 1660.*

[2] Copyright 2005 by the Anabaptist Reconciliation Planning Committee. To purchase books or to contact the author, write unlockingourinheritance@earthlink.net.

[3] For information about national and international dialogues see http://mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/interchurch-relations/relationships/bilateral-relationships/ or http://www.mwc-cmm.org/index.php/initiatives/interchurch-dialogue.

About the author

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Learning from Luther on Christian discipleship

Allan Rudy-Froese

Old caricatures portray Anabaptists with a corner on discipleship and Lutherans with a corner on God's grace. Although a kernel of truth is often present in such ways of identifying a tradition's theological emphases, caricatures ought to be starting points for conversation, clarification, and joint worship of God rather than being used to make quick judgments and to separate believers. As a result of recent conversation, confession, and reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites, these old caricatures are giving way to fresh discussion and collaboration.[1] Lutherans are studying discipleship in new ways, sometimes looking to Anabaptist-Mennonites. And Mennonites in North America and Europe over the last forty years have been nuancing their understandings of discipleship in conversation with representatives of various Christian traditions, including Lutherans.

Old caricatures portray Anabaptists with a corner on discipleship and Lutherans with a corner on God's grace. As a result of recent reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites, these old caricatures are giving way to fresh discussion and collaboration.

This reflection on two images from the writings of Martin Luther is one attempt to look to a cousin in the faith for what Anabaptist-Mennonites might learn about discipleship. While Anabaptist-Mennonites have much to contribute on the topic of Christian discipleship—indeed, Anabaptism is hot these days, in part because many of our cousins are exploring discipleship—we can also learn new slants on this topic from our Reformation cousins.

Good Samaritan or hurt man?

A classic image of Christian faith is that of the good Samaritan stooping down to tend the wounds of a man who is lying in the

ditch. Christians in the West have cherished this image, supposing that it depicts us as the ones who help those in need. The Samaritan, we assume, represents the Christian, the in-control agent who aids the hurt man when others would pass by. The one in the ditch represents those in need of our assistance.

The Samaritan stopping to help, the oil and bandages, the transport to the inn, the coins passed to the innkeeper—these are simple, straightforward, acceptable images. When we hold up this canvas, it shows our faith as a practical faith, an ethical faith—one that joins with others the world over in serving those in need. When we are asked by people who do not believe, or in the court of public opinion, to defend Christianity, we can point to these scenes in the story of the Samaritan. This—at our best—is what Christians are like: we help others.

The image of one stopping to help another has even become a kind of commonsense ethic in our society, working its way into our legal provisions. "Good Samaritan" laws not only compel me to offer reasonable help if I see you in trouble but also protect me against litigation if I inadvertently hurt you in the act of offering aid. But in telling this story, did Jesus really have in mind the kind of legislation we know as Good Samaritan laws? Closer to home for those of us who are Christian, did Jesus really tell this story so that we could hold up an image of ourselves as good and helpful people?

When my daughter Abby was five years old, she and I had an extended back-and-forth on what to call this story in Luke 10:25–37. In her children's Bible the story was called "The Good Samaritan," but Abby would say, "Dad, can you tell me the story of the hurt man again?" I would say, "You mean 'The Good Samaritan,' right?" Again she would ask for the story of the hurt man. Finally I got it. Abby liked the Samaritan, to be sure: he was the hero of the story. But her identification was with the vulnerable one. Her understanding of the story was simple: if she were robbed and left in a ditch, she would want to be helped.

There was no "moral takeaway" here. Abby was just relieved that the Samaritan stopped—that he bandaged up the hurt man, took him to the inn, provided for his needs. Hearing this story left her with an uncomplicated sense of gratitude. She felt no guilt about some past event when she had failed to help another. Nor

did she feel obligation about some future event when she would encounter someone in need. She was simply thankful.

A different hermeneutic is at work when we call this the story of the hurt man rather than the good Samaritan. The story of the hurt man is a story of one who is vulnerable, in need of help. The story of the hurt man is a story of one who is not in control but instead is absolutely dependent. The story of the hurt man is uncomfortable for self-made, in-control people, like many Christians in dominant cultures. After all, we are the givers, the helpers. To be helped? To be the one stooped down to? If we read the parable as the story of the hurt man, we might need to redefine ourselves: Christians are those who recognize that they are in dire need of help.

Martin Luther's way of reading this Gospel story is similar to Abby's at the age of five. The focus is not on any of us as the agent of change but on all of us in our need for an agent of change. For Luther, we humans are all in dire need of Christ and salvation: the man in the ditch represents all of us, and the good Samaritan is Christ.[2] When read in this allegorical way, the Christian identifies with the receiver of help, not with the giver.

For Luther the man in the ditch whose wounds are bound and who is set on the donkey is already a disciple, for he is one who can receive the gift. Only those who receive and are thankful can in turn give to others.

Where, you may ask, does discipleship fit into this reading? For Luther, the in-the-ditch state of the human, along with the desire for help, is the beginning of discipleship. The question of discipleship for Luther is not What shall I do? but What has been given?[3] For Luther, discipleship—helping the neighbor—is necessary and even demanded by Christ ("Go and do likewise" [Luke 10:37]), but it must always begin with experiencing gifts given by God which we have done nothing to merit. The man in the ditch whose wounds are bound and who is set on the donkey (allegorically, the donkey is also Christ) is already a disciple, for he is one who can receive the gift. Only those who receive and are thankful can in turn give to others.

In "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels" (1521), Luther spells out his way of reading the stories of

Jesus and his parables. Jesus is first and foremost our Savior, the one who comes to us with gifts that can be received from no one else. Jesus is an example too, but only after he has been received as gift. Note that for Luther we do not simply sit back and observe what Jesus and others do in a given scene so as to learn how to be better disciples. We are first and foremost in the story as those who receive what Christ brings. Just as Christ comes to a given character in a scene, so Christ comes to us as we read and hear the Gospels. We are not observers of an action in first-century Palestine but participants in what Christ is doing right now to us:

> *When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him. When you see how he works, however, and how he helps everyone to whom he comes or who is brought to him, then rest assured that faith is accomplishing this in you and that he is offering your soul exactly the same sort of help and favor through the gospel. If you pause here and let him do you good, that is, if you believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. Then Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift.*[4]

Christ is first gift *for us* and then—and only then—is he to serve as a model for the life of faith. Luther is not discounting Jesus as example, but Jesus can only be an example after he is received as gift:

> *Now that Christ is gift, the other follows: Now when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you. See, there faith and love move forward, God's commandment is fulfilled, and a person is happy and fearless to do and to suffer all things. Therefore make note of this, that Christ as a gift nourishes your faith and*

makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example exercises your works. These do not make you a Christian. Actually they come forth from you because you have already been made a Christian. As widely as a gift differs from an example, so widely does faith differ from works, for faith possesses nothing of its own, only the deeds and life of Christ. Works have something of your own in them, yet they should not belong to you but to your neighbor.[5]

This way of reading the Gospels leaves the Christian in a place of thankfulness that cannot but result in love and acts of kindness toward others. Near the close of his sermon on Luke 10:23–37, Luther—speaking for himself as one who was in the ditch and has been brought to the inn by Christ—notes that "health has indeed been poured into me and there is a turn for the better, but nevertheless I am not perfectly restored to health. Meantime Christ serves and purifies me by the grace he pours into me, so that day by day I become purer, chaster, milder, gentler and more believing until I die, when I shall be entirely perfect." But then, in his vintage style, Luther does not end his sermon with a focus on Christians becoming better, or on some notion of progress in the Christian life; rather, his final word goes to the vital importance of continuing to depend on God: "Thus all saints must do, however holy and pious they may be, they must lay on Christ's shoulders."

Luther will always point the one who asks about Christian discipleship to Christ, who comes to us, addresses us in love, gives the gifts of oil (the Word) and wine (the cross), and carries us on his shoulders.

Luther will always point the one who asks about Christian discipleship to Christ, who comes to us, addresses us in love, gives the gifts of oil (the Word) and wine (the cross), and carries us on his shoulders. While Luther had plenty to say about right and wrong, any of his commentary on Christian discipleship per se directs our attention back to devotion to God. One does not read the story from Luke 10 and strive to be good like the Samaritan. With regard to faith, the Christian is not in the position of power. We are the ditch-dwellers, those carried by Jesus who end up in the inn with thankful hearts and bodies being

restored to health. We are so grateful that we cannot help but serve others. Christians are the ones who wait for, yearn for, and yield to the Christ who strives to work in us. Discipleship is Christ working in and through us; it is not our attempts to imitate this or that action of Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

> *To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ's work in us is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of Christ incarnate, crucified, and glorified.*[6]

Be opened!

Picture a human figure in a fetal position, with arms holding bent knees close to the torso. Here is the narcissist—seeing only the self, lost in the self, hugging the self. Salvation, according to Luther, unbends the human from this incurved posture and raises her to a standing position with eyes and ears wide open. Arms are not protecting the self but outstretched. Now the human can see God, the beauty of God's creation, and the blessings and needs of the other. Creation is new. This is how God wants all of us to live. This is what a disciple looks like.

Luther draws on the image of the incurved and opened up human in his sermon on Mark 7:31–37, preached on September 8, 1538.[7] Luther claims that "the whole earth is full with speaking," but humans are deaf: they are not listening to each other or to God—they are curved in on themselves. After meeting a man who is deaf and dumb, Jesus puts his fingers into the man's ears and on his tongue and cries, "Ephphatha!"—"Be opened!" Instantly the man's ears are opened and he speaks plainly. In Luther's sermon, it is not only Jesus who makes such a cry; God's creatures cry out in the same way for humanity to listen, and to open up: "Sheep, cows, trees when they bloom say: 'Ephphatha.'" God and creation cry out for humanity to allow Christ to uncurve them so that they can be open in body, soul, ear, eye, and spirit to worship God, enjoy creation, and serve each other.

Martin Luther is often charged with seeing faith in a more individualistic sense than his predecessors did. Luther certainly focuses on faith as a personal matter; however, in many respects, his view of faith stands in sharp contrast to our age's secular individualism—the kind that is often associated with consumerism in the West. The uncurved person is in fact released from looking only at the self and justifying the self and is set free to look on God, the beauty of the earth, and fellow believers, as well as those in the wider community. In Christ, the believer in fact loses himself, and lives in Christ. For Luther, uncurved people are freed from self-interest, the incurvature that limits their sight—free even from striving to please God through actions. The uncurved Christian is free to use the energy that was once dedicated to self-preservation and self-improvement for the praise of God and in love for the neighbor.[8]

The uncurved person is released from looking only at the self and justifying the self and is set free to look on God, the beauty of the earth, and fellow believers, as well as those in the wider community.

Faith and works, although Luther pitted them against each other in many places (he rarely missed an opportunity for polemics) are intimately connected in the following way:

> *Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. Oh it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. . . .*
>
> *Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes us glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, Christians are ready and glad to do*

good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown them this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.[9]

"Out of the depths I cry to you"

Martin Luther was a father and a husband, a teacher and preacher, an administrator and debater, a supporter of the poor and a critic of the rich.[10] He was also prone to mood swings and suffered from what we might now call severe depression. He could be insulting one moment and gentle the next. He was afflicted with feelings of failure, sin, and guilt, and at other times was in ecstasy over God's unmerited love. He didn't have it all together, as none of us does, but he lived with an awareness that he was being carried on the shoulders of Christ.

He wrote dozens of hymns, one of which includes this verse:

It is in God that we shall hope,
and not in our own merit.
We rest our fears in God's good Word
and trust the Holy Spirit,
whose promise keeps us strong and sure.
We trust the holy signature
of trust beyond all measure.

To my Mennonite ears, this hymn, "Out of the depths I cry to you," hardly sounds like a good discipleship hymn. But for Luther, any question of discipleship takes us right back to our utter dependence on God—what God has done, is doing, and will do. Before we ask, What shall we do? we are invited to turn our attention to what has been given us, and by whom. We may serve our neighbor generously, but ultimately it is the trustworthy promises of God that are our only hope of being "strong and sure," with eyes and hearts wide open to the world's blessings and our neighbors' needs.

Notes

[1] See for instance "Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ: A Lutheran-Mennonite Guide for Congregations," by Allen Jorgenson and Margaret Loewen Reimer, at http://www.elcic.ca/Documents/Lutheran-MennoniteStudyGuidefinal_web.pdf.

[2] See Luther's "Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity; Luke 10:23–37," in *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 19–35.
[3] See Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007. Bayer's essays in this volume centre on discipleship and ethics as rooted in God's gifts of creation, peoplehood, and Christ. What has been given? is the central question for all ethical reflection.
[4] Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels (1521)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed., edited by Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 94.
[5] Ibid, 97.
[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 321.
[7] See *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–) 46:493–95; and Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 106–12.
[8] David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert Allen Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 25.
[9] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Lull, 104.
[10] For a short book on Luther's life, see Martin Marty's *Martin Luther* (New York: Viking Books, 2004). For an account of Luther's life in connection with the social issues of his day, see Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Struggle with Social-Ethical Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, edited by Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165–78.

About the author

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Holy experiments in forming disciples
Area church and congregational stories

Ruth Boehm

When I began pastoral ministry, I thought I knew about practical discipleship in the congregational setting. I had a sense of what to do, what curriculum to use. Twenty years later I'm less sure. I am no longer trying to find the right approach, and my interest has shifted toward what I have come to see as holy experiments.

This holy experimenting has begun out of necessity. Major shifts are taking place in our churches and in our Canadian context. Stuart Murray, an Anabaptist scholar from England, has identified a number of these shifts experienced by the church in post-Christendom. One of the shifts the church has the opportunity to grab hold of is a shift from institution to movement.[1]

A movement is fluid, less defined; it is exploratory, grassroots, and powerful. Keys to the success of a movement are clear communication and risk taking. As the church moves from institution to movement, we need to let go of the ways we used to do things. Our vitality will depend on being open to what God is doing and calling us to.

Communicating what the Holy Spirit is doing in different parts of the church is essential. Stories of holy experimenting can inspire people to celebrate, dream, and become open to what God is doing and may yet do. In what follows I want to share some stories of risky holy experimentation in discipleship. The first involves an area church,[2] and following that are some stories from congregations. These are all efforts to respond to the challenges of forming disciples of Jesus Christ in our current context.

Attending to God's transforming activity

In an area church representing 105 congregations, the Congregational Ministries Council and Jeff Steckley, the congregational ministries minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC), decided to risk experimenting with a different response

to the discipleship challenges that member congregations were identifying.

Jeff and the council led a process rather than trying to give answers. A summary of their experiment and what they learned was presented in the report "Written on Their Hearts: A Report on Regional Conversations about Faith Shaping and Tending," presented at the MCEC Annual Church Gathering in April 2012.[3] As the report's title indicates, Jeremiah 31:33 emerged as formative during the discussions: "I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The report notes that "118 faith formation leaders (pastor and lay) representing 50 churches participated in six regional faith formation conversations from June to October 2011. They spent time reflecting together, telling stories, and listening to how faith is being shaped in their particular faith communities."

As the church moves from institution to movement, we need to let go of the ways we used to do things. Our vitality will depend on being open to what God is doing and calling us to.

The group identified difficulties they confront in seeking to form faith:

1. Irregular Sunday attendance makes it challenging to sustain interest, to use Christian education curriculum well, and for community to be formed.

2. As a culture we no longer observe Sabbath; thus there are many more choices about what to do on Sundays. Families experience conflict about how and where they spend time. It is increasingly challenging to balance commitments to church faith formation activities and commitments to the broader community.

3. Parents struggle to take primary responsibility for the faith formation of their children.

4. It is increasingly difficult to identify and equip congregational faith formation leaders.

5. Children and youth of first generation Anabaptist congregations are well engaged in Canadian culture. Parents must mediate between culture of origin and Canadian culture as they form the faith of their children and youth.

6. We struggle to nurture relational opportunities across and among generations, for faith to be formed and for God to transform.

7. We struggle to find language that feels authentic and resonates with our experiences of faith.

Then the report addressed the way "stories of formation and transformation give hope for the future and are signs of God's presence and care. The following themes emerged from the telling of these stories":

1. Congregational celebrations of relationships and life milestones offer profound opportunities for faith formation and transformation.

2. Music continues to be a significant means through which God is experienced.

3. Sharing of personal, life-transforming stories continues to be very significant. Personal storytelling breaks down barriers across generations and cultures.

4. People are asking questions of faith, reflecting a longing for God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and relationship with Jesus.

5. Many still see church communities as having a vital role in exploring questions of faith, while others are discovering support, fellowship, and a place to explore questions of faith outside the church. God is active within and outside the institutional church.

6. A variety of forms of mentoring or companioning relationships provide significant connection to faith communities. These relationships are often the places where faith is being formed.

7. Service and learning trips provide opportunities for faith to be embodied as people "do first, then listen and hear."

8. A spiritual sensitivity is being observed in children as they pray for and with one another and readily pose questions of faith to each other and to adults.

At the conclusion of each regional conversation, those gathered spent time in prayer and stillness before God. As the conversations continued, people spent more and more time working with scripture. The story from Mark 6:45–51 about Jesus walking on the water was reassuring and freeing: Jesus comes to us in the midst of changing times when the way is not clear.

This counsel was offered as wisdom emerging from the conversations and time spent "practicing the presence of God":

1. Let go of the idea that a single approach to faith formation will serve all of us well. One size no longer fits all of our contexts.

2. Be daring and risk trying new approaches to faith formation.

The faith formation program efforts of some congregations have faltered to a point where there is nothing to lose in exploring new approaches. God seems to be grafting something new into and onto the church.

3. Develop both roots and wings; be grounded, yet open to try new ways of forming faith. As one participant said: "Be both wild and strong together!"

4. Attend to the transforming activity of God, rather than focusing on the challenges.

5. Let God be in control and tend to us, trusting that God will work with and through us. Try to see and hear what God thinks is important, as opposed to what we think is important.

6. Pray, wait, reflect, and slow down. Listen, observe, and pay attention to what God is doing.

7. Nurture and strengthen connections. We need each other's care, help, and mentoring.

8. Be open to new intergenerational faith formation ideas and possibilities, remembering that faith continues to be formed throughout all of life.

9. Remember that God is already at work, inviting us to join along. God will inspire us and show us a way forward that we don't ultimately control.

This holy experiment by the area church has already yielded some fruit. Participants found encouragement in discovering that they are not alone in facing the challenges of sporadic attendance and needing to move into experimentation. Some clusters of congregations met for a second time to continue the conversation and to see what could happen when they work together in new ways.

A shift is taking place, a shift from having a formula for how we foster discipleship in family and congregational or area church life, to discovering and celebrating possibilities. The shift involves lament and letting go of how things have been done. The shift necessitates waiting for God to lead and being open to the opportunities that will emerge.

The shifts that are taking place can be visualized using a model developed by C. Otto Scharmer in *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*.[4] The model is based on a U shape: it moves from left to right, from letting go, to "presencing" (Scharmer's new

word for presence + sensing), to letting come. This model is being adapted for use in area church and congregational settings.[5] It may help free us to try other holy experiments.

Devoted to the breaking of bread and the prayers

Like the MCEC area church, congregations are engaging in holy experiments. Some of these experiments are simply noted here without evaluation.

At Hillcrest Mennonite Church, worship is based on Gather Round texts,[6] and Sunday school follows. On the fourth Sunday of the month, the congregation meets in what they call 2:42 Groups. They take their name from Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." People in these groups go to each other's homes to eat together. Recipes for simple meals are provided. Everyone brings something. For each meeting a grace, a blessing, and two sets of questions are provided. The main course questions help people connect with each other. The dessert questions are linked to the morning's biblical text.

A shift is taking place, from having a formula for how we foster discipleship in family and congregation, to discovering and celebrating possibilities. The shift necessitates waiting for God to lead and being open to the opportunities that emerge.

The two key goals are to deepen relationships and form faith. The groups are intergenerational, and the questions are accessible to children and adults. The questions are open ended and lead both toward scripture and away from scripture.[7] One of the sessions, for example, dealt with a text from the Gospel of Matthew about the kingdom of heaven. One question was, "If the kingdom of heaven were a colour, what colour would it be?"

On the fifth Sunday of the month, worship has a thematic focus and is followed by intergenerational activities. Some of the fifth Sundays have included discernment about refugees and about fair trade; they have also used Nathan Dungan's book, *Money Sanity Solutions: Linking Money and Meaning*.[8] The congregation is in the first year of this experiment with revitalizing Sunday school, but they have already enjoyed learning to know each other more deeply.[9]

Treating catechism as a wide-open window

Leamington United Mennonite Church is trying a holy experiment with catechism by extending it from a few months to two years. According to Pastor David Dyck, this pattern has grown out of their sense that they have been failing, somehow missing the target, and being frustrated with an inability to help young people to become disciples.[10] They also had a growing conviction that this is their primary task as pastors and the church. A different approach was birthed out of longing and a sense of needing some new approach in this task of forming Christians. The way catechism was previously set up offered them a window of opportunity that was open for six months and then closed again.

"We started raising the bar, and the youth didn't balk. We felt that catechism could be a window: let's open it as wide as we can. Catechism doesn't end when you are baptized, but we had made it that way."

David Dyck notes, "We started raising the bar, and the youth didn't balk. We felt that catechism could be a window: let's open it as wide as we can. Catechism doesn't end when you are baptized, but we had made it that way. After high school and baptism, students went away to school, and it seemed like that was it in terms of faith formation."

The word *practice* has become central in the formation experiment. The focus on practice is based on the teaching of Jesus at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (NIV).

The LUMC pastoral team has been developing a catechism based on concretely defining what it means to put the teachings of Jesus into practice. The practices they have focused on include forgiveness, generosity, prayer, service, abstinence, offering gifts, gathering for worship, and community. As teachers they emphasize that none of these things comes naturally. Class participants should not expect that everyone will already be good at these practices. When we are learning how to play the violin, we start out clumsy and may want to give up. Only with practice and dedication are we able to play melodically. The unnatural becomes natural. As one follows Jesus more and more as an act of obedience, these practices become more and more natural. They

create habits and shape our identity: we become disciples following Jesus' way.

In practical terms, the pre-baptism catechism lays out these practices. In the years following baptism, the practices will be worked out in more detail in conversation about and interaction with the realities of daily life, in the world of school and relationships. The process will give attention to the practice of community and how it will manifest itself.

The experiment started this year with the students who have returned home during the university break. They call themselves Verein 6:40. *Verein* is a German word for an association, club, society, union; here it refers to a small group of students united in training to become like our teacher Jesus. Luke 6:40 reads: "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (NIV). Training and practice go hand in hand. Verein 6:40 meets every two weeks. The meeting is structured like the 2:42 Groups, with time for eating, praying, studying, and sharing. David Dyck observes that "this plan did not come to us all at once; it keeps on coming. As we experiment, we keep learning new things. It started with a word—*practice*—and the word *Master*, and the idea of learning how to live as he did. It has grown and multiplied. As we experiment, we learn—and new experiments are born."

Soup and Bible study

The soup is on at St. Jacobs (Ontario) Mennonite Church. The congregation's Christian formation ministry has helped organize times on Thursday evenings for the church to eat a simple meal and study the Bible together. Each four-week series has been led by Derek Suderman, a member of the congregation who teaches Old Testament at Conrad Grebel University College.

A volunteer prepares a simple meal of soup, bread, and water. After supper, people pitch in to clean up in time for everyone to participate in the Bible study. Topics have included a study of Jonah and "How does Jesus read the scriptures?" Thirty or forty people have participated. Some join for the study time only. The youth take care of the children during the study.

Like several other congregations, St. Jacobs Mennonite Church has had some members participate in Tending the Soul of Indi-

viduals and Congregations, an MCEC initiative to sponsor six retreats over a two-year period. Led by Wendy Miller from Eastern Mennonite Seminary (Harrisonburg, Virginia), these retreats are times of learning to be attentive and listen to the Spirit in participants' own lives and in the life of their congregations. Learning a vocabulary of tending the soul has helped participants name the experiences of individuals and the congregation. Having their own souls tended has aided them in tending the soul of their congregations.

The chair and vice chair and four other members of the St. Jacobs congregation have taken part, and the training has brought sensitivity to the work of the Spirit in the task of leading the congregation. When the congregation faced the question of what to do with a surplus of money in the budget, the council met and discerned a path forward in response to the leading of the Spirit.[11] The congregation affirmed the council's proposal to give much of the surplus away. On a Sunday morning in February they held a special offering. Baskets were set out representing ministries St. Jacobs supports, as well as the church's capital fund. People were given play money and could put it in any of the baskets. The results of their distribution determined the allocation of funds to the various projects.

True evangelical faith comforts the sorrowful

These three Ontario congregations are conducting holy experiments among themselves and with other congregations. So many other stories could be told. So many other holy experiments are underway.

Perhaps the area of greatest need for holy experiments is in beginning conversations with those who have little connection with Christian faith or are disillusioned with Christian faith.

One day I received a phone call to officiate at a funeral of someone who had no connection with our congregation. A family member had seen me lead a funeral in the community a few months earlier. I agreed to walk with the family, but I was hesitant. I wasn't sure what God was up to. That evening my six-year-old son recognized a word on a wall hanging at our house, and he asked me, "Mommy, what does that sign say—with the word 'it' and 'it' and 'it'?" I looked up at the piece, which had been hanging

there for many years. I read to him these words of Menno Simons: "True evangelical faith does not lie sleeping. It clothes the naked, it comforts the sorrowful, it gives to the hungry food." Then I stopped, hearing anew this call to live out true evangelical faith.

We are called to walk into situations, equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, the support of a praying community, the Bible (which has a way to connect with everyone), and the love of Christ. As we take up these holy experiments, we discover ways of sharing our faith with our family, friends, and neighbours. As we enter into conversations or preach at funerals or eat together or debate together, we can invite people to enter into a deeper relationship with our living God and a deeper living out of true evangelical faith.

Notes

[1] Stuart Murray Williams, from a handout at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) School for Ministers, February 22–25, 2012. The other transitions in post-Christendom include movement from the centre to the margins, from majority to minority, from settlers to sojourners, from privilege to plurality, from control to witness, from maintenance to mission, and from institution to movement.

[2] Mennonite Church Canada now calls regional conferences area churches, in recognition that church happens at many levels beyond the congregation.

[3] The report's findings included in this article have been minimally paraphrased.

[4] San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009.

[5] For more information, contact Jeff Steckley: jsteckley@mcec.ca.

[6] Gather Round is a Bible-based Sunday school curriculum for children, youth, and their families, copublished by Brethren Press and MennoMedia; see http://www.gatherround.org.

[7] From a January 21, 2012, presentation by Derek Suderman at Vineland United Mennonite Church, at an event organized by MCEC for pastors, chaplains, and congregational leaders: "Catching the Spark . . . Carrying the Light: Facilitating Dynamic Bible Study." Derek presented a grid for framing questions for Bible study. One gridline was open and closed. The second was away and toward. He challenged leaders to think about their use of questions and encouraged us to ask open-ended questions that lead us toward the biblical text (exploration) and away from the text (application).

[8] Minneapolis: Share, Save, Spend, 2010.

[9] Interview with Jan Steckley, pastor of Hillcrest Mennonite Church, May 25, 2012.

[10] Interview with David Dyck, May 25, 2012.

[11] Interview with Mark Diller Harder, May 25, 2012.

About the author

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Talking from the heart, seeing from the heart
Lessons from the Sermon on the Mount—and my dog

Will Streeter

Dogs say so much, yet they don't use words. They talk with their bodies—and if we're around them much, we know exactly what they're saying. Humans aren't so different. Some researchers estimate that as much as 90 percent of what we "say" is nonverbal. Babies are experts at expressing themselves without words, and we parents become just as good at interpreting. We call it "talking from the heart," these messages that are so simple yet say the most. Dogs, young children, and some adults are really good at this talking without talking.

During repeated readings of the Sermon on the Mount, I kept thinking that these three chapters (Matthew 5–7) are telling us to stop talking so much with words and start letting our hearts rule what we say. *Let your yes be yes, your no be no. Love your enemies. Give, pray, fast in secret. No babbling prayers like the pagans do. Forgive others. Take the log out of your own eye. By your fruits you will be recognized.* Doing these things takes very few words. The language of the heart is where truth is expressed and lived.

Talking from the heart, seeing from the heart: I think this is part of the mysterious language of the Sermon on the Mount that leads us to a new way of being, really being.

So if we are speaking from the heart, is it possible to *see* from the heart? It seems that Jesus is saying: Speak from the heart, and then start seeing from the heart. What can this mean? My dog watches me with anticipation and excitement, waiting to see what's going to happen next. He's ready. He looks at things as if they had potential to be more than what they seem. He looks at me, wondering what I'm going to ask of him, hoping that perhaps what we do will be even more exciting than the last time.

Children are experts at seeing this way, too. They look at parents, teachers, coaches, and friends with anticipation about

what new piece of knowledge, what new skill, what adventure is coming. I believe they are looking at us hoping that we have potential to be for them more than we presently seem to be. Their constant questioning suggests that they view us as unlimited sources of knowledge.

This way of seeing—with anticipation and a sense of unlimited potential—is what Jesus is asking of us in Matthew 5–7. *Don't resist the evil person. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Give your coat, and your shirt too. Go the extra mile. Give to the one who asks, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

How can we freely, joyfully, eagerly do any of these things if we aren't looking at others with anticipation—anticipation that maybe we are underestimating their potential? Maybe they will surprise us and become more than they presently appear to be! Isn't it great when you go the extra mile and find that it softens the other, that you have made a new friend? Talking from the heart, seeing from the heart: I think this is part of the mysterious language of the Sermon on the Mount that leads us to a new way of being, really being.

I like to think of God as a master gardener who plants us into this world. When I plant seeds in my garden, I'll go to great lengths to keep them growing. I have a picture, either in my head or from the seed package, of what these seeds can become, and I'll do all I can within reason to get the plants that emerge to reach their full potential. God plants us and I think maybe sees us in a way that's a little like how we see our vegetables. Except the stakes are higher. We're not plants; we have a heart and soul that are worth going the extra mile for.

We live in a world where we give most everything a monetary value. To get special attention, good products, good *anything,* you have to pay. If you can't pay, you get things and services that no extra inch (much less an extra mile!) was put into the making of. We're living in houses with no heart, filling them up with things that weren't made with any heart, for which no one went an extra mile. We don't even know who made the things we touch and look at all day, every day. Why do we cherish those few things that we know were made with heart? Because we know the effort that went into them. And the funny thing is, we usually have paid

no money for those items. They're gifts from one heart to another.

We need a new way of tending to the garden, one in which we know our hearts are being cared for, in which value is connected to how many extra miles went into a thing's creation, and in which those things are affordable for all. A life of striving for money lacks creativity, it lacks passion, and it lacks compassion. Obsession with money is killing our hearts. Walking the extra mile would be good for us, body and soul. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You cannot serve God and money.*

Our native ability to talk and see with the heart gets sidetracked during the growing-up process. We get preoccupied with other matters as we move into adulthood. Stuff happens—family trouble, accidents, natural disasters, victimization, job loss, failure, premature death. We are left feeling that we have something to overcome. A wound. Most of us get busy tending this wound, trying to fill the void it has left. As Richard Rohr says, we launch into trying to fix, understand, and control this part of our life that we don't have a handle on.[1]

This story that each of us lives is not about us. As much as we try to make it about our individual pains, our hurts, and our shortcomings, the story is about God's love.

The wound I've spent the last twenty-five years trying to manage, fix, control, and understand is my relationship with my father and its lingering aftershocks. My father, unlike the good parent who gives good gifts (bread) to his children, gave me stones. They felt like emotional boulders being hurled at me: immorality, financial irresponsibility, emotional abuse. I devoted my life to trying to fill the wounds this relationship left me with: with education, adventure, travel, and—for the last twenty or so years—hard work. I've been trying to make a respectable life out of a childhood filled with shame and disappointment. A big dose of anxiety came along, too. If people knew the wrongs that are a part of my past, what would they think?

Do not worry, the Sermon on the Mount says. *Don't pursue things to store up in barns to help you feel safer, more secure. Don't run after these things. Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Seek his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.*

So I looked up *righteousness*. And among others, there was this definition: "To be free from guilt or wrong." I looked up *wrong*:

"Not according to a standard or code, improper, incorrect, unsatisfactory, unsuitable, and inappropriate." All of which are ways I've felt most of my life. I've never felt safe in places where there are standards or codes of conduct. School and church have always been places of anxiety for me, although for some reason I stayed in both kinds of places longer than a lot of people I know have. The more chaotic things get, the more comfortable I usually feel. Rules are for people who can't make up their own.

About two months ago I was taking a shower when something made me turn my head to look over the shower door. I saw God and my dad (who's been dead for six years) looking at me. I heard a voice (not my dad's) in my head say, "We did good." I responded, "He didn't do !@#$," and went back to washing. But after a couple minutes, I looked again. My dad's eyes were clear, he looked healthy, and he'd lost weight. He looked peaceful. He looked whole. I stared for a few minutes at this mental picture and finally said, "Oh." In other words, "I see."

Look at every person, every natural wonder, every moment with anticipation, eager to see if they can become more than what they appear to be at first glance. Eager to see them become more real.

What I saw is that this story that each of us lives is not about us. As much as we try to make it about our individual pains, our hurts, and our shortcomings, the story is about God's love. God sees right past our failings, our evils. He looks at us, anticipating that we are capable of reaching our full potential. For the first time in my life I was looking at my dad from the heart, seeing him as God may be seeing him right now. A full, whole person who is now free from the burdens he carried through life, which contributed to making a wreck of it. *For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* I think this small gate and narrow road are found if we follow the heart. Let your actions do your talking for you. And look at every person, every natural wonder, every moment with anticipation, eager to see if they can become more than what they appear to be at first glance. Eager to see them become more real, more whole.

When I come home and my dog greets me, he seems to be telling me, "Where've you been? Take me with you next time! But hey, I'm glad you're home. What do you want to do now?" Maybe

God sees us in a similar way when we ask, seek, and knock. Maybe God is greeting us when we arrive at home: "Where've you been? Take me with you next time! But I'm really glad you're here. What do you want to do now?"

One of my favorite musical artists is Bruce Cockburn. On a recent album he has a song entitled "Mystery." The first line is "You can't tell me there is no mystery. It's everywhere I turn." If we can live from the heart, we might be able to see mysteries everywhere we turn. And just maybe get a glimpse of God along the way. *The pure in heart will see God.*

Note

[1] See Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999); and *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005).

About the author

"Will Streeter (1963–2012), spiritual director, teacher, and builder, was an unforgettable student. At midlife, after being inspired by the teachings and friendship of Richard Rohr, Will came to Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana) to study spiritual direction. While he struggled courageously with a recurrence of ocular melanoma during the time of his study, he persevered in offering both individual and group spiritual direction. As it became clear that his journey would lead to an untimely death, his spiritual sight became clearer and stronger. All who knew him were given an extraordinary gift as we witnessed his amazing human vulnerability and simultaneously the deepening and strengthening of his faith. Will lived and loved well—and was given the gift of purity of heart. We should heed his testimony."—Marlene Kropf

The authority of discipleship

An approach to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount

Katja Neumann

When we think of what defines our faith as Christians, we immediately think of those acts that constitute our being toward God in Christ. Discipleship, our fellowship with Christ, prompts us to regard the world with the loving compassion that we are taught by the Spirit and which moves us to take action against and stand witness to the many injustices suffered in this world. Jesus' call to discipleship in ministry is a call to action, a call to serve others and to enable others to see, recognise, and obey the will of God. We rarely pause to think that reflecting on the means of our response to this call is likewise an expression of faith. Critical reflection—as it is needed for preparing to read the biblical text in devotion, crafting a sermon, or producing commentary to help others in their approach to and understanding of the biblical material—is a crucial act of service and a dimension of faith.

Critical reflection—as it is needed to help others in their approach to and understanding of the biblical material—is a crucial act of service and a dimension of faith.

And yet, in writing exegesis we do more than consider where we are in relation to a biblical passage; we position ourselves as intermediaries between the text and the listeners to whom we offer the text in exposition. We will be perceived as authorities *of* the text, when in fact we need to assert our fellowship *with* the text as a critical act of obedience *to* the text. We are at once at a distance from the biblical source that we seek to elucidate as well as the embodiment of that text as we live in response to it, pronounce it in the sermon, or write of it in commentary. In our attempt to convey its meanings, our own context becomes increasingly important. To acknowledge our critical distance from the biblical text is not to deny our situation in faith; we find ourselves doubly involved with the biblical text in our role as disciples.

Commentary's secondary status

In the introduction to *The Cost of Discipleship*, an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) shows a clear awareness of this political dimension to our response in faith. Faced with a society indoctrinated to follow the example of Abraham's "blind" obedience to God exemplified in the story of the binding of Isaac (characterised by the Nazis as an act of unthinking submissiveness), Bonhoeffer uses rhetoric that is at once uncomfortably close to the Nazi propaganda he seeks to displace and at the same time directs our attention to a different understanding of the task of interpretation which cannot deny its faith perspective. He draws our attention to remaining obedient to our own call, which requires us to reflect critically on both the biblical context and our own, in order to convey the biblical text to other readers. In a provocative phrase Bonhoeffer asserts: "If we start asking questions, posing problems, and offering interpretations, we are not doing his word. . . . However vehemently we assert our faith, and our fundamental recognition of his word, Jesus still calls it 'not-doing.'. . . The word we had was not Christ's, but a word we had wrested from him and made our own by reflecting on it instead of doing it."[1]

As text, commentary needs to establish its secondary status; it needs to follow its source text before it can claim to lead others to the word that is Christ's.

What then, does a faith-position look like for the issue of commentary? How are we to discuss the biblical narrative in view of our own discipleship? As text, commentary needs to establish its secondary status; it needs to follow its source text before it can claim to lead others to the word that is Christ's. The contentious issue for writing commentary—a reflective exercise, over against an immediate response to reading the scriptures within the context of our daily decision making, or as liturgical response to the sermon—is our need for understanding, which is largely informed by our historical situation. Considering both the context from which the call into discipleship arose in the biblical narrative (which marks the biblical material out as Word of God) and our own sense of calling (as it is situated in relation to an interpretation of the Bible) focuses our writing of commentary on a different purpose from that of the Gospels. Bonhoeffer differentiates the

scriptural passage and the commentary in a manner equally applicable to the difference between academic commentary and religious sermon: biblical text and sermon hold an active relationship to the presence of the Spirit, which lends authority to interpretations given expression in faith. The commentary, as analytical critical discourse, does not aim for such (direct) identification; its distance however *reflects* the moment of recognition present to faith as active reality indicated in the source text. The commentary thus offers up a new context for the biblical text, which invites the renewing presence of the Word of God; that is, it calls for renewed proclamation of the Word. To expand on this notion I offer a reading of the context in which Bonhoeffer produced his commentary-text and the relationship this contextual reading brings to the use of biblical commentary and our interpretations and expressions of faith.

A reading of Bonhoeffer's context

According to Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer, "both the theme and the underlying thesis of *The Cost of Discipleship* were already fully evolved before 1933, but it is to that year that the book owes its single-minded concentration."[2] Thus, Bethge emphasises a critical moment in history that was to be of crucial importance to political culture in the positioning of each individual as well as economical and institutional bodies. From the ensuing German church struggle borne out of Hitler's rise to power, the question of the churches' political annexation led to the formation of the Confessing Church and raised church-political questions about training, examination, and ordination of new ministers separate from the control of the National Church and the SA.[3]

Bonhoeffer, who until 1933 taught at the University of Berlin—his Christology lectures there served as basis for substantial parts of *The Cost of Discipleship*—left Germany for a pastorate in London. While he was out of the country, the 1934 synod at Barmen was part of an ecumenical attempt to maintain dialogue between Protestant confessions in a time of struggle; its declaration[4] marked the first (theological) step toward a clear dissociation from Nazi ideology and toward the foundation of the Confessing Church, in whose service Bonhoeffer was to return to

Germany in order to build a preacher's seminary at Zingst, before it resettled in Finkenwalde in 1935. While the demands of the Finkenwälder community delayed progress on *The Cost of Discipleship*, the enthusiasm of Bonhoeffer's students and the experiences he gathered during this time also shaped the book.[5] As of December 1935, the Fifth Enabling Act, dealing with the organisation of the churches, outlawed the Confessing Church,[6] with the eventual result that the Gestapo closed the seminary in 1937.

Bethge's statement that discipleship "opposes mass credos and 'world movements,' because it is personal commitment,"[7] makes it hard to appreciate Haddon Willmer's warning that *The Cost of Discipleship* is not to be read "essentially as political resistance literature."[8] Bonhoeffer's book seems so naturally to fall in line with a cry against Hitler's totalitarian aspirations and the rhetoric of his propaganda machine. Rhetorically estranging to a postwar reader, the foreword's explicit mention of the renewed importance of the Bible for the church in its *struggle*[9] marks Bonhoeffer's keen awareness of his context and audience. Toward the close of the foreword, the statement *"Nachfolge ist Freude"* ("discipleship is joy")[10]—mimicking *Kraft durch Freude* ("strength through joy"), a Nazi organisation devoted to fostering the *völkisch* (national, populist)[11] spirit by offering social activities—seems to ask us to understand discipleship as a decisive counter-image to the Führer's encouragement of a culture of *Mitläufertum*[12] (groupthink).

Bonhoeffer's commentary exposes Hitler's authority as fake, and his image as political saviour is seen as a thin cover for the abuse of his status which demands not faithful obedience but a blind obedience correlative with "cheap grace."

I do not mean to reduce *The Cost of Discipleship* to resistance literature, but where Christian discipleship is understood as countercultural, the question of obedience remains a legally, ethically, and theologically contentious point for faith. The power and authority of Hitler here are exposed as fake, by their *völkische* attainability, and Hitler's image as political saviour is seen as a thin cover for the abuse and illegitimacy of his status and position which demands not faithful—in Bonhoeffer's use, "single-minded" (or meek)[13]—obedience, but a blind obedience (*Kadavergehorsam*) correlative with "cheap grace."[14]

"Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God."[15] Keeping in mind the allusions to the leader principle in the sense of obedience propagated by the Nazis, the "mass movement mentality" disallows a vision from beyond the *Volk*. Any such vision from beyond is a threat to a totalitarian social order. The costly grace of Jesus does not invite *Gleichschaltung* or a *völkische* mentality; each of Jesus' disciples has been called *personally*—out of the crowd—and their community rests on perpetual mediation by Christ—a point repeatedly foregrounded by Bonhoeffer. Cheap grace—that is, grace that has no power to transform, because it has failed to be recognised as revelation—is contrasted with the *living* Word, and with the *Menschwerdung* (incarnation: literally, "becoming human"). I prefer the German term here, for two reasons: First, it uses not the image of the flesh but of the human, emphasising a social over a material/biological aspect. Second, it parallels the active element that *living* seeks to emphasise in relation to the Word, which the becoming (*werden*) of *Menschwerdung* entails. Thus, costly grace is set apart from the conceptually stale—purely ideational—and lifeless character of cheap grace, and it calls for active engagement. Already in his opening move, Bonhoeffer has drawn on the dialectic between call and response in order to emphasise the participatory aspect, which is, however, bound to an opening move by God. Grace must be given in order to be witnessed. The sacred text remains the original which the commentary does not and cannot replace but certainly invites us to emulate. This encounter that transformed the disciples, the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, needs to be substantiated in its textual representation.

Commentary recontextualises its source text

Grace stands in direct relationship to the proclamation of the Word of God, whereas the commentary does not. By definition, the Word of God is characterized by transformative power—culminating in the incarnation of Christ—and as such issues in revelation: in the presence of Christ, as in the presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching.[16] The Word of God is not itself "just" text, or sacred text, but sacred-text-in-context (*viva vox dei)*, a testimony. The historical situation of revelation, which is tied up

with its witness, cannot be regained in commentary but only reproduced in preaching. Bonhoeffer acknowledges this dynamic, saying that "we cannot identify ourselves altogether [straightforwardly] with those whom Jesus called, for they themselves are part and parcel of the Word of God in the Scriptures, and therefore part of the message."[17] Revelation is only revelation when it is viewed in relation to those affected by it, those transformed under its work. The commentary, at one step removed from this scene, can reappropriate neither the original historical nor its kerygmatic event. "If . . . history is the nexus between the historical-theological content and the literary-historical form of the gospels, literature is the nexus between the theological-spatial message and the historical medium."[18]

Whereas in preaching there is a claim to the immediacy of the Word of God in the light of ministry, the commentary has no such claims. The commentary provides a recontextualisation of its source text. It is not just an analysis or a critical interpretation but a secondary context. It presents the textual representation of the event of revelation without also laying claim to its revelatory, transformative power. The commentary then mediates not the moment of revelation but the moment of recognition of the biblical witnesses. The realisation of their role as disciples through the calling of God's grace is the model by which the commentary is transformed by its source text to aspire to be the textual equivalent of discipleship.

Whereas in preaching there is a claim to the immediacy of the Word of God in the light of ministry, the commentary has no such claims. The commentary provides a recontextualisation of its source text.

Thus, methodologically, the commentary requires obedience toward its sacred counterpart without appropriating its propositions. The commentary's analytic cannot aim for the revelatory event without presupposing its meaning, and thus objectifying the event, rendering it lifeless and therefore meaningless. Exegesis in its critical analytic cannot faithfully deconstruct the kerygma without presupposing full knowledge of—or being party to—the divine agency that discloses it. Mark Alan Bowland's work offers an insightful reading of the case of divine agency at work, as an occasion where prejudices and pre-understandings have to be negated or suspended in order

to invite new meanings to the terms by which we validate our situations.[19] An agreed method—however self-reflexive of the influences and context of the investigator and the investigated—cannot claim full validity in matters of divinity, because it cannot find objective criteria by which to (exhaustively) discern the work of the divine without assuming a position of superiority in critical analysis: our acts of worship must also speak for us. Within a faith context, such as preaching, this speaking for us happens in prayer and dedication of the sermon in its appeal to the work of the Spirit. We cannot take God seriously as a possible presence if we evade God's activity by calculating God's agency prior to meeting God in worship. To Bonhoeffer, this dynamic is substantiated in the disciples' recognition of grace in Jesus' call. Discipleship as textual and interpretive method of the commentary must assume a position alongside its source text. When discipleship assumes this position, the commentary avoids rendering the Word a lifeless object, devoid of grace. It obediently submits first and foremost to the text as text.

What a look at Bonhoeffer's historical context has brought to the fore is his keen awareness of the dangers of ideologically indoctrinated readings, which makes his aversion to reflection and interpretation stand out as bewildering. Reception history strongly emphasises the ethical and theological dimensions of *The Cost of Discipleship*, which, again, is largely informed by interest in the historical milieu Bonhoeffer was facing, and his unique testament in writing. Discipleship, as contextual feature, reveals its interpretive quality to both biblical and critical context—in theological discourse and historical reality—by transferring between their concerns, thus opening the commentary text toward the grace presented in the call of Christ. Grace is the source of authority underlying all acts of faith—and also interpretation.

We cannot take God seriously as a possible presence if we evade God's activity by calculating God's agency prior to meeting God in worship.

As Bonhoeffer chose the commentary form, approaching the situation of faith from a nonliturgical, albeit still theologically informed position, discipleship serves as a means to contextualise the commentary's critical perspective from the perspective of faith. Thus, methodologically the commentary requires the

recognition of biblical authority in a living faith's testament to the Word of God, while its position alongside the biblical narrative opens the commentary toward the recognition of revelation as an expansion of the Bible's context which transforms the commentary into the witness of its own representative status.

Notes

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, revised and unabridged 7th edition, translated by R. H. Fuller, revised by Irmgard Booth (London: SCM Press, 1962 [1959]), 176.

[2] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*, translated by Eric Mosbacher et al., edited by Edwin Robertson (London: Collins, 1970), 375.

[3] Otto Dudzus and Jürgen Henkys, eds., *Illegale Theologenausbildung: Finkenwalde 1935–1937*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke Band 14 (Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1996), 3. The SA—Sturmabteilung (Stormtroopers, also known as Brownshirts)—was the original paramilitary wing of the Nazi party.

[4] The Barmen confession is a "six-point declaration adopted by Evangelical (Protestant) Church leaders opposed to the German Reich Church at their first Synod held in Barmen, Westphalia, from 29th to 31st May 1934. Without mentioning Nazism, the Barmen Confession or Declaration categorically rejected any ideological addition to the revelation of the word of God in Jesus Christ. It did not, however, directly address the 'Jewish question'" (John W. De Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," chapter 5 in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], xx–xxi). As a first reaction and programmatic coordination of a Christian position opposed to the "Brown Synod," which established the submission of the national church under Nazi governance, this event, for all its merits, did not have a great effect on the course for *Gleichschaltung* (the process by which the Nazi regime established totalitarian control over all aspects of society), as Klaus Scholder shows (Klaus Sholder, *The Year of Disillusionment: 1934 Barmen and Rome*, vol. 2 of *The Churches and the Third Reich*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1988), 124ff.); however, it marks the critical awareness of the theological implications of the political context of the churches.

[5] Editor's epilogue, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, edited by Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt, 3rd ed. of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, vol. 4, edited by Eberhard Bethge, Ernst Feil, et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2008), 321.

[6] Dudzus and Henkys, *Illegale Theologenausbildung*, 5.

[7] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 373.

[8] Haddon Willmer, "Costly Discipleship," chapter 9 in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. De Gruchy, 173.

[9] Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, 21; Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 29.

[10] Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, 24; Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 32.

[11] I follow Scholder's explanation: The word *völkisch* "has overtones of nation and race as well as 'people,' and was a key term in the racist ideology of the Third Reich" (Klaus Sholder, *Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions 1918–1934*, vol. 1 of *The Churches and the Third Reich*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1987), viii.

[12] Describing the attitude of uncritically aligning oneself to a goal, doctrine, group, etc., with the immediate prospect of gaining an opportunity.

[13] Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 69.
[14] Ibid., 35.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Press, 1990), 1096–97.
[17] Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 73.
[18] Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 132–33.
[19] Mark Alan Bowland, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 22.

About the author

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A Mennonite view of grace

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld

It is a sign of God's grace that, unlike in the sixteenth century, Lutherans and Mennonites today do not have a disputation but a dialogue between sisters and brothers who know themselves to be members of the same body. In a real sense we are stepping into each other's shoes, each addressing an issue dear to the other.[1] I am eager to discover to what degree we might in the end turn out to be firmly in our own *and* the other's shoes. As I have contemplated this Lutheran-Mennonite exchange, I have wondered how church relations over the years would have gone if one of the tasks would have been to make a case for the gospel from within the other's cherished conviction.

Our salvation, our liberation, is premised first and last on the grace of God. And what is this grace? It is the sovereign, free, loving, and life-giving exercise of mercy toward errant and lost humanity.

Interestingly, the issue we might variously characterize as grace versus works, or justification by faith versus discipleship, has apparently not been part of the recent Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue culminating in the rite of apology and forgiveness in Stuttgart in 2010. Perhaps the issue is settled. If so, that might well be good news: Lutherans have discovered the importance of discipleship, and Mennonites the importance of grace. Perhaps. As my comments will indicate, I think there is still much for us Mennonites, at least, to grapple with when it comes to grace.

"By grace you have been saved!"

I am not so much a theologian or a historian as a student of the Bible. And I have spent much time with the letter to the Ephesians. Chapter 2 contains what sounds like a slogan straight out of the Reformation. Twice we hear the words "By grace you have been saved!"

In verse 5 the forceful assertion literally interrupts the grand recitation of the drama of salvation (perhaps it's a Lutheran interpolation?). In verse 8 it sounds like a warning (of Lutherans toward Anabaptists?) for those who might be impressed by their own abilities and capacities for good: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

You cannot state the matter more unambiguously. Our salvation, our liberation, is premised first and last on the grace of God. And what is this grace? It is the sovereign, free, loving, and life-giving exercise of mercy toward errant and lost humanity. Consider the verses leading up to the Reformation slogan. After describing humanity in the grip of the dark "prince of the power of the air" and stumbling about in disobedience like zombies, Ephesians 2:4–7 says this:

> *But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Nowhere will we find a more succinct summary of the gospel. This is the God who shines the sun and pours the rain out on both the just and the unjust, as in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the God whose justice comes to full expression in mercy, as in Romans 3, who loves us while we are still enemies, as in Romans 5. This is the "God-for-us" of Romans 8:32–39.

> *If God is for us, who is against us? . . . It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Not of one mind

As central as this affirmation is to the gospel, Mennonites are not of one mind about grace. For one, as I have illustrated, and as any concordance will show, this language comes not so much from the Gospels as from Paul, and Mennonites know he was Lutheran!

Seriously, as much as there is sometimes a sense that grace is someone else's agenda, there are some—no, many—among us who feel strongly both the lack of full appreciation in our tradition about grace and its centrality in the Christian life. At the end of his life, theologian James Reimer stressed again and again how central confidence in God's grace was for him.[2] Grace represented for him the kindness and acceptance by God of flawed human beings, who fail amid their efforts to do the right thing. Reimer knew well that he was drawing on the deep and wide evangelical and ecumenical horizon of his faith more than on died-in-the-wool Anabaptist Mennonitism of recent vintage.

Almost two decades ago Stephen Dintaman wrote an article that would ignite a firestorm of reaction, both pro and con. In "The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,"[3] he argued, perhaps rather one-sidedly, that Mennonites whose faith has been formed in one way or another by Harold Bender's "Anabaptist Vision"[4] have been so focused on ethics, on *doing*, that they have had little to say to the brokenness and sinfulness many of us Mennonites struggle with in our own lives—a brokenness that marks the lives even of those most committed to peacemaking. What Mennonites need to recover, Dintaman argued, is grace, and the work of the restoring and transforming Holy Spirit.

This is an argument Arnold Snyder has been making for decades, as one who during his time with Witness for Peace in Nicaragua struggled with what is needed if one is to love enemies,[5] and also as a historian attempting to understand the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century who took it as a given that what marked the life of the believer was the work of grace, and only then the response in action.[6] Ethicist Ted Koontz echoes Snyder's sense of the priority of grace:

> *I know it is easier to walk as a peacemaker when I know afresh God's graciousness than when I try to do so because I feel I must. For many difficult years I tried to*

be a good Mennonite pacifist, but with very little personal appropriation of God's graciousness. Even though that graciousness has become far more real to me in the last few years, I routinely slip out of living in awareness of it. The weight of being "good"—especially as extremely and oddly "good" as nonresistance expects us to be—is often more than can be sustained by a sense of duty.[7]

Such an understanding represents a profound appreciation for divine pardon, but also for the restoring and transforming work of grace in those who attempt to live their faith.

Others in the Mennonite community come at the theme of grace from a somewhat different, if overlapping vantage point. They have a deep suspicion that our forebears were unrealistic—and perhaps even misguided—in their understanding of discipleship as purity and nonconformity to the world, an understanding that has led to a sometimes disdainful disengagement from the world, and a sometimes oppressive communal life.

Turning from perfectionism

There are varied aspects to how grace relates to this turning from what is often dubbed "perfectionism." For one, I sense that sometimes we're just tired of trying so hard. Even if we try hard—and we do so less and less, to be sure—when we do succeed (or think we have succeeded), we discover that we've blown it by being proud about it. It's much better, much healthier, to make peace with sin. At such times we love to (mis)quote Luther's counsel to "sin boldly."

There are varied aspects to how grace relates to this turning from what is often dubbed perfectionism. Sometimes we're just tired of trying so hard.

Relatedly, the effort to be perfect (even though Jesus demands it explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount [Matt. 5:48]) is perceived as dangerous in that it renders us blind to the degree to which brokenness and sin have taken root even in our piety. Grace is an implicit acknowledgement of our sinfulness. Grace permits an honest appraisal of ourselves as flawed and broken human beings.

Further, since most of us are no longer living separate from the world, we've developed a kind of Niebuhrian appreciation for the

tragic inevitability of moral compromise in this world, even when we're doing the right thing. It is the tragedy of that reality that provides the need for grace. J. Lawrence Burkholder is most often associated with this perspective. His doctoral thesis of the late 1950s argued for a kind of "social responsibility" that is not squeamish about getting one's hands dirty in the course of engagement for justice in the world.

For Burkholder it was a matter of grace as pardon not only for broken individuals but particularly for those who have to work within the structures of this world that make sin inevitable, even when—*especially* when—they are engaged in the practice of love for the neighbour. "What I have looked for," he said in some personal reflections, "is a doctrine of grace that would not only have addressed the problem of personal sins, willfully committed [this is very much Stephen Dintaman's concern mentioned earlier], but also social sins, structurally *necessitated*."[8]

The effort to be perfect is perceived as dangerous in that it renders us blind to the degree to which brokenness and sin have taken root even in our piety. Grace permits an honest appraisal of ourselves as broken.

Today debates rage among Mennonites on such matters as whether Mennonites should not only support policing but be involved in it; whether Mennonites should encourage governments to adopt the doctrine of the responsibility to protect; and what should inform their participation in governmental, business, and organizational systems.

Whenever there is a sense that such engagement implicates us in sin—an implication not all of us grasp, to be sure—grace is welcomed and embraced. But it is grace largely as pardon for the inevitability of sinning.

Suspicious of limiting grace to forgiveness

That is one rather diverse end of the spectrum regarding grace. At the other end, there are also many, or the same ones at different times, who are suspicious of grace, especially if it can no longer be distinguished from moral and spiritual impunity. The great Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become virtually an honorary Mennonite for his trenchant critique of "cheap grace" in his *Nachfolge* (published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship*).

We're suspicious of a grace that can too easily provide cover and absolution for unchecked participation in the sinful structures of society, economics, and politics. We're suspicious when grace cuts the prophetic nerve of the church's witness, when it becomes the back door to *not* following Jesus, to *not* taking up the cross.

We're suspicious of a kind of *Gelassenheit*—a favourite word among Anabaptists—that is not so much yieldedness to God and abandonment *to* costly discipleship as it is a complacent abandonment *of* the rigors of faithfulness. We see this as presuming upon grace, and thus devaluing its currency. And here we usually invoke not Lawrence Burkholder but John Howard Yoder.

Grace works

Even if some of us do not speak easily of grace for such reasons, I suspect that all of us in the middle of the night, when obfuscations and delusions have run out of steam, know we are in desperate need of grace. We know we need grace as pardon for personal falleness; too many of us are too fallen to fake it any more.

But pardon, if taken as a given for an unchanged life, betrays grace. If Bonhoeffer knew that, Paul knew it better yet, anticipating the Protestant heresy: "Should we sin that grace might abound? Give me a break!"

We need grace for our churches who are hardly spotless brides (they never were, of course), sullied not because we're getting dirty in the messy messianic business of being Christ in the world but because we're not in that business. Such grace is the equivalent of forgiveness, of pardon.

But pardon is not enough. Pardon, if taken as a given for an unchanged life, betrays that grace. If Bonhoeffer knew that, Paul knew it better yet, anticipating the Protestant heresy: "Should we sin that grace might abound? By no means!" (Rom 6:1–2). Or, as we might translate the Greek quite accurately: "Give me a break!"

Grace is so much more than forgiveness, as the Anabaptists knew well. Interestingly, Paul himself seldom used the word *forgiveness*. Sixteenth-century Anabaptists emphasized grace much more strongly than their offspring have, but less as forgiveness than as empowerment, as transformation, as regeneration.[9]

Their emphasis on *Nachfolge* ("following after," their preferred word for what contemporary Mennonites call "discipleship") was

premised on God's renewing and transforming grace through the work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is premised on grace. It is the work of grace. And therein might well lie the point at which Mennonites and Lutherans can together rediscover a deeper and more encompassing understanding of grace.

To make this point as clear as I can, let me return, in conclusion, to the letter of Ephesians. As I pointed out earlier, in the first instance of "By grace you are saved!" (in 2:5) the slogan interrupts a rehearsal of God's loving and gracious liberation of errant humanity. Notice, it is grace that raises the walking dead together with Christ. Grace has to do with resurrection, with letting Easter seep into the way we are to live now in the present, still fallen age. In Romans 6:4 Paul calls this "newness of life."

In the second instance (in 2:8), the slogan "For by grace you have been saved" leads into "and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in" (Eph. 2:8–10). Grace is not a guaranteed absolution from failing at good works, nor are good works the devaluing of grace. Just so, "good works"—discipleship, *Nachfolge*—are not a means of earning our own salvation. Rather, grace comes into its own in rendering us capable of doing the good works God has graciously prepared for us. "Works" are the gift of grace. On Reformation Sunday the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church[10] on Ottawa Street had this on their sign: "Grace works." Perfect! Likewise, justification is not simply the *Freispruch*, the pardon of a gracious judge. Justification is God's faithfulness in Jesus at work rendering us capable of *doing* justice (Rom 3:21–26). This is what Paul calls "new creation" (compare 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

Just as Paul was exasperated by those who would split grace from good works (see Rom. 6:11), so the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount knew that to demand the rigours of good works, the righteousness that exceeds even that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), required first the Beatitudes, the promise of God's favour, the sun of grace and the rain of mercy.

Mennonites dare not leave grace to the Lutherans, any more than Lutherans should leave discipleship to Mennonites. It is a great gift to us as Mennonites to have sisters and brothers to

remind us that we don't earn our way, that ultimately whatever good we do, we give thanks to the gracious author and finisher of that work.

Notes

[1] *Theodidaktos: Evangelical Mennonite Conference Journal for Theology and Education* published a version of this article (vol. 6, no. 2 [November 2011]: 3–7); it is based on a presentation made on November 26, 2010, at a conference, "Confessing in Faith: Healing between Lutherans and Mennonites," held at Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, Ontario). My conversation partner on that occasion was Robert A. Kelly, professor of systematic theology at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary; his presentation was "A Lutheran on Discipleship." Other presentations from the conference are also available on-line at http://www.emconference.ca/theodidaktos.

[2] A. James Reimer taught religion and theology at Conrad Grebel University, served on the faculty of the Toronto School of Theology, and was director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. He was author of *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Pandora Press, 2001); and *The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief* (Herald Press, 2003). He died in 2010 of cancer.

[3] Stephen F. Dintaman, "The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision," *Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 205–8.

[4] Harold S. Bender, as president of the American Society of Church History, published the "The Anabaptist Vision" in 1944, which in many ways determined the direction. See "The Anabaptist Vision," *Church History* 13 (March 1944): 3–24; reprinted in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944): 67–88.

[5] C. Arnold Snyder, "The Relevance of Anabaptist Nonviolence for Nicaragua Today." *Conrad Grebel Review* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 123–37.

[6] C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995).

[7] Ted Koontz, "Grace to You and Peace: Nonresistance as Piety," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (July 1995): 354–68, and in *Refocusing a Vision*, edited by John D. Roth (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1995), 82–96.

[8] Rodney J. Sawatsky and Scott Holland, eds., *The Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Grebel College, The Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1993), 50. My italics.

[9] See Thomas N. Finger, "Grace," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online; http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/G7325ME.html.

[10] One of the remarkable ways Lutheran and Mennonite story lines have intersected in the past is in the Mennonite Brethren part of the Mennonite community of denominations, which owes its beginnings in 1860 in Russia to the work of a Lutheran evangelist, Eduard Wüst.

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