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Peace

Editorial

Ted Koontz

Editing this collection of essays on peace has been inspiring because of the abundance of worthy topics and authors I could imagine including. As I look back on peace-related developments occurring within my lifetime among Christians, and among Mennonites in particular, I am filled with amazement and gratitude.

Mennonites in North America emerged from World War II with a strong peace commitment that focused heavily (though not exclusively) on refusing military service. This commitment was unpopular and sometimes costly, *and* it was challenged by many within our churches.[1] This understanding of peace—as *at least* refusing to kill and *mostly* as refusing to kill—had been central for Mennonites and other groups known as peace churches throughout the centuries. This understanding of peace remains strong.

But since the 1940s—as North American Mennonites became more integrated into and more influential in our societies; as the pressure of a military draft ended; and as biblical, theological, and ethical thinking evolved (now more frequently engaging those from other Christian traditions)—attention and energy shifted from the "negative" act of refusing to kill to the positive (or proactive) tasks of peacemaking and peacebuilding. This shift, and the increasing sophistication characteristic of Mennonite scholarly work in peace theology, is reflected in Willard Swartley's essay here. He stresses biblical texts and theological themes supporting nonviolence or nonretaliation as central to Christian commitment to peace, while also giving attention to a more comprehensive view of peace as *shalom* present throughout the biblical canon.

That more active understanding of peace has accompanied and supported a flourishing of peacemaking initiatives. Reinterpretations (such as those by Arnold Snyder in these pages) of themes from the Anabaptist beginnings of Mennonite tradition—including their gifts and their limitations—have challenged the viability

and the faithfulness of a sharp (especially sociological) church/world divide. Arnold also points to the centrality of spirituality, of staying connected to the life-giving (sap of the) vine of Jesus, for those who would be Christian peacemakers.

When I began imagining what this issue of *Vision* might include, I thought of many expressions of peace theology—with roots in the Bible and growing out of five centuries of Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition—that have emerged since World War II. I imagined essays about that branching out. But as I thought further and as others contributed thoughts, I experienced the downside of an abundance of possible topics and authors: pain because I could not include everything that should be included!

How could an issue on peace for *Vision* in 2013 fail to include such topics, movements, and themes as, for example, justice for women; antiracism work; development efforts to address poverty; revolutionary violence aimed at bringing about justice; witness to governments; Christian Peacemaker Teams; pioneering work in mental health; interfaith dialogue; just policing, just peacemaking, and responsibility to protect as alternative ways of thinking about Christians and violence; help for soldiers who become conscientious objectors; efforts to deal with domestic and sexual abuse; making peace with the natural world; teaching and practicing mediation and other conflict transformation skills in contexts of direct violence within or among nations; immigration; opening conversations with military folks on nonviolent or less violent ways to defend peace/justice; the emergence of peace studies programs at our schools . . .

In the end I chose to include essays on a sampling of worthy and relatively well-developed initiatives: restorative justice (Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz); conflict transformation at a congregational level (Betty Pries); ecumenical engagement related to peace (Hans Ulrich Gerber); and (a particular window into) efforts to heal wounds caused as native peoples were shoved aside by European settlers (Eileen Klassen Hamm). While a good deal of work has been done in these arenas, the essays point to the opportunities and need for further work. Shalom has not yet arrived, even where faithful people have been at work!

I also chose to make room for a reflective essay (Alain Epp Weaver's) on the relationship between peace theology and the

practice of peacebuilding. Broadening our understanding of peace, teaching about how to build peace, and creating programs to promote peace call for engagement with social sciences and with people who hold all kinds of commitments. Alain explores ways our commitments to peace translate into language that is readily understood and valued by those with many theological or philosophical starting points—and ways our theology may not be easily translated. And he asks (respectfully) whether our emphasis on peace might tempt us to substitute it for the much richer gospel of Jesus Christ.

I also wanted to include essays dealing with frontiers in peace thinking and acting. Jason Boone asks us to consider whether peace church communities might have a role in helping heal wounds—moral injuries, in particular—that have been suffered by veterans (who often are also victims of war). Joel Kauffmann reflects on his work in taking a Christian peace message outside the comfortable confines of churches and church institutions, through popular media such as cartoons and films. Nekeisha Alexis-Baker tells her story as a (relatively) new Mennonite, and challenges us to move further in rooting out racism and sexism—and argues that taking our peace theology seriously means refusing to raise and kill animals in order to eat them.

Finally, I wanted to include personal stories. Both Joel's and Nekeisha's contributions include this element while also dealing with particular topics. The final essay by Samantha Lioi is the testimony of another new-ish Mennonite. It offers evidence that telling and living a Christian gospel that is not shy about stressing peace does not necessarily put people off. It can indeed be good news, inviting others to journey with a Christian peace church and contribute to its ongoing growth and transformation.

Note

[1] In most instances here and in the essays that follow, "North American Mennonites" and similar terms refer primarily to groups that are now part of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of young men drafted from the bodies that now make up these churches accepted some form of military service in World War II.

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Biblical roots of peace and peacemaking

Willlard M. Swartley

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, occurs about 250 times in noun and verbal forms in the Old Testament. David Leiter identifies fourteen different meanings (in numerous genre types), though all relate to its core meaning: wholeness or well-being.[1]

Old Testament shalom roots for New Testament peace teachings

Some Old Testament shalom texts are the roots of New Testament peace teachings. According to Isaiah 32:17, "The effect of righteousness will be peace." James 3:18 reverses the order: "A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."[2] This shift illustrates how the Old and New Testaments complement each other's way of framing the relationship between peace and justice.

Shining brightly are numerous prophetic oracles that envision a peaceable future. Visionary texts of "beating swords into plowshares" stir the people's hope for universal shalom.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isa. 52:7). In the Aramaic, "Your God reigns" reads "The kingdom of God will be revealed" (so also for Isaiah 40:9: "Behold your God"). Since Aramaic was the language of Jesus's culture, Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God is rooted in this text proclaiming the gospel of peace and salvation. The exact phrase in the Septuagint for "gospelizing peace" (a literal translation of the Greek) appears in Acts 10:36, summing up the content of Jesus's proclamation: "You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all." The same term occurs in Ephesians 2:17 and 6:15.

Notably, 1 Peter 2:22 quotes Isaiah 53:9—"And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although

he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth"—for warrant, and 1 Peter 2:24 uses Isaiah 53:5—"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (ESV). First Peter 2:18–25 thus draws on Isaiah 53 to warrant instruction to undergo suffering in the face of injustice rather than repay evil with evil. To authorize his admonition "Do not return evil for evil, or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing," 1 Peter 3:9–12 quotes Psalm 34:12–16a, which includes the words "let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it" (1 Pet. 3:11).

Isaiah reprimands King Ahaz as he musters troops for war: "If your faith is not sure, you will not be secure" (Isa. 7:9b). What Israel lacked then, and nations lack today, is trust in the LORD and the prophetic word.

"I will make with them a covenant of peace. . . . I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing" (Ezek. 34:25–26; compare Ezek. 37:26 and Isa. 54:10; all three texts promise a covenant of peace). My major study of peace in the New Testament, titled *Covenant of Peace*, highlights this crucial link between the Testaments. I explain how each New Testament book or corpus contributes to peace theology.[3]

Many other Old Testament texts are crucially relevant for peacemaking, even though the word *shalom* does not occur in them. These stories also build the bridge between the Testaments. The first is the creation portrait of Genesis 1 and 2. God creates a paradise, a "peaceable ontology of creation," as David Neville describes it.[4] But human sin (Genesis 3) disrupts this peaceable ontology. That peace is regained only through the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation-reign of Messiah Jesus, envisioned fully in Revelation 21 and 22. The long narrative between these peaceable bookends is filled with murders, warfare killing, and many sinful deeds (lies, deception, rapes, torture, and infidelities—both in worship of false gods and to sexual covenants). Jesus predicts that "wars and rumors of wars" will continue until the end (Mark 13:7; compare Luke 21:9).

Also in the Old Testament are many stunning peacemaking stories, most notably the related stories of Elisha healing Naaman

and throwing a banquet for the invading Arameans (2 Kings 5 and 6). Other stories exemplify peacemaking: Isaac's handling of disputes over wells (Gen. 26:12–22), the welcoming of Ruth into the messianic Boaz lineage, and the Jonathan-David bond of covenant loyalty, in which Jonathan risks his life to protect David from Saul's efforts to kill him.

Shining just as brightly are numerous prophetic oracles that envision a peaceable future, most notably Isaiah 2:1–4 and Micah 4:1–5. These similar visionary texts of "beating swords into plowshares" stir the people's hope for universal shalom. Many nations will stream to Jerusalem, for from Zion the "word of the LORD will go forth: nations will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." What a vision! When will it come to pass?

Israel, meanwhile, secured its borders, stockpiled weapons, and marginalized the prophets, achieving a situation quite the opposite of sitting under fig trees in peace (Palestinians today, losing their fig trees, know). Isaiah reprimands King Ahaz as he musters troops for war: "If your faith is not sure, you will not be secure" (Isa. 7:9b).[5] What Israel lacked then, and nations lack today, is trust in the LORD and the prophetic word. Where does fulfillment of these prophetic hopes come from? How do we get to a restored ontology of God's creation peace?

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In short, the answer is through Jesus Messiah, fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus does not bring a theory of pacifism or nonviolence. Rather, he intervenes in the cycle of violence by exposing it. He inaugurates God's reign and promises eternal life to believers. New Testament literature is laced with Old Testament citations, for it is only in the light of the Old that the New shines. In one sense, Rudolf Bultmann was correct when he spoke of the relation between the Testaments as miscarriage. But in a deeper sense he was profoundly wrong. For without the Old, the New is unintelligible. We end up with a different gospel (as occurs in most of the second-century "gospels" that are unhooked from the Old Testament).

Peace in the New Testament

In the New Testament, *eirēnē* in its noun and verbal forms occurs 100 times, appearing in every book except 1 John. Numerous correlative teachings support the peace emphasis.

Peacemaking and love of enemies. Jesus blesses peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), naming them children of God. The term *peacemakers* connotes positive action. It does not point to thinking about peace or avoiding evil but proactively seeks to make peace.

This seventh Beatitude is linked to one of Jesus's most distinctive teachings—namely, his command to love enemies (Matt. 5:44–48; compare Luke 6:27–36). The two texts are linked by an identity mark: children of God. Those who love enemies do so because "your Father in heaven" does. Jesus links peacemaking to God's moral character. Children bear the image of the parent. Being children of peace is the gospel's identity-mark for those who follow Jesus. Jesus called disciples in order to train them in this new identity and action; see Mark 9:50: "be at peace with one another." This is Jesus's catechism of the disciples.

Loving enemies is beyond human capacity. The natural human response to enemies is to avoid them, tolerate them, or scheme to wipe them out. Rarely do people respond to an evildoer with intent to convert the enemy into a friend. But this is at the core of Jesus's gospel. Its uniqueness shines!

Do not resist one who does evil, but overcome evil with good; do not return evil for evil (Matt. 5:39–41; Rom. 12:17, 19–21; 1 Pet. 3:9; 1 Thess. 5:15). Jesus and apostles Paul and Peter together command nonretaliation. Paul adds the positive initiative: overcome evil with good.

It is not clear how Matthew 5:39 should be translated. The descriptor "the evil (one)" is in the dative and could mean "by evil means"; thus, "Do not resist by evil means." Some interpreters (John Ferguson, Clarence Bauman) propose this translation. But this leaves "Do not resist" without a direct object (whom or what is to be resisted?). Walter Wink retains the direct object: the evildoer. Jesus's command is followed by five specific examples (5:39–42): turn the other cheek, go the second mile, give your cloak as well, loan and don't expect return, and give to one who begs. How would the hearers respond to such novel steps toward peacemaking? Living under Roman occupation, many undoubt-

edly developed "a rankling hatred for a system that subjects them to humiliation by stripping them of their lands, their goods, finally their outer garment."[6] This novel response to evil intends to disarm enmity in social relationships, even in a sociopolitical system in which injustice abounds. The shock tactics expose the indignity of the oppression.

According to Wink, "do not resist" (*antistēnai*) means "do not resist violently." The examples show a form of nonviolent resistance whereby the poor and oppressed ones claim their dignity and open the door to a new relationship between oppressor and oppressed. The enemy is disarmed by a surprise response: turn the other—left—cheek to one who insultingly hits you with his backhanded right-fist slap on your right cheek; when sued for your coat in court give your undergarment also, and thus stand naked; and offer to go a second mile when required to carry a Roman soldier's load one mile.

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Such response throws the opponent off balance, introducing a third way response to instinctive fight or flight reactions; the situation is radically redefined. This approach of nonviolent resistance does not guarantee that the other party will refrain from violence or that there will be no casualties. It rather creates a new paradigm by using "moral jujitsu" to disarm the enemy. Wink's insight is valid as long as the third way response is not tactical, used in order to win, but arises from a genuine interest in the other's welfare, expressing love of enemy.

Luise Schottroff connects not resisting evil with love of enemy—key to proper interpretation of "do not resist," I believe. She writes that Matthew 5:38–41 "commands the refusal to retaliate as well as prophetic judgment of violent persons. . . . As imitators of God, Christians are supposed to confront the enemies of God with his mercies. . . . Loving one's enemy is the attempt to change the violent person into a child of God through a confrontation with the love of God. That is, love of one's enemy can be concretely presented as the prophetic proclamation of the approaching sovereignty of God."[7] Especially persuasive is

Schottroff's connecting "not resist" and "love your enemy" to another important strand of New Testament teaching: God alone in sovereign justice and mercy bears responsibility to deal with those who do evil, through either judgment or mercy that transforms the heart of the evildoer. Our human task is peacemaking, a daunting but life-giving challenge.

Jesus taught against the use of the sword (Matt. 26:52–53; Luke 22:49–52; John 18:10–11, 36; compare 2 Cor. 10:4). When Peter uses a sword to cut off the ear of the high priest's servant with the intention of defending Jesus, Jesus's response is clear and definitive: "No more of this!" (Luke 22:49–51). Rather than responding with violent self-defense, Jesus heals the ear, an act more broadly symbolic of healing the evil of violence. In his arrest, trial, and crucifixion as a criminal, Jesus remains defenseless (Luke 23:35), though in John's Gospel Jesus's response to the high priest's query evokes a violent response from one policeman. Jesus renounces the sword as a weapon to defend justice. His defenselessness seeks to make peace (Matt. 15:18–19; 5:21–22; 1 John 3:15). In John, Jesus's extended verbal tiff with Pilate, while not violent, is politically stunning: Pilate, more than Jesus, is on trial.

New Testament writers do teach standing against evil, through means similar to that of Exodus 14:14: trust in God and clothe yourselves with God's armor. Stand against all the wiles of the devil with truth, righteous justice, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and "the word of God" (Eph. 6:10–18). In his third temptation (Matt 4:8–10), Jesus resists the devil's offer to give him the kingdoms of the world. At his arrest he refuses to call twelve legions of angels to defend himself against the Romans who arrested him. Jesus proclaims the enduring kingdom of God; earthly kingdoms propped up by military power are doomed to pass. God's kingdom is of a different order ("from above," in John); in it, love and peacemaking mark the path to God's peace for the church and the world.

Paul's distinctive contribution. Paul contributes a novel and significant title for God: "God of peace," occurring seven times. Four are in benedictions (1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; Rom. 15:33; Phil. 4: 9: also Heb. 13:20); two more are assurances (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11); and one is a moral descriptor of God (1 Cor. 14:33).

On this basis of this unique title for God, Paul calls believers to be agents of reconciliation that is initiated by, grounded in, and empowered by God's own initiative of reconciliation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17–20). Peace and reconciliation are linked to Jesus Christ, anchored in Jesus's death on the cross (Eph. 2:11–22). No separation can be made between establishing peace with God and establishing peace between alienated Jews and Gentiles. The cross welds together the vertical and horizontal. Reconciliation is God's work in accordance with Jesus's way of peacemaking that exemplifies suffering servanthood. The "God of peace" commissions Jesus's followers to be ambassadors of reconciliation, to follow the path of suffering for the gospel, and to imitate Jesus's peacemaking.

Jesus's call to discipleship and Paul's "in Christ" identity of believers (compare Jesus as vine and believers as branches in John 15) are both anchored in God's purpose of salvation for all people and the unity of all in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). The nature of the church as one body in Christ means that Christians don't fight against other Christians in nationally authorized wars. Objection to participate in war is not an add-on to the gospel but is the gospel in the face of warring nations. Further, it is through uniting in Christ those who had been enemies (Eph. 2:11–22) that the church witnesses to the powers (Eph. 3:9–10). God's redeemed people are to be the conscience of the world, being one in Christ and renouncing desires that lead to violence and war. From this context of moral discernment, the church witnesses to the principalities and powers, to beckon them to strive toward the decisions that decrease violence and human suffering and maximize the shalom well-being of the nations with compassionate justice for all.

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Peace through justification by faith (Gentile inclusion). This distinctive Pauline thesis is often misconstrued as only a personal relationship with God. But Romans 5 is addressed to the believing community. Yes, peace with God is personal, and justification is also personal. On the one hand, Paul's extended exposition of

justification by faith appeals to Abraham's faith (Gen. 15:6) for Old Testament warranting, and it also readily incorporates a more political text, Psalm 85:10: "justice and peace will kiss each other." Why so? Because the Greek New Testament has only one word (*dikaiosynē*) for "justice" and "righteousness." Wherever one occurs, the other could substitute. The impetus driving Paul's view of justification is the inclusion of Gentiles (compare God's promise to Abraham to make of Abraham's descendants a blessing to the nations). Because justification is by faith, and not through the law or by works, the two peoples become one. The wall falls and kills the enmity.[8] This peace is precious, made possible by Jesus crucified via the collusion of Jews and Gentiles (Pilate). While that event exposed violence from both sides, God's resurrection vindicates Jesus's peaceable life and forms faith-unity of former enemies. Was Jesus scapegoated? Yes, but this cross— Paul proclaims—is the power of God unto salvation, the greatest subversion of symbol in all history (but horrors! when the cross reverted to become a fighting symbol). Indeed, justification is a social doctrine, a powerful theology empowering peacemaking between enemies.

Peace and mission in John's Gospel. John's "great commission" interweaves peace, mission, and forgiveness of sins (John 20:19–23). The same is implied in Jesus's journey through Samaria (John 4).[9]

Peace at last, in the new heavens and earth. Revelation, despite its terrifying apocalyptic imagery, has its interpretive key in the Lamb slain for the sins of humanity. Seven times choirs praise God and the Lamb for triumph over evil. The slain Lamb as peacemaker conquers evil. Those who through patient endurance faithfully resist the empire's idolatries witness to the Lamb, at the risk of martyrdom. Faithful witness to the Lamb climaxes in God's gift of a new city come down from new heavens to a new earth.

Conclusion

The biblical roots of peace are many and deep. Of the many texts referred to here, Acts 10:36 (with Eph. 2:17 and 6:15) describing Jesus's ministry as preaching peace (echoing Isa. 52:7) may be the central root growing down to the water. The promised "covenant of peace" fulfilled in the New Testament (new covenant) is

another. Paul's "God of peace" title is a strong, lateral root. John's account of Jesus's great commission ("so I send you") framed by "Peace be with you" (20:19, 21) is another lateral curving down deep. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." This, with "love of enemy" and "do not resist violently the evildoer," are roots that nourish our faith in God's peaceable reign and anchor our growth as people of reconciliation.

Notes

[1] David A. Leiter, *Neglected Voices: Peace in the Old Testament* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 21–32.
[2] My translation.
[3] Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
[4] David J. Neville, *A Peaceable Hope* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 190–91. Neville connects John's prologue to Genesis 1–2.
[5] My translation.
[6] Walter Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way," in *Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 104–11.
[7] Luise Schottroff, " 'Give to Caesar What Belongs to Caesar and to God What Belongs to God': A Theological Response of the Early Christian Church to Its Social and Political Environment," in *Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation*, ed. Swartley, 232. Schottroff correlates this teaching with Paul's in Romans under the topic, "Make Room for God's Wrath: Romans 12:14–21," and she takes up a study of Romans 13:1–7. She presents a persuasive case that Matthew 5:38–48 and Romans 12–13 are entirely compatible and represent a consistent pattern of early Christian response to evil.
[8] See Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), ix, 90.
[9] This subject deserves a longer discussion; see Willard M. Swartley, *John*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013), 134–36, 139–41, 457–63, 467–69; and Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, chapter 11.

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Anabaptist origins of Mennonite commitment to peace

C. Arnold Snyder

> *"We have been united as follows concerning the sword. The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. . . . Christ teaches and commands us to learn from him, for he is meek and lowly of heart. . . . Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother. . . . So should we also do. . . . Christ was to be made king, but he fled and did not discern the ordinance of his Father. Thus we should also do as he did and follow after him. . . . The rule of government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. . . . In sum: as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of his body."*[1]
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> *"The point at which the Sermon on the Mount focused most clearly the intensification of the law . . . is that . . . we are not to answer evil with evil but to love our enemies. . . . Honest readers have had to admit that that is what Jesus meant, even when they do not intend to follow it. Loving the enemy is one good candidate for the status of a moral imperative specific to Christianity, or to Jesus."*[2]

It is foolhardy to attempt to compare sixteenth century "original principles" to the expressions of those principles almost five centuries later. We look only at the bookends—and that in cursory fashion—and pay no attention to the volumes that have shaped the story in between: the coming of religious toleration, the scientific revolution, secularization, industrialization, citizenship in nation states, migrations, and catastrophic wars. Although taking a deliberately long view can sometimes help to focus continuities and differences, I apologize in advance for this brief and inadequate treatment of an exceedingly complex subject.

Even the simplified story of bookends cannot be told without entering caveats. There were nonpacifist and pacifist Anabaptists at the beginning—as the polygenesis historians taught us—but a longer historical view marks the eventual predominance of the pacifist position. The Schleitheim Confession's article VI, on the sword (cited above) is an early and powerful expression of the nonresistant conviction, and by the middle of the sixteenth century, the baptizers had arrived at consensus and endorsed positions of Christocentric nonresistance that sound much like Schleitheim. This "peace position" was subsequently bequeathed as an essential confessional element to the Anabaptist faith descendants, that is, to the Mennonites, the Amish, the Hutterites, and the Church of the Brethren.

The story of the appropriation of the Anabaptist peace position by those standing in the tradition also needs to be qualified at numerous places. In the development of the Mennonite tradition, for example, there have been times when the peace position has not been maintained or has not been lived out with consistency. During the Second World War, to pick one difficult time, no pacifist Mennonite witness survived in Europe, and around half of the Mennonite men in North America who were eligible for military service chose to serve in the Allied armed forces.

Nevertheless, Mennonites in North America have remained committed to a nonviolent, pacifist position as a central faith commitment. The decades following the Second World War have seen a strengthening and reaffirmation of the Mennonite commitment to peace, particularly in Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. Peace, or more broadly, *shalom*—which includes justice—today is supported by these Mennonites as a biblical, theological, and moral imperative for them, or even for all Christians. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995), for example, devotes article 22 to explaining Mennonite convictions on "Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance." In an appended commentary, the Confession of Faith clarifies: "Peace and justice are not optional teachings, counsel that Christians can take or leave. They belong to the heart of gospel message."[3] Or, as John H. Yoder emphasized in the citation above, loving enemies is what Jesus intended for his followers to do: as close to a moral imperative as there is for Christians.

Growing parallel to these expressed convictions, often independently of the biblical or theological discussion, has been an explosion in "peace and justice" social practice, promoted and supported by Mennonites. Among the practical expressions of the Mennonite commitment to peace we can list victim/offender reconciliation programs (VORP), nonviolent resistance to injustice (Christian Peacemaker Teams, for example), and mediation and conflict resolution training and degree programs in Mennonite colleges. Increasingly, to be Mennonite in Mennonite Church Canada or Mennonite Church USA is to be identified as someone who is part of a peace-and-justice church tradition.

Again, there are exceptions to this generalization, and some Mennonites worry that the Mennonite peace witness is eroding.[4] Perhaps there is some fraying around the edges, but in my experience, peace—in its biblical, theological, ethical, and practical aspects—has come to occupy the center of Mennonite conversation and identity as no other denominational conviction has.

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It was otherwise in the sixteenth century. Of course, it was another time and another world; the issues faced by the Anabaptists were vastly different. Granting all this, the fact remains that when we read widely in Anabaptist sources—even reading only the Anabaptists committed to peace—we fail to find *peace* there as the central and guiding principle to understanding the gospel and the Christian life. "Living without weapons" (*Wehrlosigkeit*) is certainly present, but it is generally located in a long list of virtues that will be visibly manifest in the lives of Christians. Living a weaponless life is one visible fruit (along with many others) of a spiritually committed life, but it is not sap. The early Anabaptists in particular were interested in both sap and fruit; more importantly, they knew the difference between them.

I am quite certain that the sixteenth-century Anabaptists would have rejected a historical metaphor that suggested that they, the Anabaptists, could be the vine responsible for the fruit of peace witness borne by Mennonites four centuries later. At best they would have accepted being one of the historical branches

connected to the true vine and witnessing to a new life in Christ as part of the vine. The metaphor that spoke to them was found in the Gospel of John, where the vine is clearly the living Christ. The parable of the vine and the branches was a favorite Anabaptist text. The reflection of Andreas Gut, below, submitted to the Zurich authorities in 1588, is typical of what can be found in many Anabaptist writings.

> *Christ declared that nothing other than beautiful fruit will grow from the true vine, and will be visible on its branches. . . . If you abide in me, he says, you will bring forth much fruit. So the Christian life should be obvious to all Christians: all of his teaching is the Christian's teaching, his love our love, his mercy our mercy, his patience our patience, his peace our peace. . . . [But] unless one is born again, one cannot see the kingdom of God, for it is through the new birth which comes down from heaven that one is grafted into the vine, planted and blessed. . . . Therefore whoever has become a participant in the divine nature, and is of the divine nature, as Paul says in Acts chapter 17, such a one truly has the Son of God in him, and also life in him, and brings forth good fruit as noted above.*[5]

The Christian life will be a Christ-like life. Thus far the sixteenth-century reflection does resonate with the conclusion that loving enemies is close to a moral imperative specific to Jesus. But the moral imperatives of a Christian life are nowhere near the central point for Andreas Gut. His point is, rather, that the fruit of Christ's peace in the life of a Christian is the **result** of a spiritual grafting of that person into the living Christ. This grafting happens through a spiritual birth, and this second birth results in a "divine nature" coming to reside in the believer. It is Christ's nature, implanted and continually nourishing the believer from within, that brings forth Christ-like fruit. The "demand" of Jesus to love even enemies can be nothing but an unattainable legal requirement to

Underlying the Anabaptist teaching on living without weapons was a Christocentric spirituality grounded in an active pneumatology.

those who are not reborn and nourished by the living Christ within.

The Anabaptist peace position was based on key theological assumptions. In the first place, the Anabaptists were not liberal or optimistic in their understanding of human nature—even though they considered infants innocent and free from condemnable sin. The Anabaptists expected all descendants of Adam and Eve to embrace lives of sin as soon as they were capable of choice, and they expected a majority to reject the narrow way of salvation. Second, the Anabaptists were convinced that the living God was near to them, ready, willing, and able to provide the grace and power for repentance, conversion, faith in Jesus Christ, rebirth by the Spirit, and strength to live a new and Christ-like life. Third, they believed that human will, cooperation, and effort are necessary in order for God's power and Christ's sacrifice to be effective in one's life. And fourth, they believed that the new birth in Christ is a covenant made between God and the believer, marked outwardly by the sign of water baptism. Water baptism visibly incorporates new members into the body of Christ, the church. This "body of Christ" is more than a metaphor. The church as Christ's body is to be a pure manifestation and continuation of Christ's incarnation in the world: a visible body of the living Christ in his members, possible because Christ the living head of his body is spiritually present in and with his members. Underlying the Anabaptist teaching on living without weapons was a Christocentric spirituality grounded in an active pneumatology.

These sixteenth-century assumptions are not operative in quite the same way for us in the present day. The Anabaptist view of human nature was bleakly Augustinian and prescientific. It is true: human beings today continue to inflict bad choices on ourselves and others; we still suffer from a self-centered alienation from God and neighbor. However, our diagnosis of the problem and the range of proposed responses today is broader and more nuanced. As Christians we recognize and value the spiritual element in human nature, but we recognize that the language of sin and repentance does not exhaust every human condition, situation, and problem. Coming to a knowledge of oneself, repentance, and prayer remain important steps on the Christian journey; but therapy or counselling may also mark key steps on the Christian

way. Our spiritual language today needs to express a broader understanding of the complexities of human nature, brokenness, and healing. Our prayer and hope, however, remains the same for us as it was for our Anabaptist faith parents: may Christ's mercy become our mercy; Christ's peace, our peace.

The Anabaptist understanding of the church as the pure body of Christ "without spot or wrinkle" was put to the test before the sixteenth century came to an end, in the banning and shunning controversies. Over the next four centuries we discovered that the spiritual regeneration of believers—while it produced an astounding fruit of faithfulness, even unto death, and undeniable testimonies to new lives in Christ—nevertheless failed to produce a pure church. Anabaptist-descended churches appear to have been made up of less than perfectly regenerated believers, and instead have often been divided, contentious churches. At times this church seemed to be guided in its mutual excommunications by stubborn men wielding lists of external requirements for Christ-likeness, with attitudes that suggested more Pharisaic legalism than Christ-like charity.

No doubt it is a good thing to keep Christ's commandment not to kill. But without a vital spiritual connection to the living vine, can such an ethically based, activist, political peace witness be expected to survive the next great challenge to national peace and security?

The peace witness of this church, maintained in refusals to participate in warfare, might be seen as something of a Pyrrhic victory, given the fading of the spiritual underpinning of connection to the living vine, the emergence of legalism, and the absence of peace among the churches and the members themselves. No doubt it is a good thing to keep Christ's commandment not to kill; it is far better to refuse to participate in state violence than it is to lend one's efforts to the destruction of human beings. But without a vital spiritual connection to the living vine, can such an ethically based, activist, political peace witness be expected to survive the next great challenge to national peace and security?

Which brings us to the Anabaptist understanding of spiritual regeneration. The majority of Anabaptists who wrote about the subject seem, in light of historical developments, amazingly

optimistic about the new spiritual birth in Christ. Divinization language is common. As Menno himself said,

> *Behold this is the nature, property, and effect of the seed of the Word of God. By it man is renewed, regenerated, sanctified, and saved through this incorruptible seed, namely, the living Word of God which abides eternally. He is clothed with the same power from above, baptized with the Holy Ghost, and so united and mingled with God that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature and is made conformable to the image of His Son.*[6]

Renewed, regenerated, sanctified, clothed with divine power, partaker of the divine nature: we conclude today that Menno was describing an extraordinary spiritual process that he may have witnessed and experienced, but that he could not be describing the common spiritual experience of all church members, given the historical evidence to the contrary.

The expectation of Menno Simons and other Anabaptists, that spiritual regeneration would be sudden and thorough and would lead to pure members populating a pure church, is an expectation we no longer share—and for good empirical and historical reasons. But this is not to deny the basic truth of the Anabaptist conviction, that a commitment to peace is one of the fruits of a life fed and nourished by the living Christ. This we can say even if we have come to the conviction, as I have, that establishing and maintaining the connection to the living vine is more difficult than Menno seemed to think, and that the fruit will not be the perfectly formed specimen Menno expected to see. Or to put it a different way: it is true that we need to do our part in cooperating with God's grace, but our efforts to love as God loves will necessarily be flawed and imperfect, because we remain flawed and imperfect. The answer is not to demand more perfection but rather to practice those things that increasingly open us to God's grace.

We no longer share the Anabaptist expectation that spiritual regeneration would lead to pure members populating a pure church. But this is not to deny the basic truth that a commitment to peace is a fruit of a life fed and nourished by the living Christ.

Dirk Philips provided a more helpful image when he described a gestation period for the new birth. "Where this takes place and is in process as a pregnancy," says Dirk, "there is the new creature in Christ Jesus."[7] Pilgram Marpeck likewise provided a helpful guide to spiritual growth into the likeness of Christ. Marpeck's devotional reflection remains compelling today.

> *Christ forbade . . . vengeance and resistance, and commanded the children who possessed the Spirit of the New Testament to love, to bless their enemies, persecutors, and opponents, and to overcome them with patience. . . . Now we are to reflect upon Him spiritually, upon what kind of a mind, spirit, and disposition He had, and how He lived; the more we reflect upon His physical words, works, deeds, and life, the better God allows us to know His mind, and the better He teaches and instructs us. . . . The more one learns to know Him and see Him spiritually, the more one learns to love Him, to become friendly and pleasant toward Him and, through such knowledge, receives Him into the heart and grows therein. Finally, one jumps with Peter himself, freely and voluntarily, into the sea of tribulations and, concentrating on Christ, casts aside the mantle or the old garment. Through such a knowledge of Christ, we also come to the knowledge of God and partake of the divine nature. . . . In this manner, through instruction and knowledge of Christ's mind, God places His law into our mind and writes it into our hearts.*[8]

The Anabaptist reading of John 15 rings true: it is not by the striving of the natural person that the fruit of Christ's peace will be produced and maintained, but only insofar as the divine sap is enabled to flow and nourish both branch and fruit. But the parable is not only about sap. It also makes it clear that real fruit is expected from the grafted branches, in visible forms that reflect the nature of the vine and its life-giving sap. The parable, as the Anabaptists grasped, points both to spiritual nourishment and to actual, living fruit, the integration of an inner "abiding in Christ" and an outer "witness of life."

The survival of the Anabaptist peace witness, no matter how flawed in historical practice, suggests that sincerely attempting to live lives that honor Christ's command to love even enemies is also a profound spiritual practice. Attempting to return good for evil, daily loving as God loves, will lead back to the living vine, for radical love of this kind is not "fruit" that grows naturally from our human nature. I believe—although I cannot prove it—that it was Anabaptist Christ-centeredness that managed to keep our peace tradition spiritually alive by something like osmosis, even though we sometimes fell into external demands and practices that lost sight of the spiritual essence. I do not doubt that a more conscious focus on the life and mind of Christ, and a more conscious practice of his way and walk, with the sincere desire to abide in his living presence, will lead to even more abundant fruit.

The survival of the Anabaptist peace witness, no matter how flawed in historical practice, suggests that sincerely attempting to live lives that honor Christ's command to love even enemies is also a profound spiritual practice.

Notes

[1] Michael Sattler, "The Schleitheim Articles," Article VI, in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, trans. and ed. John H. Yoder (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 39–41, *passim*.
[2] John H. Yoder, *For the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 47.
[3] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 83.
[4] For example, J. Denny Weaver, "The Peace Church as Worship of God: If We Confess the God of Jesus Christ, a Peace Church Is the Only Church We Can Be," *The Mennonite*, July 1, 2010; online at http://www.themennonite.org/issues/13-7/articles/The_peace_church_as_worship_of_Gods.
[5] "A Simple Confession," submitted by Andreas Gut in 1588 to the mayor and the council of the city of Zurich; original in the Staatsarchiv Zürich, signature EII, 443, 126–27; my translation.
[6] Leonard Verduin, trans., John Christian Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 58.
[7] Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, Alvin J. Beachy, trans. and eds., *The Writings of Dirk Philips* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 79.
[8] William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, trans. and eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 62–63.

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Restorative justice
The promise and the challenges

Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz

Restorative justice has come to mean many things. Most of us who work in this field agree that it provides an alternative way of viewing criminal justice and a different way of shaping a legal system to deal with crime. It is also a fresh way of responding to harm and wrongdoing in other—noncriminal, nonlegal—contexts. While the primary focus of restorative justice theory and work has been in the criminal justice arena, its principles and practices are being implemented outside that system. It is being adapted for use in schools, places of work, and churches, and it provides general principles to guide the work of living together in community.

While the primary focus of restorative justice theory and work has been in the criminal justice arena, its principles and practices are being implemented in schools, places of work, and churches.

Although the language of restorative justice is relatively recent, practices of restorative justice are not new. Restorative justice was practiced in Indigenous cultures around the world until their traditions were stifled as a result of western colonialism. Many of these communities are now seeking to reclaim traditional responses to harm and crime, and we in the West have learned much about processes and principles of restorative justice from the wisdom of these Indigenous traditions.

Prevailing approaches to criminal justice

Typical North Americans are taught that the prevailing legal system here—"the rule of law" administered by the state—was created as a "humane" alternative to a system relying on vengeance, in which those injured or their relatives and friends (if they were powerful enough) imposed sanctions on—exacted revenge against—those who offended. Our system of retributive justice—punishment, proportionate to the crime, imposed by the

state for the benefit of the society—is an alternative to a system that can lead to endless cycles of revenge.

The early legal systems that formed the foundation of western law recognized that offenders and their families need to settle with victims and their families; crime was considered an offense against the community, a breach of societal peace and a disruption of relationships. Elaborate codes prescribed restitution not only to restore the community's peace but also to compensate victims and their families.

This understanding of crime shifted in the aftermath of the Norman invasion of Britain. By the end of the eleventh century, William the Conqueror and his successors had developed a notion of crime as an offense against the state rather than against the individual. This system named the king as the victim of any crime, and the actual victim lost significance. The criminal justice system became focused on upholding the laws of the state (which stands in for the actual victim) rather than on repairing the harm done to the individual or the community.

A society's legal justice system reflects and shapes that society's character. The Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, in his 1981 book *Limits to Pain*, discusses state-administered punishment as a way that society communicates values. "In penal law, values are clarified through a gradation of the inflicting of pain. The state establishes its scale, the rank-order of values, through variation in the number of blows administered to the criminal, or through the number of months or years taken away from him. Pain is used as communication."

The emergence of alternatives

In recent decades, many have come to see this prevailing legal system, built on the notion of justice as punishment and crime as an offense against the state, as lacking in a number of areas. New models for doing justice have started to emerge, focusing on principles and values that contribute to the well-being of our communities. Christie's alternative to this system of penal justice is "participatory justice." The approach he proposes conveys values through a process of communication between those directly affected by the conflict, rather than through an end result of the state inflicting pain on an offender.[1]

Christie highlights an issue that has brought restorative justice to the forefront: the stakeholders in any justice process must be involved in resolving the conflict. Reorienting criminal justice to focus on stakeholders means rethinking our ideas about primary victims and about consequences for the offender. Victims have been neglected in our current legal system, and offenders, although they are locked up in record numbers, are not being held accountable to the person they harmed or to the community of which they are members. Restorative justice (or participatory justice, in Christie's terminology) works out of an alternate value system; it isn't just about another way of punishing offenders (or inflicting pain on them, in Christie's formulation).

The earliest use of the term *restorative justice* seems to come from Albert Eglash in 1958. Eglash distinguishes restorative justice from retributive justice and distributive justice, and he defines it as focusing on the "harmful effects of offenders' actions and actively involv[ing] victims and offenders in the process of reparation and rehabilitation."[2] Howard Zehr's seminal book on restorative justice, *Changing Lenses*, describes crime as "a violation of people and relationships. It creates obligations to make things right. Justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation, and reassurance."[3] This definition has continued to expand as practices and processes continue to be implemented in new contexts.

Restorative justice provides a framework for looking at justice through a set of values that includes respect, relationships, responsibility, and accountability to one another.

Models of participatory justice seek to build healthy communities. Restorative justice provides a framework for looking at justice through a set of values that includes (but is not limited to) respect, relationships, responsibility, and accountability to one another.

The current practice of restorative justice has been informed by concerns of people within the victim community who saw restorative justice as an offender-driven model that, like the justice system, ignored the needs of victims. Practitioners of restorative justice have worked to address those concerns and seek ways to balance the needs of victims and offenders as well as

the well-being of communities. A key conviction of restorative justice holds that a just response to harm or wrongdoing must (1) work as much as possible to repair the harm; (2) encourage taking appropriate responsibility for addressing needs and repairing the harm; and (3) involve those affected by harm or wrongdoing, including communities, in the resolution.

Restorative justice in biblical perspective

For those of us working at restorative justice out of a faith perspective, biblical texts present challenges, challenges that cannot be addressed here. But the Bible also offers rich resources. In the Hebrew scriptures, justice aimed to restore wholeness to the person harmed and to the community. Communities were to function in a state of shalom, a social peace understood as more than the absence of conflict and instead as encompassing right relationships within that community. Shalom, as Old Testament scholar Perry Yoder puts it, is a biblical vision "of what ought to be and a call to transform society."[4] Yoder identifies three aspects of shalom that are relevant for restorative justice: shalom can refer to a material and physical state, to relationships, and to moral behavior. Restorative justice practitioners dare not limit shalom to any one of these meanings; if our work is to transform society, we must keep these three linked in all we do.

Programs of restorative justice

Much restorative justice work in North America began through Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP) initiated in Mennonite communities. Community-level crimes were referred to these programs which brought victims and offenders together (with a trained mediator) to talk about what had happened and the impact it had had, and to make agreements about how to put things right. Thirty-five years later, these programs continue and have expanded to work with victims and offenders in crimes of severe violence. A significant difference is that victims initiate these dialogues rather than having them happen through referral by the legal system. About thirty states in the United States now have statewide programs of Dialogues in Crimes of Severe Violence; most dialogues take place in prisons between victims and incarcerated men and women, with mediation.[5]

Another newer approach to restorative justice is widespread use of circle processes. These include re-entry circles for offenders coming out of prisons, and Circles of Support and Accountability for high-risk offenders to ensure that they don't fall between the cracks as they seek to reintegrate into communities where they are not welcomed with open arms.

Family Group Conferencing and Family Group Decision-Making were first used in Australia and New Zealand, largely at the urging of the Maori community which was reclaiming its traditional processes. These processes bring together victims and offenders not just for a dialogue but for decision-making in all aspects of the case. FGDM has also been implemented in child welfare cases to empower families and children to make decisions based on their own strengths and history; this process removes the veil of secrecy often present in such cases.

Faith communities have embraced restorative justice as ways to work at congregational conflict and also to deal with thorny issues—of sexual abuse, for example.

Schools and universities have become strong proponents of restorative approaches to discipline as ways to rebuild community in campus housing and other contexts. Restorative justice practices are transformative ways to deal with cases that would otherwise go through traditional judicial processes.

Faith communities have embraced restorative justice to work at congregational conflict and also to deal with thorny issues—of sexual abuse, for example. Restorative justice practices are healthy ways of providing support and creating accountability in such situations.

One project of restorative justice to which Mennonite Central Committee has been giving leadership is the Return to the Earth project. Through this effort the remains of more than 110,000 culturally unidentifiable Native Americans are being repatriated to federally recognized tribes for burial. These remains have been housed in universities and museums across the United States. Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne peace chief and retired Mennonite pastor, views this repatriation as a restorative justice issue, given the complicity of Christians in forced removals and massacres of Native Americans. It is an opportunity to right at least one of the wrongs.

Challenges restorative justice faces

One danger confronting the field of restorative justice is that its practices will be adopted in the absence of an understanding of—or commitment to maintaining—the values framework on which the practices rest. The concept of restorative justice is at risk of being coopted and diluted by having its processes used within a system that remains punitive and adversarial (winners and losers, good guys versus bad guys) rather than being reoriented by a different set of values.

Practitioners of restorative justice must also be aware of the danger of implementing cookie-cutter approaches. Communities need to be able to find ways to build on their own strengths in order to develop lifegiving ways to meet the challenges created by harm and crime.

Who gets to define restorative justice? Although there is no single clear definition within the field, current western understandings have largely been white, middle class, and male dominated. As more practices and processes of restorative justice emerge, it is critical that the contributions of other voices provide the framework for a broader understanding of restorative justice.

S. Y. Bowland and Hassan Batts are calling those of us in the dominant culture not to continue moving forward until traditionally marginalized voices are fully incorporated into the restorative justice work we are doing:

> *If the canons in the literature of restorative justice do not represent the voices, values, opinions and lived experiences of the people and communities it seeks to use its practices, then who is restorative justice really seeking to benefit? How does restorative justice include the perspective of the African American and the African American experience? Who are the individuals presenting the concepts of restorative justice and where are the concepts being presented? Any field of study must find a way to incorporate the voices of those who have been historically absent from and in the knowledge, research, theory, practice and application of the field of study. Restorative justice is no exception. It is a great place to create a model of success in this effort.*[6]

These words present a challenge that practitioners of restorative justice must take up as we look to the future.

Notes

[1] Nils Christie, *Limits to Pain* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981), 94.
[2] Daniel W. Van Ness and Karen Heetderks Strong, *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*, 4th ed. (New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis, 2010), 21–22.
[3] Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 181.
[4] Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987), 5.
[5] According to researchers at the University of Minnesota Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, "The most frequently stated reasons of victims and family members for meeting with the offender were: to seek answers to lingering questions about the crime; to let the offender know of the impact of the crime; to have more human interaction with the offender; and to advance their own healing process. The most often stated reasons given by offenders for meeting were: to apologize to the victim; to help the victim's healing process; to help in their own rehabilitation and healing; and to provide the victims with more information about themselves. After the dialogue, the majority of victims and family survivors reported the process led to personal growth and healing. Both victims and offenders were satisfied with the programs" (Mark S. Umbreit, et al., "Victim Offender Dialogue in Crimes of Severe Violence: A Multi-Site Study of Programs in Texas and Ohio," December 1, 2002; http://courtadr.org/library/view.php?ID=2527).
[6] S. Y. Bowland and Hassan Batts, "Re-centering: Restorative Justice towards the Elimination of Racism and Oppression," workshop presentation, January 2013.

About the author

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Reflections on journeying with congregations through conflict and change

Betty Pries

It has been my privilege to work as a mediator for the past twenty years, and while my vocation began in a secular context, for the past fifteen years my primary focus has been accompanying churches and their leaders as they experience conflict and change. Yes, this work can be hard. It is also tremendously rewarding. I have had the privilege of working with churches of many different denominations, and contrary to what some may believe, no denomination has a corner on conflict: we all fall on hard times when the way out seems dim and blurry at best.

I could regale you with stories of the odd things churches fight about (such as where the minister stored the communion cups) or of the awful things people do to each other (such as the minister who threatened to resign if the church didn't kick out certain people) or of the beauty of the human spirit in times of resolution (such as the time when at the end of a mediation, people began embracing one another, and I quietly slipped out of the room).

But I have not been asked to tell you about these things. Instead, I have been asked to write about what I have learned as a mediator, especially as it relates to churches in conflict. Here's my list of learnings: (1) Our theology matters. (2) Our personal journeys of transformation matter more—way more. (3) Our corporate journey of transformation also matters. With regard to congregational transformation I offer the following counsel to leaders: (a) Attend to the spiritual and emotional health of your leadership. (b) Learn to move beyond artificial harmony. (c) Redevelop the skill of listening for the leading of God's Spirit among you.

Our theology matters

Some months ago, I mentioned to a New Testament scholar the idea that when it comes to people's behaviour at church, our

theology matters, and he almost fell out of his chair. "I hope it matters," he said, "or my work has been in vain!" I am embarrassed to admit that as it relates to conflict, this realization came as a bit of a surprise to me. While all denominations have conflict, how we fight—and to some degree, even what we fight over—differs from one group to the next. It appears that what we believe actually makes a difference in how we behave when we are disputing.[1]

This should comfort us—and it should give us pause. I have found (for example) that all things considered, Mennonites can be relatively kind when they fight. This does not mean that we do not say hurtful things. We do! We are often deeply misguided in our attempts to work toward resolution with one another. But given the breadth and depth of conflicts I've seen, I find myself surprised by the bits of grace or restraint Mennonites are able to display now and then in hard times. Has our peace theology helped us after all? Or is it our theology of discipleship that has helped us in this way?

In my experience, the most critical factor in a conflict resolution process is the attention the individuals involved give to their fidelity to their faith commitments—fidelity that is premised on their ongoing journey of transformation.

Our personal journeys of transformation matter even more

Our peace theology is important, but when it comes to conflict I am intrigued more and more by the impact of our discipleship practice. In fact, these two are not that different from each other; they are two sides of the same coin and they must be held together. Peace theology declares the standard by which we believe God has called us to live; discipleship places our feet on the path that (we hope) leads us in this direction. Discipleship is about our fidelity to actually living as followers of Jesus, to incarnating peace theology as a part of our daily practice.

It has been my experience that the most critical factor in any conflict resolution process is the attention the individuals involved give to their fidelity to their faith commitments—fidelity that is premised on their ongoing journey of transformation. As Christians, we sometimes forget that conversion was not intended

to be a one-time event. Through every event and encounter of every day, whether it is observing a sunset, buying groceries, or engaging in conflict, we are invited deeper and deeper into God's love, and by virtue of this love into ever more profound depths of transformation. What this means practically is that conflict, in its own challenging and sometimes awful way, is a gift, as hard as that sometimes is to grasp. Conflict is an invitation to learn more about ourselves and to be awakened again to our own path toward reflecting more fully our identity as children of God.

Recently, I was speaking with some people who had emerged with emotional wounds from a painful conflict in their church. As they prepared to meet the members of the congregation on the other side of this dispute, they asked themselves again and again: "What have I contributed to this situation? How did I invite this dispute to occur? How did my actions trigger reactions in the people with whom we fought? For what do I need to apologize? How do I live the forgiveness God has asked me to offer? How do I love these people?" Just as importantly, they asked: "How do I tell my story of pain honestly, yet in a way that others can hear?" When people in our congregations ask themselves these questions, they are not only putting their peace theology into discipleship practice, they are also allowing the experience of conflict to transform them into reflecting ever more fully the image of God.

Our corporate journey of transformation also matters

While legitimate, painful, and hard realities lie behind deep congregational conflicts, one of the biggest gifts congregations can give themselves is a reminder that healing can come—but to get there, the church must gently, graciously, and courageously engage in a corporate journey of transformation. Healing after conflict requires time and tremendous patience. It typically includes hard conversations. It may also include reconsideration of the congregational culture and of how the congregation functions organizationally. While none of this assessment is easy, it can result in profound learning and growth, even grace. For our purposes here, I offer the following counsel for the consideration of congregational leaders:

Attend to the spiritual and emotional health of your leadership. Much has been said about leadership in recent years. Should

we be training shepherd leaders, chaplain leaders, vision-casters, motivational leaders? These are worthy questions, but when it comes to conflict they distract from a deeper and more important leadership issue. Leaders (lay and paid): How spiritually and emotionally mature are you? How have you attended to your anxieties, your fears, your ego needs? How do you get hooked by the anxieties of people in your congregation? What has your own journey of transformation been like? What are your spiritual practices and how are you nurturing them? Do you love the people you are leading?

Leadership matters. A lot. A former CEO of a large company has observed that "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener."[2] For our context, we might translate this as follows: *The success of a congregation depends on the interior condition of its leaders*. This is *not* to say that leaders are to blame for all the conflicts churches fall into. It does suggest, however, that the emotional and spiritual health of a congregation's leaders will *significantly* influence a congregation's capacity to navigate conflict.

Learn to move beyond artificial harmony.[3] Years ago, a friend told me: "At our church, we like to act as though everything is okay. And then at congregational meetings [or in the parking lot], it's all guns." Sometimes our peace theology helps us. Sometimes it kills us. Often church people tell me they can't be honest with one another because to be Christian is to be nice. The problem is that nice only lasts for so long. When we neglect real concerns and issues, people typically respond in one of three ways: some wear a mask of contentment, some explode, others leave.

Sadly, somewhere along the way, many of our churches came to the conclusion that to disagree is to sin. This notion seems to have left us with two choices: either avoid disagreement at all costs, or when that doesn't work, fight hard until at least one side is hurt. It doesn't need to be this way. Not only is there a third way; it is in pursuing this third way that we will encounter the Holy Spirit.

Much can be said about the nature of this alternative course, but when it comes to conflict within the Christian community, this third way has several key characteristics: (1) The people involved are able to speak honestly, even passionately, about

their perspective, yet as they speak, they are kind and gracious to those with whom they disagree. (2) People listen, listen, and listen some more to each other, holding their own perspectives with humility in order to learn from the perspectives of the other. (3) All involved listen deeply for the leading of God's Spirit—with regard to the issue and with regard to what this conflict might be teaching those involved about themselves. This last item leads us directly to the next major theme.

Redevelop the skill of listening for the leading of God's Spirit among you. I am grateful that the Mennonite churches I visit know what I mean when I ask them to listen for God's leading. That said, most of these same congregations tell me they have no idea how to do this, either personally or collectively. The implications here are profound. Without the discipline of listening for God's leading, we reduce our dialogue to a battle of opinions rooted in our own perspectives about the situation at hand.

I am aware that the notion that we might be able to discover the heart of God is fraught with challenges. How do we know we are on track? How do we know when it is God's wisdom we are hearing? What role does scripture and biblical scholarship play in our listening? These are important questions. Too often, though, we have allowed these questions to become an insurmountable barrier, and in frustration we give up on the task altogether. Or we seek to answer these questions using only the same resources—our own opinions—that created the problem in the first place.

Listening for God's leading involves relearning practices of prayer, especially listening prayer. We are invited to release our attachments to our own opinions in order that we might hear God's voice rather than our own.

Listening for God's leading involves relearning practices of prayer—especially listening prayer that allows us to become still in God's presence. From this restful and reflective space, we are invited to release our attachments to our own opinions in order that we might hear God's voice rather than our own.

It is of course possible that two or more people or groups will hear God differently on the same issue. In fact, we may now have two conflicts, the original one and the one that emerged when we sought God and discovered that we heard God differently from

one another! It is possible that one of us hasn't listened well, though it is just as possible that neither of us has listened well or that God is calling us in different directions. More commonly though it is that God is still working with each of us, inviting us to continue listening for God's leading together.

Listening for God's leading places us in the heart of God, and when we are there, we discover that each of us belongs to God, and that despite our differences each of us is held in God's loving embrace.

It is worth noticing that when we take on the discipline of genuinely seeking God, the ego falls away and a deep humility begins to emerge. Why? Listening for God's leading places us in the heart of God, and when we are there, we discover—we remember—that each of us belongs to God, and that despite our differences each of us is held in God's loving embrace. Even if our conflict causes us to part ways (and sometimes it does), we part well when we do so knowing in our bones that each of us is held in the heart of God.

A word about our context

Our twenty-first century North American context has added complexity to congregational life and to our conflicts. Many churches are in steep decline, and recent research has shown that the number of youth born into the church (whether evangelical or mainline) who leave the church is well over 50 percent.[4] It is easy to target each other and to blame those in leadership for this decline. Sadly, this adds conflict and stress to an already high-stress situation. Like the children of Israel, we are in a wilderness—kicked out of our Egypt and not yet near our promised land. It is encouraging to remember that the Israelites left Egypt as a ragtag group of slaves and entered the Promised Land as children of God. Of course, this transformation did not happen overnight! It took forty years to make the journey, with much heartache and petty squabbling along the way. According to the Exodus story, the Israelites could have entered the Promised Land a lot sooner had they been ready. Instead it took forty years for the people to yield themselves to the new identity to which they were being called.

Like God's people long ago, we too are being called into a new identity. Perhaps we do not yet have a name for it, but this shift

we are in represents an invitation to recognize ourselves more fully as children of God, with all that this implies. The journey of transformation is not easy and is bound to involve conflicts—some of them petty and distracting, others significant and germane to the very transformation we are undergoing. How many years we will remain in the wilderness will depend on how we address the questions implicit in the list offered above. How are we listening for God's Spirit, especially in our disagreements? How are we being shaped by our encounters with God? How are we attending to our spiritual and emotional health? How are we engaging each other, and how does this engagement reflect God's presence in our lives?

And one more question: How are we noticing the presence of God's joy and hope among us? After all, even when we cannot see them, God's joy and hope are always in our midst, calling out to us, awaiting us, inviting us again and again to drink from God's life-giving streams. May each of us be renewed by this water of life.

"How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Ps. 36.7–9; NRSV).

Notes

[1] It is worth noting here that what matters is not what we say we believe but what we really believe in the depths of our being. Many people say they believe in a loving God, but the God they worship in their quieter and more honest moments is somewhat different.

[2] William O'Brien, former CEO of Hanover Insurance Company; quoted in Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges : The Social Technology of Presencing* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 7.

[3] I have borrowed the term "artificial harmony" from Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage:* Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

[4] See a report of a recent Canadian study at http://hemorrhagingfaith.com.

About the author

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Mennonites, peace, and the global church

Hans Ulrich Gerber

Mennonite thinking on peace and Mennonite presence and practice since World War II have left profound and lasting marks on world Christianity and on the larger peace movement. And in that process Mennonites and their peace witness have also been changed.

J. R. Burkholder's article on peace in volume 5 of *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* ends with this observation:

> *At the end of the 1980s, it is difficult to assess the Mennonite peace position. On one hand, there has been impressive growth in church agency activity, in educational programs, and in theological sophistication. In the wider Christian world, the cogency and relevance of Mennonite pacifism has made a significant impact. At the same time, the rapid assimilation of Mennonites into the mainstream of society (particularly in the Western world) threatens to erode the traditional commitment to stand over against the world in faithful obedience to the love of Christ.*[1]

The decades since the 1980s have seen significant developments. Fernando Enns provides a detailed account and assessment of Mennonite engagement in ecumenical interaction on peace at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.[2] My aim here is to draw a picture in broad strokes starting with the nineteenth century and looking to the future.

Mennonites and pacifism before World War II

Today's global developments and the gradual reappearance of pacifist thinking and movements, diverse as they may be, prompt us to pause for a brief consideration of Mennonites and pacifism in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term *pacifism* is of some importance here, because it gathers any and all movements that are opposed to war, resist militarism, and reject the idea that peace and justice come through violent means. Such movements have always met with strong opposition and often with some form of oppression or persecution.

Before World War I, the pacifist movement was prominent at all levels of society and in the churches of Europe and North America, but it went largely unnoticed by Mennonites of that time on either continent. Interest in ecumenical interaction came only later, after World War II. Mark Jantzen has shown that Mennonites in nineteenth-century Prussia for the most part were not among those objecting to military service.[3] It is not easy to find traces of Mennonite objection to military service or Mennonite resistance to war in Europe during World War I or World War II.

Before World War I, the pacifist movement was prominent at all levels of society and in the churches of Europe and North America, but it went largely unnoticed by Mennonites. Interest in ecumenical interaction came only later, after World War II.

Those Mennonites of European origin who continued to hold a pacifist position migrated to North America. There they were instrumental in setting up alternatives to military service. But these Mennonite communities were socially isolated, had a dualist worldview and a dispensationalist theology, and were to a substantial degree able to maintain nonconformity to the world, including refusal of military service. These homogeneous communities were not prepared to engage with the world by cooperating with Christians of other confessions, much less with pacifists who were not Christian. Mennonites' cultural isolation seems to have prevented them from seeing potential sisters and brothers outside the borders of their communities.

Mainline churches call on historic peace churches

That isolation changed with post–World War II trauma in Europe, during which International Fellowship of Reconciliation[4] and the historic peace churches, including Mennonites, were called to sit down with mainline church leaders to discuss war and peace. Mennonite Central Committee staff in Europe, some of

whom were students motivated by Harold Bender's recovery of Anabaptist vision and influenced by Guy Hershberger's promotion of peace witness, found themselves giving leadership to these initial dialogues, referred to as the Puidoux Conferences.[5]

This is where Anabaptist-Mennonite perspectives, articulated most thoroughly by John Howard Yoder, were beginning to change the churches' discourse on war and peace in a lasting way. The deepest impact came through the insistence that the church as the body of Christ celebrates the cross and resurrection of Christ as redemptive events while actually following the way of Jesus, who announced the kingdom of God not only for a distant future but beginning now and here. The commitment to peacemaking is therefore not a moral derivative of an abstract or ritualized religious belief but an essential mark of Christian existence.

European Mennonites were minimally involved in the Puidoux Conferences, and they were not affected directly. Language may have been a major reason, with church leaders not being fluent in English. However, among some pastors of mainline churches, and especially among ecumenical grassroots communities of the 1960s and 1970s, there was strong resonance and a desire to pursue peace as central to the gospel. Mennonite Central Committee supported these efforts, from which the European ecumenical network Church and Peace grew.[6] Church and Peace encouraged mainline churches to participate, on the way to becoming peace churches. For some Mennonites in Europe, this network opened the door to ecumenical experience and the discovery of spiritual treasures.

Ecumenical presence with a peace agenda

Apart from the Dutch Mennonites (ADS) and the North Germans (Vereinigung), who were founding members of the World Council of Churches, European Mennonites until the mid-1980s had minimal ecumenical interaction, and the primary Mennonite initiative for ecumenical work came from North America. Mennonite Central Committee's priority in Europe during the 1980s was interchurch and peace agenda. That priority was driven by a concern for peace—understood as going beyond refusal to participate in war—which was growing in the North American Menno-

nite community as a result of the Vietnam War and the threat of nuclear war. Marlin Miller, and then his brother Larry Miller, carried MCC's peace portfolio and nurtured many contacts in various confessional circles. There was the Eastern Europe Fraternity, with personnel placed in Eastern Europe to engage with Christians of various confessions. MCC and Mennonite Board of Missions jointly supported Mennonite centers in London, Paris, and Brussels, all of which were propagating a peace theology. For a time the Brussels Mennonite Centre published *NATO Watch*, a rare Mennonite effort involving both North Americans and Europeans (through European Mennonite Peace Committee) addressing issues on the political/military level.

Initiative to promote a peace agenda in Europe came primarily from North American Mennonite service workers. In its beginnings the Military Counseling Network in Germany relied on North American initiative.[7] The Anabaptist peace witness clearly found more resonance outside traditional European Mennonite communities than within them. The Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom is a telling example.[8]

Nonviolent accompaniment

At Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Strasbourg, France, in 1984, Ron Sider called for development of "a new nonviolent peacekeeping force . . . ready to move into violent conflicts and stand peacefully between warring parties"; these peacekeepers would place themselves between "the weak and the oppressor," acting with "courage to move from the back lines of isolationist pacifism to the front lines of nonviolent peacemaking."[9]

If nonviolent accompaniment doesn't end a conflict or dramatically change the course of events, it does help protect civilians and inhibit armed action. And it promotes nonviolence and has in its turn influenced many Mennonites.

The response to Sider was extraordinary: much excitement, wonder, head shaking. People well beyond Mennonite circles heard his call. Little did we know then of the shape this vision would take in the early twenty-first century. Meanwhile, Anabaptist peace theology became more global, shifting from a Euro-centric and North American–driven base to the global South.

Today, the idea of international nonviolent accompaniment in areas of grave injustice and armed conflict has taken on remarkable significance and proved to be rather effective. If this accompaniment doesn't end a conflict or dramatically change the course of events, it does help protect civilians and inhibit armed action against particular people in specific areas. It helps vulnerable people become more visible and increases international awareness of injustice and violence, putting checks on perpetrators' actions and increasing pressure on governments and paramilitaries and other warring factions to find ways of settling issues. On top of that, it promotes nonviolence and has in its turn influenced many Mennonites.

The initiative that arose in response to Sider's call, Christian Peacemakers Teams (CPT), struggled for years to find recognition and support in traditional Mennonite circles. Meanwhile it didn't go unnoticed in the ecumenical world and in the secular peace movement. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, inspired by CPT, became a flagship program for the World Council of Churches at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Peace Brigades International, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Nonviolent PeaceForce all have accompaniment programs. In Colombia alone, several such international projects have been active.

The concept of accompaniment is not exclusively a Mennonite product, but Mennonite theology and practice inspired it and contributed to its realization. If Mennonite peacemaking is credible around the world, down to the grassroots, it is largely because of the presence of people who believe that God is already there and at work through local wisdom, leadership, and gifts. That's where Mennonite theology of presence fits in powerful ways, almost regardless of doctrinal orientation. And that clearly is not a one-way street but has deep impact on the sending community.

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding

Likewise, if conflict transformation and peacebuilding have become academic disciplines across the world, it is in part because of Mennonite thinking and practice/presence in areas of armed conflict. Anyone interested in the subject knows about John Paul Lederach's pioneering and crucial contributions. The theory and

practice of these relatively new disciplines require an engagement with the world and with likeminded actors going beyond the possibilities envisioned by earlier Mennonite communities and their leaders. Such interaction has had an impact on the Mennonite community.

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Ecumenical dialogues affirm and challenge Mennonites

The 1980s also saw the beginning of two decades of bilateral dialogue between Mennonites and other confessional bodies. These dialogues, fruitful and influential in the long run as they may be, have also been seedbeds for friendship that leads to increased interaction and collaboration on multiple levels and with immediate effect. One particular and perhaps surprising outcome was the report from the Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue: "Together Called to be Peacemakers."[10] The report points to an affinity between Mennonites and Catholics not obvious at first glance to either side: a commitment to peace, grounded in an understanding of community. These dialogues affirmed and challenged Mennonites as communities and as a Christian world communion to be more assertive on issues of peace and nonviolence.

From overcoming violence to just peace

By the mid-1990s, Mennonite Central Committee seconded a service worker to the World Council of Churches Programme to Overcome Violence. Beginning in 2001, the Decade to Overcome Violence was the fruit of deliberate historic peace church conversations and a joint determination to make a difference in the ecumenical world. Now, with a new focus on overcoming violence, Mennonites and their historic peace church friends were compelled to get directly involved. Fernando Enns, a young German Mennonite representative to the WCC Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, made a motion for a Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV). This idea had been taken off the agenda prior to the meeting by WCC leaders who felt it didn't stand a chance. But Enns's motion was accepted with rare enthusi-

asm. The DOV, however one assesses its results, forever changed the ecumenical profile of Mennonites. They are now seen as an integral part of the emerging deliberations—some still prefer to refer to it as a conciliar process of the churches—on just peace.

The ecumenical movement has come to a point of acknowledging that just peace must be a higher priority for the church than the question of whether and when war may be just.

Where this process will take the ecumenical movement remains uncertain, but Mennonites will be part of it. The ecumenical movement, although not unanimous with regard to nonviolence or war, has come to a point of acknowledging that the meaning and implementation of just peace must be a higher priority for Christians and the church than the question of whether and when war may be just. The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011, marked the end of the DOV and displayed a somewhat new spirit. Liberation theology had insisted that there can be no peace without justice; now there was a stronger sense that just peace is the vocation of the church, and that it leaves little or no room for armed intervention. The participating churches have not reached consensus on whether there is room for such intervention (and if so, how much), so the ecumenical challenge and journey is ongoing.[11]

A living peace church?

To what extent do Mennonites see themselves as ecumenical players? In the nineteenth and early twentieth century they were *die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet in the land), and their refusal of military service was more or less accommodated. Global Mennonites of the twenty-first century are in a very different position. In Europe others remind them of their identity as a historic peace church. Now and in the future, their national authorities may no longer graciously grant them a kind of minority status.

Nor are they homogeneous communities with little exposure to the outside world. Many—especially in the Global South, but also increasingly in the Northern Hemisphere—are directly exposed to or part of social, political, or religious tension, which calls for wise and courageous nonviolent action. Amazing stories emerge from such contexts in Indonesia and Colombia, among

other places. One can see hopeful indicators that Mennonites are a living peace church.

Stuart Murray in *The Naked Anabaptist* points out that Mennonite tradition, faithful as it may have appeared, also kept Mennonites from living up to their calling as a people of peace.[12] That reality was visible in debates emerging in the 1980s in Mennonite World Conference meetings, when delegates from Africa stated that they had not been prepared by their missionaries for the real meaning of being a peace church. They had learned about baptism, communion, and Mennonite customs, but now, they said, "we are told that we are a historic peace church, but we don't really know what that implies." Paul Gingrich, then president of Mennonite Board of Missions, suggested that North American mission agencies have a responsibility to help churches in the South catch up on the peace agenda. Meanwhile, many Mennonite churches in the Southern Hemisphere have as much experience as—if not more experience than—their northern counterparts in embodying a theology and practice of just peace or nonviolent resistance. Many impressive stories from Indonesia, Australia, and Africa illustrate this reality.

Many Mennonite churches in the Southern Hemisphere have more experience than their northern counterparts in embodying a theology and practice of just peace or nonviolent resistance.

Another global development, about which Mennonites may feel torn, is the further decline of historic confessional structures and the increase of nondenominational, evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal, and other church groups and movements. As Mennonite denominational loyalties weaken, and as Mennonites seek relationships with other Christians, will nonviolence and peace be decisive elements or marginal ones in forging alliances? The true global horizon of the twenty-first century is not how we respond to the threat of terrorism but how we live out our faith through nonviolent action.

In such contexts, Mennonites are not the only ones to be challenged, nor can they act alone. In what respect and to what extent will they be willing to cooperate with unlikely partners, including non-Christian pacifists? Will our actions be oriented by insight or will they be fixated on cultural identity and doctrine?

Will commitment to peace and nonviolence be primary, or will it be circumscribed by traditional and confessional issues? Given the diversity within the Mennonite fold, and given the fading of our ethnic identification, what will be our distinctive mark? These are crucial questions.

If Mennonites make nonviolence and just peace a priority again, and join others with new insights and new approaches, they can be sure they will be in good company. Part of the challenge for Mennonites is that we no longer can pretend to be the faithful few when it comes to peace. The people of God is a reality that is larger than the people of Menno. This is true in both a geographical and a confessional sense. Divine grace brings us together with unlikely sisters and brothers.

Notes

[1] J. R. Burkholder, "Peace," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 685; online: http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/P4ME.html.
[2] Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007)
[3] Mark Jantzen: Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880; Notre Dame, IN, 2010
[4] IFOR, incorporated in 1919, was the first significant international pacifist organization, deeply rooted in and closely affiliated with churches.
[5] See Paul Peachey, "Puidoux Conferences," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* 5:738; online: http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/P856.html.
[6] See http://www.church-and-peace.org/.
[7] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Counseling_Network; http://www.mc-network.de/.
[8] See http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/.
[9] Http://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/sider.
[10] Http://www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/report_cathomenno_final_eng.pdf.
[11] An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace states: "On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable"; http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf.
[12] Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010).

About the author

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Truthtelling and reconciliation on the prairies

Eileen Klassen Hamm

I live along the South Saskatchewan River near the northern edge of the great prairie in a city named after the sweet purple berries that grow in abundance in the coulees and creeks of the watershed. This is a generous land under an expansive sky with room for so many stories that sometimes it takes too many years for them to bump into each other. Stories of ingenuity and overcoming, of migration and resettlement, of community and compassion exist alongside stories of deception and blindness, of ignorance and violence, and of losses in abundance.[1] We do not get to choose the stories that inhabit our landscape. We can choose how to respond to those stories. What does it mean to be a peace church in a particular watershed? How is a community's peace theology shaped by the stories in the landscape?

We do not get to choose the stories that inhabit our landscape. We can choose how to respond to those stories. How is a community's peace theology shaped by the stories in the landscape?

As I write this article, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada is hosting the fifth of seven national events, in Montreal, Quebec.[2] I am watching it live on my computer, and it reminds me of the rhythms, emotions, rituals, and practices that I was deeply immersed in ten months ago when the TRC held its Saskatchewan national event here in Saskatoon.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is in its fourth year of a five-year mandate to learn the truth about what happened in the Indian residential schools and to educate Canadians about this history and its legacies. The commission is collecting testimony from officials of the institutions that operated the schools and from survivors and their families who have been personally affected by the residential school experience and its subsequent impacts. The TRC hopes to guide and inspire pro-

cesses of truthtelling and healing that can lead toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Indian residential schools, government-funded and church-run, operated in Canada for about 130 years. The last school closed in 1996, in Saskatchewan. More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in these schools.

In the 1990s, church institutions involved in Indian residential schools began coming forward with apologies for their actions in these schools. On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on behalf of the government of Canada, delivered a formal apology in the House of Commons to former students and their families and communities for Canada's role in the operation of residential schools.

> *Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country. . . .*
>
> *It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered.*
>
> *It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. . . .*
>
> *To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. . . .*
>
> *The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Gov-*

> *ernment, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.*[3]

The TRC came to my town last June, and it changed my life, shifted my worldview. From the lighting of the sacred fire in the early morning of the first day to the closing words of the commissioners four days later, I was drawn into a powerful experience of listening, wrestling, unlearning, relearning, reimagining. This was not my first experience with the residential school story. I would have said I had a fairly good grasp of the history; I had taught it to college students. What was so new was the intimacy of the experience. We, white settlers and recent immigrants, were invited into a most intimate re-storying of our community and our country. The stories are disturbing, troubling, heartbreaking. Our hearts should be broken by these things—children snatched from their parents and grandparents, stripped of their identity, isolated, abused, never told they were precious. Our hearts should be broken wide open to make room for transformation.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to my town, we, white settlers and recent immigrants, were invited into an intimate re-storying of our community and our country. The stories are disturbing, troubling, heartbreaking.

Many church folk supported the TRC event in Saskatoon. Some congregations raised funds for food and travel expenses; some created educational conversations ahead of and after the TRC event. During the June event, church volunteers assisted with the flow of activities, and many joined the gathered community witnessing the testimonies of survivors and their families. We wondered how it had taken us so long to listen for the stories that live right here among us on this land. Will the TRC change us as a church? Will it transform us? What gifts does the TRC offer to us?

Truthtelling and repenting

An examination of Indian residential school history is also an examination of colonialism and the church's willing and enthusiastic participation in colonialism. The Mennonite story in Canada is not at the centre of this history, but it plays at the edges and is not unconnected. The TRC is making room in the public discourse for churches to carefully and critically remember their own stories (not just the honourable ones), to tell their own truths, and to take responsibility for their memories. It is a rare moment in a nation's experience when leaders of institutions line up to make public apologies. The TRC has created spaces for that to happen.

Unsettling history

As truths are told and confessed, identities are dislodged. One such identity lies close to the heart of many peace church folk, and that is of Canadians as "benevolent peacemakers." Canadian settlers like to remember that while the United States conducted "Indian wars," Canada enjoyed a more benign settlement process made possible by treaty negotiations with Indigenous groups. These treaties spoke of peace and harmony, bounty, and benevolence. Stories being told at the TRC are calling this national mythology into question, both historically and in the present. Broken treaty promises litter the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples,[4] and the stories of residential school survivors bring us face-to-face with horrific violence enacted on children's bodies and souls as well as the hearts and minds of parents and grandparents, over generations. Seven generations.

Many Mennonite settlers came to the prairies to escape violence in Ukraine and elsewhere. We have benefitted immensely from the treaty negotiation processes, which opened up large tracts of land for Mennonite settlers to recreate communities based on language, religion, culture, and communal practices. At the very same time and in the very same landscape, Indigenous communities, generation after generation, were shattered by the Indian residential school policy and the Indian Act, which systematically sought to strip Indigenous peoples of their languages, religion, culture, and communal practices. What is a peace church on the prairie to do with such knowledge? How might we share such a burden as we journey forward?

Courage and forgiveness

In the midst of immensely difficult stories of violence and abandonment, the TRC is also a place of forgiveness and grace. I have been astounded at the open-handed forgiveness offered by survivors, first to themselves and also to those who hurt them. Life stories are not only about victimization but also about courage and resilience and overcoming. Telling and receiving painful stories can be an act of dignity, an act of redemption. There is a role here for us, as settlers and as church folk, to receive stories, to witness the hard telling, to honour the long journey.

Peaceable spaces

The TRC events have been carefully constructed to create healthy and gentle spaces for the oh-so-difficult work of telling truths and stepping toward reconciliation. Both the smaller community hearings as well as the large national events are wrapped in prayer and compassion. Local elders begin each day with prayers and songs. Often prayers are requested during the day, and each day ends with prayers. There is a clear understanding that this work cannot be done without the guidance of the Creator. Healthcare workers and cultural support workers encircle the rooms where testimonies are given, creating a safe space for vulnerability, watching for distress, holding a hand, supplying tissues for tears, paying attention to the storytellers as well as the listening witnesses. The tear-filled tissues are carefully collected each day, and when a sacred fire is lit at a national event, the tissues carrying such pain are burned there. These rituals and symbols have much to teach us about creating peaceable spaces for whatever difficult work our communities have before us.

Mennonites benefitted from treaties that opened up large tracts of land for settlement. At the same time and in the same landscape, Indigenous communities were shattered by policies that sought to strip them of their languages, religion, culture.

Reconciliation mentors

The commissioners of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Marie Wilson, are remarkable people with extraordinary ability to weave together the pain and gifts of

community. Theirs is a massive re-storying task, and in the doing of it, they make room for laughter and weeping, for anger and art, for questions and dancing, for singing and grieving. They practice gratitude, recollect learnings, and offer their whole hearts to this work, which they consider a sacred trust. They are mentors for us all, gracious teachers leading us toward healing and reconciliation. The commissioners are also patient and pragmatic, reminding us that it took seven generations to bring us to this place, and that change will not happen overnight. It may take another seven generations to undo the harm. We are all invited to be part of the healing generations.

Cultural revitalization

The TRC, among other activities in our country, is playing a role in the resurgence of Indigenous language, culture, and identity in our communities. The traditional knowledge, songs, and rhythms of Indigenous peoples are honoured and showcased at the TRC, and the strength and hope this brings to people is tangible. I am hopeful that we can embrace not only the pain but also the joy of Indigenous peoples, that we can set aside our paternalistic impulses and genuinely value the skills and teachings of the cultures that surround us, living and breathing so comfortably in this landscape.

Healing for settlers

Do I need healing too? I need healing from an imperialist mindset, from thinking I know what is best for others. I need healing from racism that lives and breathes in the institutions and activities of my everyday life, that gets ugly quickly when Indigenous peoples speak up for themselves, questioning the inequalities they face in housing, employment, education, healthcare, access to safe water.[5] I need healing from denial that colonialism has shaped my church, my workplace, my family. I need to be honest about how I have benefitted from the Canadian colonial enterprise.

We need healing and courage to imagine mutual relationships with Indigenous friends and neighbours. Five years ago, the prime minister stood in Parliament and gave what was considered at the time a heartfelt apology to former students of Indian residential schools. Included in his statement was a commitment to forge "a

new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on . . . a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together." Many Indigenous peoples are still waiting for this apology to come alive, waiting for us to make space for new conversations between peoples, to create new opportunities for sharing our lands and resources, to acknowledge the missing and murdered Indigenous women, to renew treaty relationships, to celebrate a multitude of languages and identities.

The apology is only words on a page until we act it out in the watersheds of our landscape. The church is invited to be part of making the apology come alive and breathe in our communities. The church, with full knowledge of a sordid past, is still invited to look forward, even to seven generations, nurturing the growth of reconciliation, celebrating small shoots and blossoms of peace on the land.

Notes

[1] Two examples of writing that explores the stories of a landscape are Roger Epp, *We Are All Treaty People: Prairie Essays* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); and Candace Savage, *A Geography of Blood: Unearthing Memory from a Prairie Landscape* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012).

[2] The TRC's last two national events are in Vancouver in September 2013 and in Edmonton in March 2014. All TRC information is available at www.trc.ca.

[3] For the full text, see http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649.

[4] For settlers seeking to establish more just relationships with Indigenous friends and colleagues, I recommend Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 83–110. For an incisive subversion of the history of Indigenous-settler relations on both sides of the 49th parallel, I recommend Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* ([Toronto]: Doubleday Canada, 2012).

[5] Recent examples are the backlash to Idle No More activities, to Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike, and to protests at oil pipelines and mining sites.

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Peace theology and peacebuilding

Alain Epp Weaver

"Nonviolence is the way for peace and a good society!" These words formed the refrain of a song sung by the nearly twenty participants in a several-month-long workshop for religious leaders organized by the South Sudanese Organization for Nonviolence and Democracy (ONAD) and sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee. The Lutheran pastor who had composed the song hoped that, with ONAD's help, it might be recorded and eventually get airtime on South Sudan's radio stations. Newly independent South Sudan, the workshop participants noted, must confront numerous potential internal conflicts dividing people along ethnic, religious, and other lines. Coming from varied ethnic backgrounds, these Christian and Muslim leaders emerged from the ONAD workshop convinced that promoting nonviolence as a means for addressing conflict was an urgent necessity for South Sudan.

Should peace theology and peacebuilding be seen as two distinct and unrelated fields? Or as two fields that occasionally intersect? Or as two fields that stand in unrelieved antagonism to each other?

Nonviolence, for purposes of the ONAD workshop, referred to a variety of conflict analysis, mitigation, and prevention techniques, particular practices accessible to persons from varied religious and ethnic backgrounds. While certainly not value neutral, these peacebuilding practices gathered together by ONAD under the term *nonviolence* are transportable, able to be carried from one religious or other worldview commitment into another: these nonviolent practices could be used by Christians as well as Muslims (not to mention atheists, Buddhists, communists, and others). Yet when workshop participants shared about what they had learned, they almost all contextualized these practices within Christian or Muslim theological discourse, using not only "secular" terms such

as conflict analysis, conflict prevention, and nonviolence, but also religious ones such reconciliation, sin, grace, God's sovereignty. This was the language they used to describe the nonviolent practices they had learned through appeals to stories and other precedents from the Bible, the Qur'an, and extra-Qur'anic authoritative texts such as the hadith (traditions from and about the Prophet Muhammad) and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

Distinct disciplines?

I visited ONAD in April 2013, when I was starting to think about the assignment to write this article, in which I was asked to reflect on the relationship between Mennonite peace theology, on the one hand, and peacebuilding as an emerging academic discipline and set of practices, on the other. Should peace theology and peacebuilding be seen as two distinct and unrelated fields? Or as two fields that occasionally intersect? Or as two fields that stand in unrelieved antagonism to each other?

The first option—which would present peace theology and peacebuilding as so distinct that they have nothing to do with each other—seems clearly misguided. True, the array of diverse peacebuilding practices need not be embedded within theological discourse. In that regard, peacebuilding practices—such as promoting restorative justice, or conducting a conflict or Do No Harm analysis—can be thought of as equivalent to conservation processes in agriculture or best practices in nursing. So, for example, although some conservation methods promoting low-external-input farming—the "Farming God's Way" approach,[1] for instance—are packaged in Christian theological terms, these sustainable agriculture practices can be learned and implemented by anyone, regardless of theological or philosophical commitments. Similarly, even though Mennonite colleges might underscore how Christian commitments and practices should inform how one acts as a nurse, the best practices of the nursing profession can be learned and carried out by anyone—Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, atheist, or other.

In this sense, basic peacebuilding practices appear to be transportable practices that can be integrated into various forms of theological and philosophical discourse. Yet it is also true that those practices can become deeply embedded in such discourses,

so that to the practitioners the peacebuilding practices appear to be inextricably intertwined with these religious or philosophical convictions. That was certainly the case with the Christian and Muslim leaders in the ONAD workshop, for whom peacebuilding practices were bound up with theological commitments. For the Christian participants, being a faithful Christian meant incorporating peacebuilding practices into one's daily life; they viewed peacebuilding as an essential expression of their Christian identity. This fact did not preclude them from recognizing that for their Muslim co-participants, peacebuilding practices also appear to emerge organically from their commitments and practices as Muslims. Peacebuilding practices had become part of the Christian identity of these South Sudanese Christians in Juba, yet these practices, as the Christian participants themselves recognized, were transportable and could be integrated into other religious (and nonreligious) discourses.

Peacebuilding practices appear to be transportable practices that can be integrated into various forms of theological and philosophical discourse. Yet those practices can become deeply embedded in such discourses.

Intersecting fields?

Peacebuilding and peace theology are thus not completely separate, unrelated fields: at a minimum, they intersect at specific points. The ONAD example is but one of perhaps thousands of examples of people and groups for whom peacebuilding practices are tightly intertwined with Christian theological discourse. Not only do the two fields of peacebuilding and peace theology intersect; for at least some peacebuilding practitioners, Christian theology offers the backdrop against which peacebuilding practices make sense—just as for other practitioners, Islamic theology offers the semantic field within which peacebuilding practices have their meaning.

But these points of intersection should not blind us to the fact that peacebuilding and traditional Mennonite peace theology (which in bare bones terms I would characterize as the christologically rooted conviction that Christians should always under all circumstances refrain from taking human life) can sometimes stand in uneasy tension with or even outright antago-

nism to each other. Consider the ONAD workshop participants. Although all the participants emerged from the workshop fully committed to using grassroots peacebuilding practices in their individual lives and within their communities, and although all agreed that peacebuilding practices could help South Sudan grapple with many of its challenges as a newly independent state, none of the participants—Christian or Muslim—were pacifists committed to the proposition that it is always wrong to kill. All would have supported the South Sudanese armed struggle against the Sudanese military, viewing such struggle as a justified form of self-defense, defensible for Christians using just war criteria and representing for Muslims a legitimate form of jihad. At a minimum, adopting peacebuilding practices does not require that one be committed to a stringent pacifism. That observation should not call into question the validity of the types of peacebuilding practices the ONAD participants were learning; it simply underscores the fact that these peacebuilding practices can be used by pacifists and nonpacifists alike.

Antagonistic areas?

From the perspective of Mennonite peace theology, greater concerns surface about peacebuilding as a field to the degree that self-identified proponents of peacebuilding either explicitly endorse armed and potentially lethal actions or appear implicitly to do so. This concern has less to do with grassroots forms of peacebuilding in civil society, and more to do with peacebuilding involving military and other armed actors. For example, so-called humanitarian intervention to prevent or mitigate genocide or other large-scale human rights abuses is touted by its defenders as a form of peacebuilding, a type of action aimed ultimately at violence reduction and mitigation. Such intervention may be championed by proponents of "just peacemaking" and "just policing," yet from a Christian pacifist standpoint it may ultimately prove indistinguishable from traditional just war approaches. Christian pacifists will rightly welcome having just war proponents take just war criteria seriously, but the rebranding of just war as humanitarian intervention or just policing or peacebuilding does not ultimately overcome the gap between such actions and Christian pacifism.

Christian peacebuilders have also at times engaged military actors with the aim of promoting nonlethal strategies while also championing "whole of government" approaches in which diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives complement military action. At their best, such engagements can be viewed as a form of what John Howard Yoder called "middle axioms,"[2] inhabiting non-Christian discourse in order to promote better outcomes within the operating terms of that discourse—in this case, helping military actors think through less lethal alternatives and strategies. Yet such engagements also run the risk of moving beyond middle axiom–style intervention to active promotion of certain forms of lethal force as the best option, and thus end up as advocacy for a form of justifiable war.

Compatible practices?

While some initiatives that fall within the broad tent of peacebuilding thus run up against and contradict Christian pacifist commitment, most forms of peacebuilding are compatible with a christologically rooted conviction that lethal force is always wrong. Restorative justice initiatives; Do No Harm analyses; trauma healing interventions; nonviolent direct action; the promotion of conflict assessment, circle processes, and other types of grassroots peacebuilding practices: all these can and should be vigorously supported by Christian pacifists—and also by non-Christians and nonpacifists. And, not surprisingly, Mennonites have been at the forefront of the emerging peacebuilding disciplines and practices. It is not surprising, given the understandable eagerness of Mennonites in the United States and Canada to move beyond the nonresistant stance that seemed to confine Mennonite witness to a sectarian ghetto toward an embrace of activist peacebuilding in which pacifist convictions display their public utility.

While some initiatives that fall within the broad tent of peacebuilding contradict Christian pacifist commitment, most forms of peacebuilding are compatible with a christologically rooted conviction that lethal force is always wrong.

So far I have sought to show that while some peacebuilding practices sometimes stand in tension or opposition to rigorous Christian pacifist commitment, most peacebuilding practices at a

minimum are consistent with Christian pacifism and arguably flow from Christian pacifist convictions while not necessarily being peculiar to Christian pacifists. In the remainder of this article I will highlight two dangers or temptations for Mennonite peace theology as it reflects on peacebuilding practice. The first danger I will discuss is the danger of epistemological hubris, of claiming more for nonviolent direct action and other forms of peacebuilding than can be legitimately advanced. The second danger I identify is reduction of the rich Christian vocabulary regarding sin and redemption into the language of peace and violence.

The danger of claiming too much

My first concern stems from a decade of work with Mennonite Central Committee in the occupied Palestinian territories. During that time I repeatedly encountered a form of what I would identify as "peace colonialism" in Mennonites and other Christian pacifists who would visit Israel and the occupied territories and hold forth about how vital it is for Palestinians to engage in nonviolent resistance. They argued that nonviolence would clearly pave the way to Palestinian liberation from military occupation and from a history of dispossession. Not only did such sermonizing display a telling ignorance of the nonviolent resistance Palestinians have used extensively against Zionist colonization over the course of the twentieth century and up to the present day; it also reflected an unwarranted confidence in the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action as a mode of struggle.

The hope that peacebuilding strategies will contribute to desirable outcomes must be tempered with humility about the limits of our knowledge and ability to control the future.

Christian pacifists often rightly accuse proponents of just war of epistemological hubris, of wrongly claiming to know what the outcomes of particular lethal actions will be. Defenders of justifiable killing claim to know that specific courses of action (ones involving the lethal use of force) will result in specific desirable outcomes. The Christian pacifist counters this epistemological (over)confidence with an attitude of humility about human control over history. But a pacifist hubris that arrogantly claims to

know that nonviolence is going to work in a particular situation must be subjected to a similar critique and replaced with a similar humility. The experiences generated and the knowledge compiled by practitioners in the peacebuilding field offer good reasons for hope that in many situations specific peacebuilding strategies will contribute to desirable outcomes. Yet that hope must be tempered with humility about the limits of our knowledge and ability to control the future—and such humility is all the more vital when Christian pacifists privileged enough to live in relatively stable, safe, and prosperous settings are tempted to lecture people living under oppressive regimes on the efficacy of nonviolence as a means of struggle. To be sure, nonviolence has at times, by the grace of God, led to liberating outcomes, but Christian pacifists must soberly acknowledge the real possibility that nonviolent resistance might well lead to tragedy, death, and failure. The rationality of the Christian pacifist's commitment to nonviolence is validated only against an eschatological horizon.

The danger of impoverishing our vocabulary

At least within some Mennonite theological circles, the primary danger is no longer that pacifist commitment will slip away or be treated as an optional addition to core Christian belief, but rather that the rich Christian vocabulary about the human condition and future has been impoverished, reduced to the words *peace* and *violence*. Concerned to show that Christian pacifist commitment need not lead to sectarian withdrawal, some Mennonites have been eager to demonstrate that Christian commitment to peace has practical import for a world scarred by violence. Mennonite peace theologians have in turn eagerly sought to show that peace and overcoming violence are at the heart of the Christian gospel. And to an extent these shifts within Mennonitism in Canada and the United States have been welcome. Yet I worry—and I readily grant that this may be an idiosyncratic perception—that at least for some Mennonite peace theologies the language of peace is now so ubiquitous that it not only becomes synonymous with but even practically replaces the vocabulary of salvation, redemption, and restoration. Similarly the language of violence, rather than representing one instantiation of sin, has practically displaced talk of sin.

My point is not to deny that various forms of violence constitute real forms of sin. Rather, my concern is that reducing sin to violence threatens to externalize the fundamental problem besetting humanity. Since most Mennonites in Canada and the United States are not engaged in (at least overt and public) acts of violence, it becomes all too easy and all too tempting to think of violence as outside ourselves and to conceive of the principalities and powers of this world as external forces with which the heroic community shaped by messianic pacifism must contend. As a result, we fail to recognize the deep brokenness within our churches and families (whether or not it involves violence), and we also fail to recognize the depth of sin within ourselves. We fail to perceive our disordered loves (as Augustine put it), and fail to acknowledge that, far from being independent of the powers, we are shaped by them at the capillary level (as Michel Foucault would put it). Failing to recognize the depth of sin and our captivity to the powers and principalities, we delude ourselves in neo-Pelagian fashion into thinking that salvation, now reduced to peace, is within our grasp, something we can achieve on our own.

Failing to recognize the depth of our sin and our captivity to the powers and principalities, we delude ourselves into thinking that salvation, now reduced to peace, is something we can achieve on our own.

Again, I readily grant that this interpretation of the Mennonite theological landscape might be idiosyncratic: perhaps it is simply a confession that I have in the past found myself tempted to reduce salvation to peace and sin to violence. But even if I am the only person (and I hope I am) who has been tempted to such impoverished theological language, the lesson I have gleaned from this temptation has broader validity—namely, that although peace and violence should continue to be significant concerns for Mennonite theology, Mennonite theology should have broader concerns. In the words of Peter Dula, we should not allow peace to be the tail that wags the theological dog.

Nonviolence and other forms of peacebuilding are indeed key elements for sociopolitical peace and a good society, as the Christians and Muslims sang together in Juba. And these peacebuilding practices are practices that Mennonites—alongside nonpacifists and non-Christians—should readily embrace and

promote. But all this does not exhaust the good news, the good news that our salvation is not in our own hands but in God's, that it is thanks to God and not to our own actions that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, and that through Christ's death and resurrection and the ongoing work of the Spirit our disordered individual and communal lives are being restored to God's image.

Notes

[1] See http://farming-gods-way.org/.
[2] John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies Series no. 3 (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1963), 71–73.

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Moral injury and a new way of making peace

Jason Boone

Jesus told the crowds following him: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?" (Luke 14:28–31; NIV).

But we can never fully calculate the cost of war. The economic costs reach to so many sectors of government and society that a realistic, comprehensive accounting of total expenditure and lost opportunity is at best a matter of guesswork. Our most primal and most tangible cost in war we measure in bodies. The bottom line is the body count: How many died? How many were wounded?

The spiritual wounds that are forcing us to reassess the cost of war have been around as long as war itself. From ancient times they've been written into myths, stories, poetry, and song. Science has been slowly catching up to art in recognizing these wounds.

And what about the soldiers who return alive and seem to be intact physically? In the past, when people came back from combat uninjured, they were not counted among the costs of war. Leaving them out of the calculus was beneficial for those who made and prosecuted war: the fewer the bodies lost or mangled, the better the war.

The longer a war goes on, the more difficult it is to reduce the cost to numbers of dead and wounded. Veterans who return home physically whole may be psychically scarred; they carry emotional, psychological, and spiritual scars. Spiritual wounds that don't show up on the balance sheets of war are nonetheless real and enormously costly.

Moral injury

After the armistice that ended World War 1, the philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Only the dead are safe; only the dead have seen the end of war."[1] The spiritual wounds that are forcing us to reassess the cost of war have been around as long as war itself. From ancient times they've been written into myths, stories, poetry, and song. Science has slowly been catching up to art in recognizing these wounds. The term given them during World War I was *shell shock*. In World War II it was called *battle fatigue*. In 1980, the term *posttraumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) became an official diagnosis growing out of research on Vietnam veterans who returned from war but had trouble adjusting to life back home.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, alarming patterns—including a high rate of suicide—among vets returning from tours of duty have defied traditional diagnosis and treatment, even that of PTSD. The shame, guilt, and despair some vets wrestle with doesn't align with a PTSD diagnosis. The search has continued among mental health professionals and military chaplains to explain why some returning vets suffer in these profound ways.

The term *moral injury* was first used in 2009 to describe extreme distress resulting from "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations."[2] Moral injury occurs when soldiers engage in or witness acts of violence that violate their understandings of right and wrong.

> *Moral injury is different from PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress is a fear-victim reaction to danger and has identifiable trauma symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, hyper-vigilance and dissociation. Moral injury is an inner conflict based on a moral evaluation of having inflicted harm, a judgment grounded in a sense of personal agency. It results from a capacity for both empathy and self-reflection. Judgments pertain not only to active behavior, such as killing, but also to passive behavior, such as failing to prevent harm or witnessing a close friend being slain. Moral injury can also involve feeling betrayed by persons in authority. Even when an action may have*

saved someone's life or felt right at the time, a veteran may come to feel remorse or guilt for having had to inflict harm that violates his or her inner values.[3]

The effects of moral injury can be devastating. Not only does moral injury make coming home from war difficult; it can destroy a veteran's will to live.

These deep wounds drive risky behaviors and harm to self to confounding levels. And these are just immediate effects on veterans themselves. What happens to families, to children, when a loved one returns from war with moral injuries? Sadly, we can predict sustained high suicide rates, increased homelessness, and domestic violence, among other outcomes.

There is not yet a formula or pattern for facilitating healing of moral injury. But a basic element of healing is long-term ties with a caring community.

Where do we go with this knowledge? What does healing look like for veterans with moral injury? There is not yet a formula or pattern for facilitating healing of moral injury. But a basic element of healing is long-term ties with a caring community. Veterans with moral injuries need to be involved in communities where their stories can be told and held. A moral authority needs to be present in the community. Most urgently, veterans need a place to seek forgiveness.

These needs are not met by the traditional models for healing we have come to rely on. Healing from moral injury doesn't seem to depend primarily on the professional expertise of a psychologist or counselor. Rather, a healthy relationship with a community of committed, loving people is needed. Certainly professional counseling and therapy will have a role to play in the holistic healing of returning vets, but it appears that healing community is a central aspect that cannot be replaced: "Healing requires access to a caring, non-judgmental moral authority and welcoming communities that can receive the testimony of veterans, provide means for making restitution, offer forgiveness and sustain their long-term community service and ties."[4]

What types of communities can offer the resources needed for healing by veterans living with moral injuries? Today, aided by technology, communities can form broadly and over distances

that used to be barriers to connection. Person-to-person communities or networks can form around almost any interest or specialization. But what communities are equipped to offer long-term relationship, walking with people through a valley of guilt, shame, and pain, and offering them forgiveness?

Healing peace

The apostle Paul reminds us that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor. 10:3–4). Church communities are uniquely suited to providing space and relationships where veterans with moral injuries can find healing. Mennonites in particular have long practiced walking with people through the dark valleys, listening to their stories, offering forgiveness. As a peace church, Mennonites understand the destructive power of violence and believe in the restorative power of forgiving love. The question now is, can we use these convictions and practices in service of veterans with moral injuries? Will we do so?

It's complicated, especially for a peace church. There's no getting around the fact that soldiers are the most tangible—embodied—expression of military power and war in our communities. To actively embrace veterans may seem like a betrayal of pacifists' convictions. And this engagement wouldn't be on a superficial, programmatic level. It would involve the long-term work of building intimate spiritual connections.

And there are barriers from the other side. Returning veterans may be uncomfortable in a peace church. If they feel shame and self-loathing, why would they hope to find welcome with a group of people opposed to actions they did as soldiers?

And we must keep in mind that not all vets suffer from moral injury. It would be insulting to assume that they do. People enlist in the military as individuals; they have different experiences. We don't know how many veterans live with moral injury. What we know is that it is a painful condition, and that many suffer from it.

Clearly, a gulf separates peace churches from veterans experiencing moral injury, however suited to each other we may be. To bridge the gap will require developing a tolerance for discomfort and a willingness to do hard work. The question remains, is

becoming a community devoted to this kind of healing something in which Mennonites and other peace churches are called to invest prayer, thought, and energy?

I think we must. The pain from moral injury is too deep to ignore. A recent Associated Press story quotes a former US marine captain: "I can't forgive myself. . . . And the people who can forgive me are dead."[5] This kind of guilt propels the rage, the shame, the substance abuse that affect too many returning vets.

The church isn't called to address all wounds and symptoms that veterans experience. But if we contain in our communal DNA attributes that can help relieve their suffering, to refuse to engage for cultural or theoretical reasons is to miss an opportunity to participate in the peaceful reign of God that Jesus lived and taught. Mennonites have long taken the light of Christ to victims of violence in a variety of settings. Veterans who suffer from moral injuries are also victims of violence. The blood of the mortally wounded cries out from the ground. The pain of the morally injured is present among us in their tormented silence.

We have to see the suicides, the self-inflicted harm, and other problems for what they are: effects of the wars we protested against. This is the violence our nation shipped overseas, returned to sender.

Concerns about how reaching out to returning veterans will affect our peace witness are legitimate. Do we become accomplices of the machine that caused the damage when we help pick up the pieces? I think the opposite is true: helping returning vets find healing is another flowering of our stance against war.

When the towers fell on September 11, 2001, the road the United States would take in response was heartbreakingly obvious to many. Taking the violence *over there* was preferable to living with the violence *here*. Many of us went into action in the familiar ways, with marches, protests, prayer vigils, calls to our senators and representatives. Despite these efforts, violence was transported over there, and in time the voices of dissent grew weary.

We have to see the suicides, the self-inflicted harm, and other problems for what they are: effects of the wars we protested against. This is the violence our nation shipped overseas, returned to sender. Healing for veterans is one way of bringing an end to

the war, though not the way we had hoped for. To adopt this way is to live out our faith that, as Jesus taught us, the reign of God grows from mustard seeds; a little yeast leavens a big batch of dough. The part of the war that rages spiritually in returning veterans won't end with the stroke of a pen or an announcement from those in power. It ends where the restoring grace of forgiveness is found in a community that loves and accepts those burdened by wrong they have done.

In those ways, embracing returning veterans is not foreign for Mennonites. Helping to heal pain, nonviolently opposing violence—and doing so together, in communities of faith willing to confront our own participation in violence—this is who we are.

Embracing returning veterans who live with moral injury has another important effect: it becomes our response to the powers and principalities that foster and sustain the wars we find ourselves in. Helping returning vets find healing may be our way of standing against the powers that are disobedient to God. We can't fight these powers, and we seem to be unable to tame them using ordinary political means. So we follow Christ in carrying the burdens of those around us; we embrace returning veterans weighed down by intense spiritual suffering. We continue to work in the places available to us; we continue to pray. But we also face the powers squarely and offer compassion to the men and women damaged while in their control. We do not know what effect this action may have, but we stand firm in our belief in the power of nonviolent love in the face of war, oppression, and violence. As we learn to recognize the powers and principalities asserting themselves in ways previously obscured, our peace witness takes new forms.

Where does this road lead?

How Mennonites may become communities of healing for veterans returning with moral injuries is not altogether clear. Just as the understanding of moral injury is evolving, our sense of how we could move toward these vets is evolving. In Virginia, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, and elsewhere, communities of faith are discerning how to make connections with vets.

Our attempts have to be rooted in relationships. The pain of moral injury seems to turn vets inward. In the safety of friendship,

healing may become possible. Mennonites who want to connect with returning veterans will have to find and create relational pathways in their communities. We have heard Jesus's invitation and we can extend it to others: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30).

One church's way of building relationships with returning veterans may not resemble another's. As Wallace Stevens has put it (poetically), "It was when the trees were leafless first in November / And their blackness became apparent, that one first / Knew the eccentric to be the base of design." Each group will have to find its own particular path.

This will be a prayerful journey, and the prayer may take new forms. Prayers of petition have a place in all we do. But contemplative prayer may also be needed now, especially in these uncertain early stages. In contemplation we reach to God with our hearts. We grope in the dark for understanding, in a place where our symbols lose meaning. In that darkness, we may meet brothers and sisters suffering under the heavy burden of moral injury, groping for meaning of their own.

May Jesus guide our paths to such a meeting.

Notes

[1] George Santayana, "Tipperary," in *Soliloquies in England [1914–1918] and Later Soliloquies*, no. 25 (London: Constable and Company, 1922), 102.
[2] Brett Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (2009): 695–706.
[3] Herm Keizer, "The Moral Injuries of War," *The Military Chaplain* 85, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 6.
[4] Ibid., 6–7.
[5] "'I Can't Forgive Myself': U.S. Veterans Suffering Alone in Guilt over Wartime Events"; online: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57570706/i-cant-forgive-myself-u.s-veterans-suffering-alone-in-guilt-over-wartime-events/.

About the author

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Frogs, miracles, martyrs, and the fog of peace

Pitching peace to pagans through popular culture can be a whole lot harder than you'd think!

Joel Kauffmann

I revere Michael Sattler because he remained true to radical convictions that included refusing to take up the sword against a "pagan horde" then threatening the very survival of sixteenth-century Europe (or so its leaders claimed). While I don't envy Sattler's fiery demise, I do envy the clarity of his faith.

Unfortunately for generations of Anabaptists who follow in the wake of such sixteenth-century martyrs, even a life of relative faithfulness (hey, I volunteered in post-Katrina New Orleans four times) leaves us feeling inadequate—with a sense that if we were all the Anabaptists we should be, somebody somewhere would be making a serious effort to burn us at the stake.

Perhaps an act of peacemaking should be judged not only by its resonance with our core beliefs, or by the extent to which it jeopardizes life and limb, but by the challenge of its context.

But those long-ago martyrs, with their all-in approach—like those today who advocate radical peacemaking from the safety of tenured positions at peace church schools—offer limited help to those of us seeking to balance the burden of peacemaking with the also-weighty demands of career, family, and the effort to fight off that last ten pounds that just might be the difference between diabetes and mere middle-age spread. So where am I headed with this? Well, ultimately to address (or confess) my several decades of attempts to inject Anabaptist convictions about peace and justice into the marketplace of popular culture.

But first, to establish the bar by which my efforts might be measured, an account of the bravest peace stance I have witnessed. At halftime of a basketball game at my local high school, the audience was asked to stand in support of the Iraq War (the first one). I didn't stand, but I was up in the dimly lit cheap seats. So no big deal. Stand. Sit. Who would notice?

But several high-profile members of my congregation had highly visible courtside seats. Members who wouldn't be caught dead carrying a protest sign—one that protested anything. Furthermore, they were well-known about town and had careers that depended on the continuing goodwill of (non-Menno) community leaders. I assumed they would have to stand and even prepared myself to pre-forgive them. But they didn't stand. In fact, they remained conspicuously seated. I have no idea what that act cost them economically or otherwise. Though it probably did not lead to physical harm, it could have cost a lot.

While that act of courage dwarfs anything I am about to claim, I mention it for one reason beyond humility: perhaps an act of peacemaking should be judged not only by its resonance with our core beliefs, by the extent to which it jeopardizes life and limb, or by its magnitude on some Richter scale of righteousness, but by the challenge of its context.

A death-defying act of conscience may make for a good story, or at least a good myth, but for most of us, a peacemaking stance requires a series of ongoing calculations that must be made while muddling through the fog of peace, much as soldiers have to act in the fog of war.

The Weight

It was the Vietnam War that introduced males in my generation—at least those of us who had low numbers in the draft lottery—to this fog of peace. I wrote a novel, *The Weight*, to describe my inner and outer struggle with this fog. This was also my toe-dipping test of peace proclamation to popular culture (okay, the publisher was my peace church's denominational press, and the intended audience was Mennonite youth, but hey, it was a start).

My postscript to the book expresses both the central struggle of its protagonist and my naive idea that the seriousness of a peace stance can only be judged by the degree of physical jeopardy it brings down on you:

> *Although the response by pacifists to the draft and war was at times courageous, it was just as often confused, comatose, or even cowardly. While some persons did go to jail, to Canada, or into Voluntary (alternate) Service,*

> *many simply went to college—and stayed there. We did join a notable parade of Anabaptist ancestry in protesting war, but we were the first to do so in an era when such protest was not only acceptable, but prestigious. And, ironically, while the struggle of our Anabaptist forbearers placed them in physical peril, our stance as conscientious objectors kept us (out of the Vietnam War and therefore) safe from such peril.*

In the novel, the main character does lose the girl, and in the movie made from that book, he gets beat up by a local thug, so that's something.

One of the actors in the film (made in the 1970s) was Doug Caskey, now the drama director at Goshen College. One of his students recently remarked that he found the film (intended as a serious drama) to be "really really funny." So in the end, I guess I did endure some suffering.

Pontius' Puddle

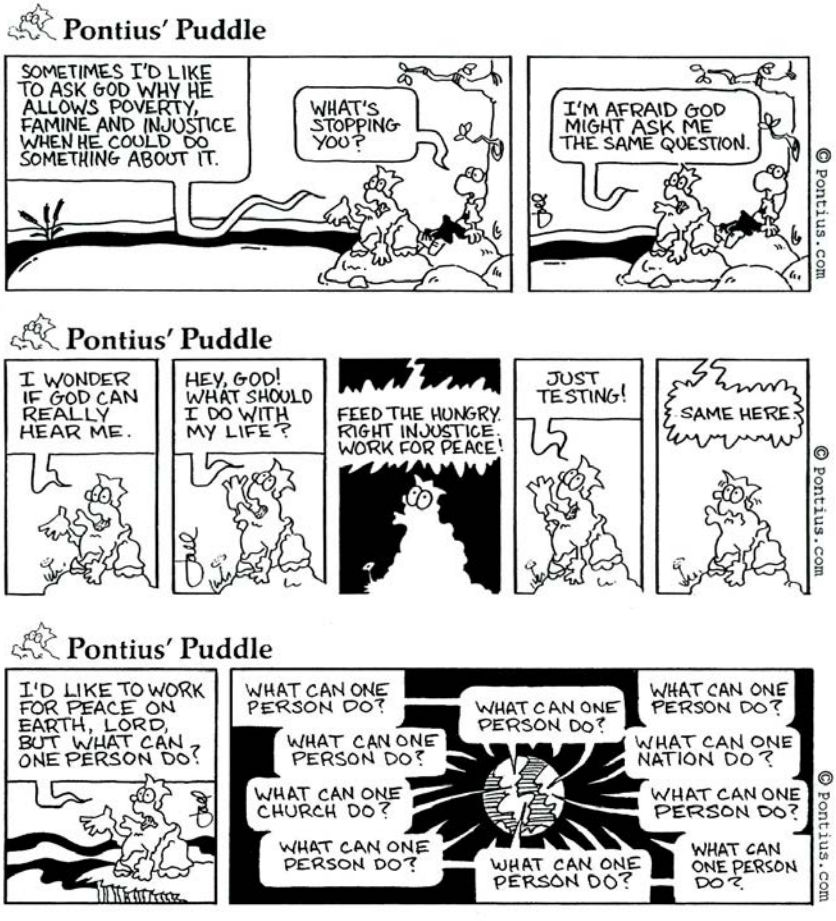
Widening the circle of popular culture slightly. Since 1982 I have produced a cartoon strip for the religious magazine market (and a few secular magazines and papers).

Abingdon Press published a collection of these cartoons, entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom and Other Fallacies of Faith*. I felt Anabaptism had something to say to the rest of the world, including the rest of the global church, and I used this frog prophet perched precariously on his pond's pulpit pad of pontification to address peace whenever possible. In his foreword to the book, David Augsburger expressed the advantages and limitations of this aspiration better than I could have: "The amphibian is, by definition, capable of living in two worlds, Pontius does it well. Alter ego to a cartoonist aptly named for a stubborn prophet, he delivers the wit of Joel Kauffmann with the bite of honest, the nip of revelation, the tug of compassion." Of course, I like the last line, but the relevance here comes from the first.

Growing up in the isolation of a two-kingdom world led, at times, to lapses of judgment about what other traditions might find funny. I lost several Catholic papers by creating a Christmas cartoon (harmless, I thought) that lampooned the Virgin Mary

writing the first whiny Christmas letter. And note to self: check all the Yiddish meanings of "schmuck" before sending a cartoon to a Jewish publication.

But on the positive side, the strip gave me ample opportunity to address issues of peace and justice broadly, if not deeply. Some of my strips embracing these issues proved to be the most popular. At the height of the strip's popularity (before budget concerns and the Web diminished the religious magazine marketplace), it appeared in more than 250 magazines in eleven countries. I estimate that the audience for some of the most popular strips may have exceeded 200 million readers.



The takeaway here, if there is one, is that there is broad receptivity to considering the faith basis for peace. But if you're

going to do it in a cartoon strip, along with conveying some larger truth, it had also better be funny. And maybe that's a lesson for real-life peacemaking. Standing on a street corner with a scowl and sign designed to elicit insults from passing pick-up trucks may feel like a form of witness that resonates with Sattler, but might there be—as we like to say—a third way?

The Disney miracle films

And now to the pinnacle of my popular culture career (by popular culture standards): the two movies I penned along with writing partner and fellow Mennonite Don Yost for Disney Channel.

The first was *Miracle in Lane 2*. The plot was simple (and a true story): a kid born with spina bifida and wheelchair-bound since birth wants to win a sports trophy like his athletic older brother. What elevated this loser-to-winner film was that throughout the story, Justin Yoder (his real and movie name; the part was played by Frankie Muniz at the cusp of his popularity) has a series of conversations with God. Conversations that question the Justness of God: "If the world you create is perfect, what the heck happened to me?"

For Don and me, this film was perfect. We wrote about something we knew. About people we admired. We wrote (and rewrote) it reasonably well. We sold it immediately. Disney pumped nearly seven million dollars into its production—nearly twice their usual budget for a TV flick. And it premiered at the Directors Guild to an audience of industry execs with aisles lined by kids in wheelchairs from the Southern California Spina Bifida Association. We not only felt successful but thought we had done the world a service. The second being far more relevant than the first to the articulated happiness of a Menno.

Just one fly in the ointment. When the project began, Don and I felt strongly that for Justin to earn his final insight (that God's idea of perfect is different than our own, perhaps even contradicts it), it was important that Justin *not* win the final race. And we went into our first script meeting with Disney executives prepared to defend this anti-ending with near-Sattler-like passion.

The Disney execs listened with practiced patience borne of having withstood the onslaughts of many a self-righteous writer, then said: "All right, you come up with a more satisfying ending

than Justin winning the race and we'll use it." And of course, we folded like a cheap Rook table. The film got made, Justin won the big race, and we remain proud of the film.

The second film Don and I did for Disney was *Full Court Miracle*. They brought this idea to us. Their thinking: these guys made one film with a religious theme work; they should be able to pull off another. Our thinking: All right, another paid gig!

Again sports-themed, this second film was about a loser basketball team (Jewish kids) transformed to winners against larger and more skilled foes. It was meant to be an allegorical re-telling of the Maccabean Revolt, in which an overmatched Jewish army (in about 150 BC) repelled a larger and better trained invading army intent on physical and spiritual genocide.

We're not idiots. It did occur to us that taking on this project might create some problems for our peacemaking convictions. But we scrutinized the Hanukkah story till we felt we had found our doctrinal loophole: the true meaning of Hanukkah was not the fighting but the redemptive miracle of the oil burning for eight nights when it should have burned for just one.

Here was a story consistent with other Old Testament battles, such as those fought by Joshua at Jericho, with God reminding his people he was in charge. And hey, the Old Testament is part of our Bible. Long story short: we wrote a draft with this idea in mind, submitted it, then flew back to Burbank to bask in our brilliance.

"We hate it," the execs agreed. "This is the worst thing you have ever written." What followed was the most bizarre Hollywood note session we ever endured. Instead of talking character development or act structure, we argued theology and religious history. For more than an hour, we two Anabaptists stuck to our metaphorical guns against a room full of Jewish executives and one lapsed Catholic who clearly knew where his unleavened bread was buttered.

Don and I drew on every bit of Sunday school–Bible school–Mennonite Youth Fellowship–Goshen College training we could dredge up. The Disney execs wouldn't have needed to argue at all: they could have resorted to filmmaking genocide—fired us and hired new writers. But to their credit, they chose verbal combat. I recall only one of their arguments, the final one: "Had

the Maccabees not fought successfully, the Jewish nation would not have survived long enough for Christianity—and by extension, Anabaptism—to emerge."

We were not convinced. This line of argument was wrong on so many levels (but primarily that God's plan for our salvation was dependent on our fencing skills). But we were sufficiently confused by it to wave the off-white flag of acquiescence. We left the room knowing we had lost. And this time we had lost not just the battle but the war. We had lost our way in the fog of peace.

I cheer any who rise to the challenge of promoting peacemaking through popular culture, but I also offer this warning: it's more likely that popular culture will change you than that you will change it.

The film got made, was modestly successful, and we still cash the occasional royalty checks. Our one small consolation was that the first miracle film won awards, but the second had to settle for mere nominations. Go God!

Two takeaways: (1) Sometimes popular culture will embrace a message that elevates the human condition and acknowledges an intelligent exploration of our relationship with God. (2) However, and more significantly, popular culture is not a blank slate on which any message can be written with equal ease. It is inscribed with big themes, consistent ones, nearly all of them contrary to the tenets of Anabaptism. It prefers winners to losers. It prefers the perseverance of the individual to the preservation of community. And a good fast-paced fight is always preferable to the tediousness of reconciliation.

I cheer any young Anabaptist who rises to the challenge of promoting the idea of peacemaking through popular culture, but I also offer this warning: it's more likely that popular culture will change you than that you will change it.

The Radicals

Having begun with Michael Sattler, I'll end with the 1989 biopic about this Benedictine-monk-turned-radical-reformer that I made with a gang of fellow and once-radical Anabaptist filmmakers (Ron Byler, Jim Bowman, Michael Hostetler).

After years of pre-production and fundraising, we headed to the Alsace to make our epic that would launch Anabaptism, and

more importantly (hey, we were young), our careers into the mainstream stratosphere.

Amid the daily chaos of casting crises and call sheets, we happily allowed ourselves to be enveloped by the fog of filmmaking. That fog cleared for me the last night before filming began in a reconstructed medieval village on the outskirts of Mulhouse. The mayor invited us to join him at the town hall for a toast to our mutual good fortune. Through a translator, he proudly announced that in this very room in the year 1527, a dozen or so Anabaptists were tried for heresy, frog-marched to the edge of town, and burned to a crisp.

Glasses were raised . . . and never has wine seemed more reminiscent of blood. This was no longer a film about a half-remembered patron. This was real. This was the inception of a movement paid for with breath and blood, an origin enhanced with further martyrdoms, career-killing marginalizations, harsh and frequent migrations, and banishments from American Legion baseball leagues (hey, when you're twelve years old, that's real suffering).

For a moment the fog lifted and I could see clearly. How incredible that these ancestors would put life and limb on the line for something that today might falter as a coffee shop discussion. How incredible that we have sustained these commitments and ideals for 500 years, despite our human failings and frailties, our Darwinian desires to conform to those about us. To be liked. To be successful.

So maybe we do have something to say to the world around us. And just maybe we should take up pen and keyboard and camera and attempt to pierce the oft-veiling mists and contrariness of popular culture. We'll often say our piece poorly. We'll settle for half measures that make a paycheck possible. But so long as, in those fog-clearing moments, we believe that we truly do have a worthy story, I hope we find the courage, and the chutzpah, to keep telling it.

About the author

Joel Kauffmann is married to Nancy Kauffmann, denominational minister for Mennonite Church USA. His current project is developing the program for the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC, which is scheduled to open in 2017.

Take the red pill

Tumbling down the rabbit hole of peacemaking

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker

The night is dark and rainy. A car pulls up to an abandoned building with water cascading down its façade. Three robotic characters, looking pale and lethal, exit the car. A fourth, a man named Neo, looks unsure amid the ominous surroundings. After ascending a winding staircase, one of the trio—a woman named Trinity—ushers Neo into a near-empty room where a tall Black man in dark leather and sunglasses awaits. Morpheus invites Neo to sit in a worn armchair near a table holding a glass of water and says:

> *You're here because you know something. What you know, you can't explain. But you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong in the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. . . . It's all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work. When you go to church. When you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you to the truth . . . Like everyone else, you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.*

Then Morpheus presents Neo with a choice: take a blue pill and continue sleepwalking through life, or take a red pill, wake up, and see "just how deep the rabbit hole goes."[1]

On the surface, a scene from *The Matrix* may seem like a strange framework for describing how I developed a deeper understanding of and commitment to God's shalom. After all, the film revels in violence. Yet Neo's shift—from sensing the repres-

sion in his world, to discovering his physical and mental bondage, to joining the struggle for liberation—resonates with my journey. Over the past decade, I have taken steps away from a narrow view of peace as the absence of war and violent conflict and toward a pursuit of peace that challenges systemic human oppression and embraces forgotten members of creation. This is a snapshot of my story.

"I imagine that right now, you're feeling a little bit like Alice."

When I was ten, my family moved from my rural home in Trinidad to New York City. In Trinidad I did not think of my brownness; I grew up in a context where brownness was the norm. I had much to learn about the ways racial and ethnic categories shape the United States. One lesson came after I won an elementary school tennis match. As I shook hands with my opponent, a white-identified girl from another school, she said, "They only let you win because you're black." Caught off guard, I reacted: "Well, the reason you lost is because you're white." The coaches heard my comment and saw me as the instigator. I realized then that regardless of my identity as a Trinidadian or my character and abilities, I was racially categorized as Black and should expect to share in the injustices that African Americans and other Black people experience here.

Over time, my awareness of racism and other forms of oppression heightened. In high school I had a Morpheus-like teacher whose specialties included telling the truth about the hard facts of American history. He gave an unvarnished picture of European genocide against Indigenous peoples, of European enslavement of African peoples, and of white-identified people's ongoing subjugation of various communities of color. He also inspired us with stories of repressed people's struggle for liberation and equality. A pivotal time in my learning came when MC (as we called him) sent his students to Revolution Books to purchase *A People's History of the United States*. Together we read Howard Zinn's book alongside the state-assigned textbook—an exercise that demonstrated how narratives are shaped by access to socioeconomic power; how our telling of history shapes our loyalties; and how communities are made visible or invisible, essential or expendable, depending who controls the pen.

By the time I went to New York University, I was primed to explore colonialism, racism, economic injustice, and the complexities of life in the Black/African diaspora, past and present. What I had not yet determined was how to bridge my faith with these interests. By my sophomore year, I had been part of three Christian traditions. Yet my faith consistently focused on purity, piety, and personal sin and salvation, resisting secular vices, believing the proper things, and fear of hell. Closely examining and engaging in critiques of oppression was reserved for my liberal arts education.

"You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?"

My journey with Mennonites began when a real-life Trinity invited me to walk through doors I did not know existed. Andy was an activist and agitator whose love for Jesus, peace, and justice took him to Fort Benning, Georgia, for demonstrations against the School of Americas; and to Vieques, Puerto Rico, to support local resistance to the US military presence. He was a recent convert to the Mennonite faith whose passion for the Sermon on the Mount, love for John Howard Yoder's theology, and anarchist politics quickly transformed my life. Together, we discovered Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship (MMF), a church of people from various backgrounds who wrestled with faith, church, and what it means to believe and follow Jesus. The group valued mutual care and support, a practice especially demonstrated when our pastor, Arlene Pipkin, died from cancer. Sermons, prayer, and worship highlighted the public, social implications of Christ's boundary-crossing love and the ways he upset the various structures of his day. Being part of this church was spiritually energizing as I met people who added breadth and depth to my Christianity.

I remember how safe it felt to speak openly about an alternative to more violence and how relieved I was to be among Christians who had not conflated church and state, God and nation, patriotism and the gospel.

After people flew planes into the World Trade Center and reduced the buildings and their occupants to rubble, the grief of New Yorkers was as raw and palpable as the smell of burning fuel

throughout the city. As I watched the events unfold on television from the safety of my family's apartment, my first words were, "We're going to war." In the wake of the attacks, people at MMF organized a gathering at Menno House, a communal residence that hosts Mennonite Voluntary Service volunteers, provides hospitality for travelers, and contains a library of Anabaptist resources. Sitting in the living room filled with books about peace, people took turns reflecting on the traumatic incident, the pain and shock we were experiencing, and the isolation we felt from family, friends, and others who demanded retaliation. Some of those present described how difficult it was to remain committed to nonviolence and reconciliation when such terrifying violence had hit so close to home. I remember how safe it felt to speak openly about an alternative to more violence and how relieved I was to be among Christians who had not conflated church and state, God and nation, patriotism and the gospel.

When the nation's grief eventually became a cry for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, MMF became a hub of resistance. Together, people in our church participated in witnesses for peace in New York City and Washington, DC. Prayer times included requests that cooler heads on all sides would carry the day, that we would learn to love our enemies, and that peace would prevail. Announcement times included updates on the human and economic costs of the war and information on local protests. And when I was involuntarily and illegally arrested at a demonstration against war profiteers, it was our interim pastor, Stan Bohn, who supported me. Our rich peace theology enabled us to withstand the tide of retribution when unprecedented violence came our way, and our stance attracted people to our community. When Andy and I eventually relocated to Elkhart, Indiana, for him to attend seminary, it was hard to leave MMF behind. But the move led me to a new and sometimes painful peacemaking adventure: working for positive systemic change among fellow Mennonites.

"Most of these people are not ready to be unplugged."

Although I expected to have culture shock in Elkhart, I was unprepared to feel disoriented within my denominational family. Andy and I arrived during a fever-pitched Kerry vs. Bush presidential race, and lots of people, Mennonites included, seemed

driven to distraction by the campaign. As one who—because of my faith and anarchist politics—does not vote, I felt isolated everywhere from casual conversations to Sunday school classes where the election was the central topic. The pervasive Mennonite name and genealogy games became tedious. These interactions were not meant to be unwelcoming, but they emphasized my racial, ethnic, and geographical differences, and made it hard to belong. Finding a local church also proved to be difficult. Although MMF was homogenous in terms of racial identity, it was an urban church whose members negotiated transition and diversity daily. In Elkhart it would take me eight years to find a faith community—in an African Methodist Episcopal Church, not among Mennonites.

Why is it that the fastest growing churches consist of people of color, but the power bases do not reflect this shift? Why are so many young adults feeling alienated by the church and unheard by our leaders?

I have gained privileges and opportunities within the Mennonite church—sometimes because people invited me to exercise my gifts or because a quota had to be met; other times because of my persistence—but I have nevertheless been frustrated by practices that betray the denomination's peacemaking claims. Why is it that the fastest growing churches consist of people of color, but the power bases do not reflect this shift? Why are so many young adults feeling alienated by the church and unheard by our leaders? How can we resist war without attending to the racial and class dimensions of military recruitment and concretely supporting people with limited options? Why do men lead most of our organizations while the "worker bees" are usually women? Why are the people most affected by our policies on sexuality so excluded from the conversation? Why is it that most of the people educating future Anabaptist and Mennonite leaders are white-identified men who have a "traditional" Mennonite pedigree, when worldwide Anabaptist growth has shifted to the two-thirds world? Are these and other similar patterns coincidences? Or are there systemic and personal sins at work that need to be confronted and undone?

Over time, I have observed that many people, even those of us who are adamant in our peace and justice stance, are still plugged into structures that distort the church's mission, weaken our

members, and damage our fellowship. For some, that plug is connected to unearned privileges based on racial and gender categories, age, mental and physical ability, class and sexual identity. These privileges blind us to the ways we wield oppressive power over our brothers and sisters. Meanwhile, others are plugged into sources that diminish our self-worth; undermine our call; limit our access to needed resources; and cause emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical death. Many of us can play dominant and subordinate roles depending on the situations we are in.

Many people, even those who are adamant in our peace and justice stance, are still plugged into structures that distort the church's mission, weaken our members, and damage our fellowship.

On bad days, the massive task of resisting these sins against healing and wholeness tempts me to take the blue pill! But I remain committed to the cause and rooted in this theological home because of my pre-Mennonite foundation, and because I believe in the peace message that characterizes this tradition. If the arc of the universe bends toward God's shalom, then I want to join in, wherever I am. So I thank God for the opportunities I have had to seek God's peace in this denomination, in taking Damascus Road antiracism training; in developing antiracist communication principles with colleagues at Mennonite Mission Network; in pursuing a degree in theology and ethics at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary; in working for intercultural transformation and undoing the "-isms" at the seminary; and in building relationships with Mennonite and other allies.

"Follow the white rabbit."

Of all the stops on my peacemaking journey, the most surprising has been shifting from a human-centered view of God's shalom to one that includes justice for other animals. This new awareness began when I attended Wake Up Weekend, a vegan gathering hosted at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Although I was already on a mostly plant-based diet, I was still eating fish, chicken eggs, and products derived from female cows. I went to the event without any intention of becoming vegan; foregoing all animal-based products seemed extreme. What I quickly learned is that the real extremism is in the unmitigated violence used to

make even the products I thought were harmless. What is really extreme is the unrelenting cruelty billions of defenseless animals experience as a matter of course in the flesh-food industry. It dawned on me that I—a professed peacemaker—was investing in unthinkable violence at a scale that I could not even fathom. How had I remained so ignorant of such sustained and senseless abuse? How could I say that I was committed to nonviolence and remain complicit in such a heinous system?

Listening to people talk passionately about the plight of other animals, and confronting my indirect participation in the abuse of other creatures challenged me on such a deep emotional and spiritual level that I was compelled to make the switch. But my initial questions were only the starting point in moving toward a deeper consciousness about the intersections of animal ethics, Christian ethics, environmental ethics, and human oppression. For example, "livestock production" not only creates a vast amount of animal suffering; it is also the biggest contributor to ecological degradation, surpassing the transportation sector in its damage to air, water, and soil. Today, people are decimating rainforests and other green spaces worldwide to raise billions of animals to satisfy a global flesh-food fetish. The environmental impact this causes has huge implications for all of earth's residents, but it is especially alarming for the Indigenous people and wildlife in those areas and for those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The "livestock sector" also exploits people who are economically poor, lack formal education, and otherwise live in socially precarious situations. Slaughterhouses in the United States are not only responsible for massive animal bloodshed; they are also places where workers—many of whom are people of color and/or immigrants—experience grave injustices and abuse. Violence is not only inflicted on other animals in these industrial hell-holes; it is also internalized by workers who harm themselves and others at disproportionate rates.[2]

Of all the stops on my peacemaking journey, the most surprising has been shifting from a human-centered view of God's shalom **to one that includes justice for other animals.**

Even if other animals could be killed, eaten, worn, and otherwise used at minimal to no human cost—even if it can be done

with minimal pain and harm to the animal—the question remains: Is the violence legitimate? Over time, I have observed that one's response to this question is determined in part by how one sees other animals. Rather than taking a utilitarian view of these animals as "food," "clothing," or "test subjects," I now see as biological and theological kin the cows, chickens, chimpanzees, deer, mice, and other animals used in our food, garment, medical, entertainment, and military industries. This perspective comes from biblical texts such as Genesis 1–2, Psalm 104, Job 38–41, Isaiah 65:17–25, and Romans 8:22–23. It has also emerged for me through reflecting on what it means to extend Jesus's compassion to strangers and to the least of these—the neighbors we have neglected because they belong to other species.

I have also observed that how people see violence toward other animals is affected by their understanding of themselves as humans. Do they see that they too are animals? Do they see being made in the image and likeness of God as license to overpower creation? As I have embraced peacemaking with other animals as part of my peacemaking identity, I have come to see them as fellow creatures who share in God's love and are also being reconciled to God in and through Christ. With this orientation in mind, my primary questions are: When it is okay to harm my animal kin? When is it all right to cause suffering to my friends? My response is that it almost never is.

A funny thing happened on my way out of the matrix. When people accept the status quo, they perpetuate violence that is less obvious than planes flying into buildings and bombs falling on cities. The more I realize this fact, the more I believe that peacemaking involves more than resisting overt destructive conflict. Today my peacemaking includes investing in my church families, networking in my community, mentoring youth of color, learning about the prison-industrial complex, and discovering ways to be a better neighbor. It includes writing articles about oppression and resistance, organizing conferences about Christianity and anarchism, and working for racial justice among Mennonites and beyond. It includes making daily decisions about what I eat and wear, thinking and writing theologically about other animals, teaching about and criticizing the flesh-food system, and

"vegangelizing" others to show mercy to all our kin. Like any human effort, these steps are incremental and incomplete, and I continue to discover logs in my eye even as I try to shake the specks from others' eyes. But the call to more justice, grace, equality, and healing remains, and I pursue it alongside others, with God's guidance and by God's grace.

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All these practices constantly remind me that you can't predict where you will land or what will become dear to you when God's vision for shalom takes hold. That I am where I am in my journey never ceases to amaze and delight me. Indeed, I see this diversity of interests as a testament both to the many ways our world is broken and to the many threads we can grab hold of to begin making changes. If there is anything I have learned over the years, it is that rabbit holes are surprising places. Only God knows where they will take us. All we need to do is accept God's invitation, choose to take the plunge, and follow wherever the Rabbit leads.

Notes

[1] *The Matrix*, directed by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski (1999; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD. The movie makes repeated reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

[2] Gail A. Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment inside the U.S. Meat Industry* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2006).

About the author

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker is an occasional writer and speaker with primary interests in a comprehensive peace theology and ethics toward other animals, undoing racism and other forms of oppression, and connecting anarchist politics with Christian faith. She received her bachelor of arts degree from New York University and holds a master of arts in theological studies from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. One of her most recent essays can be found in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Common Questions about Christian Care for Animals* (Cascade Books, 2012). A native Trinidadian and former New Yorker, Nekeisha currently calls Elkhart home.

What a half-Italian Jersey girl is doing in a peace church

Samantha E. Lioi

I remember sitting on the floor in the living room of a Houghton College professor, part of a circle of would-be Menno adults, some students (like me) who were curious about this budding worshiping community, and some students who'd grown up Mennonite, with last names like Stoltzfus and Gingerich—though at the time I had no inkling that in some worlds those names would mean more than other last names. I remember sitting, belly full of tea and warm homemade bread with honey, holding my Bible in my lap, open to Matthew chapter 6. I remember that moment because it was the first time it seemed obvious to me from scripture that Jesus taught nonviolence.

To me, Mennonite readings of the world and of faith, which hold together a firm realism about what's wrong in the world and an unreasonable hope in the possibility of redemption, felt true to both the pathos and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I remember the first time I heard of a listening committee—possibly in that very living room. These people take listening that seriously? Enough to form a committee just to listen through a whole event? (I didn't yet know about the underbelly of committifying things, but I still think it's a beautiful practice.)

I remember the appearance of the mutual aid box at our seminary's reception desk, and a matter-of-fact e-mail from our campus pastor explaining the need and inviting anyone to give. This was just a habit of being community, of being the body of Christ together.

It was also there in Elkhart, Indiana, that I first heard the name Swartzendruber. I am from northern New Jersey where I was surrounded by Italian- and Irish-Americans, and a large enough Jewish population to have played with plastic dreidels in elementary school each year at Hanukkah. Swartzendruber—that

couldn't possibly be one word. It was the name of a local furniture-making business, and I heard it as Swartz & Druber. That's all one word? Really? Wow. No wonder you can't get good pizza around here.

That was one type of culture shock. Another was my first experience of singing "Lift your glad voices" at the end of a funeral held in the seminary's chapel. "We shall not die"? I mean, I know we believe Jesus defied death, but this kind of triumphal singing at a funeral? It was a little much. I was stunned, maybe even embarrassed. When I mentioned it to a classmate, he told me it was traditional to close funerals with this song. These people don't mess around.

Oh, and the singing! Long before I knew the sound of a congregation singing four-part harmony in full voice, our Houghton-area "Mennogroup," as we called it (officially Sojourners Mennonite Fellowship), was learning songs from the blue hymnal, week by week.[1] These words and harmonies were healing for me. "Joyful is the dark." "We are the young—our lives are a mystery." "Bring forth the city of God!" "Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?" A new, deeply honest, and life-affirming way was opening. We even learned and practiced 118 (why do people keep saying 606? I get it now), standing in those living rooms, so we could be official.[2]

I remember a seminary professor's clarity, honesty, and humility in admitting that while we may choose to reject the use of violence, we live in a world governed by force and the threat of it, and we rely on systems built on both. I needed this modeling: to see someone who had committed his life to living and studying and teaching this way of peace sitting with the messiness of this call and these claims without attempting to resolve them. I also had peers at seminary who questioned reflexive calling of the police. We could think together about this. We planned, led, and joined in worship of the Lamb who reigns, against all evidence to the contrary.

To me, Mennonite readings of the world and of faith, which hold together a firm—at times brave—realism about what's wrong in the world and a completely unreasonable hope in the possibility of redemption, felt true to both the pathos and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was no unscathed victor, no swift

triumph over evil, but a painful, personally costly defiance of death and the powers that be. Without the option of meeting force with greater force, there was the naked necessity of trusting God, and God's goodness, and God's constant work making all things new. I continue to be drawn to the tenderness and vulnerability of this ecclesiology, side-by-side with a "damn the torpedoes" persistence. I see that in the story of Jesus. This year during Holy Week, I was especially caught by his agony in the garden. He is scared and weak and pleading—we see the tension of a human being who wants to do the right thing, and wishes it could pass to someone else. And then there is his savvy as he faces Pilate, in dignity, claiming the authority that is his, speaking the truth though it likely will make no difference.

Throwing my lot in with the Mennonite tradition awakened in me that human desire to risk on behalf of something bigger than ourselves, or on behalf of a beloved. I think any true encounter with the gospel, with Jesus, does that to a person; it happened for me in the process of becoming Mennonite. But this risking is not the sacrifice spoken of by politicians and praised in soldiers. In fact, lately, as I learn more about the scars borne by combat veterans, I see we are not talking about an individual's choice to risk his or her life. Rather, in training soldiers to kill reflexively and sending them to kill on our behalf, as a nation we are choosing to sacrifice their basic human moral instincts, and we often ignore or push away their pain when they return, all in the process of preserving our way of life—or so goes a popular national rhetoric. Emotional and relational nonviolence is perhaps the most challenging because it requires long-haul commitment and daily practice, which I believe lays a foundation for refusing to resort to physical violence.

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What I have learned in becoming Mennonite, and in becoming more fully human, is not about sacrifice. It is something about moving toward abundant life. It involves my whole inspirited body/embodied mind-soul. It touches how and what I eat, how I speak to strangers, my understanding of money and how much I

need. Again, things any Christian could (even should!) say about following Jesus, but which I came home to among Mennonites, for whom living simply, honoring participatory community, and finding peaceful alternatives to violent systems were assumed. My path into the hope and the failings of this beautiful and flawed peace church continues to mean facing what is not as it should be in ourselves and our dealings with one another and opening those parts and those places to the compassionate gaze of Christ. This is very grand and easy to say. How does it look in real life?

For the last several years, I've been working with the reality and practice of vulnerability. I find it is woven all through my call, especially the call to live and speak God's justice and God's peace. As I follow generations of spiritual seekers in haltingly opening my deepest places to God—and to my spiritual director—in trust, I have found my own heart to be some of the rockiest soil for sowing peace. What I mean is: the church that shaped me did not teach me to welcome my unwanted parts. The church culture in which I grew up taught me about original sin, taught me regularly to question my motives, taught me that human beings are not—that I am not—trustworthy. It was not a very kind environment for compassion, particularly the gentle compassion for self that is the fertile soil of peace with one's neighbor, to say nothing of one's enemy. Unintentionally we all participated in creating an environment better suited to judging ourselves and others, keeping shame hidden and unspoken, than to opening ourselves to forgiveness and mercy and the depths of healing that flow from our Creator. Still, there was real love there, and the vast beauty of the scriptures, and people bursting with pride to see me baptized. These were the people who planted deeply in me the reflexive assumption that scripture is normative for our living. Here I first experienced the words and taste and touch and smell of communion, and cold, windy sunrise services by the river at the park, with my pastor playing his trumpet to accompany the rising of Jesus.

Yet church did not give me practice at making peace, with myself or with anyone who did not fit the moral code I had been given. Tensions and inconsistencies were to be resolved as simply and neatly as possible, and sin was to be cut off as soon as it was noticed. As I became a regular in our small "Menno group," I saw

a willingness to talk about hard things, an honesty about tensions within us and about the mess of wrongdoing in which we are implicated beyond our choosing. In my seminary professors, and in many beloved friends before and since, I saw a remarkable vulnerability modeled, and I recognized in it a necessary and beautiful and frightening part of living fully as human beings created in the image of God. Indeed, it seems vulnerability is a divine characteristic, and in being transformed into the image of Christ, we become more vulnerable, not less. And mysteriously, only in sitting with my own inner discrepancies can I find what is mine to do, find where the life is. As I allow wanted and unwanted bits of myself to occupy the same space, in the presence of Love, I move toward wholeness and reduce my need for external tensions to be quickly resolved.

To be a peace church is to be vulnerable, despite our many reminders to ourselves that peacemaking and the renunciation of violence were the basic orientation and assumptions of the early church, and despite our belief (quite justified, if at times irritating to our other Christian brothers and sisters) that every part of Christ's body should claim or reclaim this identity.

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We are so small. Such a tiny fraction of the Christians in the United States and in the world. We grow weary of professing things most people think are crazy, unrealistic, and weird—especially in a context where shows of dominating force are generally applauded or reluctantly deemed necessary. In the midst of this, we must continue to nurture vulnerable love as our path to pursuing peace and renouncing violence.

In becoming a Mennonite pastor and leader, I have bumped up against our (Anglo) comfort with significant wealth, our scarce ability to pursue economic justice or practice mutual intercultural relationships. The road from charity to justice is long. Many of our Mennonite systems are ones in which oppressive, culturally biased, sometimes overtly racist assumptions and actions can go unaddressed. These are opportunities to bring unwanted things

into the light, to move from shame into compassion, to be willing to learn and be healed and transformed. There is space here for making peace with ourselves. So we may do justly and honor our own humanity in Christ while honoring the Spirit of Christ in others.

Perhaps it is because early on I was handed such a low view of humanity that I am drawn to the persistent, absurd hope of Anabaptism. No more absurd, though, than a Lamb who is also a shepherd, a God who is an infant and then a poor, traveling teacher, who is made a spectacle of state torture before trust and love are vindicated. This narrative is attractive because it gathers up the truth of our sober observations of the world alongside our wild hopes that God will redeem all things. Plainly the world is alight with beauty we stutter to name in the moments we are undone by wonder and love—and simultaneously, the world is full of unspeakable horrors, cruelty, and violation which we wield against each other and God's good earth. And still we go on singing at the end of funerals, "Jesus hath risen, and we shall not die." Absurd! And achingly vulnerable—as vulnerable as the God who in Christ entrusts us—us!—with the message of reconciliation. Being a Mennonite Christian continues to pull me in because it seems—we seem—to smile knowingly at the unlikeliness of it all and go on believing, for all our unbelief, with spiritual resources for facing our shadows, aware of our smallness and still walking the vulnerable way of Jesus. That sounds like life to me.

So I'm in, and grateful to be in for the long haul—though I admit the lack of cannoli at fellowship meals is at times disappointing.

Notes

[1] *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992).
[2] "Praise God from whom" (Dedication Anthem) is #118 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*; that hymnal replaced *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969), in which this doxology was #606.

About the author

Samantha Lioi is minister of peace and justice for Eastern District and Franconia Mennonite Conferences, a position she has been pioneering with fear and trembling since May 2012. She lives in Christian community with three other Mennonite pastors at Zumē House in Allentown, Pennsylvania.