Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

Decolonial Discipleship as an Intercultural Church

Spring 2026, Vol. 27, No. 1

Foreword

Karl Koop and Jackie Wyse-Rhodes

When Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson approached the editorial council of *Vision* with a proposal to curate a collection of essays dedicated to decolonial discipleship and interculturality, there was strong affirmation. It was encouraging for us to see scholars willing to address an important issue facing the church, and willing to do the hard work of reaching out to other writers to produce an issue of *Vision* with a prophetic edge.

Many of us have been aware of the growing cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity that makes up who we are as a church even as we have grappled with the ongoing legacies of colonialism. But we have much more to learn. Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson make clear in their editorial that while concerns related to decolonization and intercultural engagement are often addressed separately, they need to be "understood as deeply interconnected aspects of our collective journey toward peace, justice, and reconciliation."

The guest editors of this issue of *Vision* take inspiration from Elaine Enns and Ched Myers's *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* (Cascade Books, 2021), a study that engages deeply with personal family narratives, experiences of trauma, and the reality of Indigenous dispossession. In their work, Enns and Myers reflect on specific Mennonite histories of trauma and the problem of white settler colonialism, and they suggest constructive pathways toward healing and restorative justice. In this issue of *Vision*, Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson wish to enlarge the discussion with the view to reimagining a Mennonite faith that takes seriously its growing intercultural reality. Elaine Enns and Ched Myers share this goal and welcome further conversation.

Readers will notice that the editorial both affirms and is critical of *Healing Haunted Histories*. It appears that there is some dissonance among Mennonite scholars! That is neither new nor problematic in and of itself. We encourage a close reading (or rereading) of Elaine and Ched's work alongside the editorial and this collection of voices in *Vision*. And we invite readers to draw their own conclusions. Our hope is that with this issue, constructive and incisive discussion may emerge and result in further conversations and greater clarity regarding the nature of decolonial discipleship and interculturality.

Karl Koop and Jackie Wyse-Rhodes
Editors of *Vision*

Editorial

Decolonial discipleship as an intercultural church

Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson

The intersection of decolonization and interculturality presents both an urgent challenge and a transformative opportunity for the twenty-first-century Mennonite churches in North America. As we grapple with the ongoing legacies of colonialism on Turtle Island (a name used by many Indigenous Peoples to describe what is called North America) and witness the increasing cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of our faith communities, we find ourselves called to a discipleship that is simultaneously rooted in practices of decolonization and committed to genuine intercultural engagement. This special issue of *Vision* explores how these two discourses, often discussed separately, need to be understood as deeply interconnected aspects of our collective journey toward peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Why this focus?

Anabaptist-Mennonite traditions have long emphasized peace, justice, and simple living, but we must honestly reckon with how Mennonite communities have participated in and benefited from colonial structures, particularly through land acquisition and settlement patterns that displaced Indigenous Peoples. At the same time, the face of Mennonite faith communities has been changing dramatically. No longer primarily a faith of European descendants, Mennonite communities now span the globe, and local and regional communities encompass remarkable ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. This reality demands that we move beyond traditional frameworks that center the experiences of legacy groups while marginalizing the stories and perspectives of newer Mennonite communities.

Interculturality and decolonization: A necessary convergence

At the heart of this issue lies a fundamental theological conviction: that faith is contextual—not abstract but embodied, not universal but particular, not placeless but profoundly located. As co-editors, we believe that faithful discipleship requires us to take seriously the specific spaces, lands, and locations where we live out our faith. Our bodies carry the stories of the places we come from and the cultures that have shaped us. Our feet walk on particular soil with its own histories of habitation, displacement, and survival.

To follow Christ in North America means to reckon with where we are: on Indigenous lands that hold both beauty and trauma, promise and pain.

This embodied understanding of faith is deeply rooted in our understanding of incarnation—the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). In Jesus, God did not offer abstract truth from a distance but entered into the particularities of first-century Palestine, walking specific roads, speaking Aramaic, and engaging with the concrete realities of Roman occupation and religious marginalization. The incarnation affirms that divine love always takes on flesh, enters specific contexts, and walks on particular land. To follow an incarnate Christ means we, too, must take seriously the ground beneath our feet and the histories embedded within it.

Furthermore, Jesus's command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27) takes on profound complexity in our intercultural and colonial context. Love requires not just good intentions but careful attention to impact. We must know our neighbors well enough to love them in ways that truly serve their flourishing. When we love only through our own cultural frameworks and experiences, we risk perpetuating harm despite our best intentions. True neighbor-love demands cultural humility and intercultural awareness, recognizing that our neighbors carry their own cultures, histories, traumas, and ways of being that must be honored. On this land, loving our Indigenous neighbors means acknowledging the ongoing impacts of colonialism; loving our immigrant and refugee neighbors means understanding their complex relationships to place and belonging; and loving across all our differences requires both decolonial and intercultural practices that move us beyond superficial unity toward genuine transformation and mutual flourishing.

Jesus's command to love our neighbors as ourselves takes on profound complexity in our intercultural and colonial context.

This understanding of embodied faith necessarily invites us into both intercultural and decolonial practice. An embodied faith calls us to deeply consider the ways our cultures have formed us, such as the languages we speak, the foods that nourish us, the rituals that ground us, and the worldviews that shape our perception. It asks us to bring our whole selves to the work of discipleship, rather than leaving our cultural identities at the door. At the same time, embodied faith demands that we deeply consider the land we inhabit and the histories embedded within it. We cannot claim to love God while remaining indifferent to the stories of those who were forcibly removed from the very ground on which we worship. We cannot pursue peace while ignoring the ongoing violence of colonial structures that continue to dispossess Indigenous Peoples.

The combination of intercultural engagement and decolonial practice is not merely additive but mutually transformative—neither should be pursued apart from the other, and the whole is greater than the sum of the two approaches. Decolonization without attention to interculturality risks being narrowly conceived as work between white settlers and Indigenous Peoples, thereby excluding or minimizing the responsibilities and participation of Black communities, people of color, and immigrant settlers who also live on Indigenous lands. This limited framing fails to recognize how different communities carry distinct relationships to colonialism—some through histories of enslavement, others through displacement and migration, and still others through recent arrival as refugees or immigrants. Each of these communities needs to grapple with what it means to live on Indigenous land, yet their relationships to settler colonialism and their pathways toward solidarity cannot be assumed to be identical. Conversely, intercultural dialogue that ignores colonial histories and ongoing structures of oppression fails to address the fundamental power imbalances that shape our relationships. Only together can these frameworks ensure that decolonial work includes all who live on this land while honoring the particular histories and responsibilities each community brings to this shared work of justice and healing.

The work of peace and justice requires multiple interpretive lenses because our realities are multifaceted and our histories layered. No single framework can adequately address the complexity of living faithfully on Indigenous land while building inclusive communities across differences. We need approaches that can hold historical accountability alongside contemporary solidarity, that honor both particular stories and shared struggles, and that create space for lament while nurturing hope. By bringing together decolonial and intercultural perspectives, we equip ourselves with tools robust enough to engage the full depth of our calling as peacemakers in a broken world.

Navigating terminology

As we engage the complex realities of interculturality, clarity about terminology becomes essential:

- **Cross-cultural** interactions occur when people from different cultural backgrounds engage with one another, often for a temporary period, such as during mission trips, exchange programs, or cultural learning initiatives. While this approach fosters awareness and understanding, it can sometimes remain at the level of observation rather than deep engagement. Cross-cultural experiences may lead to increased cultural appreciation but do not always result in long-term change or reciprocal relationships.

- **Multicultural** approaches acknowledge and value the presence of multiple cultural groups within a shared space, emphasizing representation and recognition. However, these cultures often remain distinct, with limited interaction or influence on one another. The focus is on diversity itself, rather than meaningful relationships or transformation.
- **Intercultural** engagement moves beyond coexistence and surface-level interactions to foster intentional, reciprocal relationships that transform all involved. It emphasizes deep engagement, shared resources and power, and mutual learning. Rather than merely observing or acknowledging cultural differences, intercultural interaction fosters co-creation, collective decision-making, and the formation of something new through sustained dialogue and collaboration.

Similarly, the distinction between *postcolonial* and *decolonial* approaches fundamentally shapes how we understand our responsibilities:

- **Postcolonial** frameworks, emerging primarily from literary and cultural studies, have provided valuable tools for analyzing how colonialism shaped identities, cultures, and narratives.[1] However, the "post" in postcolonial can suggest that colonialism is a concluded historical period, something we are "after" or "beyond." This temporal framing risks obscuring how colonial structures persist in the present, particularly in settler colonial contexts like Canada and the United States where Indigenous Peoples remain dispossessed of their lands and subjected to ongoing forms of cultural, political, and economic marginalization.
- **Decolonial** approaches, by contrast, recognize that while formal colonial administrations may have ended, coloniality—the underlying logics, structures, and relations of colonial domination—continues to organize our world. In the context of Turtle Island, settler colonialism is not a past event but an ongoing structure that continues to eliminate Indigenous presence while extracting value from Indigenous lands. A decolonial framework demands that we move beyond analyzing or critiquing colonialism to actively dismantling these persistent structures. It calls us not simply to include Indigenous voices within

1 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2002).

existing systems but to fundamentally question and transform those systems themselves.[2] For faith communities, this means examining how our churches, institutions, and theologies continue to benefit from and perpetuate colonial dispossession, and committing to material changes that support Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence.

The tension between reconciliation and resurgence likewise deserves attention. While **reconciliation** has been a dominant framework in church and society, Indigenous scholars and activists increasingly emphasize **resurgence**, the revitalization of Indigenous ways of being that do not depend on settler participation or approval.[3] Settler Mennonites of various backgrounds must learn to support Indigenous resurgence while doing their own work of transformation, recognizing that reconciliation cannot be rushed or imposed but must emerge from genuine relationship and structural change.

Healing Haunted Histories: A framework for transformation

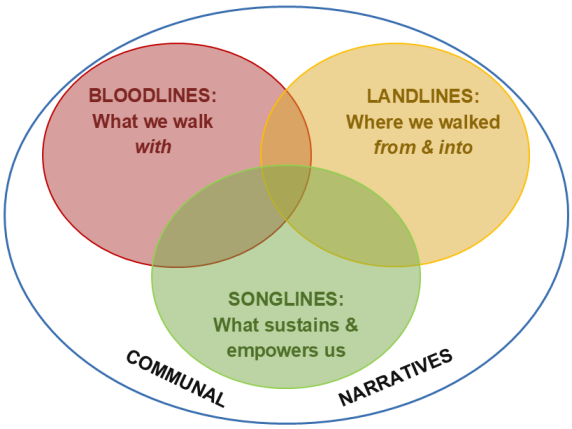
This issue takes inspiration from Elaine Enns and Ched Myers's *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* (Cascade Books, 2021), which offers a powerful framework for understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape our present. Through their LBS model—Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines—Enns and Myers provide tools for settlers to engage with the geographical, genealogical, and spiritual dimensions of decolonization:

- "Landlines" delves into the geographical and historical contexts of settler communities, tracing how land dispossession and environmental degradation have been integral to the colonial project.
- "Bloodlines" examines the personal and communal histories of settlers, revealing how intergenerational trauma and inherited narratives shape identities and relationships.

---

2 See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232.

3 See Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Jeff Corntassel, "Re-envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-determination," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 86–101; Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Broadview Press, 2005).



Storylines (LBS model). Design by Elaine Enns.

- "Songlines" highlights the spiritual and cultural traditions that offer pathways to healing and solidarity, emphasizing the role of faith and storytelling in fostering resilience and transformation.

Enns and Myers introduce the LBS model as a method to guide readers through the process of decolonization. This approach encourages critical engagement with one's own history and place, an understanding of broader social and political dynamics, and the development of restorative practices aimed at repairing and reconciling the harms of the past. By combining personal memoir with scholarly analysis, the authors provide a tool for settler communities to undertake the necessary work of decolonization in a deeply personal and impactful way.

Throughout *Healing Haunted Histories*, the authors emphasize that decolonization is not merely a theoretical or academic exercise but a spiritual and relational journey. They call on settler Christians and others to confront their complicity in colonial violence and commit to practices of restorative solidarity with Indigenous communities. The book serves as both a call to action and a compassionate guide, equipping readers with the tools and inspiration needed to embark on this challenging yet essential path toward healing and justice.[4]

While we, as guest editors, are inspired by and appreciative of the authors' approach to decolonizing discipleship—so much so that we share it as an orienting framework for this issue—we find a limitation in their exploration of Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines in relation to Mennonites, an exploration which is centered primarily around the experiences of Russian

4 Elaine Enns and Ched Myers have released companion resources to guide individuals and groups through the book, including *Throughlines: Healing Haunted Histories Study Guide for Groups* and *Throughlines: Healing Haunted Histories Self Study* (https://bcmonline.org/throughlines/).

Mennonites in Canada. While specificity and contextuality are important in decolonial work, the overwhelming focus on the experience of one of the dominant cultural groups within the Mennonite tradition risks marginalizing other Mennonite stories. Although Dutch, German, Russian, and Swiss Mennonite groups were predominant during the early formation of the Mennonite faith and tradition, the contemporary Mennonite faith has become global, intercultural, and more diverse than ever. Expanding the reflection on Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines beyond legacy groups is necessary as part of the bold attempt to reimagine Mennonite faith in an intercultural reality and therefore also to undertake the profound work of decolonizing Mennonite discipleship. We recogvnize that Enns and Myers share these goals, and offer this issue of *Vision* as an expansion of the work they undertake in *Healing Haunted Histories*.

Situating ourselves as editors

Sarah

When I saw the setup for morning tea in the Anglican church hall, I stopped short. It was the teacups specifically—each a unique floral pattern printed on a white china backdrop with fine gold tracing the rim of both the cup and saucer and winding around the delicate handle. As a child, I drank tea out of cups like these after dinner at my grandparents' homes. Each cup had a different pattern, and I would get to choose one before it was filled with a splash of barely brown tea that I sweetened with several sugar cubes. Some of the teacups featured pictures of Queen Elizabeth II at her coronation or silver jubilee, but my favorites had pink roses. It has been eighteen years since I lost my last grandparent. All of my grandparents were born in Canada—I am a fourth-generation Canadian. Their ancestors came from England, Ireland, and Sweden. Seeing the teacups in the church hall took me back to those dinner tables and that heritage.

This visceral memory was especially striking because I was at this church as part of a research project studying congregational engagement with Indigenous justice.[5] As my colleague and I listened to the priest reflect on our questions about how the church community was engaged with the work of truth and reconciliation on the unceded Anishnaabe Algonquin territory where we were meeting, I could not shake the feeling that these teacups somehow tied me to this tradition—they reminded me of my Britishness in

5 Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "Looking and Listening for Lived Theologies of Truth and Reconciliation: Learning from a Diffuse Art Installation in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 40.2 (2024): 176–192; Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Joshua Zentner-Barrett, "Germinal Ritual: Ceramic Feathers and Social Transformation in Canadian Churches," *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 41 (2025): 21–43, https://doi.org/10.21827/YRLS.41.21-43.

a way I did not expect. This mundane moment and material object revealed a certain relationship with my own history—and with this land. The story Sarah Augustine shares in response to this issue of *Vision* about the bones of bison being made into china has added further layers of significance to this encounter with the teacups.

I do not recall ever seeing teacups like this in a Mennonite church, although I have been part of various Mennonite churches for almost forty years. My parents joined a Mennonite church around the time I was born, and I was dedicated in that community as a child and later baptized there on confession of faith. I attended a Mennonite high school and university, and I became a pastor ordained in the Mennonite tradition. My work on the editorial team for the *Voices Together* hymnal and worship book brought me to Mennonite communities across Canada and the United States, including to some of the churches in Saskatchewan that Elaine Enns describes in *Healing Haunted Histories*.

Reading *Healing Haunted Histories* evoked the opposite felt experience for me as the teacups. Instead of encountering a piece of myself in an unexpected place, it felt like a piece of myself was taken away. Songlines in which I thought I shared—especially the literal songline of the act of community singing—were fused to bloodlines and landlines that are not my own. Having spent much of the last decade developing and introducing a Mennonite hymnal, it was odd to experience such a sense of exclusion from this aspect of my tradition of origin and ongoing affiliation. Exclusion is a familiar feeling for me in Mennonite spaces, although my white skin and lifetime of participation in Mennonite institutions make it possible for me to "pass" as ethnically Mennonite. However, I did not anticipate that it would be so palpable when reading a book that is otherwise intensely and intentionally committed to diversity, equity, and justice. Furthermore, having been part of the complex process of introducing more songs and prayers with connections to Indigenous communities in *Voices Together*, it was disconcerting to encounter Mennonite musical practices framed as something sustaining for an ethnocultural Mennonite community yet situated apart from questions of how what we sing can draw us into relationships beyond ourselves.[6]

I am convicted by the call to restorative solidarity in *Healing Haunted Histories*, and am committed to acting within my spheres of influence for Indigenous justice. At the same time, I receive this book with some

6 *Guide to Voices Together Songs and Resources with Connections to Indigenous Communities in Canada and the United States*, https://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Indigenous-Communities-Guide.pdf; Katie Graber, Anneli Loepp Thiessen, and Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "Centring Relationship: The Necessity and Complexity of Worshiping with Songs and Prayers with Connections to Indigenous Communities," *Conrad Grebel Review* 41.1 (2023): 18–52.

hesitation because of the way it centers a dominant cultural story within the Mennonite tradition—and in so doing risks marginalizing Mennonites who do not share this heritage. In order to engage in decolonial discipleship as an intercultural church, it is crucial to simultaneously hold an ongoing need to challenge the ethnocentrism that lurks in many Mennonite institutions in North America alongside a reckoning with our diverse relationships with this land and its original peoples, including the coloniality that infuses our lives within and beyond the church. I am personally implicated in both of these dynamics in different ways, which is what motivated me to edit this issue of *Vision* with Pablo.

Pablo

In the introduction to my book *Building Mennonite Belonging*, I tell the story of how I became a Mennonite.[7] I was drawn to this community by their beautiful songlines—expressions of faith that resonated deeply within me. These songs carried different sounds and words that our violence-filled world desperately needed. I saw them as gifts to the wider church and world, and I wanted to be fully part of that tradition.

Yet the more I engaged with Mennonites in the US and Canada, the more confused I became. Had I joined a faith community or an ethnic enclave? Local congregations centered around so-called "ethnic Mennonites," those of Swiss, Dutch, German, and Russian heritage. Social gatherings revolved around "the Mennonite game" of tracing genealogical connections, discussions of traditional Mennonite foods, and references to proper Mennonite surnames. While these conversations were enriching and helped me understand one strand of Mennonite tradition, when these particular bloodlines become the dominant narrative, those of us who joined through songlines rather than birthright were made to feel like half-Mennonites at best.

Like Sarah's experience with exclusion, I found that the bloodlines emphasized in Mennonite spaces did not resonate with me. The constant centering of these specific ethnic narratives left me questioning my belonging in the community I had chosen. In my struggle, I encountered wonderful faith partners, mentors, and friends who recognized this problem and encouraged me to tell my own bloodline story. They envisioned a day when the bloodlines of those outside the dominant groups would be fully integrated into a wider Mennonite narrative—one that celebrates the diversity of peoples and gifts each ethnocultural group brings, embodying the intercultural vision of God's kingdom.

---

7 Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun, *Building Mennonite Belonging: Toward an Intercultural Church* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025).

My reflection on landlines began when I moved from the US to Canada. As someone born in Paraguay, my original landline story was rooted there; even in Paraguay, though, as new immigrants, my family's relationship to land differed from other Paraguayans. After university, I spent eight years in the US as an international student, then six years in Toronto pursuing my PhD. Throughout these fourteen years, immigration offices and institutions constantly reminded me that my presence on this land was temporary. Renewing visas every few years, always facing the possibility of rejection, I lived in perpetual tension—physically present on the land but psychologically prepared to leave at any moment.

This temporary status profoundly shaped how I received teachings about colonization, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, treaties, land acknowledgments, and Indigenous justice. These crucial conversations remained abstract because I had never truly settled on the land called Canada. I was a guest in someone else's conversation about belonging.

Yet the songlines of Christian communities engaged in decolonizing work continually invited me into their chorus. They insisted that faithful discipleship on Canadian soil requires reconciling work with Indigenous communities. Even as an international student, I opened myself to this call and engaged deeply in these conversations.

Everything changed when I became a permanent resident. Suddenly, I was settled. These landlines were no longer theoretical but concrete realities I had to grapple with. As a new immigrant and person of color who is now a settler, I carry different landlines than white settlers. I must learn and unlearn what it means to occupy this particular position. The decolonizing discourse has primarily focused on the relationship between white settlers and Indigenous communities. I enter this conversation to bring the complex landlines of new immigrant settlers of color into view—not to diminish Indigenous sovereignty or white settler responsibility, but to expand our understanding of who lives on this land and how we might all participate in decolonial work from our specific locations.

This is why I feel called to work with Sarah as co-editor on this issue. Together, we seek to hold the tension between challenging the ethnocentrism within Mennonite institutions and reckoning with our diverse relationships to this land and its original peoples. My journey, from songlines through excluded bloodlines to complex landlines, exemplifies why decolonial discipleship must be intercultural if it is to include all who now call these lands home.

Overview of the issue

The contributions to this issue approach the intersection of decolonization and interculturality from different angles. Some writers focus primarily

through a decolonial lens—examining settler complicity, treaty relationships, and Indigenous justice—while others foreground intercultural engagement, exploring how diverse cultural traditions enrich and challenge Mennonite communities. Yet the issue as a whole seeks to hold these two frameworks in generative tension, embodying the conviction that neither can be pursued faithfully in isolation. What emerges is not a single method but a chorus of voices, each using personal narrative, sermon, letter, and even poetry as theological method. This storytelling approach is itself significant; it models how decolonial discipleship emerges from particular stories rather than abstract principles.

Several contributors explore how baptismal identity and chosen kinship can expand our understanding of family bloodlines beyond bio-genealogical boundaries. Caleb Kowalko reflects on his experience as a non-ethnic Mennonite pastor and proposes that baptism offers "decolonial and intercultural possibilities" by recentering community around the body of Christ rather than European ancestry. His invitation to ask "When did you join the family through baptism?" challenges the assumption that genealogical connection defines authentic Mennonite belonging. Leah Reesor-Keller writes a letter to her child about what it means to be "treaty people," acknowledging her settler ancestry and the complicity of her family's Mennonite tradition in harms like Timber Bay Children's Home, while insisting that this honest reckoning is essential to faithful discipleship. Peter Haresnape offers a complementary perspective from the English Fens, discovering through his solidarity work on Turtle Island that he grew up in colonized lands, and finding in Treaty a "bottomline" that offers belonging without the erasure of difference—"love" understood as regard for the other and commitment to mutual flourishing.

The theme of landlines emerges powerfully through accounts of migration, displacement, and the sacred significance of place. These narratives also make visible the diverse ways people come to inhabit this land. Sue Park-Hur describes how mountains have oriented her spiritually—from the San Gabriel Mountains, which became her compass as a young Korean immigrant, to the pilgrimage to Mt. Baekdu on the border of divided Korea, where tears and prayers for reunification seemed held in the body of crystal-blue water. Her work with ReconciliAsian demonstrates how landlines of origin and landlines of dwelling must both be honored, including building relationships with the Tongva people whose territory she now inhabits. Jonny Rashid traces how his Egyptian American family's experience as religious minorities shaped their embrace of American Evangelicalism and conservative politics, while his own experience of post-9/11 racism opened him to Anabaptist peace traditions—illustrating how landlines, bloodlines, and songlines intersect differently even within a single family.

Mollee Moua's account of a Hmong family reunion, where elderly siblings shared memories of the Laotian Civil War and their scattered diaspora, reveals how storytelling itself becomes a practice of healing when the church creates intentional space for difficult histories to be heard and honored.

Contributors also demonstrate how the songlines of cultural and spiritual traditions carry deep ethical wisdom that enriches Christian discipleship. Brian Quan explores how Confucian values—honor-shame mediation that preserves dignity, sacramental hospitality expressed through communal meals, and clan-based mutual aid—offer "living songlines" for the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church that embody gospel values in culturally particular ways. Denise Climenhage's journey into the Cree language of her maternal heritage led her to the concept of "wahkohtowin," the understanding that all living things are related and connected to one another and to the Creator. Her sermon invites the Ottawa Mennonite Church into ongoing learning and action, including consideration of reparations. Hyejung Jessie Yum's Creative Land Acknowledgment practice transforms a potentially empty ritual into embodied pedagogy, as demonstrated when students Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji shared homemade bannock from Kitchen's Moose Cree First Nation family recipe alongside poetry and critical reflection on this food's complex colonial history.

Joon Park names ethnocentrism and homogeneity as "the most persistent spiritual adversaries" in postcolonial church life, arguing that these twin tendencies—the very engines of colonialism—must be confronted for any intercultural church to flourish. His insistence that intercultural community requires "true belonging" rather than "fitting in" challenges congregations to examine whether newcomers are welcomed into genuine participation or expected to assimilate to existing norms.

Two responses extend these reflections in important directions. Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, the authors of *Healing Haunted Histories*, affirm the convergence of intercultural and decolonial approaches while sharing examples of how diverse participants such as Nigerian, Ukrainian, Greek, Pakistani, Jamaican, and Cree students have adapted the LBS framework to their own contexts. Sarah Augustine adds a crucial dimension often absent from theological reflection: the material work of dismantling structures. As executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and a Tewa descendant, she insists that churches must move beyond prayer and potlucks to changing laws and policies, following Indigenous leadership in the struggle for liberation. "Freedom for the oppressed is not a metaphor," she declares, calling the church to work that extends beyond reforming our own institutions to transforming the legal and political structures that perpetuate injustice.

Across these contributions, we see immigrants of color, white converts to Anabaptism, those reconnecting with Indigenous heritage, and multigenerational settlers each navigating distinct relationships to Turtle Island—a complexity that any adequate account of decolonial discipleship must address. Taken together, these stories stretch Mennonite identity across continents and generations. Korean, Cree, Paraguayan, English, Egyptian, Swiss, Chinese, and Hmong landlines, bloodlines, and songlines are not peripheral to the tradition but rather integral to it. These are Mennonite stories, carried by communities who now live on Turtle Island and who reckon, in different ways, with their responsibilities to this land and its peoples. What binds these diverse accounts is not sameness of origin or method, but a shared call to discipleship: to follow Jesus in ways that seek justice and peace, practice restorative solidarity, and remain accountable to the places and relationships in which faith is embodied.

Conclusion

As we present this collection of voices, we do so with humility, recognizing that the work of decolonial discipleship in an intercultural church is not a project to be completed but an ongoing journey of transformation. We offer these contributions not as final answers but as invitations to deeper engagement, honest reckoning, and faithful action. May they serve as resources for individuals and communities seeking to live more justly on this land and in the right relationship with all their relations.

About the authors

Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun is Intercultural Liaison for the Presbyterian Church in Canada and is ordained for ministry in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. He is the author of *Thriving Intercultural Ministry: Transforming Hearts, Relationships, and Systems in Community* (InterVarsity Press, 2027), *Building Mennonite Belonging: Toward an Intercultural Church* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025), and *Who Are Our Enemies and How Do We Love Them?* (Herald Press, 2020).

Sarah Kathleen Johnson is Associate Professor of Liturgy and Pastoral Theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. She served on the editorial team for the *Voices Together* (MennoMedia, 2020) hymnal and worship book and is the co-editor of *Worship and Power: Liturgical Authority in Free Church Traditions* (Cascade, 2023).

Baptismal genealogy

Dissolving the boundaries of bloodline, expanding our families

Caleb Kowalko

My journey *to* the Mennonite church has not been a unique one: a former Evangelical discovering a cruciform theology with profound social implications and a humble, lay-led worshipping community. My experience *within* the Mennonite church has also not been a unique one: feeling loved and appreciated but all the while navigating a questionable identity as a genealogical outsider.

It hit me hardest after I accepted the call to be a pastor of a Mennonite congregation. Within a few months of my first year as a pastor, I had been taken aside by a beloved and active couple in the congregation (both now deceased) to be firmly told, "You may be an Anabaptist, but you are *not* a Mennonite." They made their point clearly and firmly that "Anabaptist" was a looser theological identity, while "Mennonite" was a genealogical identity—a "bloodline"—available only by birth, and perhaps marriage. That was a prickly conversation, to say the least, as I had come to believe that, although my heritage is a mix of European backgrounds partially obscured by my mother's adoption, I was a Mennonite—enough so that I accepted the call to be a pastor of a Mennonite congregation. Over the ensuing years, I came to discover that I was far from the first to be told such a thing, not only in my congregation, but across the denomination and the global Mennonite community. And I learned how the conversation about ethnic Mennonite identity is a belaboured, decades-long (at least) debate that often causes many eyes to roll: "We're really talking about this again?!"

Ascribing the best possible intentions to that couple, I realized they were not insinuating that I was not accepted as their pastor, or even as a member of the congregation. They were actually very supportive of me. But even if I could be their pastor or a member of their congregation, I simply could not be a "Mennonite" to them. In a Mennonite congregation, I could serve and worship with Mennonites but not actually identify as one myself. For if I or others were to claim to be Mennonite, it would betray the very container of that identity—a genealogy, family, kinship, and lineage rooted in historical European "Mennonite" descendants. Certainly it is an identity and belonging that enables Mennonites to feel—or imagine—a deep connection to one

another through their genealogy. The "Mennonite game" is the obvious exercise in this, in which when people first meet they try to find mutual genealogical connections.

I became fascinated by how this genealogical identity has been centred within such a beautiful faith tradition. In the spirit of inclusion, it seems as though many—especially urban—Mennonites take the "both-and" approach: "Mennonite" is a lineage *and* "Mennonite" is a faith tradition. I deeply appreciate this effort while also sensing the boundaries that may still remain and the possibility of measuring genuine Mennonite belonging at the intersection of the Venn diagram of lineage and denomination. But my fascination with this situation has led me in other directions: to modern Western understandings of family, to scripture, to theology, to baptism, and to our colonial history.

There is more than one way that genealogical work might affect any of us. In *Healing Haunted Histories*,[1] Elaine Enns and Ched Myers demonstrate and invite all readers to this work as *a way of better understanding the historical currents we are born into*. They demonstrate what it means to have, in the words of Rowan Williams, a "serious sense of history, a willingness to understand how we got to be what we are and to see that how things are is not natural or eternal but results from decisions made—and not made—and quite a lot of things that are not controllable yet require from us a conscious and intelligent response."[2] The response to this genealogical work is the key for Enns and Myers. Hearing the stories and understanding our "bloodlines" mapped across land and time might prompt us to live and act differently. Especially as it relates to generational trauma and colonial histories, they believe this genealogical work can awaken an awareness of these "haunted histories" so that we might be healed through repentance, "response-ability," and radical solidarity.

But there is another way that digging into our genealogies might affect any of us. York University professor Dr. Frances J. Latchford describes this effect with an anecdote that introduces her monograph *Steeped in Blood: Adoption, Identity, and the Meaning of Family*:

> *Not so long ago, my mother presented me with an old manuscript, which she claimed was a copy of a journal and letters written by my great-great-great-great-grandfather Timothy Rogers (1756–1827). Inside the journal was a genealogy dating back to the thirteenth century that apparently links me not only to John Rogers the martyr (1505) but also to Edward I, king of England (1272). With the genealogy in hand, I was, of*

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

2 Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 10.

> *course, utterly seduced by these apparent bio-facts. They impressed me with myself. My immediate response to my mother's revelation was a deeply felt sense that this bio-genealogical knowledge—preserved magically, simply, materially, incontestably in the mere fact of a biological tie—reflected on me and said something unique about myself. In the course of this momentary seduction, I felt a rightful claim to identify with martyrs and kings. Feeling the powerful and immediate pull to identify with this bio-genealogy, however, does not erase for me the question of whether or not this kind of knowledge really does or should be understood to genuinely reflect who I am. This idea is operative in me at the same time that I am strongly suspicious of it. . . . This royal revelation story illustrates how bio-genealogical knowledge shapes our experiences of self and identity. It also elicits important questions about how bio-genealogical knowledge produces differentiated "family" subjects in the modern Western context. It has implications for how the possibilities of "family" experience are limited and determined in a social- political-historical context that insists on giving distinct meanings to the absence and presence of biological ties, or a knowledge of the latter, between "family" members.*[3]

Genealogical work, in other words, can have a profound effect upon our sense of *self, identity, and belonging*. It does so by inviting us to imagine genuine connection—and separation—through lineage, bloodline, or, as Latchford calls it, our bio-genealogy. This is certainly not an experience unique to Mennonites, then. This effect is something that I believe, along with Latchford, is taken for granted and widely accepted. Even if this was not the main goal of the methodology described in *Healing Haunted Histories*, it may be taken for granted by Enns and Myers as well. Our identities and sense of belonging can be largely impacted through the discovery of a bio-geneological tie. This is indeed what draws many people to this kind of bio-genealogical work in the first place. Latchford believes we catch a glimpse of this in the slogans of DNA testing services like "AncestryDNA's 'Discover the family story your DNA can tell' and 23andMe's 'Get to know you'."[4] She argues that while such knowledge has this impact on the identity and belonging of individuals, it is an impact that is not inherent to the bio-genealogical tie itself, but is rather an impact that we ascribe *to* the bio-geneological tie. What makes a family bond *genuine*, to Latchford, is not the presence of shared heredity or "blood," but the "onto-epistemic choice" to love and belong to one another even across difference.[5] This points to the possibility of reimagining real familial bonds.

3 Frances J. Latchford, *Steeped in Blood: Adoption, Identity, and the Meaning of Family* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 3–4.

4 Latchford, *Steeped in Blood*, 301.

5 Latchford, *Steeped in Blood*, 310.

Many Indigenous Peoples in Canada were—and are—those who understood and took seriously the possibilities of this choice and had the familial flexibility and openness to accept those who were different with the possibility of creating a new family by forging treaties. Treaties were never *just* legal documents. They often created the conditions for a new family or kinship network: a sense of identity and belonging. Harold Johnson, a member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation, narrated this new family being formed in Enns's own Treaty 6 territory:

> Kiciwamanawak, *my cousin: that is what my Elders said to call you. When your family came here and asked to live with us on this territory, we agreed. We adopted you in a ceremony that your family and mine call treaty. In Cree law, the treaties were adoptions of one nation by another. At Treaty No. 6 the Cree adopted the Queen and her children. We became relatives.*[6]

This new family relationship was not understood as a metaphor by many Indigenous Peoples in Canada.[7] It was a *genuine* family bond that spanned family lineage (and species!) and was made possible by the Creator mediated through the land itself, rather than bio-genealogy. It was intended to join different peoples to become one wider family with the firm sense that they truly belonged to one another and to the land. This understanding of treaty can demonstrate how, when faced with different peoples, family and kinship may indeed be identified as a boundary, but it is a boundary that is capable of being *expanded* and reoriented through a sacred decision—a choice. Reckoning and repenting of our haunted histories perhaps includes the ways we have neglected or distorted this opportunity for expanded family.

But to those of us in the Christian faith, perhaps the invitation to this opportunity is one that reaches much further back, to that moment when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist. There is wide acceptance across orthodox Christian traditions that baptism and the decision to be a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth unsettles our social matrix on all levels, reorienting our relationships and alliances around the body of Jesus. This impact of baptism touches kinship and the family as well. It's hard to ignore Jesus's words in Mark 3:32–35 (also Matthew 12:46–50, Luke 8:19–21):

> *A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."* (NRSVue)

6 Harold Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government* (Purich Publishing Ltd., 2007), 13.

7 Keavy Martin, "Kinship is not a metaphor," *Settler Colonial Studies* 13, no. 2: 219–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2022.2077901.

Reflecting on this passage in his commentary *Binding the Strong Man*, Ched Myers explains how, in Mark, Jesus "introduces a new kinship model, based upon obedience, not to the family or clan patriarch, but to God alone (3:35). . . . He has repudiated the 'old fabric' (2:21), in order to make way for the new order. The fundamental unit of 'resocialization' into the kingdom will be the new family, the community of discipleship."[8]

Jesus's words about family may sound like loss, or like a command to abandon the *people* we deeply love and to whom we feel a deep bond (especially if one reads harsher words by Jesus about the family, such as in Luke 14:26). While following Jesus may require a severance (Matthew 10:34–35), the theological aim of baptism and discipleship is not the elimination of loving, nurturing bonds to create isolated individuals severed from any sense of belonging. Baptism does not need to destroy the ways families can potentially witness to God's love, and so should not be conceived as loss or destruction. Rather, the waters of baptism are aimed at dissolving the *boundaries* of family, which opens up and liberates the possibilities of our identity and belonging from the private confines of family systems. That is, baptism is the fundamental *expansion* of our family and all its love and allegiances. By faith, our baptism might unlock our capacity to, in the words of Latchford, "decentre the biological family, rethink the possibilities of our bonds, and multiply our abilities *to be* family."[9]

Perhaps whatever bond we imagine through our genealogies, or even just our "sameness," is now to be imagined through our baptism.

A professor of mine, Dr. Willie Jennings, often shared a story with his students about the baptism of his friend's son, which he attended. He recalled sitting in the back of the sanctuary, watching as his friend, his friend's son, and the minister all stepped into the water of the baptistry together. After the young man had given his testimony from the pool, the minister allowed the father to step forward and share some words. He took that opportunity to speak to his son, reflecting on his and his wife's joy when he was born and how proud they were to watch him grow and spiritually mature. But then he spoke some particular words to his son that Dr. Jennings wanted us all to hear. He told him, "but now, I no longer call you 'my son' but 'my brother in Christ.'" The father then stepped back, the minister stepped forward, and the young man was baptized by water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

8 Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Orbis Books, 2008), 168.

9 Latchford, *Steeped in Blood*, 26.

Baptism can point us toward expanded life together. It creates the possibilities of relating to one another as *real*—not just metaphorical—siblings in Christ across imagined boundaries of family, nation, race, ethnicity, and language. An expanded family emerges from that choice to step into the way of Jesus of Nazareth.

I would be remiss if I were not to acknowledge how this life-giving, boundary-crossing possibility undergirding baptism was distorted during the encounter between European colonialists and Indigenous Peoples around the world, including in the history of this nation now called Canada. In so many instances, baptism became a weapon of cultural genocide against Indigenous Peoples. Rather than expanding loving familial belonging, conversion and baptism were used to irreversibly sever loving bonds in Indigenous families and kinship systems and coercively repudiate their language, culture, and spirituality. This colonialist baptism reoriented Indigenous Peoples around the white European body rather than the body of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew from first-century Palestine, as kindred gentiles grafted onto the covenant of God's saving work. These are among the hauntings—the wounds—that need healing in our spaces and histories, as Enns and Meyers have so tactfully expressed in *Healing Haunted Histories*.

Still, I sense our responsibility to that history as settler Christians is not to abandon this meaning of baptism but to lean into it all the more as a way of widening our sense of identity and belonging to one another in Christ as a *real* family. Dr. Jennings reflects on this further in his essay "Being Baptized: Race":

> *A family gathered around a baptismal font or a congregation staring at a baptismal pool often see themselves reflected in those waters, either remembering their own baptism, or contemplating the joy of their community gathered for that event. Neither thought is wrong, but neither yet sees what the waters hold. This child or adult enters through the waters of baptism the body of Jesus filled with different bodies, spanning space and time. The newly baptized are set on a journey that will bind them to peoples they have not seen, to ways of life they have not known, and endow them with a holy desire to love other people different from the people who brought them to those waters.*[10]

Perhaps we can perceive the decolonial and intercultural possibilities in such a baptism. Perhaps this is how the Spirit is always pushing us. Perhaps whatever bond we imagine through our genealogies, or even just our "sameness," is now to be imagined through our baptism. Perhaps baptism allows us to turn around and look at our family genealogies as the "old wineskin"—still

10 Willie Jennings, "Being Baptized: Race," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Second Edition, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 286.

recorded, still accessible, still important to understand historically, but wrapped up in old, limited forms of identity and belonging.

What if the questions of the "Mennonite game" were not "Which 'Friesens' or 'Wiebes' do you belong to?" or "Who were your grandparents?" but rather "When did you join the family through baptism?"

And perhaps this means that the Mennonite church and its congregations have a tremendous opportunity before them. Not to simply open up the door to allow others to be genealogically "Mennonite," but to re-centre the new family, re-organized around the first-century Jewish Palestinian body of Jesus rather than around the white bodies of European descendants. Since bio-genealogical belonging has been centred in many Canadian Mennonite contexts, there is an opportunity not to simply throw away this emphasis on familial connection but to redefine it and lean into this expansion that Jesus has made possible.

Centuries ago, Mennonite Anabaptists paved a way by dying for the conviction that baptism into the Christian faith was not a birthright passed on through citizenship or lineage. Today, "genealogical" Mennonites can pave the way for all of us to better understand that my "bloodline" may name those from whom I came, but it does not define or contain all of those to whom I *truly* belong through baptism.

What if the questions of the "Mennonite game" were not "Which 'Friesens' or 'Wiebes' do you belong to?" or "Who were your grandparents?" but rather "When did you join the family through baptism?" or "Can you tell me about your baptism story?" This is not to rekindle old forms of division over baptismal convictions (pouring versus dunking, or even infant versus adult). Rather, it is to alter the way we imagine our bonds and connections to one another, away from the bio-genealogical, in order to say within and across faith traditions, "By the grace of Christ, you and I are truly siblings. My family is your family. My people are your people."

About the author

Caleb Kowalko received his MDiv from Duke Divinity School in 2016 and has been truly blessed to serve as the pastor of Calgary First Mennonite Church for the last seven and a half years. Caleb stepped away from ministry at the beginning of 2026, but he looks forward to engaging with all things church and theology as long as he has breath in his lungs.

Mountains that speak to us

Sue Park-Hur

The work of Elaine Enns and Ched Myers has profoundly shaped my journey as a Korean American peacebuilder and the ministry of ReconciliAsian, a peace center based in Los Angeles.[1] For almost two decades, their friendship, their writings, and the community of practitioners I have met through them have offered encouragement and challenge in what it means to follow Jesus. Their book *Healing Haunted Histories* has been especially pivotal, offering a framework for engaging the intersections of faith, history, and place. The three threads they name—landlines, bloodlines, and songlines—parallel and deepen the work we do among immigrant churches. Of these, the most formative has been the invitation to remember our landlines.

Enns and Myers define landlines as "places of personal, communal, and ancestral inhabitation, past and present. They are geographies and landscapes of memory, struggle and contestation, affection, sustenance, and identity—and hold deep stories of peoples' placement and displacement."[2] My first awareness of the importance of landlines came when I was eight years old. It is unimaginable in this current political climate with its anti-immigrant sentiments, but in 1980, my aunt, who was already living in the United States, sponsored over twenty Park family members to come to the United States. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act revoked the national quota system and made family reunification possible for families like ours, enabling them to leave a Korea under military coup and seek a better life in the United States. On my last day of second grade, I went to say goodbye to my teacher. I no longer remember her name, but her words remain etched in me: "Remember this land. Don't forget the land you came from." That night, I took a spoon into the backyard, scooped a handful of dirt into a plastic bag, and tucked it into the one suitcase I was allowed to carry. I did not understand the gravity of being uprooted from my homeland, but there was a part of me that knew that the ground I was on was shifting and that I needed to take a piece of the land with me.

Coming from a homeland where approximately 70 percent of the country is mountainous, settling in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in California was strangely familiar and comforting. When I lost my bearings in

1 ReconciliAsian, https://www.reconciliasian.org/.

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

the new country, I faced the mountains to find north. They became not only a compass with which to recenter my body, but they became my emotional and spiritual anchoring too. I remember being afraid to walk home alone after school, not knowing if I would be harassed by bullies on bikes because I was one of the few Asians in the school. I quickly discovered in the new land that racism was learned at an early age for both the dominant group and the minoritized groups. One of the ways I found courage in my steps was to look toward the mountains as I headed home and quietly sing Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." The San Gabriel Mountains oriented my body and soul, grounding me and teaching me that the power and mystery of the Divine was near.

This call to remember landlines has become a core work in the ministry of ReconciliAsian. As part of the Korean diaspora, we grapple with the pain of a motherland that was divided over seventy years ago. In 1945, foreign powers drew a line at the thirty-eighth parallel without the consent of our people.[3] This arbitrary boundary scarred the land, ruptured families, and inaugurated decades of militarization. Growing up in a country without a permanent peace treaty has profoundly fragmented the Korean psyche and body.

One of my most profound experiences from the past thirteen years in the ministry of ReconciliAsian was preparing for a reconciliation forum with officials from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). After years of building trust and strong relationships with the help of many friends who had paved the way in the past, the proposal to co-host a reconciliation forum was miraculously granted by the ministers in the DPRK (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). However, the plans to go into the DPRK in the late fall of 2017 came to an abrupt halt when the United States took a hostile stance on China and imposed a travel ban to North Korea. We were very disappointed at the prospect of canceling this event that we had been planning for so long. However, we pivoted our plans and decided to hold a reconciliation forum in Yanji, China, with members of the Korean diaspora from across Asia and North America. No delegates from the DPRK were able to attend, but it was an important gathering of global peacebuilders working toward reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

After the forum the delegates headed to Mt. Baekdu (백두산), which sits on the border between present-day North Korea and China. This majestic mountain is more than just the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula. In Korean mythology, it is revered as the birthplace of the Korean people and the spiritual origin of the nation. The trip up Mt. Baekdu was

3 Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (Modern Library, 2010).

harrowing, with multiple bus stops and a slippery jeep ride to get to the top in freezing temperatures. Due to severe weather and icy winds, we were unsure if we would be able to make it to the vista and if we would be able to see the actual crater lake on top. Miraculously, the delegates made it safely to the top and saw Heaven Lake (천지) open up. Standing on this holy and mystical mountain entranced us, and our emotions swelled with awe and reverence. Simultaneously, we also felt deep sadness in realizing that we were standing on the China side overlooking the Heaven Lake and unable to enter from North Korea. We felt like every tear and prayer longing for reunification and reconciliation was held in that body of crystal-blue water, and mother mountain was holding them all. The realization that land holds our stories was palpable while standing there.

A few days later, the Korean American delegates flew from China to Jeju Island, the largest volcanic island in South Korea, located southwest of the Korean Peninsula. There we climbed Mt. Halla, the tallest volcanic mountain in the country, which stands at the center of the island. It is a sacred site, often symbolizing a place that bridges earth and heaven. In spite of the breathtaking beauty that the island holds, Mt. Halla and its vicinity also hold painful stories of the Jeju 4.3 massacre, in which tens of thousands were killed in the late 1940s.[4]

One of the delegates, who is a pastor and woodworking artist, secretly picked up pieces of wood from Mt. Baekdu and Mt. Halla and brought

4 Kim Jongmin, "Early Cold War Genocide: The Jeju 4.3 Massacre and U.S. Responsibility," *Korea Policy Institute*, 4 Apr. 2020, https://www.kpolicy.org/post/early-cold-war-genocide-the-jeju-4-3-massacre-and-u-s-responsibility.

them to the United States. With the pieces of wood he found on these holy mountains, he designed a reconciliation cross. The cross Sungwhan designed looks like two people embracing each other. The reconciliation cross, I think, encapsulates the ministry of reconciliation—to embrace the complex stories that the land holds and in that process find healing and hope.

Remembering landlines does not end in the motherland. Enns and Myers remind us that discipleship also means relating to the land where we dwell here and now. We are not to merely settle on the land and reap the benefits, but we must learn to live in right relationship with it and its inhabitants. For the past forty-five years, my family and I have taken root in the Los Angeles river basin watershed with the San Gabriel Mountains above us. Through Enns and Myers's connections, we have begun building relationships with Indigenous leaders who have been stewarding the Tongva land where we live. Native American and Asian American cultures share many common values, such as the importance of community, harmony, reciprocity, and ancestral connection. Thus, it has been invigorating to collaborate with Gabrielino-Tongva organizations to visit sacred sites, and friendships have deepened to the point where we have been invited by Indigenous Christians to preach at their church and we have invited them to preach at our local church.

The majestic San Gabriel Mountains that have always pointed me to the north endured a devastating wildfire in January 2025. Over 14,000 acres of Los Angeles County burned, starting at the epicenter in Eaton Canyon, only three miles away from my home. The extreme hundred-mile-an-hour winds and dry vegetation created the perfect conditions for such destruction in such a short time. Many of my friends' homes burned down completely, and the extensive smoke damage has resulted in many more families being displaced even as I write. The charred, bare mountains, excavators leveling the ground of burned homes, and haulers removing debris in the area are visible reminders that these grounds hold stories and hauntings—of stewardship, dispossession, racial disparities, resilience, and the ongoing struggle to seek restitution and reparation. The mountains have not forgotten and have held these memories. Following Jesus at this time and in this place has activated many faith leaders in the community to stand in solidarity and to

center the needs of the fire victims, engage with lawmakers and insurance companies to compensate those impacted, and re-examine how we build in times of climate disaster. This work of repair and restoration toward healing and hope is an essential part of Christian witness and discipleship.

For the past several years, the ministry of ReconciliAsian has included co-leading Hidden LA tours with my daughter, Lynn. It is an intergenerational effort to decolonize the dominant history we were taught and to excavate the rich and restorative stories of the marginalized. We guide participants to Tongva sacred springs and to neighborhoods scarred by exclusion and resilience—Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Koreatown, and Historic Filipinotown. Walking these lands, we remember histories often silenced: the extermination of Indigenous Peoples during missionization, the lynching of Chinese immigrants in 1871, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the burning of Watts in 1965, and the fires of Koreatown in 1992. These lands have borne witness to these cycles of violence and resilience. And we also bear witness and retell stories of resilience and hope from people learning to not only survive but thrive communally as they help to steward the land in the present.

For me, grounding in mountains means refusing to forget the trauma and resilience embedded in Korean soil while also refusing to overlook the hauntings of Los Angeles. Both require deep work of unearthing economic, political, and ecological wholeness, and we need to find such connections to heal collectively.

My teacher's words—"remember this land"—still echo after four decades. I long for healing in the San Gabriel Mountains where my children and I have made our home. I long to stand one day on Mt. Baekdu from the Korean side, to touch the soil of my ancestors before borders divided them. Enns and Myers remind us that decolonization is lived discipleship: remembering haunted histories, transforming inherited structures, and practicing restorative solidarity. Mountains embody this call.

About the author

Sue Park-Hur is the co-director of ReconciliAsian, a peace center in Los Angeles. She is also the director of racial ethnic engagement for Mennonite Church USA and a member of Pasadena Mennonite Church in California.

kahkiyaw niwahkomakanak—All my relations

A sermon

Denise Climenhage

This sermon was preached at Ottawa Mennonite Church in Ottawa, Ontario, on September 21, 2025. It emerges from and speaks into a particular local context. You are invited to reflect on and explore related opportunities in your local community.

> *[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*
>
> *Learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)*
>
> *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35)*

tanisi, Denise Climenhage nitsikason. Fort Erie, Ontario ochi niya, maka migwich Ottawa niwikan. Hello, my name is Denise Climenhage. I'm from Fort Erie, Ontario, but now I live in Ottawa.

Some of you have read in the most recent issue of the *Forum*, our church newsletter, about my Indigenous language learning experience—specifically my study of Plains Cree. I began this in earnest during the COVID pandemic.

A few weeks ago, Andy, one of our ministers, asked me about sharing how this experience related to my faith and my identity, and if I would share my thoughts on what Ottawa Mennonite Church (OMC) may be called on to do in terms of Truth and Reconciliation with our Indigenous sisters and brothers. Andy was very flexible, offering several possibilities for delivering my message this morning. Given the breadth of the topic, and the fact that I owe the OMC community a detailed treatment of my experience, considering I've worshipped at OMC since 1985, I've opted to use the sermon time, rather than to roll out a highly condensed version as the Children's Story.

My Cree family

So why study Cree? I love history, particularly Canadian history, and the Cree Nation, which is both populous and spread throughout Canada, has great significance in many ways to the development of our country. But the greatest attraction for me to learn the language is a familial connection.

Despite my Germanic family name and deep Anabaptist (specifically Brethren in Christ) roots on my paternal side, my mother's heritage is Cree. Mom came to Ontario from northern Saskatchewan in 1948, at age fifteen, to attend the Niagara Christian College, the Brethren in Christ boarding school in Fort Erie near Niagara Falls. At the time, Mom's family lived on a rural homestead thirty miles north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, where high school attendance could not be arranged locally. My grandmother and her children attended the Brethren in Christ North Star Mission church, an outreach established by congregations in southern Saskatchewan in Kindersley and Delisle.

Mom's grandmother, Bella Halkett, was one of the first residents in the La Ronge residential school when it was built in 1907. We know this from a 1981 transcript of an interview in Cree from the Saskatchewan Archives Board in which Bella's cousin Sarah Ballantyne recounts how she and Bella were brought to the school as seven-year-olds from the Little Hills Reserve, six or eight miles away, via dogsled by the school's principal and Anglican clergyman Robert Brown. La Ronge today is a two-hour drive north of Prince Albert and a four-hour drive north of Saskatoon.

My great-grandmother Bella died a single mother in her late twenties in about 1930 in Prince Albert, and left behind a daughter, my grandmother, Frances, then twelve years old, and two very young sons, Percy and Alan. None of these children attended residential school. My grandmother went into foster care in Prince Albert, and Percy and Alan were adopted by Bella's cousin Sarah Ballantyne and taken north to live on the trapline near La Ronge. My grandmother Frances married a homesteader of British heritage, while her brothers married Cree women and raised their families in and around La Ronge.

We're not sure how much contact my grandmother had with her Cree relations in La Ronge over the years. Sarah Ballantyne would show up from time to time during our visits from Ontario, but Grandma never really explained the connection. In the mid-1970s, my grandmother began volunteering in the kitchen and dormitory of the Timber Bay Children's Home at Montreal Lake, midway between her home and La Ronge, which the Brethren in Christ had begun operating a few years earlier. During this time, she connected and established close relationships with her seven nieces, her brother Percy's daughters (Doreen, Annie, Jemima, Adele, Rose, Alice, and Nancy), who were residents there. Although these nieces are my mother's first cousins, they are around my age. Her nieces would spend weekends

at my grandmother's home, and the eldest, the late Doreen, lived with my grandmother while completing high school in a nearby town.

In the early 1990s I drove my grandmother to La Ronge to visit her nieces and their families and to obtain information from them in order to apply for my grandmother's Band membership and Indian status, for which she became eligible when the Indian Act was amended in 1985. This was the first time I met my La Ronge cousins.

These cousins are fluent Cree speakers, and they have since told me that my grandmother was a "silent speaker" of Cree—one who understands, but does not speak, the language. This may or may not be true.

Cree language and culture

After meeting my La Ronge relatives, I sought opportunities to study Cree in Ottawa without success. However, during the COVID pandemic, and with increased resources for Indigenous language revitalization from the Commission on Indigenous Languages, many opportunities to learn Cree (and other Indigenous languages) remotely, including from instructors in Western Canada, suddenly became available.

I should explain that my relatives in La Ronge, and Cree-speaking residents in the communities north of La Ronge such as Stanley Mission and Southend, speak Woodland Cree, whereas the dialect I study is Plains Cree. The latter is widely spoken throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta and the dialect of instruction by universities in those provinces, even though many instructors' first dialect is Woodland Cree. The two dialects are mutually understood, the primary difference being that the "y" sound in Plains Cree is replaced by the "th" sound in Woodland Cree.

My study has been a combination of informal conversational courses and university credit courses. Both formats have incorporated cultural teachings. Significant elements of Cree culture and community are the concepts of being connected, animacy (that is, being alive), and kinship.

You've just heard about "all my relations" or "kakiyaw niwahkomakanak" in the conventional sense of the expression; however, the Cree worldview goes a step further and embraces the concept of "wahkohtowin," which means that all living things are related and connected to one another and to the Creator. "wahkohtowin" implies that all living things have a spirit, and that's how everything is connected.

It follows that the Cree language, which does not distinguish gender as Romance languages do, applies the concept of animacy (whether or not a thing is living) to each noun. Living things are animate and non-living things are inanimate. This attribute is usually pretty easy to determine, but not always, as in the case of bannock (or fried bread), trousers, and mittens—each of which is animate.

Kinship terms, or the words used to describe relationships, are very important and strongly emphasized in studying the Cree language. Cree prayers and public addresses often conclude with the expression "kahkiyaw niwahkomakanak" ("all my relations"), reminding all present that they are included in the prayer and that they are all related to each other. The relationships Cree kinship terms describe reflect the Cree community's structure and in some cases indicate how children whose parents were unavailable would be cared for and how distant relatives must be before it would be acceptable for them to marry one another.

There are no specific words for great aunt or great uncle in Cree—those individuals would instead be called grandmother or grandfather. The Cree word for aunt translates as "little mother." There are no particular words for maternal-to-maternal cousins; they are called siblings. There are no first, second, or third cousins . . . they are all called siblings, cousins, or relatives.

Beyond giving me a broader understanding of Indigenous and specifically the Cree language and culture, my study experience has made me appreciate the strength of kinship within Cree communities. It has provided insight into the familial ties in the Cree community that were weakened or severed by the experience of residential school, the foster care system, and incarceration. It has given me greater appreciation for the humour, compassion, and resilience that has allowed victims of the trauma of these experiences to support those with greater need than their own, to regain and maintain community, and to work to revitalize their language. It has made me realize my own position of privilege in growing up in a stable, supportive, and affirming family, community, and church.

My experience has increased my appreciation for my La Ronge cousins and the companionship and care they gave to my grandmother—especially in early 2011 during her final days, when her children and grandchildren were all in other provinces.

I'll never be fluent enough to conduct conversations with my La Ronge cousins entirely in Cree, but they're thrilled that I'm learning the language, eager to help me figure out idiomatic expressions, and happy to begin and end our chats with Cree greetings and farewells.

Cree culture and Christian faith

From a faith perspective, studying Cree has let me see how others have integrated their Indigenous spirituality and Cree worldview into their Christian faith.

Dorothy Visser was one of my earliest Cree instructors, whose classes out of Surrey, British Columbia, I happened upon by chance in an internet search. I've visited Dorothy in person twice in British Columbia, and I still attend her Monday night Zoom classes.

In addition to teaching Cree, Dorothy—a residential school survivor—is a leader of Hummingbird Ministries, founded by her friend Mary Fontaine.[1] Hummingbird Ministries is a Christian ministry for urban Indigenous youth in Vancouver who have little or no contact with their home communities. Dorothy integrates her strong Christian faith and the Indigenous principles based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings (love, respect, honesty, courage, truth, wisdom, and humility) throughout her instruction. In 2022, when Mary Fontaine was appointed Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, she chose Dorothy to accompany her in the role of Indigenous Spiritual Elder for her installation in Halifax.

Dorothy lives her faith. Like several of her Indigenous students, Dorothy has worked and volunteered to support the largely Indigenous displaced and dispossessed community in Vancouver's Lower East side. Many of these people are part of the large Cree diaspora in the British Columbia Lower Mainland from the Prairie provinces. Dorothy and these students are not wealthy, and they are often grappling with their own families' challenges with housing, mental health, missing relatives, and other social issues. I hear their stories in bits and pieces between instruction on grammar and reviews of sentence structure, and for me they are models for living out today's scriptures in their love for others, especially for those who are oppressed.

Calls to action for our congregation

What is OMC called to do as we approach September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which recognizes the horrors of the Canadian Indian residential school system?

Certainly, we need to commit to learning more about past institutional injustices and land loss perpetrated against Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Living in Ottawa, we're fortunate to have opportunities to learn and listen to many Indigenous voices. Two such opportunities are the walking tours in downtown Ottawa and at the Beechwood Cemetery on September 30 that discuss the federal government's role in the Indian residential school system. Ongoing public events at the Wabano Centre in Vanier,[2] by the Indigenous Studies school at Carleton University,[3] and through the Ottawa Writers Festival[4] are also examples of opportunities to listen and learn. Resources on Indigenous issues are available from the OMC library and Mennonite Church Canada's Commonword Resource Centre. The

1 Hummingbird Ministries, https://hummingbirdministries.ca.

2 Wabano Centre—Indigenous Centre for Excellence in Health Care, https://wabano.com/.

3 Indigenous Studies—The Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies, Carleton University, https://carleton.ca/iis/indigenous-studies/.

4 Ottawa Writers Festival, www.writersfestival.org.

University of Alberta and Coursera offer an excellent and free Indigenous Canada Course that teaches Indigenous history and contemporary issues online.[5] And the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network,[6] which is provided with every television cable package, offers educational and cultural programming as well as news from an Indigenous perspective.

I know that individuals in the OMC community were inspired to work toward reconciliation during our annual Days of Worship and Reflection in early 2016. This was soon after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its recommendations for achieving reconciliation.[7] As a community we participated in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise illustrating the historic mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples, led by Algonquin Elder Barbara Dumont-Hill.[8] We listened to Steve Heinrichs, a settler who, at that time, was Director of Indigenous-Settler Relations for Mennonite Church Canada. He has worked for reconciliation and has written well and extensively—and compiled writings of others—on the subject.

Since that time, OMC has developed and makes a land acknowledgement to open each worship service. OMC community members have volunteered at Indigenous organizations such as 510 Rideau,[9] facilitated learning programmes on Indigenous Spirituality at the Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality,[10] donated a children's Sunday school collection to the Odawa Native Friendship Centre,[11] and walked on a pilgrimage in support of the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[12] I'm sure OMC community members have done more than I'm aware of for the Indigenous community. I know of at least one instance where someone from OMC has fielded difficult questions and hostility for being an ally of Indigenous Peoples.

At OMC's most recent AGM a suggestion was made that we direct a certain percentage of our budget toward Indigenous initiatives. I don't recall whether this proposal was linked directly to either reconciliation

5 Indigenous Canada—University of Alberta, https://www.ualberta.ca/en/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada/index.html.

6 APTN, https://www.aptntv.ca/.

7 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (2015), https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.

8 KAIROS Blanket Exercise Community, https://kairosblanketexercise.org/.

9 510 Rideau, https://odawa.ca/programs/510-rideau/.

10 Ottawa School of Theology and Spirituality, https://www.osts.ca/.

11 Odawa Native Friendship Centre, https://odawa.ca/.

12 United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.

or reparations for the use of Indigenous land. A little over ten years ago, Adrian Jacobs, Senior Leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation in the Christian Reformed Church, proposed a Spiritual Covenant with Mennonite churches (on the Haldimand Tract) in which they would set aside a portion of their budgets as a token toward reparations for lands promised but never received by the Six Nations Confederacy. Four Mennonite churches have implemented such a measure: one on the Haldimand Tract in Kitchener and three in Winnipeg. Esther Epp-Thiessen is part of the Indigenous-settler relations committee at the Home Street church in Winnipeg that is giving 1% of its budget to Indigenous organizations. Perhaps we could engage Adrian Jacobs and Esther Epp-Thiessen to lay out the considerations leading to such an initiative and the consequences for the church's relationship with the Indigenous community.

Ongoing learning and action in relationship

Our individual efforts for reconciliation are all very important and good. But it's time for the OMC community to come together again to listen to and learn from survivors about what we should be doing as a community toward reconciliation, and to learn together from the Algonquin Nation on whose traditional land we worship about the history, care, and stewardship of their land. Should unceded land be considered and treated differently from land stolen or withheld, treaty notwithstanding? I don't know. We need to learn. Beyond learning, we need to determine our way forward. We should anticipate that difficult conversations will occur as we listen, learn, and, within OMC, determine how to proceed. Our annual Days of Worship and Reflection can have inspirational results, but there's so much listening and learning to do that a series of dedicated learning and listening sessions would seem more accommodating to thoroughly considered outcomes.

In all of this, we need to be guided by Christ's commandment set out in the Gospel of John to love each other, and the Old Testament exhortation in Micah to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

We are all related (wahkohtowin), and we need to work together with each other, beyond our important and individual efforts, to understand, reconcile, and live together with our Indigenous sisters and brothers in the way our Creator intended. We are all connected in spirit (wahkohtowin), all of my relations (kakiyaw nowakomakanak).

About the author

Denise Climenhage is member of the Ottawa Mennonite Church and a retired federal public servant, who worked for more than thirty years in the domain of international trade. She and her husband, James Bluhm, divide their time between Ottawa and their rural home in Fort Erie (Niagara). Denise visits her relatives in Saskatchewan whenever she can, and is grateful for social media, which allows her to keep in constant touch with them.

Treaty as bottomline: As love

Peter Haresnape

> *If this litle World of o[u]r Boddies Were all Armes, or all Leggs it Would proue very vnfitt for vse, and the same I doe conclude to betyde in this bigger World I meane this ffennye Region.*[1]

In 1922 T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, a long poem filled with allusions, quotations, and strange images. The poem opens with a vision of dry desert(ed) ruins, death and sterility, and concludes in an ambiguous collision of poetic fragments drawn from past literature, Eastern and Western religions, erudite plays, and popular songs. The overall effect is a confusing and unresolved commentary on modern life in the shadow of the First World War. The final lines of the poem circle a key phrase: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." In a time of disintegration, chaos, and loss of moral centre, the poet and the reader pull together whatever fragments of meaning, beauty, whimsy, and truth that they can. The efficacy of this effort is left to the recipient of the poem to judge.

The "dry ruins" that I write from include the retrenchment of colonisation,[2] social collapse as a result of climate change, the absurd, pernicious grounding of Christofacism, and the failure of religious institutions to restrain evil. Around 2003 I read an article that listed "trying to understand *The Waste Land*" as one of the fifty essential activities for a University of Stirling undergraduate, a prompt that I took seriously. I carried my battered copy of *Selected Poems* through my degree programme and with me in the years that followed—to protest camps in Scotland and England against nuclear weapons and coal power, to occupied Palestine to learn from Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and educators, and then to Turtle Island.

In these days I live and work in the lands of the Haudenosaunee, Wyandot, and Mississauga (Anishinabe) Nations, in the watershed of Lake Ontario, in the city of Toronto. I am a long way away from the East of England where I was born, and from the churches (nondenominational and evangelical) of my upbringing. I have been married to Ken for nearly ten

1 Quotation from an unattributed letter, 1622, objecting to the drainage of the Fens and the anticipated loss of biodiversity and imposition of monoculture. Quoted from Todd A. Borlik and Clare Egan, "Angling for the 'Powte,'" *English Literary Renaissance* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 256–289.

2 I have asked the editors to retain the spelling of words according to the English that I grew up with: colonise, favourite, dyke, etc.

years, and we live with our three feuding guinea pigs in a Mennonite-founded intergenerational community. I am Peter (he/him).

For six years I've served Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) as a pastor, after being a member for some years. I first encountered Mennonites as a young adult through Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT[3]), an organisation that supports communities taking nonviolent peacemaking action in response to violence or oppression. Through CPT I came to Turtle Island as a volunteer, supporting Indigenous-led movements to defend land and water, and this brought me into contact with Mennonites, although it was not a foregone conclusion that I would join the church.

I was new to both Mennonite and Indigenous worlds, and in both cases was connected to smaller, politically active subgroups. Although an outsider to both groups, I could immediately see myself as a member of the Mennonite communities, and could be claimed as such in a way that would never be possible among the particular Indigenous Nations that invited our team into relationship. This latter invitation was to witness, show up, and be supportive without becoming a part of the story. My goal was to ensure Indigenous people taking direct action against the harms of settler colonialism were able to do so without being harassed or intimidated, and to avoid (as far as possible) situations where my teammates and I could be misrepresented as the "heroes."

By contrast, it was possible for me to find a home within a Mennonite community—perhaps even necessary, so that I could have a community to be accountable to. The church I ended up attending (TUMC) gave me a place to explore my vocation, and invited me after a few years to membership—and eventually, pastoral office. As a white European Christian with a commitment to pacifism, I suspect it was a lot easier for me to join a Mennonite community than it had been for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) Mennonites. TUMC is a socially progressive urban Mennonite congregation that had put effort into welcoming queer folks and honouring different ethnicities. Inevitably, though, I left behind certain theologies, spiritual practices, vocabulary, and songs in order to become a member. Both the Christianity of my upbringing and that which I have claimed/has claimed me have been "fragments I shore against my ruins."

Through solidarity work I have heard Indigenous teachers address many settler audiences, offering context and insight. As a volunteer facilitator of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise I learned almost by rote some of the basic facts of colonisation and resistance, including stories originally drawn from Indigenous Peoples' testimony to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991–96). I've sat in formal teach-ins at university campuses and listened to storytelling around blockade-site fires, and I've read some of

3 Since 2023 called "Community Peacemaker Teams."

the generous canon of materials written in recent (and not-so-recent) years. These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

I make a practice of remembering how little I know; but how privileged my access has been. My learning has benefited from the so-called comprehensive education I received in the UK—one distant unit on Native Americans from secondary school, probably filled with the same simplicities as North American schools of the era, but mostly silence, especially about Canada. I'm sorry to say that I didn't think or know anything about Canada throughout my whole childhood, and the simple thought that there must be Indigenous people in Canada just as there are in the USA did not occur to me. This silence and ignorance at least allowed me to hear the stories of colonisation and resistance without having to dismantle a narrative of settler superiority or family heritage, and as an outsider with less to lose (or defend) it was easier for me to learn a truer story. At university I learnt language to understand colonialism through reading African and Caribbean literatures and gaining insights from other colonised contexts. These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

I'm no longer a full-time volunteer in the world of Indigenous-settler solidarity activism, but I am still invited to speak, consult, and write, especially for churches. I weigh the opportunity to lift up Indigenous voices involved in active struggle against the responsibility to share what I know and offer my understanding, doing some of the "heavy lifting" that might otherwise fall on Indigenous Peoples or go undone. I think there are things that can only be learned around the campfire—but perhaps I can offer words that disarm colonialism and strengthen those who resist.

While being humble about what I know and honouring those who taught me, I also don't want to obscure who I am—not just a generic Englishman/coloniser, I came from the Fens of East Anglia. I grew up in lands rich in agriculture, with echoes of Roman and Norman occupation in the landmarks, architecture, language, and legal system. I was born in the city of Ely, once "the Isle of Eels." Ely Cathedral is poetically named "the ship of the Fens" because it once loomed over watery lands. But Ely is no longer an island, and the Fens have been drained. Eels are no longer caught in Ely.

In the 1630s, a group of rich men known as "adventurers" employed engineers and surveyors to drain the Fens. Over the following centuries the water was drained away through specially cut channels called dykes, pumped at first by wind, then coal, then diesel engines. The most famous engineer was a Dutch man named Cornelius Vermuyden, whose name graces schools and whose descendants can be traced throughout the area. Their drainage efforts changed the land into highly productive farmland, requiring constant maintenance.

The drained soil of the Fens is peat: a fertile, dark soil. But without the water, the peat shrinks, lowering the land even further below sea level and

emitting carbon in the process. Strong winds blowing over flat land with minimal trees and wide-open fields create a "fen blow"—a barrage of displaced soil to batter your house and car and further deplete the land. The drainage has completely changed the species of animal, bird, and insect life, except in marginal places and a few areas where the Fen ecology is maintained.

The artificial landscape has a stark look. The skies are large, the fields are flat, and there are few trees. As a small child I read books about children in enchanted forests without understanding that forests were real. Driving anywhere in the Fens means navigating bumpy, subsiding road surfaces and multiple bridges across drainage dykes, but it's rare that we interact with the water itself. Unlike natural rivers, the dykes are uniformly straight and deep with steep banks, not good for swimming or recreation.

Each winter, large areas of land called "washes" are intentionally flooded, recreating huge shallow fields of water, which are pastures in drier seasons. On occasion, winter stays cold enough for long enough to form ice strong enough for skaters. Fen skating is the oldest tradition of skating in the country, predating artificial rinks, and it is charmingly eccentric. There are formal championship races and games with trophies awarded, but only every few years when the weather is right, and the competitors are whoever can get time off work or school and get down to the Fens. It is increasingly rare for the weather conditions to permit this practice.

Fen religion has its own rare, stark character. At one time the Fens were called the Holy Land of the English, in part because of the great cathedrals and abbeys. The inundated lands were unproductive for farming, and inhabitants either clustered in small hamlets on drier ground or lived under cathedral spires in the market towns. The damp and the diet produced sickness, and the Fens were thought of as desolate, wild, and demon-haunted. In order to contend with unclean spirits, it is said, holy people were drawn to live in the Fens.

Queen Etheldreda founded the great abbey at Ely after an eventful life. One of my favourite of the Anglo-Saxon saints, she pledged herself to prayer and virginity rather than a political marriage. She was nonetheless married off, but continued to exercise her holy autonomy over her body and soul by running away. With her handmaidens she took shelter on a rock in the ocean. Her erstwhile suitor pursued her and waited on the shore for the tide to go out. After three days of the women's prayers he gave up and went home, after which God released the tides and the women were able to pursue their vocations unharassed.

Oliver Cromwell is another of the great religious figures of the Fens. He was an MP, a rebel, a military leader, a ruler, and a Puritan zealot. His bloody legacy lives on in the colonisation of Ireland. Ely Cathedral houses statues without heads because of the activities of his ilk. Every small country

church in England has a story that Cromwell's New Model Army used it as a stable during the Civil War.[4] I have seen his statue on the wall of reformers in Geneva. His house in Ely is a tourist attraction.

Hereward the Wake was a Saxon partisan who resisted the Norman conquest, fortifying Ely against them for many years. Finally his army was betrayed by the monks of Ely, who gave the Normans the secret safe path through the Fens—perhaps tired of living in a fortress? In the ensuing years the Normans built the great cathedral, stamping their authority for all to see in sacred stonework.

Queen Boudica was another notorious rebel, raising the Celts against their Roman occupiers, burning Roman colonies, and dying after her army was defeated, possibly by her own choice. Her brand really took off in the Victorian era as a symbol of British pride alongside imperial pretensions. In the strategy game *Civilization VI*, her Great General ability allows you to recruit barbarian troops to your side.

It seems that the Fens have stories of rebellion and struggle regardless of the era. The people of the Fens knew that the drainage meant the end of their livelihood. For generations they sabotaged the pumping stations and earthworks, burnt houses and crops, and broke sluice gates. Their struggle reached beyond the material, since this was a spiritual threat as well. They would take water and pour it over the drying lands, seeking to placate Tiddy Mun, the spirit who had formerly protected their villages from flooding but who now sent sickness to punish the theft of his waters. Protest songs of the era invoke Neptune and Aeolus, honouring *noms de guerre* like Captain Flood. These ballads speak in the voice of species facing extinction, calling for inter-species alliance against the colonisers, describing waters being incarcerated and criminalised.

The Fen folk were ridiculed, described as being pagan throwbacks with webbed feet, but they were also feared as "Fen Tigers" and punished as witches. I knew a little bit of this history as a child, but I only understood the drainage of the Fens as an amazing feat of engineering that had created arable land. It wasn't until I came to Turtle Island and learned from Indigenous land defenders that I could see that I had grown up in colonised, settled, devastated lands. The same people making money on colonising and enslaving around the world were doing the same a day's ride from London.

As a child I found the Fen museums deadly dull, not being interested in bone skates and stilts, wickerwork eel traps and low-bottom punts for fowling on shallow waters. But from Turtle Island I can perceive the genius of these technologies for thriving in the Fens. When the Fens were drained,

4 "Very sensible," comments my mother, noting that if your theology denies inherent sacredness in church buildings, you might as well use them to keep your horses safe on campaign.

this culture and its technology was recast as primitive. Agriculture displaced, and the wild Fen folk became farm workers or moved to the landless cities. The eel traps were sent to the museums and the punts became pleasure craft for Cambridge undergraduates. The Fens, I came to realise, are a place where something like an Indigenous culture was destroyed through the destruction of the land. I learned this by listening to land defenders explain about how their culture, law, and language are formed and passed on through relating to the land: trapping, hunting, fishing, gathering medicines. As the land is destroyed by clearcut logging, uranium mining, or subdevelopment construction, the culture is attacked. And as traditional activities are outlawed or made prohibitively expensive, the culture is attacked.

Although I am from England and my parents and their families are English, I grew up as a settler in the Fens. My parents migrated there from the northern industrial cities of their birth and built a life and family. In my lifetime I became a settler again by migrating to the lands of the Wyandot, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee, choosing to become a Mennonite, and a Canadian.

What I bring to the decolonisation work of my new home in occupied and colonised lands on Turtle Island is the knowledge of the endgame of colonisation. I know settler-colonialism tries to justify its activities with stories of progress and innovation. I know how settlers can feel love and loyalty to the landscape of their birth, knowing that the land itself is held together by constant tension, a battle against waters that want to return. I know that settlers believe in their deepest fears that if the settler state is abolished, they will be swept away by a tide of living justice. I know that this fear inspires hatred of Indigenous Peoples and dismissal of their rights. I know that this catastrophic fear or fantasy of annihilation is not the only possible form of decolonisation. I know that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) and that many waters cannot overcome love (Song of Songs 8:10). These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

The difference for me between these two colonial contexts is treaty. Even though I have no prior family history in Canada, I can find a place for myself through the institution of treaty. Not exactly a "songline" or "landline,"[5] I think of treaty as a "bottomline" in the sense of "the basic, most important facts to be understood" and "something necessary that a person has taken responsibility for." My sense of treaty, which has developed out of fragments gathered, is something like "love," meaning a regard for the other, a desire for their well-being, and an intention not to overwhelm, absorb, or control.

The formal documents negotiated and signed between Indigenous and settler nations are called treaties, but I mean something more. Analysing the

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

flaws and injustices of these specific documents is important, but not my current intention. The concept and culture of treaty is more important than the letter of the law. Part of the beauty and tragedy of treaty is that it combines both settler and Indigenous traditions of making agreements about living together. The settler-colonial interpretation of specific treaties has assumed that they are land-surrender or sale documents, but the Supreme Court of Canada has consistently interpreted treaties through Indigenous perspectives as Protocols of perpetual sharing that (like covenants of scripture) reference the more-than-human world as a treaty witness or partner.

There is no treaty in the Fens, although there are unspoken understandings about the seasonal inundation and a grudging respect for the land, and thankfulness for its tortured fertility. The draining of the Fens was a land grab, the theft of the commons from the people, in line with the colonial doctrines of discovery and *terra nullius* in other lands. In Canada, treaty is almost nearly as nonexistent, but not quite. The enduring presence of Indigenous Nations and their constant work of advocacy, activism, and survival ensures that a vision of treaty continues to haunt the settler. This might be called a spiritual understanding of treaty, or "Treaty as Sacred Covenant,"[6] or treaty as love—a lover that assures, and demands, and welcomes, and transforms.

As a newly arrived settler, I am just as beholden to treaty as people whose ancestors have been settlers for centuries, or those whose ancestors were trafficked from other parts of the world, those without status, those whose legacies draw from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, and those whose ancestries have been obscured by violence, adoption, and asylum. Treaty discussions often focus on how the Indigenous and settler nations are equals, but the treaty also offers an "equality before the law" to all non-Indigenous treaty participants.

While a land surrender is a document that terminates rights, a treaty creates and ensures an ongoing relationship between partners. It assumes that there will come a time to reevaluate and remember the initial common cause. In eastern Turtle Island, the symbol of the silver covenant chain was shared with the Dutch by the Haudenosaunee. The makers knew that the silver would tarnish, so that the parties would need to come together regularly and polish the chain, remembering their commitments. This understanding of treaty assumes that both parties hope for the continued existence and well-being of the other. At the very least, the parties are committing to support the flourishing of the other by fulfilling their side of the treaty, and they trust that their treaty partners understood and communicated their intentions.

6 The name of a webinar series hosted by the Truth and Reconciliation working group of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada: mcec.ca/treatysacredcovenantvideos.

I cannot say how a treaty-as-love decolonisation might affect those who live and bring life into the Fens, but I strongly suspect that it would not involve a zero-sum or catastrophic destruction of the settler imagination. There are ways to coexist, adapt, remember, and renew relationships. In some areas, the Fens are returning as a managed ecological preserve. In others, new crops like rice are being considered.[7] Canada Geese who have made the long Atlantic crossing join thousands of birds who flock to the wonderment of onlookers at the Welney Wetland Centre—a symbol for me of our interconnected world, my own migration, and the capacity for life to flourish even in colonised lands.

The more I try to use the language of landline, bloodline, and songline to explain what animates my imagination for holy decolonisation and righteous liberation, the more I realise that I am rooted in a ruin, grasping at fragments. These fragments nonetheless help me to understand that my singular life can participate in liberation on Turtle Island, where I have found myself. The spirit and intent of the treaties provide a solid bottomline to measure my own priorities against, in place of the landlines, bloodlines, and songlines of others. I don't expect to own land; my family line ends with me; and I have left behind the culture I knew in order to be part of a Mennonite faith community that can nurture and teach me. Yet treaty offers me a path to know who I am and how to relate in a land where I don't have roots. It is a generous and gracious discipleship.

> *The beautiful order of nature (as some authors describe it) is the arrangement of rivers, meres, plains, etc., in such a way that everything helps everything else, each in their own way. This order is at risk of being destroyed by those who are attempting to drain the land, who claim that mono-culture pastureland is more profitable for the common good and for the benefit of private landowners. If this little world of our bodies were all arms, or all legs, it would prove very unfit for use, and the same principle holds in this bigger world–as in this Fen region.*[8]

About the author

Peter Haresnape (he/him) was baptised in the city of Ely in the watershed of the Great Ouse by Ely Christian Fellowship (now Lighthouse Ely). He came across writings by Leo Tolstoy in Stirling University library, which led him toward pacifist and anarchist expressions of Christian faith, and eventually toward service on Turtle Island. He is one of the pastors of Toronto United Mennonite Church.

7 Georgina Rannard, "Dismissed as a joke, UK's first rice crop ripe for picking after hot summer," *BBC*, 27 Sept. 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1wgeq702dyo.

8 Unattributed letter, 1622, loose translation by me.

Confucian songlines of dignity and community

Brian Quan

It was one of those conversations that left me curious, with more questions than answers. "I follow Jesus and belong to a Christian church, but I still keep my Buddhist beliefs," she said matter-of-factly. "I believe in Jesus and also keep our Chinese traditions."

Knowing I was a pastor, she wasn't offering a confession—just stating her reality without batting an eye. But warning lights flashed in my mind. What? How? Can someone really live this way? What about the First Commandment? The Great Commandment? James warns us about a divided mind.

She was my aunt, not my parishioner. How should I proceed? Should I warn her about misplaced allegiances? Question her theology? Or gently explore how she reached this conviction?

Family-gathering wisdom prevailed. I carefully navigated this minefield, simply nodding and saying, "Now that's interesting."

This conversation from over a decade ago remains vivid as I continue wrestling with what it means to be Christian—and Mennonite—within Chinese heritage. What do our history, culture, and context teach us about God, community, and peace? Which cultural values and practices align with biblical witness? And when culture and faith feel misaligned, how do we navigate that tension?

What follows is a praxis of decolonial discipleship in our intercultural church. When we recognize the deep ethics of Confucianism within our culture, we discover living songlines[1] that can guide our faith journey toward healing and solidarity without colonial assimilation.

Honor-shame mediation: The art of preserving dignity

My aunt's matter-of-fact declaration taught me something important about navigating our intercultural congregations. The Confucian concept of 礼 (*Li*) emphasizes proper relationships and social harmony. This is quite different from the Western approach, which is direct and tends to be more confrontational—something that can end up being counterproductive in our context. In Western contexts, we value direct and forward communication.

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

We see this as an honest, efficient way of addressing the issue at stake. But this approach can bring distress in our Chinese culture, which prioritizes relational harmony. If I were to charge headfirst into a disagreement, I could shatter the relationships to which I'm trying to bring healing.

A decolonial approach calls for moving beyond Western, low-context models of engagement. At the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church, we operate within a high-context honor-shame framework, where communal harmony and the preservation of face are of central importance. This requires an approach that is nuanced and mediated. It is one that prioritizes discreet, often private conversations in which people are recognized, understood, and respected.[2] It is less like a debate and more like a dance, a carefully choreographed sequence of mindful reflections, pauses for discernment, and then the offering of carefully chosen words at the right time. The goal is not simply to present facts or resolve issues but to safeguard honor, nurture harmony, and preserve the unity of the body of Christ.

Jesus's teaching in Matthew 18:15–17 sheds light on this approach. His instruction to "go privately first" emphasizes the importance of beginning with personal conversation, then moving gradually outward if necessary. This progression mirrors the Li principle of harmony in relationships through expanding circles of obligation. It begins with the immediate family, then extends to kin, and finally to the wider community.[3] By practicing Jesus's teachings in this way, we create space for face-saving opportunities while still seeking reconciliation and truth.

Silence, too, carries a different meaning in this framework. In the West, it is often seen as ignorance, passivity, or even surrender. Yet in high-context cultures, silence is a form of reflection, a deliberate pause to assess before responding. It creates a safe space for discernment and honors the weight of the moment. Recognizing these nuances allows us to hold together both the wisdom of Jesus's teaching and the insights from our cultural traditions. Integrating these learnings allows us to nurture a community where dignity and truth do not compete with harmony.

---

2 Many intercultural churches are learning that effective pastoral care and conflict resolution require an understanding of the honor-shame framework, where communal harmony and the preservation of face are of central importance. This represents a significant shift from Western models that prioritize individual guilt and innocence. See Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (IVP Academic, 2016).

3 Fei Xiaotong's concept of the "differential mode of association" provides a foundational sociological framework for understanding relational networks in Chinese society. Contemporary missiologists like Brad Vaughn have developed these ideas further, specifically applying them to theology and conflict resolution within honor-shame contexts. See Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, trans. Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng (University of California Press, 1992), 64–67.

Sacramental hospitality: When meals become worship

Our church began renting space from a historic Presbyterian congregation after we outgrew our previous space. They were traditional and long-established, and we were a much younger new-Canadian congregation. The arrangement felt providential. We now had space to worship and, best of all, a large fellowship hall where we could share meals together.

Having meals together wasn't just about filling stomachs; it was a highlight, a joyful extension of worship and fellowship. Then we received a jarring request: "We ask that you refrain from using the kitchen and cooking meals during the morning service. Our members find the odor of your cooking distracting."

For our community, the fragrance of steamed jasmine rice was a pleasant aroma of welcome and belonging. To others, it was an interruption, even a nuisance. What we experienced as sacramental hospitality was interpreted as something out of place in worship.

Meals as sacred gathering

In our Chinese culture, meals are an expression of hospitality that carries both cultural and theological significance. There is a beautiful concept called 热闹 (*rè nào*)—literally meaning "hot and noisy." It describes a lively, vibrant atmosphere of communal dining. Gathering around the table embodies warmth, joy, and harmony. It is where relationships are formed and deepened. Eating together reflects intentional hospitality, belonging, and mutual respect. It is where we live out our social etiquette of serving the elders first and offering guests the choicest portions. Unlike individualistic fellowship models, Chinese hospitality is collective. Hosts serve others before themselves, embodying Christ's kenotic love—he came "not to be served but to serve."

Robert Karris commented, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."[4] Meals were central to his mission, teaching, and kingdom proclamation. Hence, a post-worship meal isn't just a social afterthought but an extension of liturgy and an expression of Christ's love.

The potluck problem

The tension we experienced wasn't just about food odors. It reflected a clash between sacramental hospitality and colonial individualist practices. With the typical North American potluck, individuals bring their own dish, queue up in a buffet line, and serve themselves. The act is decentralized and self-oriented. This model claims to be egalitarian, and anyone can serve themselves at any time. However, this ignores our formal practices of respect

4 Robert J. Karris, "Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel," in *Luke: Artist and Theologian: Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (Paulist Press, 1985).

and honor in which our young people serve our elders first. When the loudest or hungriest eat first, cultural rituals of honor are lost. The sacred and ordinary become separated. Worship ends and the meal becomes a fellowship of casual conversation.

When churches dismiss cultural practices like Chinese communal meals as distracting, they miss the theological traditions embedded in these practices. It tends to perpetuate colonial assumptions about what proper Christian fellowship looks like. Yet the early church "devoted themselves to the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). For them, meals weren't optional extras but integral to worship.

Economic community: Learning from clan wisdom

When I first learned about Confucian clan structures, 宗族 (*zōngzú*), I was surprised to see how they resembled the early church in Acts. These family networks created ecosystems of care. When imperial governments in China were unable to meet people's needs, the clans stepped in offering economic support, education, health care, and conflict resolution.[5] This mirrors how the first Christians shared everything in common, caring for one another as one body.

Somehow, many modern churches have drifted from this holistic vision. We often silo faith into Sunday services and ministry departments, and leave the practical needs of parishioners to be navigated alone. It saddens me that this is the experience of many Christians. However, there are aspects in our cultural practices that don't separate the spiritual from the practical.

Consider these two stories from the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church.

Even though Mr. Shen never attended our church, we prayed for him while he fought cancer. After he passed, we were deeply moved by his family's needs and learned that they struggled financially. The congregation immediately took up a love offering to help with his funeral expenses. Though he never visited our building, he was part of our community, and we could share that practical burden.

Then there was Mrs. Lee, a senior in our church who was also fighting cancer. In addition to visitations and prayer, we recognized she needed more support. When we shared her need, one member felt moved to personally prepare meals and to offer her company during the week. The congregation partnered with her, granting funds from our benevolence fund to cover the cost of groceries.

---

5 Cohen provides an anthropological framework that details how kinship structures like clans acted as a critical, informal social safety net when the imperial state's reach was limited. See Myron L. Cohen, *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

This is the kind of integrated care that clans provide. Colonial Christianity has often dismissed these communal systems as foreign, overly enmeshed, and even backwards. They have replaced them with individualistic models.

Western missionaries often taught that clan loyalty competed with Christ, not understanding how clan structures actually embodied biblical principles of mutual care. While some missionaries recognized this and worked within the cultural frameworks, others struggled to see the relationship between these communal bonds and Christian discipleship.[6] The result is that our fellowship can sometimes feel limited to social gatherings, while people in our pews face crises in silence.

Mennonites believe the church is called to be an alternative to the world's systems of domination and scarcity. The clan structures understood something we've forgotten: Caring for souls means caring for bodies. We need to remember that we are a spiritual community that sees and responds to the physical, economic, and social needs of our people.

We have been rediscovering this rich way of being God's people. What feels new is actually very old. We are embracing collective responsibility, honoring our elders, and integrating our spiritual and practical lives together. These cultural practices continually emerge, not as separate from our faith, but as elements contributing to our theological heritage.

As a pastor walking this path, the journey often feels like a complex puzzle, yet it unfolds in surprising and beautiful ways. We have been learning that the very Confucian songlines within our culture are not obstacles to the Gospel; rather, they have become living guides. We continue to discover that being faithful to Jesus does not mean discarding cultural wisdom, but recognizing how God has already spoken through it. This is the promise of decolonial discipleship. It's a faith shaped by a rich culture while remaining rooted in the radical love of Jesus.

About the author

Brian Quan is a native of Toronto, Ontario, the son of immigrants from China. He serves as the lead pastor of the three worshipping groups at the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church. He holds a BS degree in pharmacology with a background in addiction research. His master's degree in pastoral studies is from Tyndale Seminary. He is a husband, dad, friend, photographer, cyclist, hiker, and tinkerer, a big sinner enjoying an even bigger grace, and an unlikely pastor.

6 This was a central tension in the missionary endeavor. Western missionaries in China frequently perceived the Confucian clan system as a primary rival to Christian allegiance, viewing its ancestral rites as idolatrous and its kinship bonds as a challenge to the absolute loyalty demanded by the Christian God. This perspective led to active efforts to dismantle clan cohesion among converts, inadvertently dismantling the very systems of social and economic mutual aid that mirrored the practices of the early church. See Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (Yale University Press, 2010).

What does this have to do with us?

A letter to my child[1]

Leah Reesor-Keller

Dear I.,

You asked me why I wrote a letter to your sister, but didn't write one to you.[2] Well, this is your letter.

What does this have to do with us? You ask me versions of this question when we're talking about what you'll wear for Orange Shirt Day at school, or when I do something that seems strange to you like put a copy of the book *Treaty Words: For as Long as the Rivers Flow*[3] up on our picture ledge in the living room.

Hearing this question always makes my heart constrict. Have I failed as your parent, that I haven't already infused this knowledge into your bloodstream? Tied it to your hands and bound it on your forehead, as truths that must not be forgotten? I see it as a core responsibility for your dad and me to raise you in a good way where you know your ancestors, know your community members, and know how we are connected in the web of life in the world. We are treaty people, part of living, generational covenants with the original caretakers of the land where we live and with all nations, the human and non-human world that we are connected to in relationship together.[4]

And despite my panic, I am glad you ask the question, because curiosity is the gateway to education. The Honourable Murray Sinclair, Chief

1 I would like to offer my gratitude and respect to the many Elders, teachers, and friends who I have learned from in my own journey of decolonization and reconciliation. In particular, thanks to Terry Swan, Yvonne Bearbull, Connor Sarazin, and Clarence Cachagee for your gifts of conversation and shared wisdom over the last couple of years. I am grateful.

2 Leah Reesor-Keller, "Epilogue: Dear Ava," in *Tending Tomorrow: Courageous Change for People and Planet* (Herald Press, 2024), 185–188.

3 Aimée Craft and Luke Swinson, *Treaty Words: For as Long as the Rivers Flow* (Annick Press, 2021).

4 Drawing on the principles of reconciliation in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (2015), https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf.

Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that led the inquiry into the Indian residential school system, famously stated that "education got us into this mess, and education is key to getting us out of it."[5]

Knowing your history, culture, faith, and family knowledge over the generations is powerful. That is why the Canadian government tried to break Indigenous families apart through the historic and ongoing harms of the residential school system. They wanted to stop the sharing of stories, wisdom, language, and song that families and communities nurtured and sustained over untold generations. Another name for this is cultural genocide—seeking to end a peoplehood by purposely trying to make people forget, or never learn, their culture, history, and ancestral languages.[6]

"Do I know anyone affected by residential schools?" you asked me. Yes, you do. We talked about friends of mine you know who are descendants of residential school survivors. But more than that, *it is our story too*. Anabaptist-Mennonite church denominations and organizations to which our family is connected were part of running homes and schools where Indigenous children were forced from their families, were told their languages, culture, and faith practices were evil, and experienced spiritual, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.[7] Our people were part of committing cultural genocide.[8]

Bobby Bird was ten years old, the same age that you are now, when he ran away from Timber Bay Children's Home (also known as Montreal Lake Children's Home) in Saskatchewan to escape the daily abuse and rejoin his family in 1969. He died in the attempt and was missing for decades before his remains were identified.[9] My father, your granddad, would have been just a few years older than Bobby at the time of his running away and subsequent death. What if it had been him in the home? What if it had been you? I feel

5 "Education," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2020, https://nctr.ca/education/.

6 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (2015), 5, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf.

7 For a detailed examination of Anabaptist-Mennonite involvement in residential schools, see Melanie Kampen, "The Mennonite Peacemaker Myth: Reconciliation without Truth-Telling?" *Conrad Grebel Review* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 42–61.

8 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (2015), 5, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf.

9 Jason Warick, "Cold and Alone; The 30-Year Search for Bobby Bird," *The Star Phoenix*, 9 Aug. 2015, https://thestarphoenix.com/news/saskatoon/cold-and-alone-the-30-year-search-for-bobby-bird.

sick thinking about it. The reality is, it was people who looked like us, from our family's faith and ethnocultural tradition—perhaps even people who were our relatives—who were in charge of the home at that time, and who caused the abuse that led to Bobby's death and harm to so many others.

This is not ancient history—the home finally closed in 1994,[10] when I was about Bobby's age. Many former students, teachers, volunteers, and administrators of the home are still alive, and the generational harms persist. Timber Bay Children's Home was not part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that provided compensation to survivors, and to this day Timber Bay survivors continue to seek justice and restitution for the harm caused to them and their families.[11]

What does this have to do with us? Everything. It has everything to do with us because it is our story too, as Canadians and as part of the Christian denominations that sought to destroy Indigenous culture, languages, and faith practices in the name of the Christian faith. The summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada includes a quote from Reverend Stan McKay of the United Church, who is also a residential school survivor. He makes it clear that we have our own work of healing to do too:

> *[There must be] a change in perspective about the way in which Aboriginal peoples would be engaged with Canadian society in the quest for reconciliation. . . . [We cannot] perpetuate the paternalistic concept that only Aboriginal peoples are in need of healing. . . . The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing. . . . How can a conversation about reconciliation take place if all involved do not adopt an attitude of humility and respect? . . . We all have stories to tell and in order to grow in tolerance and understanding we must listen to the stories of others.*[12]

Do you understand now why it is so important to me that you learn about Indigenous cultures and history since time immemorial here on the land where we live, and know our own culture as descendants of Swiss Mennonite

---

10 "Timber Bay (Montreal Lake) Children's Home," Paths to Reconciliation, *Canadian Geographic*, https://pathstoreconciliation.canadiangeographic.ca/?mpfy-pin=4012.

11 Nick Pearce, "New Calls to Recognize Timber Bay as a Residential School after Kamloops Discovery," *The Star Phoenix*, 5 June 2021, https://thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/new-calls-to-recognize-timber-bay-as-a-residential-school-after-kamloops-discovery.

12 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015), 10, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf .

and Brethren in Christ early settlers? I long for us as a family to find our way forward to a place of genuine humility, respect, and friendship. That's why I care that you wear an orange shirt to school on September 30, Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and why I wear my own orange shirt and take part in the survivor-led commemorative walk through our city every year.

You were in the audience a year ago when Chapleau Cree First Nation member and Crow Shield Lodge founder Clarence Cachagee joined me in a conversation about re-telling Indigenous and Mennonite stories, held at our Mennonite church, the congregation itself founded by Swiss Mennonite settlers in the 1800s and now a faith home to a diverse body of believers from many different cultural backgrounds. Now that you understand how family, language, songs, and prayers were taken away from children in the residential schools and children's homes like Timber Bay, you will understand why it was so important that we show as a Mennonite faith community that we welcome, honor, and respect the Cree spiritual practices and traditions that Clarence brought with him into the space that evening. Considering the legacy of harm that we have inherited, it is a privilege I don't take lightly to be part of genuine conversations pointing toward reconciliation, reparations, and action for change. Clarence reminded all of us in attendance that night that

> *we're in the truth part right now of reconciliation. We're going to be sitting in the truth part for five more generations. It's going to take seven generations of us sitting in that truth until we can even possibly talk about reconciling. And what we're going to talk about reconciling is the land. It's going to be a difficult conversation. But I think that conversation needs to be happening. . . . Let's start creating new pathways of understanding as equals. Where we walk beside each other. Not one in front of the other. Not one behind the other. Not one on top of the other, or below the other. But walking beside each other as equals.*[13]

This letter to you is my way of sitting in the truth, of making sure that you know that this is your story too, that you have a part to play now and in the future as the next generation to keep moving forward in this journey of repentance, repair, and transformation.

I still follow this global, living faith tradition, not only because it is the faith that I inherited from my ancestors, but because I see the seeds of good things there still, of liberation and shalom for people and the whole

13 Clarence Cachagee, transcript from live event "Retelling Our Stories: Mennonite and Indigenous Perspectives in Conversation," Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, ON, November 8, 2024. Recording available at https://youtu.be/OU5Pd7E3P4Q?si=RMfaG9c6rfnX7gBo.

This letter to you is my way of sitting in the truth, of making sure that you know that this is your story too, that you have a part to play now and in the future as the next generation to keep moving forward in this journey of repentance, repair, and transformation.

earth. I see teachings on repentance and transformation, on the possibility of turning around and going in a new, life-giving direction, of forgiveness and repair being worth seeking after. This speaks to my soul, and I hope it speaks to yours as well.

The thing about adult baptism in the Mennonite tradition is that you must choose it willingly, with full knowledge and consent, choosing inwardly and outwardly to be part of the community of faith. Our faith ancestors in the early Anabaptist tradition, including many of our biological ancestors, understood this choice, and made it at great personal cost. This cost included their very lives in some cases. In the same way, as you grow up you have the choice to lean in, to be an active participant in the work—community and relationship-building work—of reconciliation and reparations.

Choices reveal character, and I know your character to be strong, to be attentive and determined. You have great capacity for empathy and imagination, and a mind that stores knowledge like an endless library. You have so much to bring to this journey toward reconciliation here on Turtle Island. I hope you choose to step into the stream, into relationships of restoration and healing. I hope that you will be a solid link in the chain of generations sitting in the truth on the journey toward reconciliation.

That is my hope for all of us on this journey of repentance and transformation toward reconciliation. May we draw on deep wells of empathy and determination, using the strength of our history, cultures, and faith traditions not to exert control over others but to move toward changed relationships and structures, toward making things right with people and the land.

I know you can be a part of this transformation. You already are.

About the author

Leah Reesor-Keller is the author of *Tending Tomorrow: Courageous Change for People and Planet* (Herald Press, 2024), and is a writer-in-residence at the Kindred Centre for Peace Advancement in Waterloo, Ontario, on the lands of the Haldimand Tract and the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Chonnonton, and Haudenosaunee peoples. She formerly served as executive minister for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada and transitional executive director for KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

How do you love your enemy when your enemy is your family?

Jonny Rashid

I grew up in an Egyptian American household in Central Pennsylvania. I was raised as a fundamentalist Christian, and my family attended the largely white Evangelical Free Church in town. I was taught to have a deep reverence for the Bible, particularly. My family had weekly Bible studies, and we held that the Bible was so holy, we could never even place it on the ground. In my reflection on this aspect of the Christian holy text, I wondered how much conservative Muslims' respect for the Qur'an influenced my family's respect for the Bible. We honored it as if it were a god unto itself, and while my views of the Bible—and, frankly, the rest of the world—have shifted dramatically away from my family's, I credit my family with planting a seed of faith that has blossomed into my own calling and vocation as a Mennonite pastor today.

When I was ordained in Mennonite Church USA, I remarked that I was not the pastor my parents expected me to be. I departed from their understanding of the Bible, their fundamentalist theology, and their political worldview. What's more, I'm queer and divorced, both of which, to put it mildly, were not pathways my parents expected, or honestly hoped, for me. So, despite not being the pastor they expected me to be, I am still proud to be the one they raised.

Mom and Dad live in the same world that I live in and they witness the same current events that I do. And yet, they see them from a decidedly different perspective. When I was younger and trying to find my way, I differentiated myself from them by expressing my alternative viewpoints to the world. I did this to become my own person, but it naturally resulted in a lot of emotional tension in my family. I can't quite tell you if I was trying to share my point of view or if I was trying to share that I was growing up and becoming my own person. Were we having a political debate, or was politics merely the playing field upon which we were hashing out our changing relationships? I suspect it was a bit of both.

These days, I have favored not engaging in political or religious discussion with my family. It's become far too painful for me personally because my sexuality, part of my very identity and body, is a discussion point. I don't want my body to be reduced to a discussion subject. Additionally, the existential issues that we face in our society are far too costly for me to simply debate them. The great cost of this boundary is intimacy. But the cost of not having a boundary is far greater: my mental health.

The prevailing nonviolent theory suggests that empathy alone is the key to lessening and dampening our polarization.[1] The argument suggests we are polarized because we cannot see each other, cannot empathize with one another, and have forgotten to treat one another as human beings. Politics, to some, has become too important and has eclipsed our very humanity. My experience suggests the opposite. It is not that politics has eclipsed our humanity in its importance, but rather, that politics is embodied. So our discussions have moved from ones about policy and theology to ones about people and their oppression.

The modern far-right has argued that empathy is so destructive, it has caused us moral ambiguity that is threatening the values our society is built upon. Put another way, some might say that it results in moral decay. While it is ludicrous to suggest empathy is sinful, I do not think it is a panacea to our polarized society. However, empathy does have a role, perhaps not in political action, but in making it possible for me to continue to relate to and, as our Lord commands, love my enemies.

It might feel dramatic to name my immediate family as enemies, but given their hostility toward my sexuality, for starters, naming them as enemies moves me to offer them empathy. How could they see the world so categorically differently than I do? How could they elect their ideological position over my very humanity? To begin answering those seemingly unanswerable questions, I want to draw upon Elaine Enns and Ched Myers's notion of "landlines, bloodlines, and songlines."[2] Landlines are where we walk to and from, referring to our geography and land. Bloodlines are whom we walk with, our family and our ancestors. Songlines are the cultural and spiritual communities and traditions that have shaped us.

Prior to knowing these terms, it was nonetheless precisely this framework that allowed me to grow in my understanding of my parents' theological and political formation. Not only did it help me empathize with my family, but it also helped me understand myself and how I was formed theologically and politically.

My parents grew up in Egypt, my father in Upper Egypt and my mother in the Shubra neighborhood in Cairo. My paternal grandfather was a Protestant pastor, and his ministry led him to Shubra. It was at his church where they met. They essentially grew up together, both being raised in the Protestant tradition—which is notable, because while Egypt's Christian population is fairly large compared to its neighbors, it is largely Coptic, not

1 Kazu Haga, *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm* (Parallax Press, 2020). Haga's book has many arguments favoring nonviolence, but central to his thesis is that enemy empathy is tantamount to their transformation.

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

Protestant. My parents, in my view, collected the faith that was brought to Egypt via missionaries and colonization. They were not part of the ancient Coptic church, but rather the relatively recently introduced Protestant one.

So, my parents grew up in a Protestant church and gravitated toward Evangelicalism in Egypt. The reason I name them as fundamentalists is because I grew up with hard and fast rules about the Bible, morality, and "the world." We were never to engage in worldly activities that could pollute our souls. Harry Potter was strictly forbidden, and I remember having to sell my Pokémon cards (though I still play, and my mom knows it!). Their religious formation is something of their *songline*. It empowered and sustained them through the persecution they faced. It also intersects with their *landline*, because they developed and held their faith because of Western influence. And it is further connected with their *bloodline*, because it was passed on to them from their parents, and specifically from my paternal grandfather.

In a Muslim-majority country, my parents felt like they needed to hide their faith or face genuine prejudice. I've experienced this very prejudice in my brief visits to Egypt. So, because of their witness and my own lived experience, I believe their experience. In the land they called home, they couldn't be themselves. Sadly, that does not give them empathy for me as a queer pastor, but it does help me to understand them.

My dad's family, and later my mom's family, immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. My parents followed them, not just to be close to family, but also to be in the mythical Land of the Free. They believed, and to a degree this is true, that they would experience more religious liberty in the United States. I know that they did, but from my perspective it was less because of the pluralism of the US, and far more because for the first time in their lives they were part of the religious majority, instead of a minority. Surely their immigration status, their culture, and their language made them stand out.

They were in a tricky predicament as migrants. They wanted to protect themselves and their children from the so-called evils of secular American culture, but they also wanted to assimilate to that very culture to guard against the prejudice that many migrants and people of color feel.

Their bloodline brought their faith, their landline brought them persecution, and their songline brought them hope in the form of the American Evangelical church. It was within a moderately sized Evangelical Free Church in Lebanon, PA, the place my dad's job ultimately landed us, that they found relief, respite, and home. As a result of the welcome they received from American Evangelical culture, they also gravitated toward political conservatism, a key project of the Evangelical church. Migrating to the United States in the 1980s made them comfortable with the conservative politics of Ronald Reagan, a darling of Evangelicals and one who positioned the

United States against the majority-Muslim countries of the Middle East. For them, because Reagan and Republicans made Muslims into their enemies, they became their friends, so to speak. They adopted Evangelical politics as a way of surviving their new environment, and to this day they've followed that songline into support for the current president, Donald Trump. The safety they experienced in this cultural milieu caused them to support many conservative talking points, including (and I will get into this more later) Christian Zionism and Christian dispensationalism. The safety they found in the church made them supporters of Israel, whose "restoration" would expedite the return of Jesus.

It may be shocking to white liberals that a family of Arab migrants would support Donald Trump—and it remains shocking to me—but given their histories and experiences, it makes some sense. It is through understanding the experiences that formed them that I am able to empathize with them and love them. Stretching myself toward empathy is how I avoid reducing them to merely my oppressors, but rather view them as victims of their own oppression looking for an escape. Have they found it in Trumpian Christian nationalism? Hardly, in my opinion, but decidedly so in theirs.

As I stated above, they planted in me the seeds of my own faith. I grew up with an appreciation of the Bible and a love for the church. The safety they found in that Evangelical Free Church in Lebanon County was the safety that I also enjoyed. Compared to the public school I attended, that church community was far less prejudiced and racist. I felt a sense of belonging there, despite feeling some shame about my skin color, my family's accent, and even how warmly spiced our food was (we didn't smell like cumin, but we sure looked like we did).

I played my part in my family and was an avid church attendee and a fixture in the youth group. I enjoyed it so much that I became a student leader of the youth group and developed a close relationship with my conservative, yet understanding, youth pastor. To this day, I mark some of the friends I made there as my closest and dearest. I am extremely grateful for the seed of faith that my parents gave me, and the lifelong friendships that it helped blossom.

It wasn't paradise, but it was very welcoming to me. I found a sense of love and family in that church. But things started to go awry after the September 11 attacks. My family experienced fear after learning that it was Arab attackers who were responsible—my parents because it felt like the prejudice they had escaped was coming for them across the Atlantic Ocean, and me because I was fearful of the racism and xenophobia that would impact me. And it surely did. I was asked if we lived in a pyramid, classmates compared my likeness to that of Osama bin Laden, and, of course, I heard epithets too.

My bloodline brought me my faith and my ethnicity. My faith brought me the comfort of the kind but not particularly inclusive Evangelical Free

Church, and my ethnicity brought me the prejudice that I experienced as the Global War on Terrorism started. It wasn't just my ethnicity that informed how I saw the post-9/11 world, but also my faith (and admittedly some politically charged punk rock). Coupled with my experience of racism, it was my fidelity to Christianity and to the teachings of Jesus (which I would later learn aren't limited to the four Gospels, but rather span the whole Bible) that positioned me to protest the very wars my parents supported and to oppose the administration (and the political party) that was causing them.

The issue I faced in that Evangelical church was that nearly everyone in it had the same theology and politics as my parents. I described my understanding of the war to the youth pastor, and though he disagreed with me, he allowed me to express my own viewpoints. My disdain for the war also led me toward more radical politics, asking questions about the US economic form, as well as other social issues including anti-racism and LGBT+ inclusion. Little did I know that it was also my sexuality that helped burgeon in me a passion for queer folks—I was not out yet.

But despite the support of my loving youth pastor, I felt entirely isolated in my faith, which I had already begun deconstructing. Though my aforementioned dear friends would deconstruct their Evangelical faith in a similar way, I did so a few years before them, and felt the additional isolation.

A few summers after 9/11, I moved to my beloved Philadelphia to attend Temple University and study journalism, political science, and eventually education. I wasn't sure what would happen to my faith; I didn't even know I *could* protest wars and the Bush administration and still call myself a Christian. The campus Christian groups and the local Presbyterian Church in America church didn't help matters either, because I found more of the same in them. My bloodline and landlines were conflicting with what I felt was my songline. I found much deeper community and solidarity with left-wing campus groups than with Christian ones. And the Christian community I tried to form made me feel more alone than I did before.

On a fateful Sunday, after seeing a flyer for a show at a certain Anabaptist church, my dormmate invited me and some friends to check it out. It felt far away (we didn't use the bus, and it took a subway transfer to get there). But we sojourned to that neighborhood, one that has since become extremely gentrified. When I walked in, I saw a bumper sticker on the side of a computer monitor that declared: "War in Iraq? NO!" I felt, for the first time in a long time, the possibility of a new home—a new songline, if you will.

While the community was predominantly white, I made a home with them under the guidance of the congregational pastor. It was he who saw something in me, specifically the ability to lead and communicate, that ultimately led me to plant a church with that community and find a place in the world of Anabaptism. For the first time in my life, my landline (an Egyptian American), my bloodline (a Christian American), and my songline

(a person of faith with a penchant for social justice) found their intersection. This journey would eventually lead me to become a pastor in Mennonite Church USA, where I currently find myself.

This intersection was made even more powerful by Mennonite Church USA's commitment and passion for justice in Palestine, another place where my bloodline, landline, and songlines intersected.[3] It wasn't just my Christian conviction for peace that led me to advocate for Palestine; it was also my heritage as an Arab American, my bloodline. In that very advocacy I found my songline again, an apropos term considering that many of the actions I've used to protest the genocide and imposed famine in Gaza have been done through song and melody.

The place I found is far from perfect, and though I see very little fault in my beloved West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship, the limitations of a predominantly white church have haunted me. Additionally, I am further disenchanted because my own identities, as a queer person and as a brown person, are often at odds in Mennonite circles. I hear too often that the interests of queer people are different than the interests of brown people. But I am a living testament to the fact that this binary is utterly false. And so I will continue to share my story in hopes of softening those hard and painful divisions.

Ultimately, it was my faith and my social position as an ethnic minority that shaped my politics and my theology. Similarly, it was their faith and social position as religious minorities that shaped my parents' politics and theology. Our lines' concentric circles landed us in decidedly different places, and while that is deeply painful for me, I have moved from seeing our differences purely as a matter of hatred and prejudice to seeing them as the result of our lived experiences. I naturally wish for a sense of family with my blood relatives, and I am saddened it is not there. But the work of God through our histories is long, and there may be hope yet for our future. In the meantime, I am grateful to trace our lineages to a greater understanding of both myself and them. While it doesn't heal all the wounds I have, it softens my pain and keeps it from turning into an anger that might result in total detachment. To my family, I see you. And I hope you can grow to see me, too.

About the author

Jonny Rashid serves as pastor for West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship. He serves on Mennonite Action's national team, and he is on the steering committee for the Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities and the Philadelphia Alliance for Peace and Justice for Palestinians. He writes for *Anabaptist World*, wrote *Jesus Takes a Side: Embracing the Political Demands of the Gospel* (MennoMedia, 2022), and is a DMin student at Eastern Mennonite University.

3 Mennonite Church USA, "Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine:A Resolution for Mennonite Church USA" (August 2020), https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/IP-Resolution.pdf.

The stories that shape us

Hmong memory and Mennonite faith in intercultural community

Mollee Moua

In the Hmong tradition, when a woman marries, she usually goes to live with her husband's family. Shortly after my wedding, I packed all my belongings and joined my husband's household. Today, we continue to all live together—now as three generations under one roof. Yet for many Hmong families, this way of life was painfully interrupted in the 1960s, as the Laotian Civil War and the Secret War fractured communities and uprooted households that had been established in Laos for generations. Song Moua, my father-in-law, endured unspeakable tragedy and loss, much like many other families affected by war. Sadly, he has not been under the same roof as his three siblings since they all fled Laos nearly fifty-six years ago. Last summer, however, this long separation was about to end, as all four siblings were invited to our home for a grand reunion.

The centrepiece of this reunion was a gathering at our home, where we had invited close friends and additional extended family to share a meal together. Before we partook in the meal, along with children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, my father-in-law and his siblings each took a turn to share their memories surrounding the fateful events that had separated them. The atmosphere was heavy with grief but also filled with a quiet strength as each sibling found the courage to speak. Around our dining room, my father-in-law, his two brothers, and his younger sister began to share their recollections, their voices weaving together the fragments of a story torn apart by war and displacement.

It was a touching and monumental reunion, with each sibling providing their perspective of what had happened to them when *teb chaws puas* (when the Laotian Civil War unfolded). My father-in-law, typically a man who rarely displayed his emotions, shared his journey of loss and hope with tears rolling down his cheeks, revealing all of the deep pain and hurt he had experienced.

He was the second-oldest of four children, with one older brother and two younger siblings—another brother and a sister. He was only a child when his mother had died in childbirth giving birth to his sister, the youngest of them all. He shared a memory from that time of needing to take on the responsibility of caring for his baby sister. Too young to be left alone, he

would bring her with him to school, slipping her inside his shirt to keep her hidden. He remembered the small, tender routines of caring for her, pre-chewing food so she could eat and doing whatever he could to make sure she survived. But he was only a child himself, and eventually they had to let her go when another Hmong family offered to raise her as their own child. With that came another painful farewell, not knowing if or when they would meet again.

Rumours of war had already reached those remote Hmong villages located in the rural mountains of Laos. Shortly after, the Hmong village in which they lived was attacked by Pathet Lao soldiers. Many villagers fled but my father-in-law's father hesitated, held back by his concern for their farm animals. This decision cost him his life, leaving my father-in-law without both parents.

Hearing their stories made me realize how little I knew of their struggles, and how much pain and trauma they carried with them as they were forced to quickly leave their homes and all that was familiar to forge a path forward. I had heard and read many tragic stories from this time period in Hmong history. Yet there is something profoundly different when those stories are no longer distant or abstract—when they belong not just to "the Hmong people" but to your own family, to the lives of those you love and call your own. Hearing these stories first-hand leaves an indelible impact on our lives. These are stories that should not be forgotten. They are important for knowing who we are, for honouring the generations before us, and for shaping generations yet to come.

I am a second-generation Hmong Mennonite Canadian in my forties. Yet I know so little about the journeys of my parents and grandparents, and even less about my great-grandparents. Because very little has been written down, many of their oral stories risk being lost with the passing of the older generation. I am deeply grateful that we had the opportunity to hear my father-in-law's story, and I will always treasure the time spent together listening to their struggles and witnessing their vulnerability.

Unfortunately, however, their struggles didn't end there. Once my father-in-law and mother-in-law arrived in Canada, they had to learn a new language, navigate a new culture, adapt to a new climate, and discover what it meant to belong in a new land. Those of us who grew up in Canada witnessed first-hand our parents' resilience and grit. They worked hard at their jobs without ever taking a sick day, even when they were ill. They picked up overtime whenever possible, sometimes even taking on a second part-time job when ends still didn't meet. For that we are forever grateful.

At the same time, we recognize that their determination to build a new life did not give them space to heal from past traumas.

All this has led me to wonder how the church might serve as a place for truth-telling and lament, providing healing for all generations. But before this can happen, it is important to recognize that sharing these memories is not always easy. This realization came to me during a conversation with Sue Park-Hur and Pablo Kim Sun. Upon accepting the invitation to contribute to this issue, I participated in a Zoom call with Sue and Pablo to discuss the theme and potential ideas for our articles. I had met both of them previously at other Mennonite events. So it was wonderful to reconnect and to share our work and experiences in the communities we served. In our conversation, Sue shared about a time when she had been asked by an organization to consult on a project addressing a difficult past. She explained how sometimes retelling our stories can actually re-traumatize those sharing them. She noted how this particular project provided support through onsite counsellors and additional resources to help participants navigate the process safely.

Sue's insight reminded me that any space created for truth-telling and lament must be intentional, sensitive, and prepared to support those who are sharing their stories. While the prospect of gathering these stories can feel exciting, it is always essential to prioritize the well-being of the individuals who lived through these traumatic experiences. Healing is rarely straightforward; oftentimes the pain, trauma, and grief associated with past events remain embedded with the memories.

Although we did not have counsellors present at our reunion, the presence of trusted family and friends surrounding my father-in-law and his siblings created an environment where they could share their pain without fear of judgment. This atmosphere of care fostered openness in storytelling. There was no expectation or pressure to speak; each sibling chose to share at their own pace, offering their perspective as it fit into the unfolding history. A close friend of my father-in-law was also present, offering words of encouragement when emotions grew too heavy for speech. Together, these elements sustained a supportive and healing space for their sharing.

Reflecting on the past of our Hmong community will inevitably bring sorrow and grief, given the many family members, friends, and neighbours who were lost during that time. Yet the church can be a place where difficult stories can be shared, vulnerability can be assured, and healing can begin. When these stories are brought into the open, they no longer remain private burdens; instead, they offer the community opportunities to bear witness, provide support, and walk alongside one another in the healing process. Creating this space will require ongoing attention and reflection. However, as I learned from Sue and Pablo, it is not enough to simply gather to tell our stories; there must be intentional action to cultivate trust by listening deeply and naming the wounds that have remained unspoken.

In my congregation, I have witnessed glimpses of what this might look like. At First Hmong Mennonite Church, we provide space during our worship services for members to share their testimonies. I have heard congregational members speak openly about moments of struggle as well as times of triumph. In doing so, they allow the congregation to enter into their healing alongside them. These moments of sharing illustrate how storytelling can foster empathy, build understanding across generations, and create the beginnings of a shared space where grief, resilience, and hope can be acknowledged and honoured. Like our family reunion, moments like these draw us closer together as a community and remind us that even painful histories can become sources of healing and strength.

There are a number of different ways that our church could intentionally create spaces for sharing these stories. In worship, this could be a series of services centred on storytelling, including liturgies of lament and healing. In smaller settings, story circles or intergenerational groups can provide safe environments for deeper sharing, perhaps with trained facilitators to guide the process. Creative projects such as recording oral histories, launching a congregational podcast, or curating archives and exhibits of community stories would help preserve memories for future generations. Community events that combine storytelling with cultural traditions, or joint gatherings with Indigenous and other immigrant communities, can further build solidarity and mutual understanding. Underlying all of these practices is the ongoing work of training leaders in trauma-informed care, cultivating trust through deep listening, and making storytelling a regular rhythm of discipleship.

My hope is that holding the stories of our ancestors alongside our faith will challenge us to live faithfully in ways that honour both memory and justice. We are grateful for the refuge Canada provided for our family, for the opportunities that allowed them to rebuild their lives and for the Mennonite churches and Canadians who made this possible.

At the same time, we are also mindful that this land had a history long before our arrival, and we are aware of the ongoing presence and struggles of its Indigenous Peoples. Canada is built on lands that are the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples, some unceded and others governed by treaties. Their histories of displacement, trauma, and resilience intersect with, yet remain distinct from, the stories of immigrant communities like ours. To hear our own ancestors' voices fully is also to recognize and respect the ongoing struggles of those whose land we inhabit today, especially as we begin to learn what it means to belong to a new land. Gratitude for our own refuge must be accompanied by humility, listening, and acting in solidarity with Indigenous communities.

As I reflect on the reunion with my father-in-law and his siblings, I am reminded that storytelling is not merely a way to preserve the past; it is a

call to responsibility in the present. The stories of war, loss, migration, and hope shape who we are. They inform how we live in community and guide how we extend care and justice to others. If the church can be a space where these stories are shared and honoured—where lament is allowed, where intergenerational and intercultural understanding is nurtured, and where healing is pursued—then it can model a deeper, more expansive vision of belonging. In listening to our elders, in witnessing their pain and resilience, and in learning to hold multiple truths at once, we participate in a sacred work: the work of remembering, reconciling, and striving to live faithfully in a complex world.

In recent years the Mennonite church has begun to live into being an intercultural church and broadcasting stories that do not centre around the traditional Russian and Swiss Mennonite historical traditions. To decolonize discipleship as an intercultural church, we need to recognize and value stories that have been historically silenced or overlooked (whether that was by choice or not) by listening to marginalized voices. The Hmong have been part of the Mennonite story for forty years now, and by recounting stories like my father-in-law's, we honor each other's stories across cultures as one body in Christ.

The reunion of my father-in-law and his siblings reminds me of the profound impact that sharing our stories can have—not only on those who speak but on everyone who listens. Witnessing their vulnerability and courage brought our family closer together. It created space for grief and healing, and it made the abstract history of our people tangible and deeply personal. Our experiences as immigrants, shaped by displacement and resilience, intersect with our faith by calling us to act with gratitude, humility, and justice in the world around us. In the same way, the Mennonite church has the potential to cultivate spaces where difficult stories are heard and honoured, where communities can bear witness, offer support, and grow together in understanding.

By holding the stories of our ancestors alongside our faith, we are reminded that belonging in a new land carries responsibilities: listening carefully, acknowledging past traumas, and walking in solidarity with Indigenous communities whose histories and struggles we now inhabit. Just as our reunion revealed the strength and resilience of one family, intentional storytelling within the church can strengthen the bonds of intercultural community, helping us all to belong more fully, heal more deeply, and bear witness faithfully to the histories that shape us.

About the author

Mollee Moua is a second-generation Hmong Mennonite Canadian living in Kitchener, Ontario, with her husband and their four sons.

Deconstructing colonial spirituality

Ethnocentrism and homogeneity

Joon Park

The transformation of a culturally and racially homogeneous church into an intercultural church inherently carries a postcolonial, decolonial dimension.

The term *colonialism* is usually discussed in terms of power, violence, and coercion. But its ultimate goal is to suppress, control, and eliminate all cultural and racial differences in order to establish a single, uniform culture (homogeneity) rooted in self-centered thinking (ethnocentrism).

Therefore, when we say we are moving toward an intercultural church, two fundamental reflections are required: on ethnocentrism and homogeneity. These are not only the driving forces of colonialism but also core aspects of humanity's sinful nature.

Without a thorough repentance and overcoming of these two tendencies, all intercultural or multicultural church efforts—no matter how well-intentioned—will inevitably regress to their original state. That is, they will once again become racially homogeneous and confined to self-centered ways of thinking. And in the end, the spirit of colonization will triumph once again: *One Unholy Uniform Church.*

From this point forward, I will explore ethnocentrism and homogeneity as the most persistent spiritual adversaries that remain in the postcolonial context of church life, including for the Mennonite church.[1]

Ethnocentrism

Do you remember the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, directed by Joel Zwick, which was a huge box-office hit in the early 2000s? It is a story about a young Greek American woman, Toula Portokalos, falling in love with a non-Greek WASP, Ian Miller, and struggling to get her family to accept him while she comes to terms with her ethnic heritage and cultural identity.

Acclaimed as a romantic comedy spiced with a celebration of ethnicity, this movie goes beyond that. Toula's Greek father Gus's dialogue comically represents the exaltation of the Greek culture and accompanies the inevitable ethnocentric point of view:

1 The following reflections were originally published in *Canadian Mennonite* in 2024 and have been edited here to align with the purpose of this *Vision* issue.

> *Gus (Father): Now, gimme a word, any word, and I'll show you how the root of that word is Greek.*
>
> *Young Athena: Oh, not this again.*
>
> *Gus: Okay? How about arachnophobia? Arachna, that comes from the Greek word for spider, and phobia is a phobia, is mean fear. So, fear of spider, there you go.*
>
> *Schoolgirl: Okay, Mr. Portokalos. How about the word kimono?*
>
> *Young Athena: Good one.*
>
> *Gus: Kimono, kimono, kimono. Ha! Of course! Kimono is come from the Greek word himona, is mean winter. So, what do you wear in the winter-time to stay warm? A robe. You see, robe, kimono. There you go!*[2]

In Gus's perspective, there exist only two kinds of people in the world: Greek, and everyone else who wishes they were Greek.

The greatest barrier to decolonizing and becoming an intercultural church does not lie in any external elements—buildings, capitals, or the others—but in our own ethnocentric tendency, a.k.a. ethnocentrism, which puts one's own group (or its assumption and judgment) in the center (*kentron* in Greek) of every thing/nation (*ethnos*); it also develops into a rigid belief that some or all aspects of its culture are superior to those of other groups, finally contributing to dividing the whole with the concepts of in-group and out-group (segregation).

For example, the ancient Greeks perceived other groups as barbarians (which means "babbler"); in the Greek ear, speakers of a foreign tongue made unintelligible sounds ("bar bar"). The Inuktut word *Inuit* means (real) human beings, compared to a racially charged word like *Eskimo*, which means raw meat eaters. The Chinese call their country the "Middle/Center Kingdom" (中華).

No one is free from ethnocentric tendencies unless we are born out of nowhere or from a state of cultural and political vacuum. So ethnocentrism is not a modern creation but an ancient phenomenon, even though the word itself was coined by the American sociologist William Graham Sumner (1840–1910) in his book *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (Ginn and Company, 1906). In this book, he introduced ethnocentrism as a view that one's own group is the center of everything and all others are downgraded to its reference.

In Christianity, its origin even goes back to Genesis. Ethnocentrism was inherited from the birth of humans, who were kicked out of the Paradise

2 A corrective note by Wikipedia: The kimono (きもの/着物, lit. "thing to wear") is a traditional Japanese garment and the national dress of Japan. It is not Greek!

where no human centricity was allowed. The Wisdom of Solomon[3] already predicted this human centeredness: "While over those people alone heavy night was spread, an image of the darkness that was destined to receive them; but still heavier than darkness were *they to themselves*" (17:21, NRSV; emphasis added).

To survive, the eye-opened Adam and Eve in the unknown world put themselves at the center, seeking to define and control their surroundings. This human impulse toward self-centeredness and superiority reappears throughout scripture, including in Israel's story, where the struggle to live faithfully as God's covenant people often intertwined with tendencies toward ethnocentrism and exclusion. Yet the prophets continually called Israel—and, by extension, all humanity—back to humility and justice, reminding us that God's covenant extends beyond any one nation or culture. Early Christians, reflecting on this same human tendency, came to see in Christ the revelation that "Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise" (Ephesians 3:6). This vision invites all people, not one tradition over another, toward a posture of humility, interdependence, and shared belonging before God.

So we modern-day ethnocentrists seem indelibly indebted to these early human ancestors, because we are still ethnocentric, even though we are not aware that we are ethnocentric, insular, and self-serving. We are now defenselessly bombarded by ceaseless sociocultural bastards of ethnocentrism such as cultural bias, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, xenophobia, racism, and genocide. Are we now living in a world that is culturally more relativistic or dignifying compared to the ancient era?

The church that should have been the last resort or refuge from these unfortunate anti-gospel phenomena is no safer. It has become a hotbed of superiority, nationalism, and discrimination under the guise of protecting its purity and fidelity to God and its ethnic and cultural identity.

In the united, intercultural body of Christ there is no place for ethnocentrism. Remember how the Gospel of Jesus crossed cultural boundaries and ministered to the gentiles (*ethnos*)? Jesus's references to the widow of Zarephath in Elijah's time and the healing of Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:25–27), the healing of a gentile (Samaritan) in the group of ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19), the healing of the Syrophoenician's daughter (Matthew 15:21–28), the healing of the Roman centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5–13), and the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)—these are only a few examples.

Ethnocentrism and the teachings of Jesus cannot be compatible or reconcilable. There is no middle way in between. Ethnocentrism, a

3 The Wisdom of Solomon is found in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles as part of the Deuterocanonical books, while in most Protestant Bibles it is considered apocryphal.

beginning and final destination of colonized mindset, is the very thing to be crushed, *deconstructed* by the power of the Gospel that is universally true and applicable. We cannot be ethnocentric and a follower of Jesus at the same time. Jesus on the cross ended human ethnocentrism. Why do we keep singing "Jesus Be the Center"[4] in Sunday worship? Because the one and only centeredness we need is not in and through us, but only through Jesus Christ our Lord. "Jesus be the center, be my source, be my light, Jesus . . ." Let's sing out loud!

We cannot be ethnocentric and a follower of Jesus at the same time.

Homogeneity

No one would disagree that the world, be it big or small, urban or rural, has become heterogeneous. If you do not believe it, go to the nearest McDonald's and see who is sitting there! Or tune your ears to CBC News; I recently read about a Chinese immigrant family farming in the backcountry of a white-dominant province—Saskatchewan—in Canada. In this era of cultural boundarylessness, making excuses not to be heterogenous at church for demographic reasons—"No, our church is in a rural area," or "No, our community is so small," etc.—seems a bit thin.

Thom S. Rainer, the founder of Church Answers and author of *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (B&H Publishing, 2014) shared his first-hand experience with homogeneity on his blog:

> *I grew up in the racist world of the Deep South. We whites had our own churches, places of business, and country clubs. No one else was allowed. If you went to the doctor, there were separate waiting rooms for whites and African Americans ("Coloreds"). It was abysmal. It was sickening. I know racism is not gone. But I am grateful that my children and grandchildren don't even know why a person of a different color should not be their friend or colleague. The culture has changed. We are living in a heterogeneous culture. But not all churches have changed. Those that haven't will die.*[5]

He prophetically warns that seeing homogeneity as a form of segregation—the main purpose of *effective* colonization—is not Gospel-centric.

But when it comes to the Mennonite church setting, another new theory is heard: Homogeneity is not absolute, but necessary in order for us

4 *Voices Together* (MennoMedia, 2020), 584, text and music by Michael Frye.

5 Thom S. Rainer, "Five Reasons the Homogeneous Church Is Declining and Dying," *Church Answers*, 4 Dec. 2017, https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-homogeneous-church-declining-dying/.

to keep our 500-year-old Mennonite identity unique and peculiar in "all set" worship styles, pew arrangements, potluck menus, and church politics. It is a lamentable fact that there are still many Mennonite churches in the twenty-first century where the spirit of homogeneity is living and active for the sake of preserving Mennonite identity. (Do we have to return to Daniel Kauffman's era of the *Manual of Bible Doctrines* (1898–1944), formulating/codifying Mennonite faith in all possible aspects, including uniform dress and deportment?)

In the 1970s the word *homogeneity* went viral among the North American Evangelical churches struggling to adjust to the changing multicultural demographic that asked for accommodation and integration. Racial integration was very limited and faced resistance even among religious institutions because of the assumption of expected disunity (*It is a universal truth that no one likes being messed up!*).

In this complex context, a new homogeneous church model was birthed, which proclaimed: "It is okay to not necessarily mingle with other cultural or racial groups at church." We know people like to gather with those who look, talk, think, and act like them. Church is a place for the similar or like-minded, not demanding any behavioral change! Its goal is to make conforming disciples first, not taking a risk to integrate, making people uncomfortable, and sacrificing.

The credit for discovering this new homogeneous church phenomenon goes to Donald McGavran, a third-generation missionary to India who spent more than three decades from the 1920s to the 1950s prioritizing his missional focus on the Great Commission, converting over one thousand people *without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers*. He later developed his experience into a new church-growth theory called the homogenous unit principle (HUP) through his seminal publication *Understanding Church Growth* (Eerdmans, 1970), which asserts that people are more open to accepting the Gospel when it's shared by someone similar to them in language, culture, social standing, or ethnicity.

Thirsty for church growth and grappling with the multicultural drive in the 1970s, North American churches welcomed this expedient and practical theory with great enthusiasm, regardless of its weak biblical foundation: Does the Bible (or Jesus) support isolation, stratification, and separation for the sake of church growth (or to preserve our Mennonite identity)?

A half century has passed, and there have been countless critiques against this church-growth model—a model that borrowed its concept from Western colonization. As of today, it seems that no one steps forward as a defender of the HUP (Thanks be to God!). It is regarded as a cold reality rather than an ideal for growth.

Instead, the space it left behind is now being filled with the success and faithfulness of many emerging heterogeneous churches, whose ultimate goal is to "anticipate on earth the life of heaven," breaking down any (colonial) walls through "cultural richness and heterogenous fellowship" among all people, in contrary to building walls up.[6]

The old belief that heterogeneity is an impractical and unachievable ideal is wrong. The HUP is long gone. We are now in an era where *heterogeneity* is the norm, which is biblically right, ecclesiastically hopeful, and politically decolonizing. And a new humanity in Christ is born.

"Awake, O north wind; And come, thou south; Blow upon my [Mennonite] garden, That the [heterogeneous] spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, And eat his pleasant fruits" (Song of Solomon 4:16, KJV).

Reflection

Pursuing an intercultural church goes far deeper than simply trying to make a declining church more numerically prosperous or vibrant. Being an intercultural church is not a way to escape the harsh reality of young people leaving and older generations passing away.

What we need to do in an intercultural church—or to seed and nurture this intercultural vision within our homogeneous Mennonite context—is to help all people, people of color, and people from different races and ethnicities who are gathered in Christ's name to find their true selves, their true identities, and their true sense of belonging. This is distinct from the notion of "fitting in" or assimilation.

Brené Brown, a prominent researcher on belonging and author of *Braving the Wilderness* (Random House, 2017), defines "fitting in" in contrast to "true belonging" as the process of assessing a situation and adapting oneself to meet the perceived expectations of others for acceptance.[7] In other words, fitting in involves erasing or suppressing one's authentic self to conform to a culture that seems larger or more dominant than one's own.

At this point, we need to reflect on:

1. Whether the historically white-dominant culture of the North American Mennonite church, combined with the universal human tendency toward ethnocentrism, has created an environment where newcomers are expected to "fit in" rather than freely express their identities.

6 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle," *Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 1* (1978).

7 Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Hazelden, 2020), xxvii.

2. Whether the homogeneous Mennonite aversion to conflict or tension, under the guise of "peace," has hindered newcomers from finding their authentic expressions of who they are in worship or other church activities.

If an intercultural church merely becomes a place that produces model minorities or fit-ins—people of color who are polite, compliant, and exemplary—it will fail. If it becomes a place where newcomers are forced to fit in with the old norms to create a stronger, homogeneous, ethnocentric unity/identity, it will fail. What makes our intercultural church different from Charlie Chaplin's factory, which churns out identical items?

A church that is truly intercultural should be fundamentally different. It should be a place where all people feel safe as they journey to discover their true, authentic selves in the midst of unfamiliarity and discomfort.

A church that is truly intercultural should be fundamentally different. It should be a place where all people feel safe as they journey to discover their true, authentic selves in the midst of unfamiliarity and discomfort. It should be a space where their unacknowledged, untapped gifts can be shared for the well-being of everyone.

The work of building a church that is voluntarily mixed—where people of different cultures, languages, and histories come together to find their true colors and shape a third culture, again, a kind of new humanity in Christ—is not a burden. It is a blessing, not a curse. It is a victory, not a failure. It is a bold resistance to the grip of colonial spirituality that still lingers in many Christian traditions.

And so I finally ask: Where does our Mennonite church stand in this ongoing journey of decolonization and transformation?

About the author

Joon Park, a Korea-born graduate of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), is a Christian writer and the pastor of First Mennonite Church in Calgary. He is a trained intercultural church practitioner and serves on the denomination's Intercultural Church Steering Committee.

Creative Land Acknowledgment and bannock

Cultivating decolonizing spaces in the classroom

Hyejung Jessie Yum with Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji

> *Sharing Bannock for me is a way to share a forgotten history with the world and to honour my mother's fight to keep our cultural history alive, even if it's a messy one. We also chose to highlight Bannock as a way of demonstrating a contemporary, even possibly mundane aspect of First Nations culture.*
>
> *–Excerpt from Matthew Kitchen's reflection on "Bannock"*

Introduction: A personal story of Creative Land Acknowledgment

It was in my first doctoral class in 2016 in Toronto that I, Hyejung Jessie Yum, encountered a land acknowledgment for the first time. Although I had lived in the United States for about six years, I had never experienced such a practice before. I soon realized that land acknowledgments were not limited to the classroom but were also integral to other public settings—such as theaters and churches—where gatherings began with this recognition. This practice became more widespread in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report and its Calls to Action in 2015. Moreover, Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto, where I had my academic formation, was committed to decolonizing education. The intellectual and pedagogical climate of this environment has profoundly shaped both my research and teaching. Since then, as I have pursued peace theology through a postcolonial lens, I have engaged critically with questions of Indigenous rights in the settler-colonial structures of North America, where I live as an immigrant. This ongoing engagement continues to inform both my scholarship and pedagogy.

In 2021, I had an inspiring experience with my students in the Social Justice and Theology in Context master's class at Emmanuel, where I taught my first course as a sessional instructor. I began each session by reading a land acknowledgment. That same year, the unmarked graves of Indigenous children were discovered at the former residential school in Kamloops,

an event that profoundly shaped our collective reflection.[1] To honor and remember the forgotten children, my students and I collaboratively created a land acknowledgment poem titled "I Will Not Forget."[2] Each student contributed a sentence in the chat box during our online class amid the pandemic. This small and collaborative act became a heartfelt expression of remembrance and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. The experience reinforced my conviction that mutual learning is not merely a pedagogical approach but lies at the heart of a transformative, decolonizing education. It rests on the recognition that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active agents in the process of decolonization.

To demonstrate how a land acknowledgment can operate as a decolonizing practice within the classroom, this article first introduces the motivation and meaning behind Creative Land Acknowledgment. It then briefly presents the work of Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji—"Bannock"—created for the Creative Self class at Concordia University in Montréal, as an example that embodies this practice.

Creative Land Acknowledgment: Cultivating intentional spaces for decolonizing learning

Since the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in the mid-2010s, offering a land acknowledgment at the beginning of public events has become an important and widespread practice across Canada. However, scholars have critiqued the way that these gestures, when institutionalized, often risk becoming performative—serving settler comfort and reconciliation narratives rather than embodying genuine relationships with Indigenous Peoples or decolonizing intent.[3] Acknowledging these critiques, I propose that reimagining the practice through creativity can transform it into a meaningful entry point into decolonizing education. When approached this way, a land acknowledgment opens space for active reflection on our colonial histories, Indigenous cultures, and the lands we inhabit, as well as on our accountability and solidarity in our own contexts. In this sense, it invites both educators and students to engage

1 Courtney Dickson and Bridgette Watson, "Remains of 215 children found buried at former Kamloops Indian Residential School, First Nation says," *CBC News*, 27 May 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%BAps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778.

2 "I Will Not Forget," poem collaboratively written by students in Social Justice and Theology in Context class (Summer 2021), Emmanuel College, Toronto, unpublished classroom project.

3 Joe Wark, "Land Acknowledgements in the Academy: Refusing the Settler Myth," *Curriculum Inquiry* 51, no. 2 (2021): 191–209.

in mutual learning as an ongoing endeavor of relational responsibility on Indigenous land.[4]

As an educator in theological studies, I developed Creative Land Acknowledgment in a classroom as an intentional effort to engage directly with the Calls to Action—the 94 recommendations issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015. In particular, Calls to Action 59 and 60 emphasize the need for sustained education regarding the church's involvement in colonization and the residential school system. They further call upon theological and religious institutions to develop curricula that cultivate respect for Indigenous spiritual traditions and actively work to prevent ongoing forms of spiritual violence.[5]

Instead of simply reading the assigned land acknowledgment at the beginning of each class, I invite students to lead a Creative Land Acknowledgment by engaging critically and creatively with settler-colonial realities, learning from Indigenous Peoples and cultures, and acknowledging the land we inhabit. Students have explored diverse themes such as the settler-colonial histories of Concordia University and Montréal, the works of Indigenous artists, ceremonies like the Powwow and Sundance, cultural appropriation during Halloween, and tensions between settler institutions and Indigenous communities in local contexts.[6] Unlike visible and direct forms of violence such as war, colonial violence functions as structural violence that often remains invisible, as conquest and its enduring effects have been legitimized and normalized within systems of colonial sovereignty.[7] Only through continuous and intentional engagement with colonial realities and Indigenous Peoples and their stories can we begin to discern the workings of colonial violence and recover silenced histories that have too easily slipped into the realm of the "normal."

---

4 As a racialized person engaged in anti-racism, I often observe that the responsibility for education is placed disproportionately on survivors, under the guise of privileged ignorance, adding further burden to those already harmed by the system. While it is crucial to respect and center Indigenous voices, settlers—both white and racialized—must also undertake a continuous process of self-education to recognize and assume their own responsibilities in settler-colonial structures.

5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (2015), 7–8, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf.

6 The Creative Self class, taught by Hyejung Jessie Yum, Department of Theological Studies, Concordia University, Montréal, Winter 2024 and Fall 2025, unpublished classroom material.

7 Hyejung Jessie Yum, "Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace: A Decolonizing Investigation of Mennonite Migration from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s," *Anabaptist Witness* 7, no. 2 (Oct. 2020): 93–113; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 38.

At the beginning of each class of the Creative Self in the Winter 2024 and Fall 2025 semesters at Concordia University, students led a Creative Land Acknowledgment, a ten-minute activity designed as part of an ongoing decolonizing practice. This exercise invites students to introduce their classmates to various aspects of Indigenous cultures, spiritualities, and colonial histories, fostering awareness of the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. Through creative formats such as video, poetry, song, collective reading, or experiential exercises, students are encouraged to engage critically and respectfully with themes of Indigenous presence, decolonization, and settler-Indigenous relations. The activity not only promotes understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions but also cultivates habits of reflection, relational accountability, and mutual respect in the classroom.

Creative Land Acknowledgment: "Bannock" by students in the Creative Self class[8]

On September 19, 2025, Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji led the Creative Self class with their Creative Land Acknowledgment on bannock. They incorporated visual aids, including photographs and a video, cited Salmon's original poem on bannock, and shared homemade bannock prepared from Kitchen's mother's recipe, which originates from the Moose Cree First Nation. This recipe is included at the end of this article.

The following is a transcript of the recording of their Creative Land Acknowledgment.

Introduction of bannock

Okay, let us get this bread. So our project is about bread.

We chose to do our Creative Land Acknowledgement on bannock. It is a key thing in Indigenous cuisine. It is referred to as *palauga* in Inuktitut, *luskinikn* in Mi'kmaq, *ba'wezhiganag* in Ojibwe, and *pahkwêsikan* in Cree. But this is just a small example of the different Indigenous groups that have some variation of bannock, when, in reality, pretty much everyone in North America—Turtle Island, if you will—has some variation on it. So this begs the question, what is it exactly?

What is bannock?

So bannock is a fried bread food with just a few ingredients, flour, water, and fat, and it's kind of similar to biscuit texture. When it is cooked in an

8 Matthew Kitchen, Nathaniel Salmon, and Nour Bach Tobji, Creative Land Acknowledgement Presentation: "Bannock," *THEO 245: The Creative Self* class, Concordia University, Montréal, September 19, 2025.

oven it has more of a dense, chewy texture, and when it is fried, it has a more crispy texture.

Where does it originate?
So pre-colonization Indigenous communities had similar cakes and breads made with *camas*, which is wild hyacinth and dried fern roots, which were then mashed and roasted on the pit fire. The modern wheat-based Bannock was introduced by Scottish fur traders in the eighteenth century, and it eventually got adopted by Indigenous hunters due to its practicality and versatility as a calorie-rich, carbohydrate-rich, portable food source. The ingredients were light to carry and it was quick to be prepared and cooked, so it was super convenient when traveling nomadically.

Bannock's relationship to settler-colonialism: Cultural exchange or colonization?
As you can see, modern forms of Bannock result from the arrival of Europeans, which makes it a tricky subject when it comes to its place in Indigenous culture. On one hand, you can see aspects of cultural exchange in that fur traders brought new ingredients which filled a need for carbohydrate-rich food sources, as these can be hard to come by in cold months, especially when they were living nomadically. Many Indigenous hunters adopted it for this reason. On the other hand, once the reservation system was imposed and Indigenous Peoples were forced to conform to a sedentary lifestyle divorced from traditional food knowledge, Bannock became more of a necessity for survival, as food was limited to rations based on the European diet—namely wheat flour, baking powder, lard, salt, things like that.

Symbol of resilience or legacy of colonialism?
As such, it can be a bit controversial. Many Indigenous communities embrace bannock as a cherished food, viewing it as a cultural touchstone shared among a variety of Nations on Turtle Island, as well as a way to share their culture with the world. In this way, bannock can represent reclamation of something imposed upon them, as well as a source of pride and resilience, despite the tragic circumstances.

Others reject it as a colonial food that doesn't necessarily represent Indigenous culture. They may opt to use traditional ingredients like corn or plant flowers like the ferns or hyacinth we mentioned before, and preparation methods to decolonize their relationship to bannock. For them, it symbolizes the erasure of traditional ways. As Dr. Yum said, these things are never quite black and white, and there's always a nebulous sort of gray area. But either way, today bannock plays a big role in modern Indigenous cuisine. Bringing it to modern day, we have a video of Jeanette Posine, who is an Ojibwe woman from Pays Plat First Nation in Ontario, and she is the Bannock Lady herself.

Watching video: "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay" [Added by Yum]
The video titled "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay," produced by SKIP, features Jeanette Posine, an entrepreneur from Pays Plat First Nation and the owner of the Bannock Lady, a restaurant in Thunder Bay that specializes in Indigenous cuisine. Posine explains that bannock—a traditional Indigenous bread made from flour, baking powder, and water—has been passed down through generations in her family. Originally a staple in her upbringing, she modernized the recipe by deep-frying it to create a light and fluffy texture. Her journey began when she noticed a lack of Indigenous food representation at a local festival, inspiring her to perfect her recipe and share it with the public. Over time, her participation in community events led to growing popularity and eventually to the establishment of her restaurant. The Bannock Burger and the Indian Taco have become the most popular menu items. Posine expresses pride in offering a space that celebrates Indigenous heritage and welcomes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to experience and appreciate traditional foods.[9]

Bannock today
So yeah, today bannock serves as a way to share and preserve Indigenous culture, both interculturally and intraculturally. So it's a staple in Powwow gatherings and is a part of the growing Indigenous food industry. It's way more mainstream now. People have heard about it outside of Indigenous communities. There's the Kekuli Cafe that is quite popular, and yeah, so many families pass down their recipes generationally, therefore creating a link to their ancestors through shared food.

Matthew-made bannock shared with the class
And Matthew's mom is Cree, and she shared her recipe with him, and today we'll share it with the class.

So I [Kitchen] made some bannock to share with everybody from my mom's recipe. I'm not going to say it's like a generational recipe, but it's definitely representative of the bannock that would be eaten in northern Ontario, where she's from the Moose Cree First Nation on James Bay.

So I brought jam to eat with it too because it's baked, so it's kind of dense, a bit dry, so I'll pass it around. And as it's going around, Nathaniel is going to read a poem which he wrote inspired by Bannock.

Nathaniel Salmon's poem "Bannock"
Okay, so I [Salmon] made this poem about bannock. But one thing I will say, though, is it's the first time I ever made a poem on bread. So bear with me.

9 SKIP, "The Bannock Lady | Thunder Bay," *YouTube* video, 3:59, October 26, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BorlchHeWlM.

BANNOCK
by Nathaniel Salmon

A bread, which has a complex history,
Forgetting the struggles would hurt their culture like an injury.
A necessity for Indigenous Peoples, confined to their limited lands,
This bread marked the symbol of strength they claimed with their own hands.

Made with ingredients such as fat, water and flour,
Food rations were scarce, limited access left them to cower.
Resilience; a word to describe Indigenous Peoples,
This bread prevented starvation which helped move the needle.

From light to fluffy, golden brown,
The taste shapes your frown upside down.

Fried or cooked,
We don't get taught these things in our textbooks.
In schools or presentations,
Their culture should not receive discrimination.

We offer this land acknowledgement, for this bread not to be forgotten like a wish,
Their absence will make the impact their presence could not accomplish.

The Indigenous culture is something that has been brought to light in these troubled times. This poem was made to bring awareness to not only their culture but the people as a whole, so they may be respected and remembered. Words can only mean so much; thus, I [Salmon] hope they resonate with you so it can manifest into something greater.

Matthew Kitchen's reflection on the Creative Land Acknowledgement "Bannock"

I am Matthew Kitchen, and I am a third-year student in theological studies at Concordia. When we were assigned the Creative Land Acknowlegment in Dr. Yum's class, I proposed to my group to highlight bannock as a way of sharing an aspect of my own Cree heritage, as well as a tangible part of

a variety of Indigenous cultures, with our class. My mother is from Moose Cree First Nation in Northern Ontario, and our family has a complicated history with this identity.

My mother spent her formative years learning traditional ways of food and hunting from her grandmother, but her own mother felt ashamed of her heritage and wanted to keep us, her grandchildren, ignorant of it. Sadly, this seems to be a common dynamic I've heard from others I've spoken to of different First Nations backgrounds. It wasn't until relatively recently that our family was even recognized as Cree by the Canadian government due to generations of colonial erasure. The first documented ancestor we can find is simply listed as an "Indian woman" in a marriage registry, as she married a Scotsman working in the fur trade. Most of our subsequent ancestors are listed in census forms as "half-breeds" due to this, despite being Cree speakers living on ancestral lands.

Bannock, even with its complicated history, was a way in which my mom was able to give my brothers and me a link to our relatives and ancestors while we grew up far away from ancestral lands in New Brunswick. This is among many small acts of resistance on her behalf to keep her ancestors alive and acknowledged through her own children. Sharing bannock for me is a way to share a forgotten history with the world and to honor my mother's fight to keep our cultural history alive, even if it's a messy one. We also chose to highlight bannock as a way of demonstrating a contemporary, even possibly mundane aspect of First Nations culture.

Often, I find that land acknowledgments portray historicized, tragic images of Indigeneity. While it is certainly important to acknowledge these things, a holistic approach to land acknowledgments should also bring awareness to the joys of Indigenous culture despite tragedy. My family certainly has fond memories of sharing bannock among their relations, both Cree and not, and it is something that keeps our ancestors alive for us.

Her recipe, the one I made for the class, is as follows:

6 cups of flour
1 ½ cups of lard [I substituted vegetable shortening]
3 tablespoons of baking powder
1 tablespoon of salt
3 to 4 cups of water

1. Mix together the flour, baking powder, and salt.
2. Cut in the lard to the dry mixture.
3. Add just enough water to moisten and mix (I lightly kneaded mine after mixing).

4. Place the dough into two 8-inch square pans and bake at 425 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 to 40 minutes.

Conclusion

As Kitchen, Salmon, and Tobji shared creative baking, stories, and a poem on bannock with the class through their Creative Land Acknowledgment, this practice demonstrates how small yet meaningful acts of remembrance, creativity, and sharing can transform education from a space of knowledge transmission into one of mutual learning toward decolonization. This brief gesture—about ten minutes in each class throughout the semester—creates an intentional space to reconsider what we have taken for granted in a settler-colonial society, to invite students to become active agents in decolonizing work, and to reflect on how we can participate in decolonization in our daily lives. This embodied response to the Calls to Action is not an endpoint but an initiation to connect Indigenous histories, peoples, and lands where we are residing. I hope this will continue to grow in meaning and practice in students' own contexts and future fields, just as I once experienced land acknowledgments as a student and now carry them forward in my own classrooms as a teacher.

About the authors

Hyejung Jessie Yum is a faculty member at Concordia University in Montréal, committed to fostering decolonizing and intercultural relationships and dialogue across differences.

Matthew Kitchen is a student in the department of theological studies at Concordia University, interested in researching mysticism and relational theological frameworks.

Nathaniel Salmon is a third-year student attending Concordia University in Montréal, pursuing his education in English literature and hoping to inspire others with his writing.

Nour Bach Tobji is an English literature student at Concordia University in Montréal who is interested in the intersection between literature and philosophy.

Response: Elaine Enns and Ched Myers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peter Haresnape begins with a poignant description of how T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* accompanied his years of activist engagement, which have given him so many "fragments to shore against my ruins." His exploration of Landlines in the Fens of East Anglia offers a concise overview of its colonial history and the marginalization of its waters and traditional inhabitants, and his decolonization work on Turtle Island has helped him see how "the same people making money on colonising and enslaving around the world were doing the same a day's ride from London." For many of us settler activists, it takes an intercultural and decolonial immersion in another's place and struggle to see the truths of our own. We agree with his conclusion that treaty is the best lens through which to understand both colonial histories and decolonial futures. The Canadian slogan "We are Treaty People" is for us a discipleship call, whether in Treaty Six land or here in untreatied, unceded Chumash territory (*HHH*, pp. 189–92). Treaty invites Christians back to the deep biblical substrate of *covenant* as a trinitarian commitment—to Creator, land, and people—to "tend and defend" just and equitable community in the places we inhabit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Response: Sarah Augustine

Sarah Augustine reflected on this issue of Vision *in conversation with guest editors Pablo Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson in December 2025. An edited version of that conversation is presented here.*

Could you tell us a bit about yourself and your role with the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery?[1]

I'm Sarah Augustine. I'm the co-founder and executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. I'm a Tewa descendant and a displaced person. That's how I define myself. I am racially Tewa, but politically a Tewa descendant because of the laws in my country and how they define who is allowed to claim that definition.

As you reflect on reading this issue of *Vision*, are there key themes that you would like to highlight?

Your introduction does such a beautiful job outlining the themes of the whole issue. I am so grateful for the framework that you created, because I think it's a model for Christian activists who are trying to grapple with all of this and for Christian theologians. There are a couple of themes that I would like to highlight.

You mention that faith is contextual, and I think that is really an important framing. For me that is consistent with what Vine Deloria expresses in his book *God Is Red*. Vine Deloria is the predominant voice in twentieth-century US Indigenous theology. He talks about how our understanding of the divine is not universal, but particular. I think that really resonates with Indigenous spirituality in general. Although there is no pan-indigeneity, in many of the indigeneities I've encountered, including my own, it's so deeply tied to land, and not an abstraction.

You talked about how decolonization and working with Indigenous communities can't just be based on intention but must also pay careful attention to impact. Those of us who are academic types are talking conceptually when most Indigenous Peoples in the US are really living in the trenches of oppression. And so when we bring our theoretical intentions to communities of poor and oppressed people there is a disconnect there when it turns out the people that we're interacting with are living in a completely different reality.

With this in mind, I would add three more themes. First, we have to reckon with power dynamics, understanding who has power, and how

1 The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, https://dismantlediscovery.org/.

power works in the context of institutions. Second, we have to reckon with an understanding of how trauma works as well, as Mollee Moua explores in her reflections. Third, I want to add a dimension to the model of decolonial practice this issue of *Vision* introduces, which is the material. Beyond theoretical, beyond theological, beyond spiritual, we must attend to the material as well. How do we, as people of faith, move beyond prayer and worship to dismantling structures?

There are laws and policies that define reality for all of us, not just Indigenous Peoples. But our oppression as Indigenous Peoples is framed by laws and policies, and those we call structures. And so, dismantling structures is what our people cry out for when we cry out for justice. So, sharing a potluck is nice on some level, but really what we need is partners in the struggle to dismantle systems of oppression. And that is absolutely the work of the church.

I disagree that for Christians decolonization is about our own institutions. It's also about shaping our world as the beneficiaries of the Doctrine of Discovery—the prevailing body of law that is the law of the land today and that defines oppression for Indigenous Peoples and advantage for settler communities. That has to be dismantled. And whose job is it to change the law? The churches. These are the institutions that have the moral authority to take action, and yet generation after generation choose not to.

I really want to put that challenge out there, that there is material work as well as spiritual work.

I really want to put that challenge out there, that there is material work as well as spiritual work. I don't want to dismiss the spiritual work within the context of the cosmology that I've learned from my Elders that's so crucial and important. But the material outcome can't be dismissed.

The spiritual grounding for the material work of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery is described on your website: "We are a group of people who work together to mobilize Christian church communities to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and follow Indigenous leadership. We proclaim an Anabaptist spirit of discipleship rooted in the call to love of neighbor, seeking right relationship and reconciliation through active non-violence." Part of the theme of this issue of *Vision* is "Decolonial Discipleship," and *Vision* is an Anabaptist journal. Could you say more about how the Coalition understands an "Anabaptist spirit of discipleship"?

In our Coalition, we define decolonization as the relinquishment of subjugated people. In order for there to be freedom, those people who have the

power have to relinquish control of those that are subjugated. And so I think this is also a call to the church.

From my point of view, Anabaptist discipleship moves beyond belief into collective action. Discipleship is living as a collective into the mandate that Jesus voices in Luke 6. Jesus says, reading from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to bring good news to the poor," and he addresses what those things are, namely "release for the captive, restoration of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the announcement of the year of our Lord's favor," which is jubilee—the just reordering of human systems. Anabaptist discipleship acknowledges that there's something beyond the first step, which is belief. Even in the baptismal covenant, you're entering into a life of discipleship, not just crossing a boundary of belief.

As an Indigenous woman and activist, engaging in that collective is seeking justice in peaceful means because of that mandate of Jesus. Freedom for the oppressed is not a metaphor. We're living into that process of struggling for and also embodying a different way of being in the world.

Can you say more about how this vision of discipleship is lived out in practice in the work of the Coalition?

In the Coalition, we follow the leadership of Indigenous Peoples. There are land and water protectors with whom we're in relationship who come to us with a policy objective or focus. We organize Christians to support that policy focus. We don't define what the focus or outcome is—it's up to Indigenous leaders to do that. What we're doing is activating Christians—settler-descended people who are beneficiaries of these structural injustices and who hold these values together—to awaken to injustice and to join in the process of liberation by following the leadership of Indigenous land and water protectors.

Everything that we're doing is rooted in spirituality, and we always seek to embody a posture of loving-kindness. That has to be our posture because that's our mandate: "to love one another." And so we're encountering conflict constantly, because when you are stepping into something as countercultural as working for justice, there's going to be a constant onslaught of conflict. And we seek to encounter that conflict with a posture of love and kindness.

The second part of the theme of this issue is being an "intercultural church." A lot of social justice organizations and institutions predominantly engage with white people and we rarely see people of color being involved. If new immigrants and people of color are not part of this important work, there is a risk of perpetuating colonial patterns. At the same

time, we miss the wisdom and participation of many who are essential to making this a truly collective and transformative effort. These are some of the reasons why we want to hold together interculturality and decolonial discipleship. What was your experience of this in decolonial work?

I want to be clear that our Coalition is mainly made up of white settlers. We do have people of color in positions of leadership, and Indigenous people, and those numbers are growing slowly. These are tricky waters to navigate, and I don't want to say we figured it all out. We don't have five easy steps to liberation.

Originally, we as a Coalition began by targeting church institutions because these are the beneficiaries of colonization. These are the institutions and the individuals and families who have gained the most from systems of domination. And so, if you think about the struggle to end slavery, for example, it's hard to imagine those people whose bodies are enslaved being able to give all the work to end slavery. It takes the people who are the beneficiaries, which is the voting people, the Christians who are settler-descended.

As we have been on this road people of color have found us and joined us, especially young people. But I don't go recruiting Indigenous people or people of color, because we're trying to shape the context where it's possible for those people with power to relinquish that control. And it's not the work of Indigenous people or people of color to train the beneficiaries how to do that. Some of us do that. We're the bridges. I think it's really a special person who's willing to come along and accompany those people who have been the primary beneficiaries. To me the work of Indigenous activists is to lead their movement for liberation. What we're trying to do in the Coalition is train Christians to accompany that.

Now after eleven years, we've started to contextualize some of our materials into Spanish. What we're doing is contextualizing, not just translating. We're going to communities of Spanish-speaking people in North America and asking them to share their colonial stories. We're taking the time to build those relationships.

Recent immigrants who are subjugated are some of the people that are the most supportive of colonial structures because they hope they're going to serve them too. When I was in college, I did this big study on immigration at Northwestern University. We found that by the third generation immigrants were done. In the first generation, they're very hopeful and gung-ho. The second generation is raised by the first generation, so they're still quite hopeful. But by the third generation, they're subjugated and no longer hopeful. That study was about systemic poverty across generations. It took three generations to realize that integration is not possible—they're stuck in that subjugated space.

In some ways, the book *Healing Haunted Histories*[2] is a story of another immigrant community—Russian Mennonites on the Canadian prairies. How does the approach to decolonial discipleship and restorative solidarity in the book fit within the approach of the Coalition?

I'm grateful for the framework and I think this book has been much discussed. I think the pathway that it's created has a shadow side, which is meeting the needs of a group of beneficiaries who are able to engage in self-analysis continuously without actually investing in making justice. I'm not saying that's inherent in the project, but I'm saying it's a risk. It's the shadow side that is casting everything through an individual lens.

I am going to talk about this in the context of "All My Relations" by Denise Climenhage, who is of Cree and German Brethren in Christ descent. She talks about "kahkiyaw niwahkomakanak," which is that all living things have a spirit and are related, which is different from centering the experience of the individual. I have learned from my Elders across multiple tribes this very idea.[3]

I respect the idea of calling a narrow group of Anabaptists to this kind of reflection—this is really the experience of Russian Mennonites and not all Mennonites. But we need to get beyond the individual experience where we reflect on our ancestors and on our spiritual lines. Caleb Kowalko quotes Frances Latchford, "They impressed me with myself." These identities we form have to move beyond self-edification and work for collective liberation.

It's very common for people to come to me after I speak and say, "I have some Indigenous ancestry." I say, "Great, you're so welcome, we're so glad you're here. And by the way, you don't just get to claim that once in a while. The obligation is that you join in the movement for liberation for our people. That's how you can be Indigenous every day of your life. You don't have to wait for an invitation. That day is today. Can we join together as a collective in struggling for liberation on behalf of our ancestors?"

The way we relate to others in that web is through mutual obligation as opposed to individual-level identity. Brian Quan describes this sense of obligation in relation to the Confucian principle of harmony. I think in some ways the *Healing Haunted Histories* framework is really focused on individual

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

3 Sophie Pierre, a tribal Chief of the Ktunaxa Nation, describes how any policy has to reflect the benefit of all living things, and anything that doesn't reflect the benefit of all living things is a pointless endeavor. If there's winning and losing, it's in a very narrow, time-bound situation. You win today, but if your opponent loses, then everybody loses in time. We need to look at a different timeline than what's happening right now at the individual level. You can watch her lecture at https://dismantlediscovery.org/resources/indigenous-speaker-series/.

identity. I long for a moment when we move beyond individual identity and redefine our collective identity as the body of Christ. This understanding is described by Denise Climenhage when she talks about all my relations.

Reconciliation has to move past individual action. That's what was expressed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, with 94 recommendations that are primarily structural. Those Calls to Action are almost always institutional. At what point will we as a collective engage in that path of justice?

Ched and Elaine's model falls short of that. I'm not saying it's bad, and it's not a critique; I'm just saying we have to take another step. Because we're still centering the idea that we had this horrible experience as Russian Mennonites and we were oppressed. Yes, that happened, but meanwhile, right here, right now, we have the opportunity to work for liberation together.

This is an issue of *Vision* full of stories. Are there stories that resonate with you in particular ways?

Peter Haresnape wrote about how he was a settler to the Fens first before he was a settler to Canada. He described how he encountered decolonization as a volunteer for Christian Peacemaker Teams. He talked about arriving by invitation, witnessing, showing up, to be supportive of land and water protectors without claiming the story, and putting his body side-by-side with Indigenous land and water protectors to prevent their harassment and intimidation, centering their aims, not his own aims. I related to his story because I also relate to the Fen folk who were talked about like pagans and throwbacks and rebels when they were defending their territory. Peter wrote, "I know that settlers believe in their deepest fears that if the settler state is abolished, they will be swept away by a tide of living justice." And then to that, he responds, "I know that perfect love casts out fear." I love that. I relate to that so much, and I appreciate how he's defining so concretely not only what decolonization looks like, but the fear that's at the center of how we don't do that.

I viscerally related to Sue Park-Hur's essay where she was talking about gathering a spoonful of dirt because her teacher told her, "Don't forget the land you came from." It reminds me of a poem by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish: "Take me as a relic from the mansion of sorrow; / . . . Take me as a toy, a brick from the house / So that our children will remember to return." And I love that, because my people also are people of a diaspora. We have been scattered, as we sometimes say from the UN definition, "as refugees in place." We're excluded from our own homes, our own lands, and yet we can't leave the country because we're citizens of only this country.

There is a story that I would like to share in relation to the story Sarah shared about encountering the teacups in the Anglican church. You talk about coming into this space and identifying with it as part of your heritage that reminds you of your grandmothers. It's important to grapple with how different people enter the same space, and how they experience what these symbols mean. You're saying these teacups help you to locate your place in the family of things.

In the United States, we had a systematic slaughter of bison by colonial powers. The purpose of that eradication of bison was to eradicate a people, particularly the people of the plains, to cripple that people by destroying the food supply and neutering their ability to resist this process of settlement and colonization. There were huge piles of bones that were then exported to England for the production of china. And so the end of the bison created this symbol of civilization in England.

The Coalition is working together with the tribes of the Wind River Reservation and their bison reintegration project.[4] They're trying to build bison herds to reintegrate a very important species into the care of the land. The church can help not only by buying and returning land (and the majority of land on the reservation is owned by the church), but also in shifting laws and policies nationally and regionally. Laws need to change to transfer these bison from being livestock, which can be governed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the federal government), to wildlife, which is governed by tribal authorities. This is a bid for self-determination that is tangible, material, and rooted in the land.

I'm trying to extend this metaphor of the teacup. I'm not saying we shouldn't have teacups. I'm not saying it's wrong or bad. I'm saying it doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. Something that has this understanding of belonging can also be a symbol of oppression. None of us here, or any of us alive now, created the systems that enslave us all. And all of us have an opportunity to dismantle those things, in relationship with each other, and on behalf of our ancestors, whoever they are. Each one of us is a representative of the ones who came before, and we have the opportunity to work for justice now, on their behalf. What a privilege is that! What a joy to be alive now, and to have the opportunity to do that.

We hope that this issue of *Vision* will inspire readers to hold together commitments to interculturality and decoloniality—to join together as people from across cultures in the shared work of dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery and its ongoing legacies of harm. What call to action would you offer to churches?

4 Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative, https://windriverbuffalo.org/.

I don't think it's tricky. I know that a lot of scholars talk about it being tricky, but it isn't. Some of us are oppressed, and others of us aren't. The ones that aren't need to work for the liberation of the ones that are. It's not hard.

Some people say to me, we need to work in relationship with Indigenous people. A lot of people ask me, how do I find Indigenous people to relate to? Wherever you are, look for the tribe near you, or any tribe; it doesn't have to be near you. Find out what their legislative agenda is. If you're working for that legislative agenda that is changing laws and policies and structures for the liberation of the people, believe me, in time you will have a relationship.

That's the essence of Jesus's ministry. This working-class Palestinian healer was not compliant with the rules of the empire. He was expressing a different way of being in the world, a different centering than individualism, a different centering than the empire, a different centering than the religious leaders, but instead centering the collective in love, establishing the kingdom of God, a different way of being that is actually the expression of the Creator's dream for creation, the reconciliation of all things.

Christians have lost that vision, if we ever had it. Now it's like, we are so wealthy, and we give thanks for our excess, and we're willing to share the breadcrumbs with the less fortunate. Give me a break! That is not it! We have to work together for something else. This is something I ask church leaders all the time: We are charged by Jesus with establishing the kingdom of God. Will we do it? Or will our generation punt like all the generations before us?

We have a chance right now. We're alive right now. People who created the systems that we're living under, they're not smarter than us, they're not more creative than us. They did that. We could do something else, we could choose to, but that is risky. Which of us will risk being willing to live for justice? We can open our eyes and see our our siblings, not just in humanity but across creation, who are struggling for survival.

My people, the Tewa people, are dwindling every year. Indigenous tribes across the board are shrinking. We are shrinking, not because we don't want to flourish, but because the strongest, most powerful empire the world has ever known has made it their policy objective to eradicate us from the surface of the earth. How can the Christian church say, "We want to have a potluck with you"? Save our lives! Join us in the struggle to be able to live in this world!

About the author

Sarah Augustine, a Pueblo (Tewa) descendant, is cofounder and executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery and cofounder of the Suriname Indigenous Health Fund, where she has worked in relationship with vulnerable Indigenous Peoples since 2005. She is the author of *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Herald, 2021) and coauthor with Sheri Hostetler of *So We and Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis* (Herald, 2023).

Annotated bibliography

This bibliography was prepared by Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun and Sarah Kathleen Johnson as a starting point for further reflection and action.

Anabaptist voices

Augustine, Sarah. *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery.* Herald Press, 2021.

Sarah Augustine explains the Doctrine of Discovery and its ongoing impact on Indigenous Peoples and the planet. She calls for Mennonites to reckon with our Christian colonial legacy as part of our commitment to following Jesus in the way of justice and peace. Many of the themes present in her response to this issue of *Vision* are explored in greater depth in the book.

Hart, Drew. *Making It Plain: Why We Need Anabaptism and the Black Church.* Herald Press, 2025.

Modeling deep attention to both interculturality and decoloniality, Anabaptist Drew Hart calls for the integration of the radical discipleship of the Anabaptist tradition with the prophetic witness of the Black Church. Hart directly addresses the Doctrine of Discovery and anti-Blackness in ways that resonate with many of the themes explored in this issue of *Vision*.

Heinrichs, Steve, and Esther Epp-Thiessen, eds. *Be It Resolved: Anabaptists and Partner Coalitions Advocate for Indigenous Justice, 1966-2020.* Mennonite Church Canada, 2020.

This 480-page volume collects and contextualizes over ninety documents detailing commitments Anabaptists in Canada have made to Indigenous justice and decolonization since the 1960s. Statements address Indigenous land rights, access to water, education and housing, missing and murdered women and girls, the legacy of residential schools, and restorative responses to crime, among other topics. The result is not a self-congratulatory narrative of "progress" but an account of a complex and winding journey. The book includes a study guide with questions for discussion and actions of response.

Kim Sun, Hyung Jin (Pablo). *Building Mennonite Belonging: Toward an Intercultural Church.* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025.

Kim Sun examines how Canadian Mennonites, especially in Mennonite Church Canada, are wrestling with ethnicity, culture, race, and identity as the church becomes more ethnoculturally diverse. Using three theological frameworks—messianic community, missional church, and shalom church—he argues that the resources for building intercultural belonging already lie within the Mennonite tradition, and what is needed is intentional transformation so all can experience full belonging. This book connects strongly with decolonial discipleship by challenging settler/white Mennonite norms, decentering dominant cultural assumptions, and fostering a church intercultural in worship, leadership, and communal life so that discipleship is not just personal but deeply shaped by justice, inclusion, and mutual transformation.

Rashid, Jonny. *Jesus Takes a Side: Embracing the Political Demands of the Gospel.* Herald Press, 2022.

Rashid argues that following Jesus necessarily involves taking sides with the oppressed, and rejecting neutrality and the so-called "third way" that often upholds the status quo. Drawing on his pastoral and activist experience, he presents discipleship as a public, embodied, and political practice. His call to solidarity with marginalized communities resonates with a decolonial approach to discipleship, where faith entails dismantling systems of domination and building intercultural communities rooted in justice, mutuality, and prophetic witness.

Reesor-Keller, Leah. *Tending Tomorrow: Courageous Change for People and Planet.* Herald Press, 2024.

Leading change in churches and communities is challenging. Weaving together personal narrative, theological reflection, and practical guidance, Leah Reesor-Keller invites leaders to consider how to nurture change with deep attention to local colonial, intercultural, and ecological contexts.

von Gunten, Edith, and Neill von Gunten. *Walking Together: Intercultural Stories of Love and Acceptance.* Mennonite Church Canada, 2022.

In this volume, Edith and Neill von Gunten share stories about their relationships with Indigenous communities around Lake Winnipeg spanning more than four decades. The volume weaves together biblical principles with the Ojibwe "Way of Life" teachings through seven chapters that reflect on love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. In some sense the volume is a meditation on lives of decolonial discipleship lived out through shifting institutional structures and in deepening relationships with Indigenous communities. The book includes a study guide for personal reflection or group discussion.

Additional resources

Aldred, Raymond C., and Matthew R. Anderson. *Our Home and Treaty Land: Revised and Expanded.* Friesen Press, 2024.

Boopalan, John. *Memory, Grief, and Agency: A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Charles, Mark, and Soong-Chan Rah. *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery.* InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Lansdowne, Carmen. *Wearing a Broken Indigene Heart on the Sleeve of Christian Mission.* CMU Press, 2025.

Marzouk, Safwat. *Intercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration.* Fortress Press, 2015.

Medina, Néstor, and Becca Whitla, eds. *Decolonizing Church: Emerging Voices Speak.* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025.

Journal of NAIITS. https://naiits.com/journal/.

We encourage you to explore books and resources available through CommonWord: https://www.commonword.ca.