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## Foreword

In this CGR issue, we are pleased to make available to a wider audience two Benjamin Eby lectures given at Conrad Grebel University College by Professor Marlene Epp in 2008 and by Professor Laura Gray in 2009. Both explore territory that is bound to be new to many readers.

The Article and the Reflection in this issue are provocative in quite different ways, and illustrate the journal's mandate to offer a forum for "thoughtful, sustained discussion of spirituality, ethics, theology and culture." The book reviews cover a broad field, surveying recent publications in a range of academic and applied areas. These reviews are now posted on our website.

We must draw readers' attention to CGR's new cohort of Consulting Editors (see inside front cover). We offer sincere thanks to members whose terms have concluded, and we welcome new and continuing members. Many of the past members began serving as early as 1983, when CGR began. Their willingness to support a new venture publicly was crucial to the journal's birth and subsequent growth. With our new Consulting Editors, we have instituted specific terms of service, and we will actively engage them in shaping CGR's overall direction. We welcome feedback from all our readers in that regard as well.

Upcoming in the next few months are two theme issues, one on Teaching the Bible and the other on "International Justice and Reconciliation: Challenges and Opportunities for the Peace Church Tradition."

Jeremy M. Bergen  
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## 2008 BENJAMIN EBY LECTURE

### Women who ‘made things right’: Midwife-Healers in Canadian Mennonite Communities of the Past<sup>1</sup>

*Marlene Epp*

#### **Introduction**

Aganetha Reimer, born in 1863, was a community midwife in Steinbach, Manitoba until 1938 when, after a hospital was built, her career gradually came to an end. She had taken a three-week course in birthing and the use of home remedies from a Minnesota woman, who was summoned to Manitoba in the late 19th century when the need for a midwife amongst the new immigrants was felt “very badly.” Aganetha assisted at the delivery of close to 700 babies, in one case attending a birth only three days after giving birth herself. She also performed the function of undertaker, bathing and clothing the bodies of the dead, and helping to arrange their coffins.<sup>2</sup>

Sarah Dekker was born in 1878 in a German-Mennonite village in South Russia (present-day Ukraine). She married David Thielman in 1911, and they moved to a settlement called Barnaul in Siberia. They moved to Canada in 1929, in the final year of a significant migration that saw about 21,000 Russian Mennonites re-establish themselves mainly in Ontario and the prairie provinces. The Thielmans settled first at Glenbush, Saskatchewan – about 200 kilometers (125 miles) northwest of Saskatoon – then moved to Beamsville, Ontario, near St. Catharines, in 1941. In the early years of the 20th century, Sarah had gone to St. Petersburg to be trained as a midwife and in 1909, still a single woman, she began recording the births at which she assisted in a midwife’s journal, a carefully hand-written document in German gothic script.<sup>3</sup>

When the journal entries end in 1941, Sarah had assisted at 1,450 births, or at least these were the ones recorded. After moving to Ontario, she ceased her labor as a midwife but continued offering her chiropractic and other healing skills to the local community.<sup>4</sup> As a multi-faceted healthcare provider, Sarah was sometimes referred to as a *zurechtmacherin*, meaning

“one who puts things back” or “makes things right” – hence the title of this lecture.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another such midwife-healer, and indeed spiritual leader, was Barbara Bowman Shuh, born in 1857, an Ontario woman who exercised her gifts and abilities in both sanctioned and unconventional spheres of activity. Not only was Barbara the first chairwoman of the sewing circle organized at Berlin Mennonite Church in 1908, and a cheese-maker, she was also well-known as a midwife and one who had inherited the gift of charming, a traditional spiritual healing art, which she used primarily to treat bleeding, burns, and scalds.<sup>6</sup>

For most of human history, women have given birth in their own homes, either alone, or assisted by family members or neighbors, by lay or professional midwives, or by trained doctors. In Canada, homebirths predominated until just before the Second World War. Prior to the hospitalization and medicalization of childbirth, a process documented by Wendy Mitchinson in her history *Giving Birth in Canada*, the community midwife was a central figure in the lives and households of women giving birth.<sup>7</sup> Even while the “decline” of midwifery in Canada was occurring in the first half of the 20th century, midwives in rural and ethnic communities continued to fulfill this function somewhat longer. For some immigrant and culturally distinct groups, Mennonites included, the practices and functions of community midwives were among a range of beliefs and traditions that were maintained through the process of leaving the homeland for new horizons.

Maintaining “old country” practices of midwife-assisted births once in Canada – and indeed in the Russian Empire and in Latin America, for instance – helped groups like the Mennonites conserve an important sense of group and cultural identity. For Mennonites who emigrated from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada beginning in the late 18th century, for those who arrived from the Russian Empire near the end of the 19th century and from the Soviet Union beginning in the 1920s, and for those who established settlements in Mexico and Latin America, the community midwife served multiple purposes. Not only did she assist at numerous births when hospital deliveries and physicians were rare or inaccessible, she also provided a wide range of essential healthcare services crucial to individuals and

families experiencing the trauma of uprooting and the challenges of rural settlement.

The fact that midwives were fairly plentiful and midwife-assisted childbirth common amongst Mennonites perhaps longer than in the general population relates to a number of factors: their rural isolation, their strong kinship relationships, their desire for separation from non-Mennonite services and institutions, and their preference for healthcare providers who shared their language, religion, and cultural ethos.

But it also may well have related to the sheer number of births that took place in Mennonite households. Until about the 1970s, Mennonite birth rates were 40 to 50 per cent higher than national rates in North America, at which point they began to decline to meet societal averages.<sup>8</sup> Mennonite women, especially those who were rural immigrants, sustained pregnancy and childbirth in numbers that are amazing for most 21st-century women to consider. For instance, Barbara Schultz Oesch, an Amish Mennonite woman who migrated directly from Europe to Wilmot Township, Upper Canada in 1824, gave birth to 18 children, 15 of them in Canada, and still outlived her husband by 30 years.<sup>9</sup> In at least 64 of the births attended by Sarah Dekker Thielman, the mother had already delivered 10 or more babies.<sup>10</sup>

Large families seemed especially common amongst Mennonites who migrated from Russia to Manitoba in the late 19th century, the so-called Kanadier Mennonites; indeed birthrates seem to have increased after migration. Judith Klassen Neufeld, the youngest in a family of 15 children, was five years old when she immigrated and would herself bear 10 children over 19 years. Maria Stoesz Klassen bore 16 children, 12 of whom were girls, and immigrant midwife Maria Reimer Unger bore 13 children. Such birthrates surely kept the local midwives busy.

### **Midwives in Earlier Eras**

The story of Mennonite midwifery does not begin, or end, in Canada. Bits of research evidence tell us that the midwife may have held crucial religious functions within Anabaptist communities of the 16th century. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, in their recent book on Pilgram Marpeck, point out that there were a “large number” of midwives among the Anabaptists in Strasbourg and Augsburg, including possibly Marpeck’s wife Anna.<sup>11</sup>

Because they opposed infant baptism as unscriptural, Anabaptist midwives were accused of not baptizing newborn children in danger of dying, as birth attendants were allowed to do at the time. Within this clandestine and subversive community, the desire to use the services of midwives who shared the Anabaptists’ faith was based on their need for assurance that the attending midwife would not conduct an emergency baptism on a sickly newborn child. One example is Elsbeth Hersberger, imprisoned for her Anabaptist beliefs several times in the 1530s, who reportedly “influenced numerous parents not to have their children baptized.”<sup>12</sup>

The tradition of community midwifery continued as Mennonites, in this case the Dutch-Russian variety, made their way from Prussia/Poland to Russia. Wilhelmina Ratzlaff, born in 1854, was a trained midwife who delivered many babies in the Wymyschle area of Poland and had 12 children of her own.<sup>13</sup> Another Prussian midwife was Justina Schulz Harder, who died in 1856, and about whom her son Abraham wrote: “My mother had been a very busy woman. Her hands had never lain idle in her lap. She had served as midwife in the community. She had made many a herb tea from different plants for sick people. We did not have doctors in those days as we have now. On winter evenings when she was knitting or sewing, I had to read to her out of a doctor’s book or health book.”<sup>14</sup>

While there are limited available sources on the practice of midwifery among Mennonites in 19th-century Russia, one historian has concluded that childbirth was the domain of the midwife, not male doctors. That community midwives may have been quite plentiful within the Mennonite settlements of south Russia is implied in the diary of one Mennonite church leader whose wife was assisted by four different midwives for five births in an 11-year period.<sup>15</sup> And in the numerous family and settlement histories that give account of the Russian Mennonite story, brief mentions of midwife-assisted births are common, though frequently offering little more than a name, if that. Given the tumultuous events of the early 20th century in the Russian empire and then Soviet Union that brought crisis to Mennonite families and settlements, midwives on occasion found themselves in circumstances they would never face in Canada. Susanna Epp, trained as a midwife in Prussia in 1906, traveled with four armed men when she was summoned to assist women in labor during the years of revolution, civil war, and anarchy



that followed. In one case, Makhnovite anarchists threatened to shoot her if she did not assist at a difficult birth or if the mother died. Susanna (in photo at left) insisted that a witness be present, and, although the child was stillborn, she was able to save the mother. Apparently, the Makhnovites then gave her a letter which allowed her to travel unhindered. Susanna immigrated to Canada in 1924 where she “had plenty to do in the nursing field.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Skill and Training**

One of the significant questions of debate surrounding the history of midwifery revolves around the level of training and skill held by women who “caught babies.” Because birth itself was viewed as a natural activity, and because some midwives were self-trained or informally trained, the skill required to properly assist a woman in labor has also been viewed as natural, something that every woman surely carried inside herself. This kind of essentialist thinking contributed to the predominant portrayal of midwives as women who had given birth themselves, had obtained their childbirth knowledge informally through experience or as apprentices, and had assisted at a relatively small number of childbirths throughout their lifetime, mainly within their own neighborhood of family and friends. Hence, the term “neighbor” midwife was often used. Certainly self-trained or informally trained “neighbor,” “lay,” or “traditional”<sup>17</sup> midwives were present and utilized in Mennonite communities, especially in the earliest years of settlement in remote places. For instance, in the Menno Colony established in central Paraguay in 1929, women who knew about birth and “had enough courage” qualified as midwives. If they developed the special skill of “turning” a baby in the womb for a cephalic presentation, they were especially valued.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the career of Sarah Dekker Thielman (in photo at right), like that of some other Mennonite midwives, reveals that professional training and skill in childbirth procedures were common, even within 19th and early 20th-century immigrant communities in Canada. In Sarah’s case, she left home as a single young woman in the first decade of the 20th century to obtain midwifery training in St. Petersburg, several thousand kilometers from her family. Katherina Born Thiessen



(below), born in 1842 in South Russia, studied midwifery, bone-setting, and naturopathy in Prussia in about 1860, also studying to “catch babies” well before she bore any of her own. After immigrating to Manitoba in the 1880s, she sought further medical training in Cincinnati, Ohio. Eventually, an expanded medical practice and



newly-built house included a reception area, pharmacy, operating room, and overnight rooms for her patients.<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Harder Harms, after training for two years in the city of Riga, was certified in 1912 and the next year was hired to be the official village midwife in the Mennonite village of Schoenfeld in Russia. When Elizabeth immigrated with her husband to Canada in 1925, she continued to practice community midwifery, although her husband did not consider it proper for her to work in a hospital when she was offered such a job.<sup>20</sup>

While some women were certified in public institutions far from home, others obtained their skills in health care centers established by Mennonites. Marie Braun emigrated from the Soviet Union to Kitchener, Ontario with her parents in 1924, finding work in a shirt factory but also delivering babies in people’s homes. She had trained as a nurse-midwife at



the Morija Deaconess Home in Neu-Halbstadt – in the Russian Mennonite settlement of Molotschna – which opened in 1909. Also trained at Morija (at left) was Kathe Neumann, who arrived in Canada in 1948 with her sister and the five children of their brother who had died in a Soviet labor camp with his wife.

She was addressed as Sister Kathe and wore a uniform consisting of a starched white head covering and apron and black dress, a garb she wore even to church in British Columbia, a habit that her niece found very odd but undoubtedly reinforced Kathe’s professional stature, for herself and for others.<sup>21</sup>

Training also occurred in non-institutional ways. The 1870s Mennonite settlers in Manitoba brought a midwife from a Mennonite community in Minnesota to provide a few weeks of training to several Canadian women. Selma Schwartztruber, of the East Zorra Mennonite Church community in Ontario, took the Chicago Home Nurse’s Course by correspondence and then, to quote historian Lorraine Roth, “helped in various homes at the birth of a baby.”<sup>22</sup> Margarete Dueck apprenticed as a nurse-midwife with a Mennonite doctor in Russia, then immigrated to Winnipeg with her family in 1927. She initially earned money doing housework, but according to her obituary “had no satisfaction” at this labor, and so spent the next decade working as a nurse and midwife in Africa and South America.<sup>23</sup> Helena Klassen Eidse, only 13 years old, began to assist at deliveries when a local physician enlisted her as an interpreter when he was called to German-speaking Mennonite homes in Manitoba. Gradually he trained her in the basics of medical care, and she went on to a 63-year career as a midwife, chiropractor, nurse, and undertaker.<sup>24</sup> Barbara Zehr Schultz, an Ontario Amish Mennonite woman, learned midwifery from her grandfather, who trained as a medical practitioner in France before immigrating to Canada in the 1830s.<sup>25</sup>

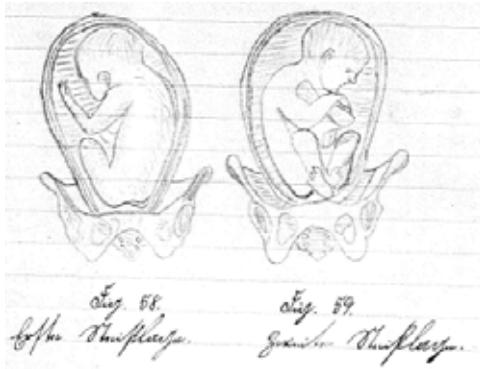
The few personal archival collections of women who worked as midwives include medical textbooks, obstetrical manuals, and more general

books of medical knowledge, further evidence that they sought out technical knowledge beyond the personally experiential or what was obtained through apprenticeships. Sarah Dekker Thielman’s midwife journal is one example. The contents of midwives’ medical bags also point to a profession with standard tools of the trade. For example, Helena Klassen Eidse’s brown leather medical bag contained such items as pills for fever, liquid medicine to stop hemorrhaging, scissors and ties for the umbilical cord, needle and thread, olive oil for greasing the birth passage, rubbing alcohol, and non-childbirth related medical items.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the sheer number of births at which some Mennonite midwives assisted confirms that for these women, midwifery was a career and not just an occasional act of caring volunteerism for a neighbor and relative. At least one historian’s conclusion about the small practices of immigrant midwives<sup>27</sup> does not hold true for all Mennonite baby-catchers, some of whom had very prolific careers: Sarah Thielman, who delivered over 1,400 infants in a 32-year period; Anna Toews, who delivered 942 babies; Aganetha Reimer, who assisted at close to 700 births; and others. A midwife who caught about 1,000 babies in a 25-year career would have averaged 40 births per year, a significant number when one thinks of the rural distances and challenging weather conditions of Canada.

Even those midwives who were formally trained and recognized for their skills were for the most part willing to work cooperatively with physicians to ensure the best possible outcome for both mother and infant. The historical and contemporary literature on midwifery often assumes a dynamic of hostility between midwife and physician. Many early investigations emphasized turf wars in which midwives and medical school-educated physicians each tried to claim their superior skill in assisting a woman in childbirth. More recent studies, however, suggest that the dynamic between midwives and doctors was more complex, more variable, and was at times mutually beneficial when it came to maximizing support for women in childbirth.<sup>28</sup> In sparsely settled rural areas, there may have been more of an alliance between midwives and doctors, as both tried to serve families with high fertility rates across large distances.

For instance, Sarah Dekker Thielman, an experienced and highly trained practitioner, called for the assistance of a physician at difficult births



on a few occasions, though judging from her journal (source of drawings at left) it was more likely that a second midwife would arrive to assist. Within the thirty pages of “teaching material” that precedes Sarah’s journal of birth records are notes describing birthing complications that require the involvement of a doctor; a section titled “When is a Physician

Needed?” lists thirteen complications that range from “Persistent vomiting during pregnancy” to “Every miscarriage with bleeding . . .” to “Chills during the postpartum period.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in the often cooperative relationship between midwife and physician, it was also true that physicians on occasion summoned midwives for assistance. For example, about Manitoba midwife Katherina Born Thiessen it has been said that “doctors called her to help with baby deliveries when they were desperate.”<sup>30</sup> If there were at times clashes of authority, experience (and gender) between midwife and physician, there were also numerous relationships of reciprocity and exchange of skill.

Although many midwives had professional training and viewed their work as a career or vocation, few were motivated by the income that resulted from their work. Though not a lucrative career by any means, the meager earnings that a midwife brought into her household made life slightly less difficult for Mennonite families, some of whom could just



barely sustain themselves, whether they were early pioneers or survivors of the Depression. Some midwives were satisfied with payment in the form of chickens, garden produce, or a sack of flour, especially during hard economic times, while others had set fees. Many were likely willing to take whatever was offered, while the “neighbor” midwife or relative might expect nothing at all. Helena Klassen Eidse (at left) initially charged 25 cents per delivery,

but in later years that sum rose to two dollars. Recalling that some people were indignant when she charged money for her services, apparently Helena had remarked that it seemed “babies aren’t worth salt on an egg.”<sup>31</sup> Agatha Schellenberg, a well-reputed midwife in rural Saskatchewan in the 1930s, didn’t charge a specific amount but took what was offered. One family paid her 6, 8, and 7 dollars respectively for three of their children, probably what they were able to pay in each case.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of how much they were paid, midwives spent a considerable amount of time with their “patients” both before and after the birth, and saw their role as greater than only the delivery of babies. Katherina Hiebert regularly brought bedding, baby clothes, and food along to deliveries.<sup>33</sup> The services of Aganetha Reimer (at right) included baking biscuits and making chicken noodle soup.<sup>34</sup> Midwives also offered women knowledge about non-medicinal methods to deal with the harsh effects on their bodies of almost constant childbirth: this included such things as chamomile tea to ease cracked nipples during breastfeeding, and rubbing pig fat on bellies and legs to “loosen everything” in anticipation of labor.<sup>35</sup>



That a midwifery and healing practice was a full-time occupation for many of these women meant that gender roles in some families were inevitably unsettled. The daughter of Maria Reimer Unger, midwife in early 20th-century Manitoba, recalled that her mother’s midwifery career meant their father took a more active role in childcare than most fathers: “Quite often he would take her to a place for such an event during the night, come back home, and in the morning start breakfast for us and get things going.”<sup>36</sup> Midwife Anna Toews regularly drove their Model T car because her husband Peter was reportedly “too nervous to drive” and so was always seen in the passenger seat. But she relied on him to crank-start the car, and so he often accompanied her on her midwife visits just to do that.<sup>37</sup> Midwives were also known to scold husbands for inappropriate behavior. In

his small manual of sex education, minister Jacob H. Janzen describes how one Mennonite midwife chastized a husband for his weakness and desire to flee the birthing room, reminding him that he had been readily there for the first part – conception – and now must be there for the end as well.<sup>38</sup>

Not unlike what was experienced by the families of church ministers, the families of midwives coped with the ramifications of a parent's demanding career and with the frequent and sudden disruptions to family life that occurred when mother was called away to "catch" a baby. Margaretha Enns's daughters expressed some resentment toward the extra household duties they had because of their mother's work: "The family often felt that everything revolved around their mother's career; family birthdays and Christmas gatherings were frequently interrupted when she was called away. Relatives who attended these gatherings recall her being summoned while she was in the midst of distributing Christmas gifts and homemade fudge to the grandchildren. She would drop everything, pick up her brown bag, and leave on her mission."<sup>39</sup>

### **Multi-Faceted Roles**

Birthing was often the primary, but rarely the only, health service offered by women described as midwives, many of whom had learned the healing arts in their country of origin. With trained medical personnel virtually non-existent in early rural immigrant communities, and hospitals and doctors many kilometers away, the midwife was often "the most important medical person in the community."<sup>40</sup> Sarah Dekker Thielman, in the midst of an obviously very busy midwifery practice, was called on for many treatments other than assisting at childbirth. Her great-niece recalled that "When there was an injury, sprain, or sore back, we drove to [see] Tante Sarah who performed chiropractic, massage therapy and midwifery. She had wonderfully warm hands. Her eyes were keen and very observant."<sup>41</sup> Her grand-daughter recalled that cars were often lined up in the driveway with people waiting to see Sarah at her Ontario home.<sup>42</sup> The descriptor of Sarah as one who "makes things right" is similar to the name given to some aboriginal midwives who were referred to, not as midwives, but as women "who can do everything."<sup>43</sup> "Handywoman" was another label for the midwife-healer.

Mennonite women who "made things right" included Agnes Meyer

Hunsberger, mother of 14 and emigrant from Pennsylvania to Ontario in 1800, who was “remarkably gifted in the healing art” and “answered all calls as physician or nurse.” According to a family genealogy of 1896, she visited the sick on her “favorite chestnut mare, a most intelligent beast [that] carried her safely through the wilderness at all hours of day or night on her errands of mercy.”<sup>44</sup> Marie Nickel Neufeld, who immigrated from South Dakota to rural Saskatchewan in 1893 and was mother to 13 children, carried the “double role of doctor and nurse” and was called “near and far” to alleviate suffering.<sup>45</sup> Women sometimes began their practices by assisting at childbirth, but once their skills and acumen were verified, people would seek them out for other services, such as pulling teeth, tending to injuries, and offering advice and treatment for various maladies that included stomach ailments, headaches, irregularity, and nervous disorders, for instance. Bone-setting, a precursor of 20th-century chiropractic, in particular, was a common accompaniment to a midwifery practice. Amongst Ontario Swiss or Amish Mennonite women, the historic European practice of charming – also called “pow-powing” or *braucherei* – was utilized as a healing art, alongside the practice of baby-catching.

Another example of multi-functionality is Katherina Hiebert (in photo at right), who became possibly the first midwife to serve the pioneer women of southern Manitoba after emigrating from Russia in 1875. She was known to roam the woods and meadows collecting “Swedish bitters, chamomile, and thyme”<sup>46</sup> for her medicines, and was mainly self-taught, ordering medical books from Germany and the United States as well as receiving advice from aboriginal women. Her daughter recalled that “She was always away, day and night, summer and winter, tending the sick.”<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Harder Harms found herself providing a wide array



of medical care when she moved to the immigrant community of Yarrow, British Columbia in the early 1930s. She mixed her own pharmaceutical compounds, and created a successful remedy to treat a unique infection under the fingernails caused by the strong cleaning solutions that plagued

Mennonite women working as domestic help in Vancouver.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to their varied expertise and services in providing health care, midwives quite often held another important function, that of undertaker, which might include certifying deaths and, especially, preparing bodies for burial. Anganetha Dyck Bergen was a Saskatchewan immigrant woman who had no formal training but wore the hat of nurse, midwife, and undertaker as needed in her rural community; the latter task involved confirming a death, and cleaning, dressing, and preparing bodies for burial.<sup>49</sup>

In the Mennonite settlement at Yarrow, British Columbia, it was “customary for midwives . . . to prepare the bodies for burial, which included closing the eyes and tying a scarf under the chin to keep the mouth closed. This had to be done immediately, before rigor mortis set in. They washed the body with alcohol to clean the skin and prevent an odour, then packed the body in ice.”<sup>50</sup> Midwives would then dress the bodies in clothing chosen by the family. It was precisely their versatility in healing services, and their knowledge of the body, that made midwives well-suited to deal with the duties of death. In reflecting on Aganetha Reimer’s life, her grandson commented: “It seems entirely fitting to me that in pioneer times the local midwife usually served also as an unofficial, behind-the-scenes undertaker. Who would understand better than a midwife that the squirming, squalling new human emerging so eagerly from the womb must someday end in the marble dignity of the dead, all care, woes and fleeting joys gone forever.”<sup>51</sup>



Other examples of a combined vocation include Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, described as “midwife, nurse, and undertaker.” She also had a fur coat and hat-making business in Russia prior to coming to Canada.<sup>52</sup> Anna Martens (in photo at left), midwife in rural Saskatchewan at the turn of the century, helped birth 280 babies during her career, but she also prepared bodies for burial, and maintained a garden of medicinal herbs which she would harvest and dispense for the community.<sup>53</sup> The roles that women played as undertakers in early settlement communities in Canada

were replicated when certain groups of Mennonites migrated to central and South America in the first half of the 20th century. In those regions, female predominance over burial preparations continued throughout the century. One woman recalled that the customs followed in the 1920s in Manitoba were almost identical to those maintained in Paraguay in 1980.<sup>54</sup>

The practical linkage of birth and death in the varied skills of midwife-undertakers arose not only from questions of expediency and sensibility: the midwife as healer already possessed the supplies and physiological knowledge useful for both functions. The collapsing of vocational roles also made explicit, in a kind of pre-modern sense, the close life-cycle ties between birth and death. Writing about 18th-century France, historian Jacques Gélis observed that midwives were called to assist at births and also to attend to the laying out of the dead: “By presiding at births and preparing people for their last journey, the midwife held both ends of the thread of life,” he noted.<sup>55</sup> These connections reinforce the crucial role that Anabaptist midwives played at a bedside where birth and death were meeting face to face.

The vocational linkage also indicated the very real possibility of death – for either mother or infant – in childbirth. In eras and geographic locales where hospitals or other medical help were distant, “the midwife alone stood between life and death.”<sup>56</sup> Prior to the Second World War, maternal mortality rates in Canada were high and childbirth-related death was second only to tuberculosis as the cause of female deaths. The fear of death in childbirth was heightened in rural, isolated areas, where assistance by either midwife or physician, or both, was far away.

### **Cottage Hospitals**

By the late 1930s and onwards, hospital births became more and more common. The shift from home to hospital for childbirth during the first half of the 20th century was dramatic; in 1926, 17.8 per cent of Canadian births occurred in hospitals, while in 1950 that percentage increased to 76.<sup>57</sup> Amongst some Mennonites, for instance, Tina Schulz’s eighth and last child was the first to be born in a hospital in 1937 in Manitoba, as was Elizabeth Klippenstein’s tenth child in Saskatchewan.<sup>58</sup> Anna Barkman’s last of fourteen children was the first born in a hospital in 1931.<sup>59</sup> Margaret

Sawatzky remarked that as her family grew, going to the hospital to give birth was preferable, since taking six or eight children away from home during the birth was increasingly problematic.<sup>60</sup>

The increased medicalization of healthcare, as well as the greater accessibility of hospital care and physicians, meant the end of a career for many midwives. When Steinbach, Manitoba's hospital opened in 1938, Aganetha Reimer's local career as a midwife began gradually to see its end.<sup>61</sup> Catherine Wagler Lichty, a midwife in Ontario in the 1920s and '30s, made a point of being at the home of a new mother when she and the infant returned from the hospital, even though she stopped attending the actual births herself.<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of the overall trend towards hospital births through the 20th century, some aberrations to this direction did occur. For instance, in the transition between home births assisted by midwives and physician-attended hospital births, some communities established birthing homes, sometimes referred to as "cottage hospitals," that had the function of creating a setting away from home in which women could give birth. The cottage hospital was also a concession to modern trends while still maintaining some Mennonite boundaries.

In Gretna, Manitoba, sisters Helen and Sarah Heinrichs ran such a home, while ten kilometers away in Altona the Nickel sisters offered such a service.<sup>63</sup> In Waterloo, Ontario, Justina Goetz presided as midwife at a birthing home.<sup>64</sup>

In 1928 a group of Mennonites in north Winnipeg decided to open a five-bed maternity hospital specifically to service a new neighborhood of Mennonite settlers, a project initially directed by two sisters, Sara and Tina Koop, hired because, as the hospital's history says, they were willing to take relatively low rates of remuneration.<sup>65</sup> Sara was trained as a nurse-midwife in the Morija Deaconess Home in south Russia, then continued that labor in rural Saskatchewan after her family immigrated in 1924. In later years, from 1941 until 1954, the two sisters operated a birthing home in Vineland, Ontario, where 732 babies were born. The sisters spent their first months in Ontario in waged jobs in order to renovate and furnish the nine-room house. While Sara was responsible for healthcare at the home, Tina looked after the significant labor of laundry and meals. While the home was run

by the Koops, physicians were called to preside at the births, though Sara reportedly resisted summoning a physician any earlier than necessary in order that he not be required to wait around. When the home closed in the mid-1950s, it was not for lack of women who may have wanted to give birth there but rather because the Koop sisters wanted to retire.<sup>66</sup>

### **Mennonite Particularity**

One reason for the establishment of these birthing homes in towns and cities may have been that they represented a compromise between modernization and Mennonite particularity. While technical training and skill on the part of midwives were important in Mennonite settlement communities, ethno-religious identity was also (perhaps equally) valued. The importance of ethnic commonality between midwife and woman in labor, pointed out by a few scholars of immigration in North America, seems very true for the Mennonites as well. A survey of the birth records in Sarah Dekker Thielman’s journal quickly reveals a large majority of ethnic Mennonite names, though it is interesting that non-Mennonite names are more prevalent in the Canadian setting than in the Siberian locale.<sup>67</sup> A profile of midwife-healer Katherina Born Thiessen notes that even after some local physicians sought a court order to prevent her from providing healthcare services because she didn’t have a medical license, Mennonites continued to seek her expertise “because they trusted her and she spoke their language, Low German.”<sup>68</sup>

The sister to Sara and Tina Koop – the women who operated birthing homes in Winnipeg and Vineland – recalled that a major reason for establishing the homes was in order for Mennonite women to give birth “amongst their own,” where language was shared, and because they were poor.<sup>69</sup> Other cultural signifiers shared by a midwife and the woman in labor would have included a common knowledge of kinship relationships and collective memory of immigrant and settlement experiences. A midwife who shared the mother’s ethnicity would have known exactly how to prepare the foods that would comfort and nourish the woman and her family in the aftermath of birth, as well as particular cultural and religious norms and sensibilities that influenced how one expressed the physical pain and extremes of emotion that inevitably accompany childbirth.

For some midwives, especially those who considered their activity

to be a lifetime career, their work took on religious dimensions as they considered themselves engaged in a kind of “ministry.” Like certain African-American “granny midwives,”<sup>70</sup> some Mennonite midwives felt a religious calling. While Mennonite midwife-healers did not constitute the kind of identifiable religious order of nursing that has been profiled elsewhere – though some were in fact trained as deaconesses in Russia – neither were they strictly lay caregivers, since within Mennonite communities the lines between “religious” and “lay” were blurred, if they existed at all.<sup>71</sup> The midwife thus often functioned as a spiritual caregiver as well, especially when the presence of a male minister – a man of any kind – was considered inappropriate in the birthing room.

Simple historic references point to this: for instance, Margareta Neufeld Thiessen attended to the “spiritual and physical needs” of residents of the village of Klippenfeld in Russia. At one occasion, she was called to a woman’s bedside and, while dealing with her physical needs, also responded to the woman’s anxiety over personal salvation and reportedly left her in peace.<sup>72</sup> One woman recalled that the midwife who attended her prayed throughout the entire birth process: “. . . and once the baby was born, she knelt down beside the bed and thanked God for being with us and that the baby had come into the world, and that child and mother were alive.”<sup>73</sup> That a certain common spiritual demeanor was required of both midwife and undertaker is implied, though not stated explicitly, in the following description of Barbara Shuh: “In her role as a mid-wife ministering at the birth of a child she rejoiced with the family. When the death of a loved one in the home was imminent, Barbara . . . without hesitation, joined the family in their walk through the valley of sorrow.”<sup>74</sup> Barbara’s role as community midwife clearly carried religious significance as well, whether she was charming away a malady, assisting a woman in childbirth, or attending at a deathbed.

Mennonite rurality – which for the majority persisted until after the mid-20th century – also enhanced the midwife’s role within this particular community. One chronicler of Mennonite funeral practices in pioneer settings observed that in villages with less than 500 people, the only professional care for the sick and dying was a “self-trained midwife.”<sup>75</sup> Pelee Island in Lake Erie, where several dozen Mennonite families sharecropped tobacco

beginning in the late 1920s, was one community that relied on several midwives for healthcare, especially during the long winter months when access to the mainland was limited or impossible. My own mother was born on the island with the assistance of Anna Wiebe, who trained as a nurse in Russia and served the islanders for 25 years.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, when a small group of Mennonites established a remote settlement at Reesor in northern Ontario in 1925, the nearest hospital was in the town of Hearst, 27 miles away and accessible only by a daily train. And, since the “main support needed was at the time of birthing,” the small immigrant group soon looked to women within their own community to serve as midwives. One of these was Frieda Isaak, who had prior midwifery experience in Ukraine, and whose first delivery in Reesor was a set of twins born after a very difficult labor. Isaak, who was called an “angel of mercy,” traveled on skis or with dog and sled with supplies on her back when called to a childbirth during the long winters of northern Ontario.<sup>77</sup>

While the midwifery skills of Mennonite women contributed to ethnic cohesion within their own religious communities – indeed were crucial to the existence of separatist communities – and thus helped to maintain definitional and identity boundaries for the Mennonites, such skills also drew them outside of those boundaries towards interaction with their neighbors. Sarah Dekker Thielman’s obituary notes that one highlight of her midwifery career in Siberia was being able to assist Russians, Kyrgyzstanis, and other peoples of the region.<sup>78</sup> In Canada, Katharina Hiebert offered her services to French, English, and possibly Métis women, as did midwife Anna Toews.<sup>79</sup> The immigrant midwife thus nurtured ethnic stability amongst her own people, and offered continuity of custom and tradition through the immigrant experience, but she also created a context for positive interactions and relationships to develop with non-Mennonite neighbors in Canada. Midwives helped to maintain ethnic and religious homogeneity in the birthing room but, significantly, they also served as conduits to the outside world.

Given the important position that midwives held in Mennonite communities, it is perhaps not surprising that it was a Mennonite midwife who led the way in moving a revitalized midwifery profession towards recognition and licensing in Ontario in the early 1990s. Elsie Cressman,

now retired in New Hamburg, has been described as “the woman who pioneered the field of midwifery in Canada,” at least in the modern era.<sup>80</sup> After obtaining a nursing degree in Kitchener, she spent close to 25 years in Africa under the auspices of a Mennonite missions agency, where she caught hundreds of babies. After formal midwifery training in England, Elsie returned to Canada, where she discovered a strong desire for home births among the Old Order communities in Waterloo region, a wish that was also growing in the general population. At that point, she basically “hung out her shingle” and let it be known she was trained and prepared to offer women midwife-assisted births at home. By now, hundreds of women have followed in her footsteps and are working as professional midwives in the province.

### **Conclusion**

According to her 1968 obituary, Sarah Dekker Thielman suffered from depression in the last years of her life. Written by “The Leftbehind Ones,” presumably her family, the brief article in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* says that “During this time, the Lord revealed to her the futility of life, and how unfit she was for the heavenly life.”<sup>81</sup> What a sad testament to a woman who had helped to bring into the world so many new lives, and whose professional skills and presence had been anything but of futile value to communities in Siberia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. One of Sarah’s nieces, reflecting on the inadequate credit given to her aunt compared to her uncle, said that “it always seemed to me that [being a preacher] was recognized as being more important, and given more recognition than the healing and midwifery of a quiet wise healer that was Tante Sarah.”<sup>82</sup>

Well, I believe Sarah was quite fit for life in heaven and on earth. As an immigrant woman, she contributed to the shaping of Canada by helping rural and culturally distinct women to give birth with a little less fear of the difficulties and isolation that was their daily existence. Further exploration of the life and work of Sarah Dekker Thielman, and other women who “made things right,” will add more to our historic understanding of midwifery as a complex assemblage of labor skills, shaped in particular by the degree of training acquired, the location of activity, and the ethnicity and other cultural identifiers of the practitioner.

While midwife-healers have received scant attention in studies of settlement processes or immigrant community identity, one might surmise that, in the context of groups that chose geographic isolation, a significant degree of ethnic separation, and self-reliance at many levels, the multi-faceted services offered by these women were crucial to the well-being of households and ethnic communities. The professionally and informally trained Mennonite midwife offered a Mennonite woman in labor both the confidence that her birthing assistant was knowledgeable in the techniques of childbirth – including the complications that could arise – and the comfort that a kindred spirit in culture, historical sojourn, and religious sensibility could readily offer.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this lecture have appeared or are forthcoming in the following publications: “Midwife-Healers in Canadian Mennonite Immigrant Communities: Women who ‘made things right,’” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 80 (November 2007): 323-44; *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), chapter 2; “Catching Babies and Delivering the Dead: Midwives and Undertakers in Mennonite Settlement Communities” in Myra Rutherdale, ed. *Caregiving on the Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing and Midwifery in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010). I would like to acknowledge research assistance from Anna-Lina Aschemeyer, Bethany Leis, Agatha Klassen, and Conrad Stoesz.

<sup>2</sup> Katharine Martens and Heidi Harms, *In Her Own Voice: Childbirth Stories from Mennonite Women* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997), 27. See also Harvey Kroeker, “Aganetha Barkman Reimer,” *Preservings* 5 (June 1995): 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Dekker Thielman personal collection, Volume 1057. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (hereafter CMBS), Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>4</sup> Biographical information for Sarah Dekker Thielman is taken from the following sources: “Biographical Sketch,” in Sarah Dekker Thielman personal collection, Volume 1057, CMBS; Obituary of Sarah Thielman, *Mennonitische Rundschau* (17 February 1968):11; Alfred H. Redekopp, *Jacob Thielmann and Helena Kroeker: A Family History and Genealogy of their Descendants* (Winnipeg: A.H. Redekopp, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Katherine Jantz, October 4, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Lorraine Roth, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1992), 28-30.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), Table 1, 175.

<sup>8</sup> J. Howard Kauffman, “Mennonite: Family Life as Christian Community,” in Phyllis D.

Airhart and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, eds., *Faith Traditions and the Family* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Lorraine Roth, *The Amish and Their Neighbours: The German Block, Wilmot Township, 1822-1860* (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1998), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Birth Records, Sarah Dekker Thielman personal collection, Volume 1057. CMBS, Winnipeg.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Waterloo and Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2008), 243.

<sup>12</sup> Guy F. Hershberger, "Hershberger (Hersberg, Hersberger, Herschberger, Hirschberger, Harshberger, Harshbarger)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 5 March 2007 <<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/h47710me.html>>

<sup>13</sup> Ella Neufeldt, *Ella's Story: The Journey of a Mennonite Girl from Poland to Canada* (Coaldale, AB: by the author, 2003), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Delbert F. Plett, *Johann Plett: A Mennonite Family Saga* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2003), 108. Quotes are from Leland Harder, *The Blumstein Legacy*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> John B. Toews, "Childbirth, Disease and Death Among the Mennonites in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60. 3 (July 1986): 462.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Ens, ed., *The House of Heinrich: The Story of Heinrich Epp (1811-1863) of Rosenort, Molotschna and His Descendants* (Winnipeg: Epp Book Committee, 1980), 129.

<sup>17</sup> Cecilia Benoit and Dena Carroll's survey of Canadian midwifery focuses on the traditional and lay aspect of midwifery in settlement communities. See "Canadian Midwifery: Blending Traditional and Modern Practices," in Christina Bates, Dianne Dodd, and Nicole Rousseau, eds., *On All Frontiers: Four Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 27-41.

<sup>18</sup> Regine Breuninger de Guenther, *Geburtshilfe in der Anfangszeit der Kolonie Menno* (Loma Plata: Geschichtskomitee der Kolonie Menno, 2004), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Shirley B. Bergen, "Life of Mrs. Dr. Thiessen (nee Catherine Bornn) – 1842-1915," unpublished manuscript, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>20</sup> Irma Epp, Lillian Harms, and Lora Sawatsky, "Midwifery: A Ministry," in *Village of Unsettled Yearnings. Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise*, ed. Leonard Neufeldt (Victoria, BC: TouchWood Editions, 2002), 17-22.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Konrad, *And in Their Silent Beauty Speak: A Mennonite Family in Russia and Canada, 1790-1990* (Toronto: by the author, 2004), 159, 422-23.

<sup>22</sup> Roth, *Willing Service*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Obituary of Margarete Siemens Dueck, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 20 April 1990, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Lorilee G. Scharfenberg, "Helena (Klassen) Eidse (1861-1938)," *Preservings* 8 (June 1996): 51-54.

<sup>25</sup> Roth, *Willing Service*, 216-7.

<sup>26</sup> Lori Scharfenberg, "Helena Eidses' Medical Bag," *Preservings* 9 (December 1996): 53.

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte G. Borst, *Catching Babies: The Professionalization of Childbirth, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> See especially Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada*. The debate is also explored in Deborah

Gorham, "Birth and History," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 17.34 (November 1984): 383-94.

<sup>29</sup> Teaching Material to Accompany Birth Records, Sarah Dekker Thielman personal collection, Volume 1057. CMBS, Winnipeg.

<sup>30</sup> Shirley Bergen, "Dr. Katherina Born Thiessen: A Woman Who Made a Difference," *Mennonite Historian* (September 1997): 8.

<sup>31</sup> Scharfenberg, "Helena (Klassen) Eidse (1861-1938)," *Preservings* 8 (June 1996): 51-54.

<sup>32</sup> Hilda J. Born, *Maria's Century: A Family Saga* (Abbotsford, BC: by the author, 1997), 35.

<sup>33</sup> Regina Doerksen Neufeld, "Katharina Hiebert (1855-1910): Midwife," *Preservings* 10 (June 1997): 15.

<sup>34</sup> Kroeker, "Aganetha Barkman Reimer."

<sup>35</sup> Luann Good Gingrich, "A Mother's Garden: Planting Seeds of Hope" (unpublished manuscript, 1997), 3, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Plett, *Johann Plett*, 536. For story about Maria Reimer Unger by Sara Loewen, see A. C. Reimer, *Peter R. Reimer 1845-1915 Family Book* (Steinbach, MB: np, 1984), 72.

<sup>37</sup> Cathy Barkman, "Anna Toews (1868-1933): Midwife," *Preservings* 10 (June 1997): 51.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob H. Janzen, *Leben und Tod* (Waterloo: by the author, 1946), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Epp, et al., "Midwifery: A Ministry," 27.

<sup>40</sup> Royden K. Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition, 1874-1982* (Steinbach, MB: The Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), 219.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Katherine Jantz, October 4, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Telephone conversation with Irene Dyck, December 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada*, 345, n 81.

<sup>44</sup> Lorraine Roth, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1992), 210.

<sup>45</sup> "Waldheim Residents to Celebrate 70<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary May 18," newspaper clipping, source unknown, dated 1939. Volume 1159, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.

<sup>46</sup> Regina Doerksen Neufeld, "Katharina Hiebert: Manitoban Pioneer Midwife," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 61 (July 2000):4.

<sup>47</sup> Regina Doerksen Neufeld, "Katherina Hiebert (1855-1910): Midwife," *Preservings* 10 (June 1997):14.

<sup>48</sup> Epp, et al., "Midwifery: A Ministry," 20.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Klassen Neufeld, "My Grandmother was an Undertaker: A Tribute to Anganetha Dyck Bergen Baerg (1859-1942)," *Mennonite Historian* 24.1 (March 1998): 2, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Esther Epp Harder, "Rites of Dying, Death, and Burial" in *Village of Unsettled Yearnings. Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise*, ed. Leonard N. Neufeldt (Victoria, BC: TouchWood Editions, 2002), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Al Reimer, "Johann R. Reimer (1848-1918): Steinbach Pioneer," in *Preservings* 9 (1996): 41.

<sup>52</sup> D. Plett, "Elisabeth Rempel Reimer: Matriarch of Steinbach," *Preservings* 9 (December 1996): 5.

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Guenter, ed., *Osler ... The Early Years and the One Room School #1238 (1905-1947)*

(Osler, SK: Osler Historical Museum, 1999), 54.

<sup>54</sup> Linda Buhler, "Mennonite Burial Customs," *Preservings* 7 (December 1995): 51.

<sup>55</sup> Gélis, quoted in Brian Burtch, *Trials of Labour: The Re-emergence of Midwifery* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 55. Actual source is Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>56</sup> Toews, "Childbirth, Disease and Death," 462.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchinson, *Giving Birth in Canada*, 175.

<sup>58</sup> LaVerna Klippenstein, "The Diary of Tina Schulz," *Memory Memories: Settling in Western Canada*, ed. Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews (Winnipeg: Centennial Publications, 1977), 231; Henry Klippenstein, *Thicker than Water: The Uncensored, Unabridged and Completely Unbiased Account of the Life and Times of the Dietrich Klippenstein Family* (North Vancouver: Loon Books, 2004), 84.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Buhler, "The Apple Tree," *Preservings* 6 (June 1995): 27.

<sup>60</sup> Martens, *In Her Own Voice*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Roth, *Willing Service*, 221-22.

<sup>63</sup> Martens, *In Her Own Voice*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> E-mail to the author from John Rempel, November 13, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Abe J. Dueck, *Concordia Hospital, 1928-1978* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>66</sup> The above information is from an interview by the author with Lydia Wichert, Vineland, Ontario, November 1, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Birth Records, Sarah Dekker Thielman personal collection, Volume 1057. CMBS, Winnipeg.

<sup>68</sup> Bergen, "Dr. Katherina Born Thiessen," 8.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, Lydia Wichert.

<sup>70</sup> Detrice G. Barry and Joyceen S. Boyle, "An Ethnohistory of a Granny Midwife," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 8.1 (July-December 1996): 13-18.

<sup>71</sup> For discussions that differentiate between religious and lay nursing, see essays in Christina Bates, Dianne Dodd, and Nicole Rousseau, eds., *On All Frontiers: Four Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), especially Judith Young and Nicole Rousseau, "Lay Nursing from the New France Era to the End of the Nineteenth Century (1608-1981)," 11-25, and Pauline Paul, "Religious Nursing Orders of Canada: A Presence on All Western Frontiers," 125-38.

<sup>72</sup> Esther Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen: A Leader for His Time* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Martens, *In Her Own Voice*, 12.

<sup>74</sup> "Excerpts from Diaries of Barbara (Bowman) Shuh, 1904-1920," in *Diaries of our Pennsylvania German Ancestors, 1846-1925* (Kitchener: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, 2002), 45.

<sup>75</sup> Ben Fast, "Mennonite Pioneer Funeral Practices," *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* 5. 1 (March 2000):13.

<sup>76</sup> N. N. Driedger, *The Leamington United Mennonite Church: Establishment and*

*Development, 1925-1972* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1973), 168-69; Astrid Koop, *The Mennonite Settlement on Pelee Island, Ontario: Memories of Life on "The Island," 1925-1950* (Leamington, ON: Essex-Kent Historical Association, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Hedy Lepp Dennis, *Memories of Reesor: The Mennonite Settlement in Northern Ontario, 1925-1948* (Leamington, ON: Essex-Kent Historical Association, 2001), 131-33.

<sup>78</sup> Obituary of Sarah Thielman, *Mennonitische Rundschau* (17 February 1968), 11.

<sup>79</sup> Regina Doerksen Neufeld, "Katherina Hiebert (1855-1910): Midwife," *Preservings* 10 (June 1997):14.

<sup>80</sup> "Elsie Cressman: A Legacy of Birth," *MediaMedia Documentary Proposal: Elsie Cressman*, no date. See also [www.mediamedia.ca](http://www.mediamedia.ca).

<sup>81</sup> Obituary of Sarah Thielman, *Mennonitische Rundschau* (17 February 1968), 11.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Katherine Jantz, October 4, 2004.

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Morija Deaconess House: *Mennonite Church USA Archives (Bethel College, North Newton, KS)*

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Katherine Hiebert: *PRESERVINGS (D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Winnipeg, MB)*

Anna Martens: From J. G. Guenter, ed., *Osler ... The Early Years and the One Room School #1238 (1905-1947)* (Osler, SK: Osler Historical Museum, 1999).

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## 2009 BENJAMIN EBY LECTURE

### **The Idea of North: Sibelius, Gould, and Symbolic Landscapes**

*Laura Gray*

Many people will recognize the main title of this lecture, “The Idea of North,” from a radio program of the same name. It was created by pianist Glenn Gould and was first broadcast as a Canadian centennial project in December 1967 on CBC Radio’s “Ideas” program. It was the first in a series of three one-hour programs that Gould called the “Solitude Trilogy.” Subsequent instalments of the trilogy were “The Latecomers” in 1969 (about the sense of solitude experienced by recent immigrants to Canada) and, in 1977, “The Quiet in the Land.” There, of course, is the inevitable Mennonite connection! “The Quiet in the Land” is about the effects of the intrusion of modern society on the solitude of the Mennonite community in Red River, Manitoba. It included the participation of Howard Dyck, the Mennonite Children’s Choir under the direction of Helen Litz, and the congregation of W-K [Waterloo-Kitchener] United Mennonite Church, a very local connection. Nevertheless, our discussion is not about “The Quiet in the Land,” nor is it specifically about Gould’s “The Idea of North”; rather, his radio program serves as a kind of linchpin for the discussion, bringing all the various elements together.

There are two names in the title of the lecture, those of Gould and of Jean Sibelius. Sibelius may be a little less familiar to us. Born in 1865, he was a Finnish composer who had lived to a ripe old age of almost ninety-two when he died in 1957. Although most celebrated for his seven completed symphonies, Sibelius is perhaps best known for an early composition from 1900, entitled *Finlandia*. Much of my own research has focused on his reception in England in the first half of the twentieth century. He was astronomically popular, especially in the 1930s in England and America. At the height of the so-called “Sibelius cult,” for example, a 1935 survey of over twelve thousand members of the broadcast audience of the New

York Philharmonic revealed that Sibelius was the most popular composer of classical music in the United States – living or dead – beating out even Beethoven by ten votes!<sup>1</sup> My research into the sociological and cultural roots of his popularity has yielded some fascinating recurring themes. One of the most pervasive has to do with Sibelius’s perceived role as embodying the spirit and landscape of Finland. This myth around Sibelius and the northern landscape, of course, had much more to do with cultural and social conditions in the United States and Britain at the time than it did with the man and his music.

Glenn Gould probably needs no introduction, especially to Canadians. He lived from 1932 until his early death at the age of fifty in 1982, and was one of Canada’s most internationally famous concert pianists – that is, until 1964 when he abandoned the concert stage for the recording studio. Perhaps the most popular and well-known of all classical recordings are Gould’s two complete cycles of Bach’s “Goldberg Variations” (from 1955 and 1982).

At first glance, these two individuals may seem only very tenuously connected. After all, Gould and Sibelius were separated by almost seventy years in age, they were from countries thousands of miles apart, and they never met. However, there are some obvious similarities. Both were musical artists from relatively northern countries and urban dwellers: Gould lived in Toronto, and Sibelius lived about one hour north of Helsinki in the town of Järvenpää, hardly a remote wilderness. Both traveled widely and were well-known internationally. In digging more deeply into Gould’s reception, however, I have found some quite astonishing similarities between their lives and legends. Above all, both artists were controversial figures, eliciting strong reactions and serving as a kind of lightning rod for some of the most passionate artistic debates of their day, and we remain fascinated with them today.

The third part of the title of this lecture, “symbolic landscapes,” although linked tenuously to physical places, refers rather to other kinds of “locations” that carry a lot of significance for us, personally and collectively. My own interest in this topic grew out of just such a landscape and began to develop almost exactly twenty years ago. Only a few weeks after embarking on my graduate program at Yale, my maternal grandmother, Rae Summers, died. In the sometimes treacherous conditions of my journey from New

Haven, Connecticut via New York, Toronto, and Sault Ste. Marie, I made my way to the Northern Ontario hamlet of Hawk Junction for her funeral. The dovetailing of this sad event and being exiled from my country increased the sense of nostalgia I felt at the loss not only of my grandmother but of a way of life in the north that she represented. Some of my happiest childhood memories were of visiting her in her remote northern village and listening to her stories of pioneering life at Michipicoten Harbour on the northeast shore of Lake Superior, where she operated a general store from 1928 until the 1950s. Today I still enjoy my mother's recollections of growing up at the Harbour. A few months ago, my husband and I visited there and, perhaps just because it is virtually a ghost town, this landscape has become symbolic to me. All the memories and stories connected to this place have contributed to my own sense of identity, and I am beginning to realize that even the memory of my grandmother has become a kind of symbolic landscape in my own myth of the north.

Another connection that served as inspiration for this lecture is that this very landscape was also tremendously significant to Glenn Gould. He was irresistibly drawn to the area of Michipicoten and Wawa. In a clip from a CBC television production, "Up in Northern Ontario with Glenn Gould," he describes the area as "extraordinary," a place he returned to again and again because it provided a therapeutic respite from "city living and city thinking" and a chance "to sort out some thoughts and get some writing done."<sup>2</sup> In fact, Gould drafted the script of "The Idea of North" in Wawa. He explains in the video his love for this landscape against the scenic backdrop of Lake Superior and the Magpie Falls, and at the end of the clip we see him walking along the dock at Michipicoten Harbour. Gould was not only connected to my mother's childhood home; he was in the same grade as my father at Williamson Road Public School in Toronto. I asked Dad what he recalled of him during those years. He said Gould did not come to school very often but did play piano in the school assemblies.

Over time, all these connections and the nostalgia that I feel towards the north have come together in this lecture. I have been compelled through the process to examine my own myth of the north, and in some ways I believe that this interior journey may be even more significant than any physical journey north could be. This lecture thus focuses on the mythical

“North” and how themes of this symbolic landscape have been imprinted on two cultural icons, Gould and Sibelius. Using Gould’s radio program “The Idea of North” as a point of departure, I will explore how Gould and Sibelius, like the north itself, have in effect become symbolic landscapes themselves, stamped with essential images of our own values and sense of identity.

### **The Myth of the North**

I want to be clear about what I mean by “myth,” because there are many meanings of this word. I am not using it as the antithesis of “reality.” I interpret the word in the manner of musicologist Richard Taruskin, who explains that “myth is not falsehood but an explanatory hypothesis.”<sup>3</sup> Carl Dahlhaus takes it further in his discussion of the Beethoven myth, asserting that a myth can be so powerful that it goes far beyond being a mere product of history to the point of taking part “in making that history.”<sup>4</sup> I think that this is the case with the myths surrounding the north, Gould, and Sibelius.

The myth of the north is complex and sometimes self-contradictory: it is a composite, collective myth and firmly entrenched in 19th-century European nationalism and Anglo-Saxon ideology. Indeed, as Carl Berger contends in his article “The True North Strong and Free,” the myth of the north functioned from the beginning as a defining ingredient in forging a Canadian national spirit.<sup>5</sup> Berger explains that, as part of the “Canada First” ideology, the new northern country would attract only superior northern races and at the same time, in a kind of Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest model, the harsh northern climate would forge a hardy, manly race.

With its long-hidden resources, its vulnerability to global warming and questions over national sovereignty, the north as a real, physical geographic landscape has lately attracted much interest. In fact, as the polar ice caps melt into passable seas, it is questionable whether the north as Canadians characterize it from a southern vantage point will continue to exist. Long taken for granted as an eternal, stark, hard, and even hostile place, the north is revealing itself as delicate, highly sensitive, and ephemeral. Because the myths and characterization of the north have played a major role in Canada’s national identity, I wonder what kind of impact the melting of our north will have on our sense of self. Will our identity as a nation melt with it?

What do we mean by “north”? Many people have asked this question, including Margaret Atwood who, among other things, sees the north as “a place with shifting boundaries.”<sup>6</sup> The north can also be a relative direction: North of what? we can ask. For those of us not familiar with the north, who have never set foot in it, the north is remote, isolated, relatively uninhabited, cold, even treacherous. We mix together such heterogeneous and distant landscapes as Algonquin Park in Ontario; the north shore of Lake Superior; Churchill, Manitoba; the Arctic; and much more into a vast indistinguishable monolith. It is anything but that in reality. As Sherrill Grace makes abundantly clear, the myth of the north originated in the south. She writes that “‘North’ is a fiction created by Southern Canadians who . . . have never gone farther north than Algonquin Park or the West Edmonton Mall.”<sup>7</sup> Grace reveals how we exploit the resources of the north, including “its seemingly endless capacity to generate resonant (and marketable) images of a distinct Canadian identity – without having to go there or face its realities.”<sup>8</sup> For those of us in the south, the “real” northern landscape remains out of view, distant and hidden. However, we do not have to leave our comfortable homes to travel to the “imaginary” northern landscape.

A number of deeply ingrained themes associated with the north impact Canadians’ understanding of a vast portion of our country and of ourselves. These include such entangled threads as racial stereotypes, gendering of the north, heroism and isolation, the north as an interior landscape, the north as a place of spiritual rejuvenation and clarity, a place of adventure, freedom and wilderness. These and other themes are all bound up with aspects of identity. Although these threads are intertwined and knotted, I will pull out three themes of the myth and discuss how they map onto the north, onto Gould and Sibelius. These three are the themes of isolation or solitude; “wilderness”; and inwardness or interiority.

### **Solitude**

Gould’s program “The Idea of North” grew out of his fascination with the north and with the experiences of those who go north, especially their experiences of solitude or isolation. In 1965 Gould travelled north himself as far as the train would take him, to Churchill, Manitoba, but for his purposes this was far enough. Two years later, “The Idea of North” aired on CBC Radio. It

was a new genre he dubbed “contrapuntal radio,” which was made up of a rich polyphonic tapestry of five individual and independent speaking voices. Gould interviewed separately his five protagonists, each of whom had spent considerable time in the north. We hear Marianne Schroeder (a nurse), Frank Vallee (a sociologist and author), Robert Phillips (a government official and writer), and James Lotz (a geographer, anthropologist, and author). The fifth voice belongs to Wally Maclean, whom Gould met on the train to Churchill. Because of Maclean’s former profession as a surveyor, with its special connection to landscape, Gould chose him as a kind of narrator for the story and as the “pragmatic idealist” or “disillusioned enthusiast” he felt was needed in the program.<sup>9</sup>

The work is deliberately unnerving: the voices are all presented over background noises of the locomotive and random sounds of train travel, which serve musically as a kind of *basso continuo* and also make audible the landscape we are crossing on our imaginary journey. Gould openly eschewed any “cohesive point of view,” and artistically the work reflects this: just as in operatic ensembles, he points out, seldom can we follow more than one voice at a time nor are we expected to do so. It is the overall effect that Gould sought in his composition.<sup>10</sup> The point of the work is quite clear: in his words, it provides

an opportunity to examine that condition of solitude which is neither exclusive to the north nor the prerogative of those who go north but which does perhaps appear, with all its ramifications, a bit more clearly to those who have made, if only in their imagination, the journey north.<sup>11</sup>

Solitude or isolation, then, clearly is the theme of the composition, as Gould explains.

Solitude was an important theme in Gould’s life. Although gregarious in some ways (especially on the phone), Gould was also reclusive. He even cultivated this image of himself as “a kind of hermit” or “isolated artist,”<sup>12</sup> and once said that “for every hour you spend in the company of other human beings you need X number of hours alone. . . . [I]solation is the indispensable component of human happiness.”<sup>13</sup> Gould spent several years in the international spotlight only to withdraw from that world rather suddenly in 1964. There are different hypotheses for why he abdicated

the concert stage at the age of thirty-two. Although wildly successful, he never enjoyed concertizing: to him it was “an inspiration of the devil.”<sup>14</sup> We also know that Gould was disturbed by the imprecise nature of concert performances, where there was no “take two.” In the recording studio, however, he could choose from multiple takes and have much more control over the final product.

Whatever the reasons for his withdrawal from concert life, Gould had an uneasy relationship with the public. So did Sibelius. Despite flawed descriptions of the Finn as impervious to public opinion, his journals and letters to his wife indicate he was so keenly sensitive to criticism that this virtual paranoia caused him on countless occasions to cancel international appearances at the eleventh hour. Sibelius’s last official public appearance was in 1935 for his seventieth birthday celebrations, which were over the top, not just in Finland but in Germany, England, and the United States. Despite enjoying a prodigious social life in Helsinki and other urban centers earlier in his life, Sibelius retreated into a shroud of mystery, isolating himself for his last three decades in what is known as “the silence of Järvenpää.” The burden of the “Sibelius cult” seemed to take its toll as the world waited in vain for the composer’s elusive Eighth Symphony.

Both Gould and Sibelius withdrew in one way or another from public life, and the effect of their retreat was remarkable. They may have been out of sight, hidden from view, but they were hardly out of mind: their images continued to grow and take on a life of their own as imaginary, symbolic, and mysterious icons, much like the myth of the north itself, the physical manifestation of which remains likewise isolated, remote, and hidden from view for most people.

Our perception of northern isolation reveals a contradiction that tells far more about our relationship to our own immediate surroundings than about our relationship to the north. Time and again, the theme of disenchantment with urban life surfaces in discussions of the north. Although we see the north as remote, isolated, and a place of solitude, it is the city where such isolation is truly found. Gould understood this: the north functioned for him “as a foil for other ideas and values that seemed . . . depressingly urban oriented and spiritually limited thereby.”<sup>15</sup> This theme imbues “The Idea of North,” where Gould emphasizes through his protagonists that, even if

they sought solitude, they did not find it in the north. It was impossible, practically. Wally Maclean spells it out in the epilogue: in the absence of war, the moral equivalent is going north, as fellow humans come together in solidarity against a common foe – the north. In the epilogue, Maclean also speaks of what is lost in modern society: “a cleanness, a sureness, a definiteness about coming up [against] Mother Nature that is lacking in our rootless pavements, in our rough big city anonymity.”

We should note that in the epilogue the sound of the train is gone, replaced by the only “conventional” music in the entire score of “The Idea of North.” For the last nine minutes of the program, Gould quotes in its entirety the final movement of Sibelius’s Fifth Symphony in a performance by Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, one of Gould’s top three “desert island” discs. Why did he do this? Taking a cue from Sibelius biographer David Burnett-James, Paul Hjartarson proposes that Gould chose the Fifth Symphony because it underscores Maclean’s role as a kind of hero who, having confronted “the dark satanic forces” of the north, has gained the necessary knowledge and wisdom of the north.<sup>16</sup> When Gould wrote about his favorite recordings a few years later, however, he cited Sibelius’s music as “the ideal backdrop for the transcendent regularity of isolation.”<sup>17</sup> Whether the finale of the Fifth universally expresses isolation or “old heroic legends” is open to debate. Either way, the symphony articulates and underscores the irony of northern isolation and Maclean’s comments about going north as the moral equivalent of war. Here too is an instance of further irony: in including the Fifth Symphony in “The Idea of North,” Gould acts as a mythologizer, perpetuating the legendary connection between Sibelius and the north.

Gould also recorded some of Sibelius’s piano music – a rare choice – and his comments about it shed a little more light on what most attracted him to the Finn’s music. He praised the composer for “that spare, bleak, motivically stingy counterpoint that nobody south of the Baltic ever seems to write.”<sup>18</sup> Such terms as “spare” and “bleak” are regularly applied to Sibelius’s music and perhaps are the qualities that Gould thought particularly evocative of the north.

With this in mind, Gould might have been considerably gratified with a recent program for a concert at the Maryland School of Music entitled

“Channeling Glenn Gould.” (If the organizers were able to channel him, perhaps he had input in the design of the publicity, since he was always so concerned with his self-image!) It is not the title but the photo near the bottom of the program that I would most like to describe. A row of barren trees stands in the foreground against a snowy and windswept landscape.<sup>19</sup> No other program in the series uses the same iconic image – it is reserved for Gould – indicating a potent and immediately understood connection between Gould’s image as an artist and a spare, bleak, and wintery northern landscape.<sup>20</sup> Such an image is not unique. It communicates a widespread perception of Gould as a lonely isolated genius and, as Hjartarson has convincingly argued, Gould “is increasingly linked, via ‘The Idea of North’ and the ‘solitude trilogy,’ to the popular, southern conception of an Arctic landscape.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Wilderness**

Such connections between Gould and a northern landscape relate to a powerful recurring theme, the idea of the north as “wilderness.” This theme returns repeatedly. Shelagh Grant qualifies it further, noting that a “northern wilderness” represents “a place beyond southern civilization, agricultural settlement, or urban life”<sup>22</sup> and is seen as “resource-rich but remote, hostile, and godless.”<sup>23</sup>

Like Gould’s reception, the literature on Sibelius’s music is riddled with northern wilderness imagery. In 1917, one of the foremost English critics, Ernest Newman, drew a direct connection between Sibelius’s music and the Finnish landscape, claiming that “this music of his is so purely the product of the land and water and air of Finland that unless we have imagination enough to visualise the Finnish landscape the music will mean nothing to us.”<sup>24</sup> Since virtually no one writing about Sibelius had ever visited Finland, any such descriptions refer to an idealized, imaginary landscape. But it was people’s perception of that landscape – the symbolic aspects – that were most significant, rather than any attempt at accuracy. As Simon Schama points out in *Landscape and Memory*, “landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.”<sup>25</sup> These landscapes were then projected onto Sibelius and, as we have seen, onto Gould.

What kind of landscape did Sibelius's fans imagine when listening to his music? Here is one example from one of his closest British friends, the composer Granville Bantock, who described Sibelius as

a true son of the soil. In his music the primitive savagery of wild and untamed races seems to stand out with naked distinctness; and we see a scene of rocks, mountains, caves, forests, and lakes, rolling mists and boiling surf, by the sinister light of storm; we feel how the iron has entered into the soul in this hard land where Winter keeps his relentless grip for six or seven months in the year.<sup>26</sup>

Here and elsewhere in descriptions of the Finn and his music we find a landscape described in such terms as “sinister,” “hard,” “forbiddingly stark,” “relentless,” “grim,” and “bleak.” It was the kind of wilderness that J.M. Hunter identifies as “the realm of untamed Nature, traditionally feared as unpredictable, alien and full of hidden menace.”<sup>27</sup> One particular wilderness theme that stands out in contemporary descriptions of Sibelius's music was the perception of it as sounding “uncultivated and unpeopled.”<sup>28</sup> Neville Cardus, music critic of *The Manchester Guardian*, wrote likewise in 1931 that “the world of a Sibelius symphony is curiously uninhabited” and “the universe of his symphonies is unpeopled.”<sup>29</sup> This deeply ingrained image of an uninhabited and pristine wilderness stood out in high relief against the cultivated pastoral agrarian settlements and densely populated urban centers of the south, and it may have served as an antidote for the poisons of industrial society, as Schama proposes. Hunter sees it in another light, however, as a kind of “primal Eden,” a pristine, untouched landscape symbolizing “man's origin and early life in a primal state of innocence and harmony with the natural order, followed by a fall from grace.”<sup>30</sup>

This mythic notion of an untouched and uncultivated wilderness can be found not only in descriptions of Sibelius's music but in images of Gould and Sibelius themselves. Both artists were distanced from the “cultivated” European tradition as a way of highlighting their natural genius. Even though Gould performed music of the European canon, any influences were downplayed, emphasizing his originality. Sibelius's fans also highlighted his originality by portraying the composer as uncultivated and untouched by European, especially German, influences. He was even sometimes

described as primitive and uncouth. In stressing this aspect of wilderness, the literature on Sibelius and Gould links them to an image of a pure, natural, or unconscious genius. The recurring theme of inwardness or interiority, as we will see, only underscores this perception of genius.

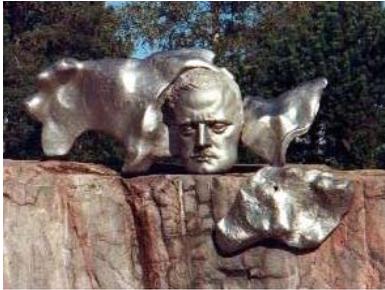
### **Inwardness**

In “The Idea of North,” as the train pushes further and further north, we discover that Gould’s work involves much more than the chronicling of a physical journey. It is a “voyage to the interior,” to borrow Atwood’s term, and what artist Lawren Harris called the “‘innerseeing’ of man’s response to a northern landscape.”<sup>31</sup> This interiority or inwardness is an essential aspect of the myth of the north and a central message of “The Idea of North”: our encounter with the north ultimately results in an encounter with our inner selves. This kind of inward journey or interior landscape is stamped on the images of Gould and Sibelius as well as on those of the north. The humming retained in some of Gould’s recordings, for example, is a case in point. Although far too distracting for some listeners, Gould’s apologists hail it as a necessary byproduct of his craft or as even revealing another level of genius – as though what we hear externally is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, and that the real music is going on inside Gould’s head. Photos of Gould often deliberately mythologize this inner world: his eyes closed, seemingly rapt in ecstasy, he is turned inward.

The same sense of genius-inspired “innerseeing” informs part of the Sibelius myth, and it has been immortalized in a 1949 photo by the celebrated Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh.<sup>32</sup> Karsh admitted that Sibelius was quite resistant to having his picture taken at first. The result is an iconic image of the composer with his eyes closed, a heavily wrinkled brow, and his left hand across his breast. Sibelius’s secretary, Santeri Levas, commented on the incident and the photo, revealing that Sibelius’s eyes were closed simply because the lights were dazzling the old man. Nevertheless, the venerated image remains and, as Levas further commented, “the master seems to be listening to inner voices – *voces intimae*,” incidentally the name given to Sibelius’s String Quartet in D Minor.<sup>33</sup>

This emphasis on “inner voices” or inwardness in both Sibelius’s and Gould’s images, while mirroring aspects of the myth of the north, links

them to possibly the ultimate inward genius, Beethoven, whose deafness has been glorified “as a trait of enhanced interiority,” as music historian Scott Burnham has pointed out.<sup>34</sup> After Richard Wagner’s famous monograph on Beethoven, the composer’s “turning inward” became a sign of genius in the nineteenth century, and this inwardness has persisted as a perceived quality of genius well into the twenty-first century.<sup>35</sup> Take, for example, such current pronouncements as the title of a 2009 film on the Canadian cultural icon, “Genius Within: the Inner Life of Glenn Gould,” or the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s recent exhibit entitled “Glenn Gould: The Sounds of Genius.”



### **Conclusion**

I would like to leave you with two iconic images that cement for me the myths of Sibelius, Gould, and the north. The first is a picture of part of the Sibelius monument in Helsinki by Eila Hiltunen (at left). The main portion of the monument is an abstract sculpture made up of many tubes.

A small concession to traditionalists on the panel of judges was a representational sculpture of Sibelius’s head, which is molded into the hard rocky landscape so evocative in his reception.

Gould, too, is frozen in position and place in the Canadian landscape, in Ruth Abernethy’s now familiar sculpture of him sitting on a bench outside the CBC building in Toronto (at right). These sculptures physically embed their subjects into the landscape but, as we have seen, both of these subjects have become more than just part of the landscape. They have in effect become symbolic cultural landscapes themselves, locations imprinted with themes of the north that reflect and inform our values, our sense of identity, and our need for iconic cultural images.



One feature I find particularly interesting about Gould's sculpture is that it invites conversation. Thousands of people when visiting Toronto sit down with Gould, sometimes having a one-sided chat with the iconic figure. I think that the conversations should continue with both Sibelius and Gould – not just with their sculpted images but with what they have left behind. Even if their images are frozen in place, our perceptions of, and interactions with, their art can thaw out and remain pliable. Then the music that both Gould and Sibelius created can reach us freshly, and we may even experience the revelation that art, in and of itself, has in store for us. Likewise, our mythic relationship with the north can bear examination. We can take an honest voyage to the interior, where we examine our frozen impressions and, when we clear away the layers of myth and legend, like ice and snow, our relationship with the north may grow and our self-understanding may become clearer. These myths are rich, full, and fascinating; but we can examine their roots, understand a little better where they come from, and without losing anything, find that they can become even more meaningful and significant to us.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Behind the Scenes: Jan Sibelius Wins Nation-Wide Poll Among Listeners – Minneapolis Symphony to Broadcast." *New York Times* (1923-Current file), November 24, 1935, <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/> (Accessed November 22, 2009). Sibelius had 1,888 votes, Beethoven 1,878, and Ravel was a distant third with 910.

<sup>2</sup> "Up in Northern Ontario with Glenn Gould (excerpt)." The CBC Digital Archives Website. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. [http://archives.cbc.ca/arts\\_entertainment/music/topics/320-1737/](http://archives.cbc.ca/arts_entertainment/music/topics/320-1737/) (Accessed November 22, 2009). In the video clip Gould is playing a piano transcription of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, "The Pastoral," a musical evocation of nature and the countryside. Like Gould, Beethoven sought solace and rest from urban life in the natural environment.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Nationalism." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/50846> (Accessed November 21, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free," in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 3-26.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (Oxford:

Clarendon Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Sherrill Grace, "Introduction: Representing North (or, Greetings from Nelvana)," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Glenn Gould, "'The Idea of North': An Introduction," in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1984), 392-93.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 393-94.

<sup>12</sup> *Glenn Gould: A Life in Pictures* (Richmond Hill, ON: Firefly Books, 2007), 166.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Meyer, "Interview: Glenn Gould: '...the inner movement of the music...'" *Glenn Gould* 1 (Fall 1995): 19.

<sup>15</sup> Gould, "'The Idea of North'," 391.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Hjartarson, "Of Inward Journeys and Interior Landscapes: Glenn Gould, Lawren Harris, and 'The Idea of North,'" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 83.

<sup>17</sup> Gould added that his "own notion of isolation involves, at the very least, a Helsinki-like latitude." Gould, "A Desert Island Discography," in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, 438.

<sup>18</sup> Gould, "The Piano Music of Sibelius," in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, 103.

<sup>19</sup> The program can be found at <http://claricesmithcenter.umd.edu/downloads/programs/MusicinMindGould.pdf> (Accessed October 24, 2009)

<sup>20</sup> Although this landscape is not identified, it is typical of much of southern Ontario in the winter and demonstrates that the idea of north is indeed relative. For an audience in Maryland, southern Ontario is considered north.

<sup>21</sup> Hjartarson, "Of Inward Journeys and Interior Landscapes," 84.

<sup>22</sup> S.D. Grant, "Myths of the North in the Canadian Ethos," *Northern Review* 1-4 (1988-89): 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Newman, "Midland Institute School of Music: Orchestra Concert," *Birmingham [UK] Post*, December 18, 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 61.

<sup>26</sup> Granville Bantock, "Sibelius: The Man and Artist," *The [London]Times*, February 26, 1921, 8.

<sup>27</sup> John Michael Hunter, *Land Into Landscape* (London: George Godwin, 1985), 4.

<sup>28</sup> The Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Program Notes for first Liverpool performance of *Tapiola*, March 7, 1933, 537. I am grateful to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society for access to their archival program notes.

<sup>29</sup> Neville Cardus, "Sibelius: Nationalist Composer of Finland," *Radio Times* 33, no. 421 (October 23, 1931): 259, 296.

<sup>30</sup> Hunter, *Land Into Landscape*, 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Sherrill Grace, "A Northern Modernism, 1920-1932: Canadian Painting and Literature," *Literary Criterion* 19.3-4 (1984): 107.

<sup>32</sup> The portrait can be found in Yousuf Karsh, *Portraits of Greatness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 183.

<sup>33</sup> Santeri Levas, *Sibelius: A Personal Portrait*, trans. Percy M. Young (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1972), 110.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Kerman, et al. "Beethoven, Ludwig van." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/40026pg19> (Accessed November 21, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Photo Credits*

Glenn Gould Gathering sculpture by Ruth Abernethy. *Credit: Wojciech Dittwald*

Sibelius sculpture by Eila Hiltunen. *Credit: Laura Gray*

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### THE BENJAMIN EBY LECTURESHIP

Benjamin Eby (1785-1853) typified, and possibly inaugurated, Mennonite culture in Upper Canada. He and his wife Mary arrived in Waterloo County from Pennsylvania in 1807. By 1812 he was ordained bishop, and in 1815 he was overseeing construction of the area's first schoolhouse. Eby provided outstanding leadership in the church and in education throughout his life. The Benjamin Eby Lectureship, named in his honor and established at Conrad Grebel University College in the 1980s, offers faculty members an opportunity to share research and reflections with the broader College and University community.

**Pneumatological Ecclesiology and Same-sex Marriage:  
A Non-essentialist Approach Using the Work of  
Eugene Rogers and John Zizioulas**

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The debate surrounding the morality of homosexual marriage is one of the most charged and fractious in the church today. As local congregations, national denominations, and international affiliations of Christians wrestle with this issue, significant conflict and division has arisen and continues to rage. At the center of this debate are so-called “arguments from creation,” that is, arguments that look to the natural or revealed “order of things” to discern God’s design for appropriate sexual behavior. This mode of theological argumentation has a long history in the tradition of natural theology, which assumes that divine direction (and even divine speech) is inherent in creaturely capacities. In this article, I will demonstrate that New Testament scholarship is agreed that in Romans 1:18-32 (the key NT text on the issue), Paul is not making an argument *per se* against homosexuality. Instead, this passage fits within the larger claim that he is trying to make throughout the book of Romans about Jew-Gentile relations. What Paul condemns here is the human propensity to judge others based on supposedly intrinsic qualities. He is using a stereotypical Jewish understanding of Gentiles, and turning it back against those who would argue for some special innate characteristic within Jews that makes them special and within Gentiles that makes them depraved.

To develop my case, I will show how two significant figures in NT scholarship today – Richard Hays and David Horrell – see Paul’s leveling of the Jewish-Gentile divide as the key point that Paul is seeking to make in Rom. 1:18-32. If we read this text in isolation, however, we make the mistake of assuming he is advancing an argument from creation against homosexuality and we miss the main thrust of his line of reasoning. Rather than repeating this mistake, I will attempt to return to Paul’s main point in Romans 1 *and* 2 – that Jews occupy a special place because of the election of God, not because of something intrinsic to their being Jews.

I will use Paul's discussion as a jumping-off point for deeper theological reflection on same-sex marriage by exploring the work of John Zizioulas and Eugene Rogers in order to develop the ecclesial implications of this interpretation of Romans 1 and 2. The collective weight of these two voices provides a creative, scripturally grounded approach offering a way around the current polarized debate. Rogers helps us to reflect carefully upon the place of the Gentiles in Israel's body; Zizioulas aids us in returning to the baptismal character of the church. Combining these ideas together allows the affirmation of the *potential* goodness of all marriage, heterosexual and homosexual alike. The word "potential" is used intentionally. Vital to my claims is that marriage is not *necessarily* good; it does not derive its essential goodness from its relationship to an ideal. Rather, its goodness is found only in its concrete display – in actual marriages between real people. Further, marriage only *becomes* good through its participation in the re-creative reality of Jesus Christ. Combining Rogers's and Zizioulas's ideas with insights gained from contemporary Pauline scholarship allows me to support my central thesis that a commitment to Pauline logic and the repudiation of all arguments from creation leads us to the place where we can affirm same-sex marriages in the church.

The danger in this article is that the ideas I develop would remain only in the abstract and are never grounded in the practices of real churches. Same-sex marriage is by no means an abstract issue – it has concrete ecclesial implications. To explore these implications more deeply, I examine one example of a positional statement from a mid-sized Canadian Protestant Evangelical denomination, *The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (hereafter, CCMBC).<sup>1</sup> I chose to examine this denomination's statements on same-sex marriage, not because they are unique but because they are broadly representative of other evangelical groups in Canada. A closer examination of the CCMBC's position will allow me to demonstrate, in concrete terms, how the theological approach to gender, sexuality, and marriage that I present in this article presses churches and denominations to consider more deeply their own positions on these issues.

### **The CCMBC Position on Homosexuality**

The CCMBC confession of faith states that "Disciples maintain sexual purity

and marital faithfulness and reject immoral premarital and extramarital relationships and all homosexual practices,” and “Marriage is a covenant relationship intended to unite a man and a woman for life.”<sup>2</sup> A recent denominational pamphlet on same-sex relationships entitled *Homosexuality: A Compassionate yet Firm Response*, fills out the confession to provide the most current, in-depth summary of the CCMBC position.<sup>3</sup> The authors of the pamphlet are sincere in their attempts to ground the denomination’s position on homosexuality in Scripture. However, what emerges from this presentation is what I term “an argument from creation,” that is, a claim that there is something in the creation, in and of itself, that reveals the truth. The authors set up the following claim regarding the exclusivity of heterosexual behavior:

Genesis teaches clearly that it is man and woman together who carry the image of God. Something of the image of God is expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman (Genesis 1:27-28; 5:2). Though the image of God is carried equally in the femaleness of woman and maleness of man, it is the covenant relationship of marriage, which includes the sexual union of woman and man, that the richness and the complementary nature of the image of God is expressed most fully.<sup>4</sup>

In another section they write, “...The Scriptures declare same-sex relationships to be deviant sexual behaviour...” and,

The Biblical argument against same-sex relationships and sexual intercourse is that it is un-natural (Romans 1:21–32) and violates the complementary image of God as expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman. It is for this reason that it is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The authors argue that something within the natural or created order of things makes a heterosexual marital union most evocative of the image of God; in their words, the union of male and female creates “something of the image of God.” The appeal to “the” biblically revealed order of things is central to the argument developed in this pamphlet. Homosexuality violates

the inherent complementarity of the genders.<sup>5</sup> The authors' assertion that something essential in the "maleness of the male" and the "femaleness of the female" unites to express humanity's image in God fits within what Mary McClintock-Fulkerson calls the ontologizing of gender. She says,

The modern subject is an autonomous self ... s/he is defined fundamentally by his or her sexual identity. This peculiarly modern move...identifies sexuality as the central explanatory principle in human subjects....This...produces the notion that one's sex/gender coincides with one's essential self.<sup>6</sup>

I share McClintock-Fulkerson's rejection of the ontologizing of gender on biblical grounds. In my view, one benchmark of Paul's thought is that we cannot see beyond our human limitations into the essence of things. In my reading of the "fall" story in Genesis 2 and 3, humanity's claim that "we can be like God, knowing good and evil" I understand as Adam and Eve's desire to transcend their creaturely limitations and see into the essence of things, which is the definition of sin.<sup>7</sup> Against this backdrop, the NT proclaims that Christian existence is about absolute dependence on God. Instead of asserting that we know the truth of things, Christians proclaim that existence is contingent and inhabited by a deep dependence on Jesus Christ. Only through Christ do we gain knowledge of the truth; we do not gain this knowledge by claiming that we can comprehend truth by looking, unmediated, at creation.

Thus, if ontologizing gender mirrors the Serpent's lie, then we must employ a different approach to derive a biblical position on gender complementarities. A biblical view, I argue, is to look at gender in a relational manner. This approach benefits from not having to attach some amorphous essence to men and women. Nor do we simultaneously have to explain, as the CCMBC position attempts to do, how the union of maleness and femaleness creates the divine image *and* how the image of God is carried fully in each gender.<sup>8</sup> A relational position does not require some inherent gender capacity; instead, people receive the image of God from outside of themselves through Jesus Christ, the God-man who *is* the image of God into which we are being conformed. Before I articulate a relational approach more fully, I wish to deal with Rom. 1:18-32 in greater depth.

**Romans 1, Gentile Depravity, and the Law**

In broader conservative-evangelical theological discourse, Romans 1 provides the most significant hermeneutical firepower in the debate over homosexual practice.<sup>9</sup> In this passage, so it is claimed, Paul links homosexuality with idolatry and describes the homosexual practices of both men and women as abominable – “exchanging the natural for that contrary to nature (*para phusin*)” in his terminology.<sup>10</sup> Most conservative-evangelical denominations, including the CCMBC, conclude that the Bible issues a blanket prohibition of all same-sex behavior and that Paul proscribes all homosexual behavior by connecting homosexual actions to pagan religious practices.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is worth inquiring as to whether these verses in Romans are theologically equipped to create doctrinal closure on homosexuality. To anticipate my conclusion, I argue that Rom. 1:18-32 lacks the theological equipment to create such closure. The main point of Paul’s argument is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ calls all human judgments into question. Because his point is not to state a position on homosexuality, neither should we.

I begin this discussion by looking at how prominent NT scholars David Horrell and Richard Hays handle the exegesis of Romans 1. In general, they both follow the same exegetical trajectory. They both affirm that the law functions positively in Paul, and that he retains a more or less Jewish approach to it. Looked at from a Jewish perspective, there is no law apart from the Torah, and so any “natural law” must be derived from the Torah. Neither Horrell nor Hays opts for a “Lutheran” interpretation of Paul that takes an extremely dim view of the law, natural or Jewish.

Horrell argues that in Rom. 1:18-32 Paul appeals to a kind of natural law ethic. In Horrell’s reading of Paul, nature displays the imprint of an Orderer who has construed the creation in such a way as to make certain ethical truths self-evident to those with the intelligence to comprehend them: “The knowledge of God is through a form of natural theology, since it comes via reflection on the visible things of creation.”<sup>12</sup> Horrell argues that Paul needs an empirically identifiable conception of right and wrong to make his argument work:

Whether Paul is right or wrong to depict all people as failing to live up to moral standards, the crucial point is that he argues – and *has* to argue – for a universal sense of what is right and wrong, a universal knowledge of God.<sup>13</sup>

However, Horrell nuances his description of natural law in Paul. The law is not natural in that it is evident apart from God. The law can be comprehended only because God has decided to reveal it to the Gentiles. Thus, the natural law is those portions of the Jewish law that God has chosen to make evident to the Gentile world.

Richard Hays takes a similar position on the natural law. However, he argues more strongly for its revealed character. For him, Paul's conception of so-called natural law is really the law *revealed* through Jewish narrative tradition and scriptures; empirical evidence is not required. In his book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Hays states that

When the idea [of the unnaturalness of homosexual acts] appears in Romans 1 ... we must recognize that Paul is hardly making an original contribution to theological thought on the subject; he speaks out of a Hellenistic-Jewish cultural context in which homosexuality is regarded as an abomination, and he assumes his readers will share his negative judgment of it.... Though he offers no explicit reflection on the concept of "nature" it appears that in this passage Paul identifies "nature" with the created order.... The understanding of "nature" in this conventional language does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exists; *instead, it appeals to a conception of what ought to be*, of the world as designed by God and revealed through the stories and laws of Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

As with Horrell, Hays does not argue that Gentiles can comprehend God's law through simple observation. Rather, he sees Paul's argument in Romans 1 as being constructed from a traditional Jewish perspective. In other words, the Gentiles have enough of the Jewish law so as to stand convicted by it. (But again, this is not obvious or unmediated knowledge.) Only from the perspective of one infused with the stories of Israel's scriptures can it be obvious that pagan sexual immorality is evidence that the Gentiles are

idolaters and are thus reaping the consequences of their idolatry by engaging in homosexual acts. While Hays tends to stress the revealed character of the law and Horrell the empirically observable character of the law, both are essentially agreed that Paul is appealing to his readers' traditional Jewish understanding of both the law and acceptable sexual practices.

More to the main point of this article, both of these scholars agree that the depiction of the depravity of homosexual behavior in Romans 1 is neither the main point (if the point at all) of Paul's argument nor what makes it controversial. Rather, it is Paul's claim that the Jews, *who have God's written law*, are no better off than depraved Gentiles who can only dimly intuit that same law through their darkened minds. "It is clear," Horrell states, "that Paul presents these arguments to establish an essentially negative conclusion: that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, stand liable to God's judgment."<sup>15</sup> Hays says, "The radical move that Paul makes is to proclaim that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, stand equally condemned under the judgment of a righteous God."<sup>16</sup> The similarity of these two statements is striking and adds considerable weight to this point.

However, after conceding that Paul's argument is about convincing Jews that they stand equally condemned by God's righteous judgment, both scholars depart from this point and focus instead on the "creation order" aspects of this passage. In my view, this move is a mistake. There simply is not enough freight behind Paul's appeal to the natural order to construct a theological position on homosexuality. Instead, I think it is better to stick with the main flow of Paul's discussion, which is not to highlight the idolatry, depravity, and excessive lust of the Gentiles, but rather merely to get nods of approval from his Jewish audience. Horrell and Hays both agree that Paul is repeating a common of Jewish stereotype of Gentiles as excessively lustful and sexually depraved. The point of Rom. 1:18-32 is to set up a rhetorical trap. On the general depravity of Gentiles, Paul will get nods of agreement. But then, with careful sleight of hand, he argues that in God's view Jews are no different. They are no better off than Gentiles. In God's sight, all of humanity suffers from a lack of intrinsic or inherent ability to fulfill God's command.

Let me restate my central point: Paul is not speaking to *our* issue of homosexuality; instead he is addressing a different and more universal

issue, namely that all our attempts to please God through our creaturely actions, abilities, or inherent characteristics, even religious attempts, are bound to fail. As Paul says elsewhere in Romans, “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”<sup>17</sup> By “all” he means Jew and Gentile alike. Jews have no intrinsic basis on which to claim a special relationship with God. Their “chosen-ness” derives from God’s grace, not from their inherent superiority. And if this is the case, then why could God not choose to save the Gentiles? In his answer to this question, Paul is advancing perhaps his most radical claim in Romans: Jews cannot claim to know with certainty that God has excluded Gentiles from the Kingdom. Because of Jesus Christ, the Gentiles are also recipients of God’s gracious election; they are not *a priori* excluded because of their “Gentile-ness.”

Eugene Rogers makes the same case in his book, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*.<sup>18</sup> He contends that for a Jew, one of Paul’s most controversial ideas was that God could include Gentiles as members of the covenant people without the need for circumcision and the keeping of Torah. Paul did not begin with this position, but originally held to the traditional Jewish perspective, which required Gentiles to become Jews and in turn cemented their status as members of the people of Israel. His change of heart came not through research but through observation and experience. In the newly emerging churches, he witnessed the Holy Spirit working among uncircumcised Gentiles and concluded that God must be up to something new.<sup>19</sup> This experience led him to re-examine the Jewish scriptures and to conclude that in Christ God is extending a covenant relationship to the Gentiles *as Gentiles* (i.e., not with their first becoming Jewish). He does this in Romans 9-11, where he develops the agricultural metaphor of the engrafting of the Gentiles as wild olive shoots into the root of the domestic olive tree.<sup>20</sup> Paul says that God accomplished this engrafting contrary to (or beyond) nature (*para phusin*).<sup>21</sup>

Rogers makes a great deal out of the strange choice of phrase in Rom. 11:24, “contrary to nature.” This phrase occurs in the NT only here and in Rom. 1:26, where Paul says God had given the Gentiles up to idolatry through their contrary-to-nature desires. Now, God *saves* the Gentiles through a process contrary to nature – wild shoots do not naturally belong with domestic roots. Ironically, as Rogers points out, “God saves the

Gentiles by adapting to God's own purposes that apparently most offensive Gentile characteristic" (their "wildness").<sup>22</sup> The natural branches (the Jews) have been cut away to make way for the wild branches (the Gentiles). The rhetorical force of this metaphor is to encourage humility among Gentile Christians. Gentiles, as unnatural branches, stand in a precarious position. They do not belong. Their status as members of the covenant people comes only through God's radical grace in Christ. And their inclusion is part of God's larger purpose to make the Jews jealous and cause them to return to God. Rogers points out that "the Gentile Church . . . has no God of its own. It worships another God, strange to it, the God of Israel, and Gentile Christians are strangers within their gate. . . . Christians owe their very salvation to God's unnatural act."<sup>23</sup>

This discussion points to a significant tension between the natural and unnatural in Paul's thought. In other places, Paul associates the unnatural with the abominable. Witness 1 Corinthians 11, where he uses Genesis 2 (that Adam was created first) to argue that men should wear their hair short and women long or with their heads covered. The long hair or covering is a sign of the hierarchical ordering of men over women. He says, "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?"<sup>24</sup> Here Paul is comfortable looking to nature for justification of the hierarchical ordering of men over women; he claims this approach simply appeals to what is self-evident. This idea stands in tension with the one he develops here in Romans. That Gentiles have been included as part of the people of God is unnatural; it is a process that runs contrary to nature and traditional Jewish beliefs.

For Jews in the first century, Gentiles were not by nature, by birth, or by citizenship members of the covenant people. Membership in the covenant people was largely determined by inherent characteristics, most significantly maternal linkages to the people of Israel, outside of which there was no salvation. Participation in the covenant had strong racial and ethnic components. Paul, however, turns this approach on its head. He claims that God, through the unnatural act of engrafting, has extended the covenant to incorporate the Gentiles, who by nature are excluded from that self-same covenant.

### **Gentile Inclusion and Same-sex Marriage**

Where does this leave us in terms of same-sex marriage? Rogers contends that we can use Paul's argument about the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God as justification for the acceptance of same-sex marriages into the church:

As God grafts Gentiles, the wild branches, onto the domestic covenant of God's household with Israel ... so God grafts gay and lesbian couples ... by a new movement of the Spirit onto the domestic, married covenants of straight men and women.... The community of the baptized must be open *to the possibility* that the Holy Spirit is able to pour out holiness also on gay and lesbian couples, without erasing the distinction between gay and straight, as the Holy Spirit rendered the Gentiles holy without circumcision and keeping Torah.<sup>25</sup>

Rogers argues for a parallel between Gentile inclusion into the covenant people and gay and lesbian inclusion into the church. Jews viewed Gentiles as by nature objects of God's wrath, subject to the excesses of immorality and sexual promiscuity. Without Gentiles first becoming Jews by circumcision and Torah obedience, they could not join the people of Israel. However, in Paul's view, God, through the Holy Spirit, has done something completely unexpected. He brought the Gentiles into the elect without first requiring circumcision and acceptance of Torah. In a similar way then, homosexuals have been regarded, at least in the modern era, as possessing unnatural desires (frequently, it is argued, brought about by biology and/or childhood trauma) and as particularly prone to sexual promiscuity and immorality.<sup>26</sup> However, Rogers argues that from observation and experience we may just be witnessing God, through the Holy Spirit, bringing covenanted gay and lesbian relationships into the church without their first becoming heterosexual.

Rogers also argues that God may be doing a similar thing with celibate relationships (i.e., marking a sexually non-reproductive relationship as capable of producing sons and daughters of God). In this view the church creates a whole new way to evaluate what constitutes "normal" or "natural" relationships. That is, the church provides a place where we can affirm

homosexual and heterosexual marriages, and singles and celibates, as equal partners.

The conservative reaction against this position is based on appeals to scriptural authority and goes something like this: If in the Bible Paul says homosexual behavior is a natural consequence of pagan idolatry, then it is. If we accept Rogers's argument, we will be going against the plain teaching of the Bible. As Hays insists, scripture and church tradition univocally proscribe homosexual behavior.<sup>27</sup> In order to respond to such objections, I will turn to the work of John Zizioulas, which provides a powerful, biblically centered, and theologically sophisticated counter-argument.

### **Zizioulas and the Misguided Ideal of Heterosexual Marriage**

We can think of John Zizioulas's collection of essays, *Communion and Otherness*, as a theological reflection on the reality of our created existence.<sup>28</sup> For Zizioulas, that we are created *ex nihilo* means two things. First, we are not necessary; our existence is contingent. Second, death continually haunts us with the possibility of non-existence. Zizioulas makes a careful distinction between our *being* (the human nature we share with all of our species) and our *personhood* (our unique and particular identity as people-in-communion).

Our being is tied to our sexuality because through sexual reproduction we pass our human nature onto our offspring.<sup>29</sup> But sexual reproduction is inhabited with death. Sexual reproduction is about the survival of the species, not the survival of personhood. Nature or being is "incapable of producing such a truly and ultimately particular human being, in fact it does everything through its very mechanism of reproduction to prevent this from happening."<sup>30</sup> Personhood, on the other hand, is that part of us that is "absolutely unique and ultimately indispensable."<sup>31</sup> Personhood is never self-realized; rather it is found in relationship with the Trinity, a communion of three persons sharing one uncreated substance.

Dominant thinkers within Christian theology have long attempted to deal with this conflict between human *being* (which is infused with death) and *personhood* (which resists the annihilation implicit in death) by positing an immortal soul that will one day escape from the necessity of our death-filled bodies. But according to Zizioulas this is an unacceptable solution because, as he puts it,

We *are* bodies, we do not *have* bodies.... And we acquire our... identities through the relationship of our bodies with other bodies, that is, through that part of our being which nature throws away after the survival of our species is secured.... Christian anthropology could never conceive of human identity without the body.<sup>32</sup>

For Zizioulas, the only way to overcome the conflict between being and personhood is the resurrection of the body. God has designed our bodies in such a way as to be “the *locus* both of the conflict and the resolution,” not the prison from which our souls escape.<sup>33</sup> Christ became a body and experienced the death of the body and the threat of extinction, yet in his resurrection by the Spirit he overcame the conflict between being and personhood. His resurrection displays the primacy of personhood and particularity over biological necessity and death. Thus as humans we share in Christ’s resurrection through new birth (baptism) and communion in the church.<sup>34</sup>

What does this have to do with our discussion of the morality of homosexual relationships? In Zizioulas’s words,

By means of Baptism, followed by the Eucharist, the Church offers us ... [the possibility of being saved from death], because it gives a new identity rooted in a network of relationships which are not obligatory, *like those that create the family and society*, but free.<sup>35</sup>

He states further that the veneration and almost religious exaltation of human reproduction among Christian theologians and even official churches, who produce “theologies of marriage” and idealize “natural law,” can be explained only by the loss of ontological [i.e. the ontological primacy of personhood rather than substance] concern in theology and a consequent blindness to the reality of death.<sup>36</sup>

In his view, salvation is the process of being released from obligation and necessity and into the freedom for communion. Obligation is wrapped in death. Freedom is the creation of the Spirit. This does not mean that sexual or biological reproduction is wrong or redundant but that it is now, because of Christ’s resurrection, shot through with contingency and instability. Christ

overcame death in his resurrection and created a new human being without sexual reproduction. This is why baptism is spoken of as “new birth,” and why Christ’s overcoming of death and rebirth by the Spirit makes even heterosexual marriage unstable. As Jesus hints at in his teaching on the kingdom of God, marriage will be rendered obsolete at the *parousia* because no longer will humans be tied to the biological necessity of reproduction; instead we will live in complete freedom for God and each other.<sup>37</sup> This is not to argue that heterosexual marriage is not useful or helpful, but simply that it is not pre-ordained, rooted in a divine Ideal, or somehow eternal or necessary. In the church, the sexual configuration of any relationship is secondary to the ways in which our relationships are inhabited by God’s grace and offer God’s gift to the other person.

What Zizioulas’s theology leads to is that the claim for the primacy of heterosexual marriage is actually the claim for the primacy of a biological relationship inhabited by death. To say that heterosexual marriage is somehow constitutive of true humanity is a misguided project, because God recreates the human in God’s image in Jesus, a single, celibate man. Following Zizioulas’s line of argument, we can conclude from Jesus’ singleness that sexual acts are not an intrinsic part of human personhood.

### **Zizioulas, Rogers, and a Non-essentialist Reading of Paul**

We now must return to Rom. 1:18-32 and consider how we might integrate the theological visions of Zizioulas and Rogers with Paul’s apparent condemnation of homosexuality as idolatry. My proposal is that we can still take Paul’s argument seriously and treat the Bible authoritatively, but also open up the possibility for same-sex marriage in the church.

My starting place is to criticize the view that Paul in Rom. 1:18-32 forever condemns homosexual behavior. This view mistakenly privileges him with some kind of special knowledge or insight into reality that transcends his creaturely position. In this framework, we must ultimately posit that God has granted him a certain wisdom that allowed him to grasp the truth that marriage is for all time heterosexual in nature. However, ascribing to Paul an insight that exceeds his temporally and culturally limited (creaturely) existence lands us in an impossible situation with respect to inspiration. While I do not deny that divine guidance plays an important role, it does

not consist in granting the authors of the Bible the ability to transcend their social, cultural, and temporal existence. The Bible's power consists of the fact that through these limitations it grants truth.

If we privilege Paul with supra-human insight into "God's eternal design for marriage," then it becomes difficult not to accept all of his ordering of relational forms as absolute – including the need for women to have their heads covered, the impropriety of female leadership in the church, and the acceptability of Christian ownership of slaves. If we take this approach to Paul, we end up in irresolvable debates about which relational orderings are normative and which are culturally bound, and we lose any ground from which to critique any or all of these relational orderings as contingent realities subject to God's redemptive recreation.

A better way forward is to assert that Paul had a firm grasp of his human limitations instead of privileging him with super-human insight. We can then focus on his main point in Romans 1 and 2 as I developed it above, namely that he is making the audacious claim that what God is doing in Jesus Christ is extending covenant membership to the Gentiles as an act of gracious choice even though this process runs contrary to nature and destabilizes Jewish claims to superiority. Abstracted from its context, Rom. 1:18-32 lacks the theological weight to do much work. A more compelling (and a more straightforward) reading of this passage is to read it in concert with Romans 2 and with Paul's larger deconstruction of sinful human pride, which presumes to take the place of God as judge and decide who is "naturally" a member of the elect.

With this approach, we reach a very different conclusion with regard to Rom. 1:18-32 and same-sex marriage. That is, as humans we cannot make *a priori* judgments as to the rightness and wrongness of certain marital configurations. Paul argues in Romans 1 and 2 that Jews cannot presume to know that the depraved Gentile lifestyle is a barrier which God's grace cannot overcome. In light of this understanding of Paul, we see there are no determinative realities and no forms of relationship within which we can enact the precise character of the Christian life. Paul argues that because of Jesus Christ, even Gentile lifestyles can receive redemption, reconfiguration, and inclusion through God's grace. Similarly, in and of themselves, heterosexual and homosexual relationships are not excluded

but can receive redemption by grace. No particular way of living has the eternal stamp of rightness. This means that the form of a marriage does not in advance determine it as right or wrong. All marriages – homosexual or heterosexual – can participate in the divine life. And all marriages, in spite of occupying the “proper” form, can be downright demonic.

What I am suggesting is that we move away from essentialist readings of Paul and towards an understanding of his thought which asserts that Christian identity is found not in the particular social or relational form we inhabit but rather in the radical rebirth we share with all Christians through our baptism and participation in the church. I wish to flee, as David Nixon says, “from all essentialist ideas into shared notions of baptismal identity,” and thus return to the radically pneumatological character of ecclesial existence.<sup>38</sup>

### **A Pneumatological Ecclesiology**

With this reconsideration of Paul’s argument in Romans 1 combined with the contributions of Zizioulas and Rogers, I return to the CCMBC statements in order to begin thinking about how we might go about constructing a denominational position on this issue. The CCMBC position is clearly attempting to fix one relational form – heterosexual marriage – as *the* divinely mandated marital form. There is plainly an appeal to a predetermined reality, supposedly revealed by Scripture, where same-sex marriage is *a priori* excluded. However, it was the observation that Gentiles had received the Spirit of God without giving up their essentially Gentile ways which led Paul to conclude that God shows no partiality.<sup>39</sup> If we appreciate our place as Gentiles with respect to Israel, we are led into a position of humility with regard to our status. As Rogers points out, we worship a strange God, a God who belongs to another people. Only through the body of Jesus (i.e., through the Chalcedonian union of God and the human) are we elected to salvation. We are naturally creatures subject to God’s wrath, and only by God’s unnatural grace are we brought into relationship with God. To argue, as the CCMBC position does, that homosexual marriage is “unnatural” and thus cannot be inhabited by God’s grace forgets the unnatural position we occupy as Gentiles with respect to God. At the end of the day, the goodness of our relationships derives from the Holy Spirit’s inhabitation of them through grace, not from their embodiment of the properly prescribed forms.

Rogers puts a basic fact before us: Today, homosexuals are joining the church and enacting the covenant of Christian marriage as same-sex couples. If we combine this fact with the notion that there are no eternally fixed ideal relational forms, then the obvious conclusion is that God is incorporating homosexual unions into the covenant of Christian marriage. If we remain open to the surprising work of the Spirit, we are forced to recognize that God is able to work within all kinds of relationships – heterosexual marriages, same-sex marriages, in celibate individuals, and in nonsexually intimate relationships.

Pressing further (and borrowing from Zizioulas), I contend that many evangelical approaches to marriage fail to adequately appreciate our creaturely position. An understanding of our creaturely existence helps us realize that all supposed divinely mandated relational forms are in fact created in and inhabited by instability, contingency, and weakness. Because of this, all our human relationships are contingent and have the potential to be deeply flawed. Thus, there is nothing *inherently* good in a heterosexual marriage; a marriage becomes good through God's gracious action in that particular relationship. It is also true that any marital form can be just as demonic as any other. In my view, marriage derives its good externally, from God, and thus does not require a preordained form, heterosexual or homosexual, to receive God's grace.

The CCMBC statement that the union of two distinct genders expresses "something" (presumably something significant) about the image of God suffers from a shortcoming common in many theological approaches to marriage. Stated succinctly, it is that any vision where heterosexual unions create (even something of) the image of God possesses the major drawback that in the NT it is not male and female that constitute the image of God, but rather the God-Man. The union of God and the human in Jesus Christ is constitutive of the new image of God into which we are being conformed. And, if Christ is constitutive of the human, then marriage is not. This allows us, as Christians, to remove gender from our definition of marriage, and to see it instead as the union of two persons in a faithful and permanent relationship that is expressive of the covenant unity of God with Israel and Christ with the church.

### **An Ecclesiology Open to Same-Sex Marriage**

Up to this point, I have not pressed deeply into the question of ecclesiology and its relationship to same-sex marriage. After a brief discussion of Zizioulas's concept of the church as a pneumatological creation, I will explore the implications of this idea for a conception of the church that is open to same-sex marriages.

Zizioulas's appreciation for the work of the Spirit makes him wary of theological positions that rely too heavily on an abstract form of revelation.<sup>40</sup> While he does not discount the importance of revelation, he is critical of those who allow it to dominate at the expense of an emphasis on the real presence of the Holy Spirit in creation. As he says, "If we make *revelation* the decisive notion in theology . . . Christology dominates pneumatology."<sup>41</sup> Instead, he returns to the insistence that

... the creation cannot survive if it is self-centered and autonomous, and that the only way for it to [experience redemption]... is through communion with the uncreated. This communion is the work of the Holy Spirit, who becomes in this way life-giving....<sup>42</sup>

For Zizioulas, the Spirit constitutes the church as "the communion of saints" and "the new creation." This point is made powerfully by the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 and the prophetic vision of the coming of the Spirit in the book of Joel.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, while not discounting the important role of the revelation of Jesus Christ, Zizioulas pushes us to consider the Spirit as an equal partner in our theological imaginings of the church. The presence of the Spirit in the church, in Zizioulas's view, is inherently disruptive, creating an unnatural communion between Jew and Greek; male and female; slave and free; and created humanity with the uncreated God.<sup>44</sup>

Zizioulas articulates a pneumatological ecclesiology, and while he is not explicitly dealing with the place of same-sex marriages in the church, his conclusions mesh with those of Rogers regarding the place of gays and lesbians. Zizioulas's findings also rub up against policies that exclude "practicing" homosexuals from church membership. By pressing the role of the Holy Spirit in the constitution and character of the church, we are encouraged to imagine the possibility that God's grafting of gay and lesbian relationships onto heterosexual ones might constitute another Pentecost-like

event in the church's life. As we saw above, a strong focus on Christology radically destabilizes all human attempts at attaching "God's will" to certain relational forms. And, if we add to that a strong emphasis on pneumatology, it allows us to look for God's work in surprising and unanticipated ways. This leads to what I view as a superior Christian affirmation of marriage, that is, as a celebration in the community of saints of the exclusive and permanent joining together of two people in the deep communion made possible by the presence of Spirit.

### **Implications of a Pneumatological Ecclesiology**

Complementarian arguments in favor of heterosexual marriage inevitably create the categories of a male and female essence and run into a fundamental problem faced by all attempts to ontologize gender. Mary Elise Lowe explains:

[They] fail to acknowledge the way subjects actually are. Human subjects are relationally, linguistically [and] socially constituted. The resulting moral problem ... is that the Cartesian subject can only treat other persons as objects. In addition, when it is assumed that the subject is autonomous, then qualities, essences, or behaviors (such as gender or sin) can be – and usually are – attributed ontologically to the subject.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, when opposite-sex desire and heterosexual marriage are essentialized into a definition of gender and proper relationships, then homosexuals become differentiated as separate from heterosexual humanity, and same-sex marriage becomes a different species of partnering. Homosexual people can easily be turned into a separate category of humans who suffer from a psychological or biological disease, and same-sex marriage can become a form of relationship that threatens to unravel the whole society. However, as argued above, the pneumatological character of the church and our inclusion in it through baptism radically undermines any human categorization of various people. We cannot beforehand require that people embody a particular form of gender or sexual identity prior to becoming or continuing as members of the church. Rather, through baptism by the Spirit and in the church we are slowly being rebuilt into a shared identity in Christ.

**Summary and Conclusions**

In this article, I have drawn from rich theological language to present an understanding of Christian marriage that includes homosexual and heterosexual relationships. A definition of marriage, in order to be Christian, cannot categorically exclude all same-sex relationships. Many evangelical denominations cite Paul's arguments in Rom 1:18-32 as "proof" that homosexual behavior is not compatible with a Christian lifestyle. In order to deal with this objection, I have advanced a reading that challenges those who see this section of Romans as an enduring condemnation of all homosexual behavior. In particular, I contend that we must cease from attaching so-called "arguments from creation" to appropriate Paul's ideas. Instead, Rom. 1:18-32 is best grasped by locating it in the context of the broad sweep of an argument against all attempts to categorize people on the basis of natural or self-evident characteristics. In Paul's situation, Jews saw Gentiles as obviously depraved and beyond redemption; the only way they could ever become members of the people of God was to loose their "Gentile-ness." However, Paul breaks down these categories and names all humans as equally candidates for God's grace.

The work of Eugene Rogers helps us appreciate the paradoxical manner in which Paul employs the categories of natural and unnatural within the book of Romans. Rogers approaches him as an ingenious rhetorician who is out to undermine essentialist definitions of Jew and Gentile, not as someone who dispenses metaphysical truths about the eternal order of things. In his view, inhabiting the tension between the natural and unnatural and relating it to the categories of Jew and Gentile, we are forced to challenge the assertion that heterosexual relationships are right because they are natural. Gentile exclusion from the promise was also the natural position, until God decided to go against what was natural and engraft the Gentiles into the covenant without requiring circumcision or Torah observance.

With regard to homosexuality, this has clear implications for the church. Foremost is that the union of Jew and Gentile in the church shows that God is able to destroy what is natural and normal and recreate it in the communion of the saints.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, for any church, neither the category of "homosexual" nor participation in the "homosexual lifestyle" can function as a barrier to God's grace. God can freely choose to include both

gay and straight as recipients of grace and members of the church. In terms of Christian marriage, many evangelical groups define it in idealistic terms – its proper, heterosexual form is thought to exist in a divinely constituted order. But, just as in natural terms Jew and Gentile are mutually exclusive categories, so too are heterosexual and homosexual marriages. In the Spirit, same-sex marriage takes on new meaning in light of God’s action in Jesus Christ. The real evaluation of Christian marriage is not through some ethereal realm of hetero- or homosexual but through its concrete display between real people. If we reject an essentialist approach, then we cannot so quickly dismiss same-sex marriage. If an *a priori* argument against same-sex marriage cannot be advanced, then we are forced to deal with real Christians who are covenanting to live with another in Christ-like love and faithfulness, even though they both have the same gender. Based on this pneumatological phenomenon, I can see no basis for the exclusion of same-sex marriages.

John Zizioulas’s work on personhood, being, and creaturely location thwarts any attempt to locate our primary identity in our sexual or gender orientation; our identity is found only in relationship with Jesus Christ in the church. As Christians, we cannot prescribe the proper form of marriage in the abstract by appealing to inherent gender characteristics. All relational forms (including sexual orientations) are contingent realities, subject to disruption by the Spirit. Among other things, this means that we theologically affirm the divine, re-creative power of the Spirit which overturns the necessity of biologically reproductive relationships. Sexual reproduction cannot create the people of God. In the NT, the reproduction of the church is a pneumatological process, not a biological one. The church reproduces through the adoption and inclusion of people into the community through Christ. As the gospel of John puts it, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”<sup>247</sup>

Our identity as men and women, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, derives from our relationship to Christ. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that marriage is not necessary (i.e., singleness and celibacy are ways to experience the fullness of God) and that marriage does not require

opposite-gender partnering. Contrary to many conservative interpreters, I believe that we can affirm, with Biblical and theological integrity, same-sex marriage in the church.

It is hard to imagine evangelical denominations changing their position on same-sex behavior. Many of these churches have made their position a question of Christian orthodoxy. However, the church is never limited by our human imaginings. Haunting our human attempts to define what is “real” – indeed haunting all our creaturely existence – is the body of Jesus. It is the common confession of all churches that this ugly, scarred, bloodied, and crucified Jewish body contains within it, by the power of the Spirit, our salvation. As Gentiles, our inclusion into Christ’s body is a radical act of God’s grace. Christians are called to continually reflect, under the guidance of the Spirit, on the profound reality that God chose what is despised to bring righteousness, redemption, and sanctification. In NT terms, salvation is an act that surpasses what is naturally possible. This calls us to affirm the possibility that God can inhabit even something as despised as same-sex marriage through the mysterious inner workings of grace.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to Mennonite World Conference statistics, in 2006 the CCMBC had 35,770 members and 246 congregations [1]. In comparison, Mennonite Church Canada had 34,000 members (in 2006) [1], the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada had 66,700 members, the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, 66,300, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada 369,500 (in 2001) [2]. Sources: [1] Mennonite World Conference Member Directory (2006) available at “<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/>” [2] Statistics Canada, “2001 Census of Canada: analysis series, Religion in Canada.” (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada), catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001015.

<sup>2</sup> General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, *Confession of Faith of the United States and Canadian Conferences of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1999), articles 10 and 11.

<sup>3</sup> Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, “Homosexuality: A Compassionate yet Firm Response,” Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Conference Board of Faith and Life, 25 November 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Richard Hays, follow this logic. Hays states that homosexual practice is wrong because the Bible unequivocally declares that “marriage between a man and a woman is the normative form for human sexual fulfillment, and homosexuality is one among many

tragic signs that we are a broken people, alienated from God's loving purpose." – Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Gender--Being It or Doing It? The Church, Homosexuality, and the Politics of Identity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47 (1993): 33.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:5.

<sup>8</sup> The CCMBC pamphlet states, "All humans have a strong need for intimacy. But though sexual intercourse expresses a part of that need, it is not necessary for intimacy. Therefore, sexual intercourse is not open to all – it is reserved for marriage. Because we are made in the image of God, it is possible to live full, rich lives without expressing our need for intimacy through sexual intercourse." How this squares with the image of God being "more fully" expressed in the male/female union is never addressed.

<sup>9</sup> This passage has a long history of interpretation. One dominant line can be traced back to Aquinas and the subsequent tradition of arguments from natural law. Commenting on Rom. 2:14, he says, "Although they [the Gentiles] have no written law, yet they have the natural law, whereby each one knows, and is conscious of, what is good and what is evil," Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 91, Obj. 3*.

However, this is not to dismiss the law, in Lutheran fashion, as simply proof that we cannot obey God's commands. Luther took the argument in a radically different direction, pitting natural law against grace. He claimed that the inability of the Gentiles to follow natural law revealed the impossibility of knowing God's laws (i.e., God's true law is completely foreign to human beings). As Luther says in his commentary on Romans, "God certainly desires to save us not through our own righteousness, but through the righteousness and wisdom of someone else or by means of a righteousness, which does not originate on earth, but comes down from heaven. So, then, we must teach a righteousness which in every way comes from without and is entirely foreign to us." Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 27-28.

In Thomas's view, while the Gentiles can know the natural law, they cannot follow it because no one, without the power of divine grace, can follow God's law, natural or not. Unless the law is infused with God's grace, it will remain ineffective and the Gentiles will go about their idolatrous ways. "According to the Romans Commentary, natural law moves human beings not one step closer to right action – unless it is restored by grace.... the Christian paradox is that natural law does not, in the concrete world of God's creation, work by nature alone.... Aquinas does not imagine natural law operating Protestant-fashion as a rival to grace; he imagines natural law as shot through with grace if it is to function at all." – Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 105-106.

Karl Barth does not even bring up homosexual behavior when commenting on Romans 1. "Wherever the qualitative distinction between men and the final Omega is overlooked and misunderstood, that fetishism is bound to appear in which God is experienced in 'birds and four footed things', and finally, or rather primarily, in 'the likeness of corruptible man' – Personality, the Child, the Woman – and in the half-spiritual, half-material creations,

exhibitions, and representations of man's creative ability – Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland.” – Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), 50-51. In the 8000+ pages of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth discusses homosexuality only once. See his *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation, Volume III/4*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 166.

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 1:26. Dale B. Martin argues that this phrase is more aptly translated “beyond nature.” To Martin, “contrary” implies that the ancients had differentiated between natural (heterosexual) desire and unnatural (homosexual) desire. In his view this is an anachronism. The ancients did not view homosexual desire and/or practice as unnatural but as the consequence of excessive desire. I am inclined to agree but have left “contrary” in place, as it is used in most translations. “Beyond” seems also a better translation of Rom. 11:24 where the “grafting in” of the Gentiles would thus be God going beyond what is prudent to bring them in. This would make better sense of the parallelism with Rom. 1. Gentiles have an excess of desire, so they search for new experiences as outlets for it. Similarly, God has an excess of desire, which finally culminated in Christ, whose desire reached across the limits of prudence to include the Gentiles. Eugene Rogers makes this point and I emphasize it in this article. See Dale B. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 3 (1995): 339-44.

<sup>11</sup> The OT does take up homosexuality in particular in two passages from Leviticus (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), which invoke the language of “detestable behavior.” Hays has a concise summary of the OT passages in *The Moral Vision*, 381-82. 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 are frequently employed in this debate as they purportedly appear to classify those engaging in homosexual acts as lawless, disobedient evildoers. Hays argues that the two Greek terms used to describe homosexual sex acts can be defined as follows: *malakoi* refers to those taking the passive role, often young boys; *arsenokoitai*, a neologism, was coined from the Septuagint phrase for homosexual acts committed by men. He further contends that with respect to 1 Corinthians, “This is not a controversial point in Paul’s argument; the letter gives no evidence that anyone at Corinth was arguing for the acceptance of same-sex erotic activity. Paul simply assumes that his readers will share his conviction that those who indulge in homosexual activity are ‘wrongdoers’.” – Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 382. This is the same point that I (along with Hays) argue that Paul is proposing in Rom. 1:18ff.

<sup>12</sup> David Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics* (London; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 251.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>14</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 387 (emphasis mine). Dale Martin disagrees that Paul is appealing to creation-order arguments, but is instead referring to prevailing Jewish decline narratives that are not related to Genesis 2 and 3. See Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” 334-39.

<sup>15</sup> Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 250.

<sup>16</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 398.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 3:23; 11:36.

<sup>18</sup> In a review of Rogers’s book, Gilbert Meilaender says “There is something a little bizarre

about attempting to use one of the most difficult and obscure theological questions—the relation of Jews and Gentiles—to clarify the Church’s judgment about homosexual behavior, but the move is not uncommon....” Gilbert Meilaender, “What Sex Is—and Is For,” *First Things* (2000): 2. His argumentative technique here is hardly sophisticated. He simply dismisses Rogers’s ideas as “bizarre.” To state that the central motif of the Pauline letters – the relationship of Jews and Gentiles – is difficult to understand is one thing, but to say it is obscure is another. Paul’s view on the baptism of the dead could be classified as both difficult and obscure, but hardly his thoughts on Jews and Gentiles, which occupy significant portions of Romans and Galatians.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 15:12.

<sup>20</sup> I interpret the rootstock in Paul’s use here as God’s covenant, best represented by the person of Jesus Christ. Many have questioned whether Paul was confused about oliculture, for it seems most logical to graft a domestic shoot onto a wild rootstock. I don’t think Paul was confused; he has instead intentionally reversed the image. As Philip Francis Esler says, “Paul may have diverged from a particular agricultural practice in a way that his audience would have recognized as a deliberate tactic aimed at making a particular point.” Esler argues that the rhetorical force of this argument is that “Paul deliberately depicts the inversion of this process, as a way of undermining the pretensions of Greek Christ-followers in Rome. The result is an image of the Christ movement, clearly differentiated in its parts, in which the Judean members are superior to the others.” Philip Francis Esler, “Ancient Oliculture and Ethnic Differentiation: The Meaning of the Olive-Tree Image in Romans 11,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2003): 106. This passage fits generally with Rogers’s desire to create heterosexual humility towards homosexuals.

<sup>21</sup> Rom. 11:24.

<sup>22</sup> Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Cor. 11:13-15a.

<sup>25</sup> Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 65.

<sup>26</sup> Witness again the CCMBC pamphlet, which says, “A study done by researchers Bell and Weinberg reported that only 9% of homosexual males had fewer than 25 sexual partners in their lifetime. Their studies concluded that only 1% of male homosexuals had had a monogamous relationship.” The pamphlet’s authors fail to mention that the cited 1981 study suffers from serious design flaws. The sample was not drawn randomly, nor was it geographically representative. This makes it impossible to draw probabilistic inferences of the general homosexual population like those cited in the pamphlet.

A 1982 review of the study states that “it makes one realize how costly these notions [advanced by Bell and Weinberg] have been to the field, not just in the vacuousness of their main themes, but also in the promulgation of their underlying assumptions: that heterosexuality [being ‘instinctive’] can be taken for granted and thus its development need not be accounted for; that homosexuality arises from factors other than those which are also involved in heterosexuality; and, worst of all, that a preference of any kind can ever rest on a negative base. (A person likes what he likes because of its rewards, not because he hates

or fears something else.) One sees the diverting power of these underlying assumptions in the case at hand.” – C. A. Tripp, “Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Woman/ Sexual Preference: Statistical Appendix (Review of Book),” *Journal of Sex Research* 18 (1982).

For the original study see Alan P. Bell and Martin S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978; Alan P. Bell, Martin S. Weinberg, and Sue Kiefer Hammersmith, *Sexual Preference, Its Development in Men and Women* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981). To attempt to measure the “promiscuity level” of homosexuals is extremely complex. Obtaining a random and representative sample is difficult; people are often reticent to reveal their sexual habits to researchers and tend to misrepresent their behaviors in surveys.

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert Meilaender, with characteristic rhetorical excess, claims the dissenting positions on homosexual behavior are the divisions between “a few Protestants, on the one hand, and [all] Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, and Catholic Christians on the other.” This is a typical conservative response – to marginalize the opposing view with inaccurate statements on the position’s popularity. Ironically, when the conservative view is in the minority it becomes a “prophetic witness against the culture of death.” See Gilbert Meilaender, “Talking Democracy,” *First Things* (2004).

<sup>28</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> “Human beings create by destroying; in sexuality the human race preserves itself while it destroys.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* trans. Martin Ruter et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 122-24.

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 59.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 62. Emphasis in original.

<sup>34</sup> For a deeper explanation of the connection of new birth, baptism, and personhood, see *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 263. Emphasis mine.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>37</sup> Matt. 22:23-30.

<sup>38</sup> David Nixon, “‘No More Tea, Vicar’. An Exploration of the Discourses Which Inform the Current Debates about Sexualities Within the Church of England,” *Sexualities* 11 (2008): 609.

<sup>39</sup> “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15:19-20). This concession by the Jerusalem Council clearly expects that Gentiles will experience a rebirth in Christ, which will lead to certain behavioral changes. The expected behaviors, however, are significantly less stringent than those followed by Jews (and Jewish Christians). The Gentile Christian lifestyle is still Gentile but with modifications. So, too, I am arguing that homosexuals (or

“the homosexual lifestyle” – a term I dislike because of its pejorative associations) can be Christian homosexuals by bringing their lives under the command of God. This does not mean, however, that they must become celibate or heterosexual Christians; this move would be akin to requiring Gentiles to become Jews (and follow the Jewish way of life) in order to become Christians.

<sup>40</sup> There is a strong resonance between what Zizioulas is arguing for and a Reformed position. Zizioulas still retains a Calvinist and Barthian aversion to natural theology. One can hear echoes of *The Institutes* when he says, “The observation of the world cannot lead to an ontology of the person, because the person as an ontological category cannot be extrapolated from experience” (Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 103).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 2:1-13; Joel 2:23-32.

<sup>44</sup> In other words, Gal. 3:28. I do not want to push Zizioulas so far as to create a direct correspondence between either Christ and the church or the action of the Spirit and the action of Christians. In my view, these connections are inhabited by a rupture (in Bonhoeffer’s words, an “abyss”) in which sin is, for the time being, still operative.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Elise Lowe, “Gay/Lesbian Ordination and the Ontology of the Human Subject,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43 (2004): 177.

<sup>46</sup> In my opinion, male and female as “natural divisions” suffer the same fate. In the Spirit, male and female as essentialist categories break down. We cannot call certain things as properly masculine or feminine or an embodiment of maleness or femaleness. Male and female take their meaning from their relationship with Jesus Christ, not through their inherent characteristics.

<sup>47</sup> John 1:12-13.

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## REFLECTION

### The Anabaptist Prison<sup>1</sup>

*Isaac S. Villegas*

*You can put us in jail, but you can't stop us. When the Holy Ghost gets to a man, nothing can stop him. The Negro has been sitting here dead for three hundred years. It is time he got up and walked.*

– James Bevel, 1963<sup>2</sup>

#### I

On Tuesday nights some of us from church drive fifteen miles down Interstate 40 to the Orange County Correctional Facility, a men's prison. I leave my cell phone and all other contraband in my car, and walk over to the guards at the gate. After they check my ID card, the prison guards admit me into the dark world behind the chain-linked fence lined with razor wire. We are led to the dining hall – white walls, linoleum floors, circular tables with chairs. A voice from a loud speaker gives permission for inmates to enter the dining hall where visitors have assembled. I find a few prisoners sitting at a table and ask if I can join them for a conversation. Sometimes we talk about the latest college basketball game – UNC beat Duke, again. Sometimes they share news about their family on the outside – a daughter in trouble at school, a son finally graduating. Sometimes they tell me what God is doing in their lives – an experience of grace, a new insight from the Bible. And sometimes we just sit there with nothing much to say; our words come to an end and all we have to offer is our silent presence. When the hour is up, we form a big circle – inmates and visitors hold hands and pray. We become brothers in Christ, praying to our Father in heaven, for God's kingdom to come, “on earth as it is in heaven ....”

When I'm with them, I can't help but pray that prayer like I really mean it. The familiar words of the Lord's Prayer come alive as I hear the profound conviction and utter desperation in their voices. The inmates inflect our routine Christian prayer with cries for mercy, for redemption, for liberation, for reconciliation, for salvation. And with their hands in mine, and mine in theirs, I can't help but echo their conviction and desperation; I can't help but want what they want: for the kingdom of heaven to crush the chain-linked fence and reach into all our hearts, and set us free. In prison I can hear 500-year-old whispers from Anabaptist graves – the prayers of the saints – who still cry out to God in unison for a re-formed world, a world remade. When I pray the Lord's Prayer with my friends in prison, our voices reverberate with the voices of the 16th-century Anabaptists, the faithful commoners who dreamed of God's future: "that this earthly life swings up into heaven," as one preacher taught them to pray and dream.<sup>3</sup>

As we pray and share our lives together, inmates tell me about how God has entered their souls even while their bodies are held captive in prison. They bear witness to the unstoppable flow of God's grace, passing through locked gates, and washing over their lives. I hear story after story of God's prevenient mercy, providential love, and permeating grace. They claim the words of the apostle Paul that "nothing shall separate us from the love of God," not even incarceration. Redemption has taken hold of them. I've seen evidence of God's work in their faces, when the light of Christ's transfiguration flashes through their eyes. I've heard it in their prayers, when their words resound with the Word of God. And I've even felt God in their hands, when we clasp our hands together and let the peace of Christ pass through our palms and fingers. They are the church, even in prison – a light shining in the darkness.

I often think about their hands – Larry's hands, Santonio's hands, Tim's hands. All of us hold hands as we share thanksgivings and concerns, and finally bow our heads and pray. With their hands in mine, and mine in theirs, I can't help but think about what those hands have done. *Who have they hurt? And how badly? Is Larry doing time for a violent crime?* I try to shake those thoughts out of my head and focus on the hands themselves, the fleshiness of them, and to learn to feel God's presence pass through them. Hand in hand, flesh on flesh – this is the site of God's mysteries revealed,

the intimate union of the Holy Spirit, companionship through Christ. The textures of our hands give texture to the Word made flesh. Together, our bodies write the Word; our hands mingle our bodies, and we find ourselves holding, and being held by, the body of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

But they are wounded hands. The inmates still bear the marks of their crimes. They are wounded by the wounds they've inflicted. Prisoners remember what they have done – the pain they've caused. Their guilty conscience haunts the mind. The marks of the wounds, now lodged in memory, can't be erased; nor can the marks on their police record: once a felon, always a felon. The official paper trail will follow Santonio forever, leading every potential employer back to the crime scene. I'm not the only one, apparently, who worries about their hands: *What are they going to do with those hands when they get out? Will they return to a life of crime?* The prisoners can hear our internal dialogues. They know that their records will haunt them forever, as if it's not enough to be haunted by those whom they hurt in the first place. The inmates are also worried about their hands: *What am I going to do when I get out? Who will want to touch hands defiled with crime? Who wants to hire a felon?*

When I join my friends in prison for prayer, I glimpse a sliver of Christ's hope. But it's only a flicker of light amidst overwhelming darkness. In prison it's dark for at least three reasons, which all cohere in the insidious power of racism. For one thing, despair is a thick fog that clouds out any light of hope. Even when they look forward to their release, inmates know that most of them will return to prison – currently the rate of recidivism indicates that 75 percent of prisoners will be re-incarcerated within three years of their release.<sup>5</sup> As one ex-offender has put it, “prison is a school and violence is the curriculum.”<sup>6</sup> Incarceration is a training ground for violence. Inmates are schooled as criminals. As James Logan writes, “Criminality is preserved and produced in such fortresses of consistent violence, degradation, and despair.”<sup>7</sup> Prison is a school for the formation in violence and once you are enrolled, you will most likely never graduate. There is little hope for escaping the cycle of imprisonment.<sup>8</sup>

Another reason I am overwhelmed with darkness every Tuesday when I visit prisoners has to do with the forces of dehumanization. Prisons have been given over to demonic powers that snuff out every spark of hope

as inmates are taught that they are not fully human. The system, observes David Gilbert, tends to “view prisoners as scum for whom incarceration itself is not sufficient punishment.”<sup>9</sup> After being told again and again that they are the scum of the earth, it’s no surprise that inmates begin to believe that they are not quite as human as the rest of us. Prison is not only a piece of land marked off from the free world with razor wire; it is also a linguistic territory where people are absorbed into a language world that re-names them as “filth,” “dirt,” “slime,” “pieces of shit,” “diseased,” “contagious,” “debris,” “monsters,” among other names.<sup>10</sup> They learn a new vocabulary behind bars; they are named and mapped into a world where they come to describe their species as less than human. Prisoners come to know themselves as human debris, the excrement of society. Their minds are invaded and colonized with this new linguistic world. A thick fog of degradation and despair clouds their vision of their humanity.

Finally, the Orange County Correctional Facility is a dark world because most of the men are dark skinned – most are African-American, some Hispanic, and a few are white. As we all know, this isn’t because black and brown people are criminals by some genetic defect. Instead, there seems to be a sinister collusion of powers that has turned our society in on itself to find scapegoats – that is, groups of people to blame as the cause of the death of the American dream.<sup>11</sup> A significant attempt at scapegoating took place during Richard Nixon’s 1968 presidential campaign. He played on the fears of White America and blamed the riots throughout the United States on the black people themselves. Instead of listening to what Martin Luther King, Jr. and others were saying about the root causes of racism and poverty, Nixon responded with a “law and order” attack on the black population.<sup>12</sup> According to Nixon, African Americans were the problem, not the segregated distribution of wealth and racist city planning.

As I learn more about the history of the Mennonite church that has adopted me, I am struck by an analogous political climate at the emergence of Anabaptism and the current African American incarceration. The Anabaptists were victims of the same criminal (in)justice approach to structural problems. In the 16th century, Thomas Müntzer preached about the blindness of the powerful as they crushed those at the bottom of society: “The lords themselves are responsible for making the poor people their

enemy. They do not want to remove the cause of insurrection, so how, in the long run, can things improve?"<sup>13</sup> For short-term thinkers, as Müntzer noted, it is easier to blame the protestors and rioters than to deal with the real issues; they treat the symptoms without investigating the pathology. Similarly, as those with social capital and political power in the 1960s lived out the "pursuit of happiness," they refused to acknowledge the reasons for riots and bought into the scapegoat solution: that is, it's time to put African Americans in prison. Those with political power did not think twice about the economic racism that made ghettos possible. Rather than starting the hard work of economic reform, the system began a process of quarantining the enraged people who seemed to be causing all the problems. U.S. society chose the easy way out; the political forces treated the symptom of the riots instead of investigating the economic disease.

Thus prisons were filled with those who raged and rioted. They were the dark side of the so-called American dream, sent to prison so that the socio-economic machine could keep producing the conditions of happiness.<sup>14</sup> To secure capital, the established order has to segregate those at the bottom who threaten the authorized distribution of wealth and power.<sup>15</sup> The prison population is the shadow side of a society that is founded upon accumulating property for the few while the many keep the machine producing.<sup>16</sup> While the legalized slavery of recent history may have come to an end, the poor are still predominately black and work for a pittance. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said in a 1967 sermon, "Emancipation for the black man was freedom to hunger."<sup>17</sup>

No one wants to die of hunger, if they can help it. Instead of silently suffering social death, African Americans made public what Michel Foucault calls the "indirect murder" of people in order to keep the system running. When the black population started to organize into a political movement of equality for the poor and powerless, the political system ignored the root problems and instead silenced the revolutionary voices. It's no mistake that the most hopeful political movement in this country was born among African Americans, and now, almost as a response, our country puts them behind bars. Sheldon Wolin, the eminent American political theorist, makes this point powerfully:

The significance of the African American prison population is

political. What is notable about the African American population generally is that it is highly sophisticated politically and by far the one group that throughout the twentieth century kept alive a spirit of resistance and rebelliousness. In that context, criminal justice is as much a strategy of political neutralization as it is a channel of instinctive racism.<sup>18</sup>

As Wolin notes, the sheer number of darker-skinned prisoners tells an important story. The political system doesn't tolerate disruptions to the established distribution of power, and the mass movements of African Americans have been seen as a threat.

While this racism is systemic and thus faceless, every once in a while the curtains are stripped away and we can see someone pulling the levers of the political machine as it rolls over people. J. Edgar Hoover, the former director of the F.B.I., displayed the paranoid fear that fuels the racist political order. During the Civil Rights movement, Hoover put Martin Luther King, Jr. on a short list of "dangerous people to be rounded up in case of a national emergency."<sup>19</sup> Now, it seems, Hoover's same policy is in play with the heirs of the Civil Rights movement. They have been rounded up and put in prisons. And in prison they are inducted into the cycle of lawlessness from which only a few escape. The system has snuffed out any spark of hope for a redeemed society, and has misdirected the hope of God's revolutionary love that emerged during the Civil Rights movement. Instead of continuing to dream with King about God's beloved community, the urban poor are taught to dream about becoming another American Gangster, an urban soldier trained in prison for street warfare when they get out. History has taught them (and us) that substantive economic, social, and political change is impossible, so why not become kings of the slums?

## II

That's the harsh reality I'm beginning to see as I talk with prisoners. When I drive back from prison on Tuesday nights, I come home to a world that seems like it's falling apart, or maybe has already collapsed, and I have the luxury to live in denial. The fact is that prisons are part of the system that makes it possible for me to thrive. My friends in prison and I are different

threads making up the fabric of the same society. Without prisons, the order of things unravels. I can experience the fullness of my humanity because of the mass dehumanization of inmates in the hidden corners of this country. The cycles of imprisonment and the violence behind bars maintains the order that allows me to go about my daily life. This has to mean something is wrong with the way life is organized in the United States. If inmates are just as much a part of our body politic as I am, and if we stick the thermometer in prison in order to take our temperature, then we will see that the U.S. body suffers from a high fever.

Days before his assassination, Martin Luther King, Jr. read the symptoms of our political body and offered his diagnosis: “the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around.” But he didn’t say we were dead just yet. King’s prognosis left open a possibility for hope, for restored health in the land. He continued: “But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars.”<sup>20</sup> The light of Christ’s hope shines in the darkness. While we are tempted to close our eyes and go to sleep when it’s dark outside, to forget about a world gone mad, King tells us to go outside and look for the stars. We aren’t supposed to run from evil; instead we wait with those in the darkness for the advent of Christ’s resurrected life. Hope is a kind of dream that comes over us when we stare into the night, with eyes wide open. To keep our eyes open and dream at night: that’s the nature of Christian discipleship.<sup>21</sup>

When I visit Tim, Larry, Santonio, and others in prison, they share their hopes with me; they invite me into their dreams – to look into the night and find a star. And I wonder how their visions for the future can set our church on Jesus’ path of faithfulness. Our church needs these stars in the night sky of our world so we can find our way again, our path into God’s kingdom. While many books and speakers theorize about new ways to be church in this so-called postmodern culture, I think we need to take another chance with the old ways of the gospel.

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus clues us in on how the Holy Spirit works in our world and how the life of the gospel flows through our lives. The old map for the future of the church tells us to go to prison, but we seem to have abandoned that life-giving mission. In a Nazareth synagogue Jesus tells us about God’s emerging future:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus' vision and mission are straightforward and concrete. And followers of Jesus can easily take up his mantle without a lot of strategic planning. All we need to do is take good news to poor people and proclaim freedom for prisoners. Anyone can do it.

This simple vision of what it means to be a Christian drew me into the Anabaptist story and the Mennonite church. The history books told me about peasants who were ready for this gospel. And when they followed what Jesus said, they found themselves sent into dungeons. Like the original mission Jesus lays out in Luke's gospel, the Anabaptist church was the church of the poor and of the prisoner. The Anabaptists were hungry for a revolution of God's love that would break down all forms of oppression – spiritual and political, liturgical and economic. As the Holy Spirit descended on these 16th-century peasants, they hoped and prayed the words of Jesus in Luke: “to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Or, as one popular preacher put it, “the people will be free, and God alone will be their lord.”<sup>22</sup> Anabaptism was centered on the jealous love of the God of freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Hunger for the gospel only grew stronger when Anabaptists went into the prisons. And that hunger spread to fellow inmates, to other people who tried to start a revolution but failed when they turned to violence. Taking up the sword didn't work, and the former rebels found themselves in prisons alongside the Anabaptists who also preached about a revolution – God's *peaceable* revolution.<sup>24</sup> They heard the Anabaptist good news and saw it lived out and developed in the crucible of imprisonment and torture. As historian James M. Stayer has shown, “In most regions affected by the [war of] 1525 . . . former peasant rebels became Anabaptists, sometimes prominent ones.”<sup>25</sup> Lawless peasants became Anabaptist leaders. The Anabaptist gospel originally caught on among peasant rebels on the run and in prisons. If Martin Luther's gospel was for the princes and the establishment, then the Anabaptist gospel was for the rebels and the oppressed.<sup>26</sup>

If the Mennonite church emerged among the lawless rebels on the losing side of history, then our church should return to that context for the Holy Spirit to move in our midst again. And where are the lawless now? Where are the outcasts who hunger and thirst for a gospel that makes sense of their dark world? Well, a lot of them are in prison. That's what political systems do to rebels, whether in the sixteenth century or the twenty-first.

Because Jesus' original calling in Luke 4 made prison ministry inherent to the gospel, and because the Anabaptist tradition arose from dungeons, then we may find out that the same world-changing life of the Holy Spirit is still in prison. If the past can be a guide for us, then we may discover that the future of the Mennonite church will emerge from the prison system. But there's no way to find out unless we experiment with our history – to see what happens when we shine the light of the past onto our present. We may find out that what was true at the beginning of Anabaptism can be true again for us: that from our church may re-emerge some of the most beautiful and powerful Christian spiritualities. Our contemporary Mennonite songs and prayers still reach back into the prisons of the 16th century, which in turn reach back to the life and ministry of Jesus. What would happen if we let our bodies follow the words we sing and return to the prisons?

The gospel begins with presence, with incarnation, with our words made flesh. Salvation begins with the touch of hands united in prayer, the mingling of flesh becoming the body of Christ. Christ's church is in prison. I join my hands and prayers in that assembly on Tuesday nights. And when I listen to the inmates dream, I can hear murmurs of a possible future for the Mennonite church.

What if we turn prisons into kingdom outposts? Just like urban gangs use prisons as recruitment centers and training facilities for their soldiers, we can train and sustain prisoners as ministers of the gospel. Many of them hope to return to their communities to spread the good news that they have discovered while in prison. The Mennonite church can provide education and institutional structure for their formation as missionaries and ministers.<sup>27</sup> They will probably go places with the gospel that most of us would never consider planting a church. Yet this shouldn't be foreign territory for Mennonites, since the prison system already runs through the veins of Anabaptist identity. Perhaps new life will flow through our church once we return to our roots in prison.

### III

When I'm visiting my friends in prison, at some point my mind wanders to Luke's hopeful vision in chapter 4. I want to see Jesus' promises come true: to bring good news to the poor, the prisoner, the blind, and the oppressed. During his life on earth, Jesus seems to do most of what is on the list. He brings good news to the poor, he feeds the hungry, and he even gives sight to the blind. But what about freedom for the prisoners? Where does that happen in the Gospel of Luke? Even though Jesus states that liberation for prisoners is central to his mission, he seems to forget them as he goes about his work.<sup>28</sup> But *I* can't forget about Santonio, Tim, Larry, and all the others because I hold their hands every week. I can't forget their faces and their prayers. But did Jesus forget?

After reading through Luke's gospel, I have realized that I can't understand the movement of the gospel through Jesus' life without reading the continuation of the story in Luke's second volume, the book of Acts. In those pages I can begin to see what freedom from prison looks like. In Acts the church passes again and again through prison cells. And when the church goes to prison, Jesus goes with them through the power of the Holy Spirit, and prisoners are set free. Through the church, Jesus fulfills his mission to the prisoners; he sets the captives free. The first church went to prison, and the first church began in prison. Perhaps ours can be reborn if we go to prison, if we relearn how prisons can become outposts for the kingdom, training centers for the mission of God, the site of a renewed Anabaptist vision.

None of this is safe. It's not safe to go to prison. It's not safe to turn murderers and drug dealers into missionaries and ministers. I can imagine all sorts of terrible problems for us if we set free in our churches some of the men I've come to know. It's a dangerous experiment. Yet I have to remember that Jesus did in fact set at least one prisoner free, a dangerous one; he released one captive. At the end of his life, as he drew near to the cross, Jesus' life was given for the freedom of one prisoner: Barabbas.<sup>29</sup> Luke writes, "Pilate gave his verdict. . . . He released [Barabbas], the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over. . . ." (Luke 23:24-25). Jesus takes the place of Barabbas. That's substitutionary

atonement I can believe in, not the doctrines that Reformed theologians theorize about and that keep Mennonite theologians up at night. Instead, Jesus shows us how the Christian life is one of substitutionary atonement: to let yourself be handed over for the sake of murderers and dealers. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can let our lives be given for the sake of another, to open up for Larry or Santonio or Tim a whole new world of possibilities, a new life. Jesus sets one dangerous prisoner free; that's the gospel.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay was first presented as talk/sermon at the Mennonite Church USA All Boards Meeting on September 24, 2009 in Kansas City, KS. I am grateful to Dave Nickel, Alex Sider, and Katie Villegas for their suggestions as I developed my sermon notes into this essay.

<sup>2</sup> James Bevel, April 10, 1963, quoted in Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and The Word That Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255. Bevel was part of the team of preachers of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Committee.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Müntzer quoted in Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, trans. Jocelyn Jaquiere, ed. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 21. For the relationship between Müntzer and the Anabaptist movement, see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "'A common future conversation': a revisionist interpretation of the September 1524 Grebel Letters to Thomas Müntzer," in *Radical Reformation Studies: Essays Presented to James M. Stayer*, ed. Werner O. Packull and Geoffrey L. Dipple (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999). Also see Goertz's summary essay, "Karlstadt, Müntzer and the Reformation of the Commoners, 1521-1525," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2007). For a description of the Reformation that shows the prevalence of Müntzer's sentiment, see Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), especially ch. 3, "Rural and Urban Utopias."

<sup>4</sup> I am drawing from Sebastian Moore at this point. Most of the time, he writes, the Christian "fails to look forward to the point when the whole mystery of God will be known in the clasp of your brother's hand." Sebastian Moore, *God is a New Language* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1967), 141. According to Moore, this union is how we "body-forth the eternal Word" (82).

<sup>5</sup> James Samuel Logan, *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 37.

<sup>6</sup> David Lewis, quoted in Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Lige Dailey, Jr., a former inmate, gives an account of the struggles in re-entering society.

For black men who have been without power for so long in this country, committing a crime is empowerment. “As a former criminal,” Dailey writes, “let me state that criminal activity is a powerful narcotic. For many of us, it was the only empowering experience we ever knew” (259). But, according to Dailey, society is also to blame for recidivism: “I believe that society’s thirst for revenge has blinded it to our escalating cycle of recidivism. It was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who said, ‘The eye for an eye philosophy will ultimately lead to a nation of blind people’” (263). Lige Dailey, Jr., “Reentry: Prospects for Postrelease Success,” in *Prison Masculinities*, eds. Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 255-64.

<sup>9</sup> David Gilbert, “These Criminals Have No Respect for Human Life,” *Social Justice* 18.3 (1991): 78; quoted in Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> David Theo Goldberg’s study, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), shows how the modern nation-state is wrapped up in the logic of racism. For Goldberg, the production of criminals is a corollary to the formation of a relatively homogenized nation-state. Prisons are by-products of the state’s claim to be the “more perfect union” of “we, the people.” “While prisons have served as modern institutions of social control in wider ways,” he writes, “they have been integral administrative apparatuses of racial definition and reproduction, racial conception and control, racial privilege and value – explicit and extended, assertive and implicative” (158).

<sup>12</sup> See Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 1999), ch. 1: “Nixon’s Splendid Little War: Social Crisis and Containment.” Also see Eric Schlosser, “The Prison-Industrial Complex,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Müntzer, “A Highly Provoked Defense,” in *The Radical Reformation*, trans. and ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Goldberg puts it this way: “the threats to presumptive safety and certainty that follow the magnification of global capital flows, economic and human, prompt recourse to law, order, and the instrumentalities of special control. Disprivileged historically, populations defined as not white are (re)configured as anxiety-promoting threat or surplus, devalued or revalued as potential sources of violating the social compact and the socioeconomic and cultural regeneration” (*The Racial State*, 158).

<sup>15</sup> Christian Parenti’s research demonstrates the need to produce a prison population during a time of crisis and social unrest: “the criminal justice crackdown has become, intentionally or otherwise, a way to manage rising inequality and surplus populations. Throughout this process of economic restructuring the poor have suffered, particularly poor people of color. Thus it is poor people of color who make up the bulk of the American prisoners.” Parenti, *Lockdown America*, xii; quoted in Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> In the 1970s, Michel Foucault focused his research on the configuration of power in the modern nation-state. His lectures in 1975-76 showed how the discourse of racism is at the heart of the formation of the state (“*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey [New York: Picador, 2003]). As Foucault said, “the modern State can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism at some point” (254). The function of racism, according to Foucault, is “to fragment, to create a caesura

within the biological continuum” of the people, which is conceived as one body, the body politic (255). From the birth of modern nation-state, the discourse of race has been used to separate the healthy parts of the population from the diseased. For the well-being of the whole body politic, the system must seek “the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species” (256). Thus the state assumes “biopower,” control over life itself. Like a doctor, the state cuts off diseased members of the social body. Foucault calls it “indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of earth for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (256). The prison system is the site of such indirect murder. But the black church has always been a community of resurrection. Interestingly, King also talks about the United States as if it were a single body. But he identifies racism as the disease itself: “Segregation is the cancer in the body politic which must be removed” (Jan 14, 1965, Selma, AL; quoted in Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 259).

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Meaning of Hope,” Dec 10, 1967 (Atlanta, GA), quoted in Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy, Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>19</sup> “[J. Edgar Hoover’s] bureau, moreover, had placed King’s name on ‘Section A of the Reserve Index,’ which listed dangerous people to be rounded up in case of a national emergency.” Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 201.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I See the Promised Land” (April 3, 1968), in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 280.

<sup>21</sup> At this point I am drawing from Nicholas Lash’s insights about hope in his book of sermons, appropriately titled *Seeing in the Dark*: “If we misread the darkness, we shall misconceive the light. Close your eyes, and wish the world were different, and you cannot begin to hope. To be able to hope is to be awake, to be watchful, to be awakened from sleep.” Nicholas Lash, *Seeing in the Dark: University Sermons* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Müntzer, *A Highly Provoked Defense* [1524], quoted in James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants’ War and the Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 109.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of God’s jealous freedom, see Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (London: Continuum, 2003), 115-25.

<sup>24</sup> For the relationship between the German Peasants’ War and the emergence of Anabaptism, see Stayer, *The German Peasants’ War*, ch. 3: “Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants’ War.” According to Stayer, the shared experience of injustice and resistance provided fertile ground for Anabaptist missions: “leaders directed their Anabaptist mission to persons who shared with them the experience of the Peasants’ War” (79).

<sup>25</sup> “In most regions affected by the 1525 uprising, after an interval of some months or years, former peasant rebels became Anabaptists, sometimes prominent ones. This fact permits us to examine the possibility, suggested by Marxist historians and obliquely by Peter Blickle, that Anabaptism was to some degree a religious after-effect of the Peasants’ War.” Stayer,

*German Peasants' War*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> See Hans-Jürgen Goertz's discussion of the "absolute incompatibility" between Luther and Müntzer: *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, ch. 10. For example: "The incompatibility between Luther and Müntzer showed here too. One had taken a position which in the field of political and social conflicts ultimately strengthened the hand of the secular authorities, while the other thought from the perspective of those suffering under this same authority, rebelling, and expecting an improvement in their condition through the kingdom of God on earth" (157).

<sup>27</sup> Through its work in the Ellsworth Correctional Facility, Hesston College is already providing an education for inmates and has even trained some to become pastors when released. See Laurie Oswald Robinson, "Prisoners become ministers," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, April 6, 2009; and Susan Miller Balzer, "Hesston College pastoral graduate says God saved him," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, June 2, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> I wonder if that's why John the Baptist is so confused about Jesus being the Messiah. While in prison, John asks his disciples to send a message to Jesus: "Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (Luke 7:18b-19). John needs to know if Jesus is really who he says he is. I'm sure John is wondering, while he's rotting away in prison, what happened to Jesus' original commitment to free the prisoners. When Jesus responds to John's disciples, he surprisingly leaves out any talk of prisoners: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fail away on account of me" (vv. 22-23). Jesus defends his identity as the Messiah, but does not make any reference to his original commitment to setting prisoners free. Instead he includes a few others that he didn't mention in Luke 4 (as if to make up for the glaring absence of liberation for prisoners?).

<sup>29</sup> This insight comes from a sermon by James Wm. McClendon: "Today This Scripture Has Been Fulfilled" (unpublished manuscript in Dr. Steven W. Jolley's collection), January 1974.

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James Samuel Logan. *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008; Paul Redekop. *Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008.

In *Changing Paradigms* and *Good Punishment?* Paul Redekop and James Logan respectively have added to the steadily growing literature on punishment. Whereas Logan concentrates his acumen on the prison-industrial complex and its societal harm, Redekop looks at how alternatives to punishment can be lived out in the criminal justice system, family life, and educational systems. He presents research showing that using corporeal punishment on children is more often harmful than not. Moreover, even non-corporeal punishments such as yelling or severe criticism can be equally as damaging as hitting.

In the latter part of his book, Redekop attempts to answer some biblical and theological arguments that pacifist parents use to justify using violence as punishment at home. For example, he posits that they use “literalist interpretations of select Bible passages” to justify corporeal punishment (185). Yet, he argues, by punishing in God’s name, these parents impart a malformed theology of God’s judgment and wrath – one in which the child’s will is broken by a parents who use their power to violently enforce God’s law and the parents’ whims. (To borrow concepts from Logan’s book, the parents humiliate and degrade their children to show who is superior and who is inferior.) According to Redekop, this can create personality issues in children who are taught to obey parents and see their punishment as an act of God. This in turn can create a tendency to being people-pleasers and to passive aggressiveness.

Thus, based on his extensive experience within the restorative justice field, Redekop concludes we cannot justify punishment on a moral or a utilitarian basis. Families, churches, and the Canadian and American criminal justice systems should orient around restorative justice principles, and restorative justice should replace rather than supplement the current retributive system (74).

Replacing retribution with restorative justice is a goal that Logan would

surely sympathize with. In *Good Punishment*, he thoroughly examines the increased incarceration rate within the United States and the ways retributive practices degrade and humiliate both the individuals and the communities of which they are a part. Logan also details the widespread effects of mass incarceration on families and communities of color in particular, and the breakdown of social cohesion that results.

Logan focuses on how structural racism plays a part in making non-white skin synonymous with criminality and thus scapegoats entire communities. By scapegoating individuals and communities of color, society inscribes a white supremacy onto itself, allowing people to feel good about what they are not. This runs against the grain of Christian practices of forgiveness, penance, and reconciliation, and therefore must be shaken off in the Christian community and denounced. In Christian theology, every person is a sinner and thus shares a very deep connection with other sinners. Not only do people who sin and get caught need forgiveness, the entire community always stands in need of forgiveness.

Working out from Christian community to the non-Christian world, Logan skillfully shows how the conditions of society create crime so that both the “criminal” and the society that creates conditions making crime attractive need repentance and forgiveness. Indeed, it is crucial for white people especially to understand how they need to be forgiven for creating the conditions under which some people are left so degraded and humiliated that their “choices” to get into crime are already conditioned by the structural racism of American society. Thus in Logan’s framework, criminality is not merely the problem of morally deficient individuals but a problem with which all of us must come to terms.

If all members of American society must reckon with the massive problem of imprisonment, theologians have not seemed to notice. Logan finds very few theologians have taken up the task of critically examining the “social costs of imprisonment on such a large scale” (7). Too often white theologians in particular have proposed theories for policing and prisons that do not take into account how much race matters in how one views the entire criminal justice system. For support and as his primary dialogue partner, Logan draws upon Stanley Hauerwas’s theology on church practices of penance and forgiveness and the ways they help Christians remember sin

rightly as something of which we all must be forgiven by God. Logan uses Hauerwas's idea of "ontological intimacy" and asks how it could be brought to bear on the problem of mass incarceration beyond telling the system not to kill. He thus pushes Hauerwas to deepen his thought to examine how Christian practices might help resist and change the way American society handles, views, and practices punishment. It is a welcome and sorely needed discussion that demonstrates Logan's respect for, and challenges to, Hauerwas's basic agenda.

In the final pages Logan suggests how Christian "ontological intimacy" could shape public debates on crime and prisons. For example, he recommends Michael Parenti's call for "less policing, less incarceration, shorter sentences, less surveillance, fewer laws governing individual behaviors, and less obsessive discussion of every lurid crime, less prohibition, and less puritanical concern for 'freaks' and deviants" (234). He then recommends "decarceration" and Angela Davis's work on prison abolition. I would also add the good work of Critical Resistance, a national organization working against the prison-industrial complex, which has even established "no police" zones in Brooklyn, New York.

Both Redekop and Logan provide challenges to Christians, particularly Mennonites, to find new ways to work for more consistent peacemaking practices within the church and for using those practices as models for society. Particularly when it comes to race, Logan shows that we white theologians and ethicists cannot afford to theorize about policing as if our social location and our skin color are inconsequential. If our proposals for dealing with "crime" are not grounded in a thorough look at race, we have just added to the problem rather than helped to resolve it. Redekop's book shows us that working toward societal renewal makes little sense if we are not practicing nonviolence in our lives in deep and sustaining ways. How we treat our children, for example, matters a great deal. I found both of these volumes enriching and challenging, and I will return to them in the years ahead as I work on these issues.

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Walter Klaassen and William Klassen. *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008. Neal Blough. *Christ in our Midst: Incarnation, Church and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007.

For those interested in the remarkable career and enduring significance of Pilgram Marpeck, these two books constitute a watershed in Marpeck studies – presenting earlier research, contributing new data and perspectives, and inviting future scholarship and reflection.

There could be no better prepared biographers than Klaassen and Klassen, who translated Marpeck’s known writings in 1978, spurring a renaissance of interest in him by a new generation of students and scholars. Following a chronological trajectory of his career, the authors’ narrative illuminates important aspects of Marpeck’s work in relation to his historical context. Examples include his technological expertise and relationship to the civil governments in Strasbourg, St. Gall, and Augsburg; the various audiences and arguments of his three Strasbourg publications; and his position regarding women and their roles in the Anabaptist movement. Two appendices provide excellent guidance in reading Marpeck’s extended *Response (Antwort)* to Caspar Schwenckfeld and the disparate collection of writings called the *Kunstbuch*.

As reflected in the title, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, Klaassen and Klassen characterize Marpeck as “a dissenter to injustice and a conformist to the highest human values” (Klassen and Klassen [hereafter K&K], 22). As a dissenter, Marpeck defied the Constantinian domination of people’s lives and faith either by traditional, feudal ruling elites (Charles V and Ferdinand I) or by newer, urban elites (city councilors, such as Strasbourg’s Jakob Sturm). As a conformist, he strove to build communities of mutual respect from the bottom up, including miners and laborers as well as those of noble birth. Affirming personal sovereignty in matters of faith and ethics, he rejected coercion in matters of faith and violence as a means to settle differences.

Marpeck’s position on the various oaths common to the period reflects these dual tendencies. Refusing to split “religious realities into inner and outer, spiritual and material,” Marpeck believed the gathered Body of Christ

must “affirm joy and make peace and justice available not just to members of the kingdom of God but to all humanity” (K&K, 353). Recognizing the claims on him by others outside the conventicle, Marpeck directed “public works projects in various cities, resulting in the direct improvement in people’s living and working conditions” (K&K, 352). Therefore, while he rejected oaths that required the use of deadly force, he embraced those that acknowledged his responsibilities to the well-being of those in or outside the Body of Christ.

In these and other areas, Klaassen and Klassen effectively synthesize earlier scholarship and lay the foundation for further investigations.

Blough’s fine book is a re-working of *Christologie anabaptiste. Pilgram Marpeck et l’humanité du Christ* (Geneva, 1984), the French publication of his dissertation. The author has substantially revised four chapters of the earlier book and introduces three new ones (*Exposé of the Babylonian Whore*, Salvation and Ethics, Incarnation, Church and Discipleship).

Blough focuses on four areas in which Marpeck makes creative contributions to his communities and to theology more generally: authority within the church, the link between internal and external dynamics of faith, the connection between justification and sanctification, and the relationship of church and state. Along with other reformers, Marpeck insists on an Christological reading of Scripture. However, his Christology – focused on a persecuted gathered community of believers – led to a theological position more critical of the use and abuse of power by ecclesiastical and civil authorities than magisterial reformers. Combining a “Lutheran sacramental logic” emphasizing the external, physical media of grace with “an almost Calvinist understanding of the ‘real’ (though) spiritual presence,” Marpeck affirms “the visibility of the church and a communal Spirit-filled presence that reflected the humanity of Christ in the world” (Blough, 22).

By refusing to separate justification from sanctification, Marpeck, according to Blough, was truer to the positions of Augustine of Hippo and much of the medieval church than was Luther. His insistence on justification by faith and that “infused grace” flows not through institutional sacraments *ex opere operato*, but as a direct gift of the Holy Spirit, places him closer to Protestant views. The inherent connection of justification to sanctification

led Marpeck to criticize the social and political quietism of many under the sway of Luther's justification by faith alone. According to Blough, Marpeck believed that the "victory of resurrection over the forces of evil and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit" brings not only "forgiveness and reconciliation" but also empowers disciples in the present for such things as feeding the hungry and the "confrontation of false theological, political or ethical options." The gathered community of believers is Christ's humanity continuing to act in history (Blough, 220, 226).

Emphasizing the cross of Christ and the non-coercive nature of the Holy Spirit, Marpeck rejected the use of the sword in matters of faith, whether wielded by the Anabaptists at Münster, the princes of the Schmalkaldic League, or Charles V. Believers are empowered to follow Christ and are "transformed collectively in his image," thereby constituting the "unglorified" body of Christ, which is sent "into the world to take on the same form as Jesus of Nazareth, the form of self-giving and nonviolent love" (Blough, 220).

For the reader interested in the intersection of Christian faith, ecclesial life, the common good, and the state, an image emerges from these books of a position that may be of help today. Marpeck's theological posture, informed by his familiarity with intellectual streams of the day and by his experience in civil government, balanced a responsive and responsible engagement of others (within and without the conventicle) and a healthy, critical distance from and leverage against the strategies of domination employed by ruling elites by means of ecclesiastical mechanisms of a sacerdotal priesthood or ministrations of a state-supported evangelical clergy. Those strategies, as Marpeck had seen first-hand, did little to vitalize the church or promote the common good; in fact, they served to disrupt both.

Klaassen and Klassen catalog Ferdinand I's persistent attempts, through threats of deadly force, to impose a catholic uniformity throughout the empire. They, along with Blough, present Marpeck's vision of voluntary communities committed to mutual spiritual, social, and economic service and struggling to free themselves from the deadening virus of domination spread by such ecclesiastical practices as infant baptism. These voluntary communities are, at once, more likely to see most clearly the forces that distort human life and freer to resist them, though nonviolently. I quibble,

therefore, with Klaassen and Klassen when they say:

But Marpeck was politically quite traditional. He upheld the legitimate authority of emperors, kings, and councils for the maintenance of social order. He had no vision for a new social order or political order such as was held by the Anabaptists of Münster in Westphalia or by John Calvin. But he believed in the autonomy of God's kingdom in the midst of the kingdoms of this world, and he devoted himself to that vision. (K&K, 26)

Marpeck did give qualified support to civil authorities as they regulated the exchange of goods and services necessary for the flourishing of an interdependent humanity. However, his commitment to the autonomy of small, voluntary communities of mutual support and discipline led to the possibility of a new, more just social and political order. That order, in his view, could not be imposed by force as in Münster and Geneva, but it could grow and spread as others were drawn to it. For him, the Kingdom of God – no matter what the next world may hold – was intended to be manifest in this one.

In that vein, Blough asserts, “only an internationally embodied Gospel can combat the disparities of wealth and privilege” in the world. Therefore, to increase the social resources available for the struggle against those disparities, Blough urges Mennonites to engage “other traditions and theologies” in a “catholic” effort to address them. His explorations of Marpeck’s use of “traditional theological categories of Incarnation and Trinity” offers entry points for the possibility of ecumenical collaboration for a more just and peaceful world. It is a call consistent with the spirit of the Marpeck whom all three authors offer to us.

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Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White. *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.

“How should the Church engage young people in vital partnership with Christ, as Christ’s disciples in the contemporary world?” Mahan, Warren, and White contend this question needs to be asked anew with the “scandalous beauty and sublimity of the gospel, as well as its power to challenge business as usual” in mind (xi).

According to these authors, the single greatest identifier of our culture is consumerism, with concomitant identifiers such as militarism and moralism. If the church is going to form young people into “the way of Jesus and the social practices intrinsic to Christian discipleship,” it needs to repent from both the domestication of Jesus and the domestication of adolescence (19). “Communitarian-narrativists” such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Westerhoff have brought to the fore the need for Sabbath-keeping, hospitality, forgiveness, and testimony. However, to these practices of *anamnesis* (right remembering) something crucial needs to be added: practices of *ascesis* (right resistance or right-restraint) (xii).

A highlight of the book is the first essay in Part I, where White provides a trenchant, Foucault-like account of the “abstraction” of youth since the onset of the industrial era. Broadly characterized by fragmentation and alienation, negative effects include fragmentation of families, erosion of traditional formation such as apprenticeships, displacement of religious moral formation by the media, and reduction and objectification of adolescence to sexual and physical energy. In our present “postmodern consumer culture,” White sees the failures of consumer capitalism as extended adolescence, evaporation of the middle class, loss of meaningful employment, criminalization of youth, declining ability for creative and critical thinking, exploitation of youth by the entertainment industry, and ultimately, inhibition of human flourishing and flourishing of the Kingdom of God (3-19).

In the second essay, White introduces “practices of resistance” that enable youth to do the kind of social, cultural, and economic analysis necessary for responding fully to God’s call upon their lives. These practices

include critical questioning, engaging in theater and games, and the dialectical practice of “coding and decoding,” based on the work of Paulo Freire (21-37).

In Part II, Warren imagines what an “inconvenient church” might look like if we sought fidelity to the Good News and to Jesus, if the Eucharist became a prototype of Christian assembly, and if all advocated for human dignity as Jesus did. These three convictions would uncloak the individualistic and mechanistic portrayal of adolescence that has become necessary for the “production of desire” in a consumer culture (41-73).

Mahan’s essays in Part III offer practical suggestions for exposing cultural scripts which define “success” in consumerist terms and surreptitiously plant seeds of suspicion and resentment regarding counter-cultural interpretations of Scripture. Mahan proposes “sacred commiseration” as a practice of “ongoing examination of conscience ... to uncover and study *in detail* the personal and collective constraints” of living out Gospel ministry, drawing on wisdom from the Psalms, the Desert Fathers, and, more recently, Thomas Merton (77-106).

In a sea of popularly written books repackaging strategies for reaching middle-class youth and perpetuating the cultural status quo, one strength of this volume is that it radically challenges models of youth ministry geared around entertainment and social events. Another strength is that the authors engage a wide array of academic resources, including the philosophy of Charles Taylor, the psychology of Erik Erikson, the theology of Martin Buber, the hermeneutics of Walter Brueggemann, and Scripture itself. Third, it is consistent with a theology of the church which is Christocentric and ecclesiocentric rather than personality-driven or issue-driven.

Three weaknesses of the book are perhaps endemic to the task of lifting up *ascesis*. First, a more robust account of the relationship between *ascesis* and *anamnesis* is called for. Resistance and narrative are best understood as cyclical, continually informing each other, especially since it is “right remembering” that provides the Christian with clues about *what* to resist. Second, a danger emerges in which resistance becomes simply being “anti” something and thereby still negatively bound to the old center. Themes such as love of God and neighbor, or long-term discipleship, are offered as the new center, but the authors do not sufficiently spell out what

these look like in contemporary culture. A third weakness follows, namely that the concepts of church and culture need to be more fully developed and the relationship between the two clarified.

While the authors' intended audience are people who engage in Christian formation with youth (pastors, parents, sponsors, and educators), this book will be appreciated by all who share the authors' conviction that something drastically problematic in our culture is inhibiting the Christian's ability to love God and neighbor.

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Paul Alexander. *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances of the Assemblies of God*. C. Henry Smith Series 8. Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2009.

Paul Alexander's *Peace to War* is likely to bring a sea-change in the way the Pentecostals view their past. The Pentecostal phenomenon is huge, so Alexander limits himself to surveying the approaches to war of his own denomination, the Assemblies of God. His approach is methodical, but it is not hard to detect his commitments, and his awareness that Grant Wacker (*Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2001) and other historians of Pentecostalism are looking over his shoulders. As Alexander reads its periodicals, pamphlets, and denominational resolutions, he notes a gradual shift that is vastly slower than Wacker asserts. Instead of a shift from the movement's original pacifism that took place within two years as Americans participated in World War I, Alexander finds one that took place over fifty years and culminated in 1967.

Early Pentecostalism, according to the author, was rooted in the primal spiritual experiences of Spirit-gifted worship and the expectation of Christ's imminent return. It also was grounded in a deep devotion to the teachings and way of Jesus Christ. These led many early Pentecostals to a

“crucifist” approach to life that expressed itself both in heroic missionary self-sacrifice and in Christ-centered social nonconformity. In arguing for this approach, they drew upon Quaker thought and pacifist tendencies in the Holiness traditions; they also, to my astonishment, repeatedly cited the early church fathers.

Alexander is careful to note that there were always differing Pentecostal voices on the subject of war. But within the Assemblies of God there was sufficient unanimity on a broadly pacifist approach to enable the General Assembly in August 1917 to pass Article XXII. This Article affirmed the Assemblies’ loyalty to the government of the United States, but it “nevertheless” proclaimed their identity as “followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace,” whose Sermon on the Mount teachings it listed. It stated that these scriptures “have always been . . . interpreted by our churches as prohibiting Christians from shedding blood or taking human life.” It concluded by saying that the Assemblies of God cannot participate in war “which involves the actual destruction of human life,” for this is contrary to “the clear teachings of the inspired Word of God.”

Article XXII remained the official teaching for fifty years until 1967, when the Church Convention finally was able to agree to delete it, replacing it with a new Article XXII on “Military Service.” Gone in the new Article are references to the teachings of Jesus; in their place is an affirmation of loyalty to the government of the United States, coupled with a pro-choice assertion that each member has the right to choose whether to be a combatant, a noncombatant, or a conscientious objector. In view of the soldiers whom the denomination’s leaders were promoting as role models, combatant military service was clearly the anticipated ethical norm.

From 1941 onwards, denominational periodicals urged young men to enlist as combatants. The writers’ focus shifted from the teachings of Jesus to stories of the Old Testament coupled with the first verses of Romans 13. Their emphasis upon mission no longer mentioned killing the enemy but witnessing to American troops. Underlying these changes was the transformation of the cultural milieu of the Assemblies, which were becoming respectable, conservative, Evangelical churches. Only domestically, in their services in which ecstatic worship still took place, was there a whiff of radicalism and risk. According to Alexander, since 1968 the Assemblies of God have been

“a pro-military and pro-American denomination” that, whatever its official position, “allowed little room for the conscientious objector.”

But, the author argues, things can change. Pentecostals can recover their origins and the Christocentric crucifism present in them. They can re-open themselves to the prophetic Spirit, who empowers a critique of social sin. In view of current Article XXII, they can allow advocates of each position to “present their understanding of Jesus, Scripture, faith, and practice so that it can be critiqued by others.” They can even confess that “we made a mistake” in departing from the original Article XXII. For those wishing to proceed in new/old directions, Alexander invites Pentecostals in their “thousands and thousands” to join a new organization he has founded – Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice. He longs to see followers of Jesus who will be “cross-bearing, Holy Spirit-filled, tongue-talking, enemy-loving, nonviolent witnesses to the Way, Truth, and Life.”

For non-Pentecostals who read this book, there is the cautionary tale of a peace church whose salt has lost its savor. “How easily,” Alexander observes, “the Christian pacifist nonviolence can be lost.” The Historic Peace Churches in particular, he is convinced, must take notice. Are we, he asks us, participating in a shift as gradual as that of the Assemblies of God, engaged in a movement from crucifism to conformity – from peace to war?

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Alexis D. Abernethy, ed. *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

What makes this book stand apart is its focus on the relatively unexplored territory of spiritual formation in worship. While much has been written about worship theology, and many fine resources for public worship are published each year, much less has been written about the space between – the middle territory, the lived experience of worship where people meet God and lives are transformed.

Edited by Alexis Abernethy, professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary and a psychotherapist in private practice, this multidisciplinary collection of essays examines the relationship between worship and spiritual transformation. The essays were written in response to a collaborative ethnographic research project called Spiritual Experience in Worship (SEM), sponsored by The Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts (Fuller Theological Seminary) with The Institute for Christian Worship (Calvin College). Organized into three sections, the essays discuss a theology of worship and spiritual growth, the role of the arts in spiritual transformation, and findings from the SEM research.

Two opening chapters provide a theoretical framework for defining and exploring spiritual transformation in worship. “Worship as a locus for transformation” by Clayton J. Schmit, professor of preaching at Fuller Seminary, engages the intriguing yet difficult question of how we can know that transformation has actually occurred in worship – whether on the personal or communal level. In another chapter, John D. Witvliet, Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, describes formation in worship as “nonstop soul-shaping” (44). He encourages us to pay attention to the cumulative power of transformation, not just to immediate results. He also argues for a fuller understanding of the Holy Spirit’s role in worship that includes both the dramatic and spontaneous as well as the ordinary or subtle manifestations of God’s presence and power.

The middle section of essays explores spiritual transformation in worship through the arts – drama, dance, visual arts, music, and film. In addition, transformation is examined through the lens of various racial and

cultural groups – emerging church experience in both the United States and the United Kingdom, along with African-American, Asian, and Hispanic congregations.

The final section of the book interprets the results of the SEM study. Surveying a wide variety of congregations and denominations, the project used questionnaires and interviews to probe people’s lived experience of worship. Interviewees were monitored physiologically – their heart rate and skin conductance were measured – as they were asked to remember and visualize significant worship experiences and respond to follow-up questions. Specifically, researchers were seeking to identify key conditions that contribute to worship experiences and to assess whether these experiences have behavioral outcomes.

Does worship change lives? Researchers found ample evidence of cognitive, affective, relational, and behavioral transformation. Although no significant differences were found between ethnic groups or denominations in the level of positive changes associated with worship, the study found that younger individuals (people in their 30s and 40s) and women tended to report more positive changes than other groups. Researchers also pondered the significance of their finding that sadness is often what people bring to worship and what precedes a transformational experience.

Though pastors and worship planners and leaders will find much to stimulate their thinking in this book, the best result of reading it might be inspiration for exploring how worship forms and transforms people in our own congregations. We likely assume that worship is making a difference, but if we were to ask people questions similar to those used in the research study, we might be surprised by what is and isn’t happening in worship. And while this book will be of significant interest to artists who use their gifts in worship as well as emergent churches and congregations of varying races and cultures, it could also provoke meaningful conversation in interchurch settings. Without judging differences of worship style, the researchers probed the deeper dimensions of what happens as we sing, pray, and encounter God in scripture and preaching. Their findings offer language and concepts that could contribute to interdenominational dialogue.

I doubt if many laypeople will wade through this volume. In many ways, it reads more like a reference work than a compelling discussion of

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spiritual formation. Nevertheless, it would be a useful addition to the libraries of those who teach worship and of pastoral leaders who are responsible for planning worship. It also makes a ground-breaking contribution to interdisciplinary conversation among theologians, psychologists, and those engaged in intercultural studies.

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Timothy J. Geddert. *All Right Now: Finding Consensus on Ethical Questions*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2009.

In *All Right Now*, Timothy Geddert provides a significant resource for congregations and denominations engaged in discernment around ethical issues. His purpose is to help Christians use the Bible well in developing consensus around controversial issues, but his approach depends as much on a particular understanding of the church as it does on sound biblical interpretation. In good Anabaptist style, Geddert attempts to articulate a third or middle way between “liberal” and “conservative” approaches to dealing with issues currently polarizing the church.

Geddert begins by outlining essential biblical principles and understandings of exegesis and interpretation. The book is clearly oriented toward lay people, and the first part functions as a kind of basic introduction to biblical interpretation, succinctly organized into clear and manageable points. Geddert’s ability to distil complex issues connected to biblical hermeneutics is remarkable, making the insights of scholars such as Richard Hays accessible to an average lay person.

It isn’t long before the reader can’t help but wonder if this book about “using the Bible well” isn’t masquerading as a work on ecclesiology and what it means to be the church. This is, in my opinion, the book’s greatest strength – its understanding of scripture is rooted within a particular understanding of God’s covenant people, the body of Christ, the church; an understanding

that resonates deeply within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition but need not be exclusive to it.

Another strength connected to this understanding of the church as the interpretive community is that the author allows for the possibility that, even with the best of exegetical tools and hermeneutical sensibilities, agreement may not be possible and consensus may not be reached. However, a lack of consensus around an ethical question does not impede Geddert's understanding of the church; that is, it need not be a sign of unfaithfulness. Geddert appeals to the early church, which continually had to find ways to live with the ambiguity around ethical issues, an uncertainty that is an inevitable part of all communal life.

In the second part of the book the author doesn't hesitate to deal with some of the most challenging issues connected to homosexuality, loving enemies, possessions, and what might traditionally be called "church discipline" (issues notoriously difficult to gain consensus on). The examples used in this part of the book build on insights developed in the introductory section. For instance, the chapter on homosexuality is a kind of litmus test of the principles Geddert presents at the beginning. He acknowledges the complexity of issues related to homosexuality and engages them in ways that recognize both contemporary realities and the authority of scripture, which he acknowledges is not entirely clear on the matter. Geddert provides a very helpful outline of the spectrum of views and perspectives; however, the hermeneutical conundrum currently present in many Christian communities is not fully recognized. The participation of "homosexually affected" (Geddert's term) persons in this hermeneutical community remains challenging, particularly as many continue to feel unsafe or shamed in the very communities that have nurtured and shaped them. Attention must be given to what kinds of practices are necessary in order to create hospitable communities of sufficient trust and safety that all members of the interpretive community can discern, and agree and disagree together, in love.

I was fortunate to hear Geddert give presentations on this book's themes at Canadian Mennonite University's Church in Ministry Seminars. His approach to Matthew 18, a text of significant influence on Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church as a discipleship community, had a noteworthy impact on pastors attending the event. For many, Matthew

18 is synonymous with church discipline in general and excommunication in particular. According to the text, the sinner who refuses to acknowledge his or her wrong is “to be treated as a Gentile and tax collector,” which has normally been assumed to mean they should be separated from the community. It was a liberating word for participants at the conference, accompanied with an audible gasp, when Geddert asked them how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors (Matthew himself being a tax collector) and how this might be instructive for the church’s ministry. What does it mean for the church to persist with the Gentile and the tax collector, as Jesus persisted with them, in order that they too might know the reconciliation of God?

*All Right Now* is theologically practical and insightful, rich in wisdom, and honest in its engagement with issues. I appreciated the book’s approach, and I have recommended it to a number of pastors.

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Scott Waalkes. *The Fullness of Time in a Flat World: Globalizations and the Liturgical Year*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.

In my largely homogenous high school, three minorities – Muslims, Jews, Orthodox Christians – periodically reminded us that they lived by the beat of a different clock. The seemingly small fact of another calendar made them distinct. How one lives in and with time is a key part of religion. A crucial aspect that set the Essenes apart from other Jewish groups, for example, was their observance of a solar rather than a lunar calendar. In early Celtic Christian history, a major controversy revolved around the dating of Easter. In faith, time matters.

Not that you’d know it by looking at the average church-going Christian. We are as busy and distracted as most in our culture. We too are

caught up in what has been called “time poverty” and “hurry sickness.” In the last church I pastored, congregants determined that busyness was one of their primary spiritual challenges and pleaded with the Elders for help. The Elders agreed, but then took two years to respond because they themselves had too much to do.

The reality is that people are busier today than forty or even twenty years ago. This is neither idle imagination nor neurotic nostalgia. But Christian resources for interpreting and responding to these new realities are scanty and scarce. Does Christian faith have anything to offer as a way forward? Political scientist Scott Waalkes believes so.

Waalkes is a Dutch Calvinist informed and influenced by the likes of John Howard Yoder, Wendell Berry, G. K. Chesterton, and William Cavanaugh. He brilliantly juxtaposes an exposé of globalization’s costly effects with the rich reorientation of living by the Christian liturgical year. He certainly agrees with Thomas Friedman (of *The World is Flat*) that globalization profoundly alters our way of life. But, unlike Friedman, he is not so enamoured with the results. Waalkes notes that globalization poses huge ethical challenges and argues that the best way to respond is by observing the church calendar and living out its implications for faithfulness.

Christians bear witness to God’s Reign by annually re-living and reflecting on salvation history. While Waalkes does not put his contention in these terms, this is a crucial place for us to live out what it might mean to be “in but not of the world.” The “dominant narrative of globalization” (and this is his terminology) need not have the last word.

Waalkes came to these insights and convictions unexpectedly. At first he, like many evangelicals, was fond of the flat world, preoccupied with the blessings and opportunities it ostensibly offered. He gradually came to see, especially because of international travels, that globalization also has profoundly adverse consequences – economically, ecologically, politically, and culturally. Our flattened world contributes to disempowerment, disenchantment, time scarcity, and diminished morality. Moreover, the “flatness” is deceptive; rhythms of consumption replaced liturgical rhythms.

The other reason his convictions emerged slowly is that it is only in the last decade that he came to understand the rich spiritual potential of the

Christian year. Nevertheless, his Calvinist upbringing did teach him at a young age that prioritizing Sabbath-keeping helps us to live differently than many neighbors, especially in trusting that there is always time enough for the most important things, including labor and leisure.

This is a surprisingly long book, weighing in at 362 pages. Waalkes carefully walks through crucial realities of globalization and contrasting them with what the liturgical year proposes and enacts: for example, Advent and the end of history, Christmas and globalization of finance, Epiphany and globalization of work, Lent and global consumption, Holy Week and American hegemony, etc. He challenges false gods of productivity, speed, efficiency, success.

Waalkes invites us to take seriously the importance of how we live out our days. Our choices around vocation, peacemaking, consumption, food, and so on all have opportunities for living sacramentally. Along the way, he celebrates testimonies and stories of many familiar heroes – including Christian Peacemaker Teams and Elias Chacour.

I have considerable interest in both of this author's foci – the shape of how we live today as it is affected by economic and political forces, and how we honor Christian traditions of time. Yet to date I have not seen anything that compares with this book in putting those two spheres in conversation. This volume may well convince you that things are worse than they seem at first blush, but at the same time it offers us imaginative and hopeful ways forward.

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