Bechtel Lecture Two

Martyrdom as Metaphor: Aspects of Global Anabaptist Witness

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Introduction

Since my childhood when I was told stories about the suffering of Christians in Communist countries, the discourse of martyrdom has been part of my understanding of the Christian community. I did not grow up with the *Martyrs Mirror* on the family bookshelf, as have many Mennonites of my and earlier generations, but it was not long after I began to know Mennonite friends and colleagues that I learned about this work's importance to them and their sense of identity. My eventual study of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, limited though it was, was built on documentation in the *Martyrs Mirror*.[1] Occasionally in recent times, the martyr discourse in our circles has been raised with new urgency, as in James Brenneman's 1996 article in the *Gospel Herald*, whose subtitle proclaimed, "Against every law of North American advertising, martyrdom has always been the most effective propaganda for biblically focused church growth."[2] Stanley Hauerwas, reflecting on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Harold S. Bender's "Anabaptist Vision," described the Mennonite/Brethren in Christ/Anabaptist heritage within the tradition of "a free church (which) is one with the strength to narrate its life, and in particular the life of the martyrs, on its own terms." He urged contemporary Mennonites to "remember our story for faithful living" by returning to the *Martyrs Mirror*, and concluded "we will not know how to tell our story well unless we are able to know what martyrdom even today might look like."[3]

I must confess that I write and think as a citizen of the United States. I recognize that I have not taken adequate account of relevant Canadian discourse. Nor have I done the work that would be required even to become familiar with Canadian discussions on the churches' witness in the world. However, one important impetus for the comments I will make grows out of the analysis by [Canadian theologian] Douglas John Hall in Walter Brueggemann's collection *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context*.[4] In defending his use of the term "despair" to describe the

contemporary condition, Hall differentiates between overt despair of those facing life's hardest realities, whether war, poverty, or illness, and "covert" despair, which is "able to masquerade under a guise of well-being so persuasive as to deceive the wearers of the masks themselves." He suggests that the response of Northern Christians to conflicts in our own midst as well as our responses to realities elsewhere reflect this covert despair. Indeed, overt and covert despair are intimately related, because the possessing people living at the center of empire do so at the expense of the poor people in our own midst and in the global South.[5]

Hall moves from this assessment to call Christians to a witness of hope: "The only fundamental reason for articulating Christian mission as hope in action is that we discern in our field of mission – today's global society – a pervasive loss, diminution, or distortion of hope."[6] If Hall's assessment of northern Christianity is at all accurate, then Northern Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, if we want to become more intimately a part of the witness of our global faith community, must reevaluate the forms of our testimony to Jesus Christ.

The question of this paper is whether the martyr heritage of the Christian faith, as well as our own martyr tradition, might lead us toward some new ways to reflect on building and sharing Christian hope. I use the term "martyr" in a broad sense, including the witness of the sacrifice of one's life, but also assuming that "what mattered was that a man or woman had testified, with the parable of his or her entire life, great faithfulness to the Gospel."[7] I use the term "metaphor" well aware of the impossibly long and ancient philosophical conversation surrounding its meaning. In this paper "metaphor" reflects the reflections of Nicholas Lash, who connects faithful witness to the story-telling, autobiographical dimension of Christian faith.[8]

Reflections from Third-century Christians

To provide perspective for reflections on the twenty-first century context, I will first consider the early Christian reflection on witness. To do so, I will compare Clement's, Tertullian's, and Origen's writings on martyrdom. These writings present different perspectives from those of the martyr *acta*, which are more often studied by those seeking an understanding of early Christian martyrdom. (The *acta* are also more similar to *Martyrs Mirror* accounts). The writings of Clement, Tertullian, and Origen reflect less the phenomenology

of these acts of witness with their exhortational approach, but more a less pressured and more theological reflection on the foundations and motivations for martyrdom. Those of us in Canadian and U.S. settings, who have the luxury of thinking about faithful witness where resulting confrontation and threat are not as immediate, might find resonances in the writings of these three theologians. I will show that the foundation for the willingness to accept the heaviest demands of witness lay, for these writers, in the prior disciplined life they advocated for Christians. Further, one Christian perspective that emerged in the third century placed martyrdom in a context of the sharing of love rather than of the search for reward, the more typical understandings articulated by Christians and pagans alike about special deaths in the ancient world. While this understanding of the love motivation was apparently a minority understanding among Christians, I will suggest that it speaks forcefully to our own situations. Questions raised by this exploration will then lead to a revisiting of the metaphor of martyrdom for Mennonites and Brethren in Christ who desire to faithfully witness to the gospel in the twenty-first century.

Tertullian, Clement, and Origen were contemporaries in Egypt and North Africa early in the third century.[9] Clement and Origen both spent a considerable part of their lives in Egypt, while Tertullian lived in Roman Africa. Clement and Origen are connected, in the traditional understanding, as teacher and student in the Catechetical School in Alexandria. Whatever the details of their actual relationship, they shared the rich biblical hermeneutical tradition of Alexandria, as well as the desire to articulate their Christian faith in terms that would communicate in the philosophical milieu in which they studied and taught. It is not evident that the Alexandrians were familiar with Tertullian's work, but all of their writings indicated that they were concerned over the Christian theological articulations made by earlier Egyptian Christian teachers, known as "Gnostics." The writings of all three men reflected their concerns that those teachers sought to soften the call for a visible Christians witness in contexts of persecution.

Tertullian, Clement, and Origen each wrote about Christian witness, using the Greek term which we have come to understand as describing a witness of blood, *martyria*. How their own lives intersected with their reflections on witness may be significant, but I do not suggest that though none of the three apparently died as martyrs detracts from their writings on

the nature of Christian witness. Clement and Origen both experienced the Severan persecution in Alexandria at the beginning of the third century. This was the time that Clement apparently left the Egyptian city, and later letters referring to him offer no mention of anything other than a natural death. Origen was himself more directly affected, since it was during this persecution, while he was still a teenager, that his Roman convert father was executed.[10] Origen himself died as a result of imprisonment and torture during the later Decian persecution. Tertullian, according to tradition, lived to a very old age, and died a natural death. Several of Tertullian's indirect comments suggest that he was converted by witnessing the courage of martyrs,[11] and his name has often been associated with the completion and editing of the famous martyr account of the African matron Perpetua and her slave Felicitas. However, his most direct reference to martyrs was in his account of an otherwise unknown Rutilius, whose martyrdom Tertullian interpreted as punishment for that Christian's flight during an earlier period of persecution.[12]

Histories of the early Christian period commonly suggest that the ascetic choices expressed in emerging monasticism responded to the end of persecution against Christians and evinced the desire for an alternative expression of deepest Christian faithfulness.[13] The work of the three theologians considered here, however, suggests instead that ascetic disciplines laid the foundation for the commitment to martyrdom itself. The titles of Tertullian's writings emphasize the importance he attached to various disciplines for Christians, albeit often disciplines appropriate for women: *On the Apparel of Women*, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, *On Exhortation to Chastity*, *On Monogamy*, *On Modesty*, and *On Fasting*. Tertullian's image of the discipline required of the martyr at times came from military imagery and dwelt on the training necessary for battle. In his *Apology* he noted that some pagans criticized the complaints of Christians about their persecution, responding that Christians were like soldiers who objected to being called into battle, but after they were engaged fought with all their strength.[14] Elsewhere he compares the prison of the martyr with the desert of the prophet, and describes the preparation for martyrdom as that of a soldier, in training under the Holy Ghost.[15] Tertullian also emphasized the importance of ascetic disciplines for their own sake, or as prior to any challenge of persecution. The widow, the virgin, and eunuch, for example, were sustained by the patience that would

also be necessary for one resisting the temptation to flee persecution.[16] Further, Tertullian clearly linked readiness for martyrdom with preparation in ascetic practices, when he criticized those Christians in prison who requested fellow Christians to bring them food: "A well-fattened Christian will perhaps be more necessary for bears and lions than for God . . . ."[17]

Clement likewise surrounded his reflections on martyrdom with comments on the importance of disciplines in life, although his perspective was less earthy than Tertullian's. For him practical ascetic disciplines demonstrated philosophical or spiritual behavior. Clement, however, did not limit his admiration for such choices to Christians, frequently citing examples from contemporary pagan writings of bravery in the face of torture. The point was the importance of discipline: "So the Church is full of those, as well chaste women as men, who have all their life contemplated the death which rouses up to Christ." This vision of the highest of human behaviors was remarkably inclusive, possible for both the educated and uneducated, and for Greeks, barbarians, slaves, men, women, and children. "For self-control is common to all human beings who have made choice of it. And we admit that the same nature exists in every race, and the same virtue."[18]

Known for his ascetic practices, Origen lived on less than the minimum wage, fasted, allowed only a few hours for sleep, owned only one coat, and went barefoot. The extent of his discipline has been part of his notoriety, reflected by his self-castration, in a rigidly literal reading of Jesus' comment about those who become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. According to his admiring biographer Eusebius, Origen's ascetic practices were based in his reading of the New Testament, in contrast to both Clement and Tertullian, who seemed to draw strongly on pagan examples to make their case.[19] Although his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* was less overt in laying an ascetic foundation for the ultimate witness of Christians, he emphasized the athletic nature of the martyr experience. His introduction called for the acceptance of tribulation "like a noble athlete," and his retelling of the story of the martyrdom of the seven Hebrew brothers from 2 Maccabees described the oldest brother as an "athlete of piety."[20]

Nevertheless, in the personal comments he addressed to his patron Ambrose, whose fear in the face of the threat of martyrdom led to Origen's writing, Origen emphasized the value as well as the difficulty of self-denial

for a wealthy and prominent citizen of Alexandria. "We have to strive not merely against denial (of Christ) but also lest we feel any shame when the enemies of God suppose that we are suffering shameful indignities. This is particularly applicable to you, holy Ambrose. Honoured and respected by a vast number of cities, you are now, so to speak, walking in the procession bearing the cross of Jesus and following him who leads you before governors and kings. . . ."[21] All three third-century theologians, then, offer support for the contemporary argument that "the ascetic response (was) fundamental in earliest Christianity."[22]

If ascetic disciplines built a foundation upon which, if necessary, the most demanding forms of witness could be offered, a related issue is how early Christian thinkers understood the motivation for martyrdom. Here it is helpful to consider the work of several contemporary writers on the development of martyrological discourse during the early Christian period. From earlier times in the literatures of the Mediterranean world, the idea of special deaths, marked by particular honor, bravery, or righteousness, had been part of ancient thought. The death of Socrates was the most prominent example.[23] W. H. C. Frend, who extensively researched early Christian martyrdom, understood its roots as lying within Jewish tradition, beginning with stories such as the resistance of the Jewish young men in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar.[24] Glen Bowersock, in contrast, argues that Christian martyr ideals came from the tradition of Roman deaths of honor, characterized by "a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and reward.[25] Carole Straw likewise points to the appropriation by Christians of pagan models of honor and special death. She further agrees with Bowersock that Christians and pagans both viewed "special" deaths as a reciprocal process that offered "mutual gain by expenditure."[26]

Daniel Boyarin uses these perspectives as background to his argument that in the third century, in the not yet sharply delineated border territory between Christians and Jews, a new understanding of martyrdom's primary motivation was emerging. Pointing to the accounts of the Maccabean martyrs in 2 and 4 Maccabees as a portrait of "the oldest, most clearly pre-Christian element of martyrology" – the idea of a reward after death, Boyarin articulates a new Jewish-Christian understanding that was beginning to emerge:

> In late antiquity, for the first time the death of the martyr was conceived of as the fulfilling of a religious mandate per se, and not just the manifestation of a preference "for violent death" over "compliance with a decree." For Christians, beginning with Ignatius, it was a central aspect of the experience of the Imitation of Christ. For Jews, it was a fulfillment of the commandment to "love the Lord with all one's soul."[27]

Boyarin offers an extended analysis of the martyrology of Rabbi Akiva, an account of a first-century event which he argues was re-articulated in third-century rabbinic discussions. These discussions claim that Rabbi Akiva, in his death "loved (God) much more than the former saints." For Boyarin, this judgment grew out of the emerging understanding that martyrdom was literally dying for love of God.[28]

Tertullian, Clement, and Origen were clearly on the Christian side of the "fuzzy" border Boyarin describes. Nevertheless, their writings speak to the same debate over motivation for martyrdom articulated in Boyarin's work. Tertullian's understandings are more in keeping with the earlier ancient perspectives; indeed, Tertullian argued not that martyrdom was to be accepted in hopes of a posthumous reward but that it was primarily repayment of a debt to God. In commenting on whether a Christian could pay the authorities to be released from the requirements of the emperor cult, Tertullian insisted instead that the Christian, based on Jesus' teaching about rendering to God and Caesar what is the due of each, owed God "the blood which his own Son shed for me."[29] Among his strongest statements about the motivation for martyrdom were those made in his debate with the Gnostic Valentinus, whom he accused of building a case that would free Christians from the necessity of taking an open stand if it would mean their death. Valentinus, it seems, suggested that requiring Christian confession in the face of martyrdom would imply that God was "thirsting for blood." Tertullian insisted that such an understanding of God does shape Christian behavior:

> The world has held it lawful for Diana of the Scythians, or Mercury of the Gauls, or Saturn of the Africans, to be appeased by human sacrifices; and in Latium to this day human blood is drunk by Jupiter, and no one expresses reluctance . . . . If our God, too, had

> required martyrdoms for himself, to have a sacrifice of his own, who would have reproached him of (creating) a deadly religion?[30]

Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* sounded a note that, while less strongly stated than Tertullian, shared some of his perspectives. A major section of the *Exhortation* was given to retelling the story from 2 Maccabees of the martyrdom of Eleazar and of the seven brothers, including its insistence that their deaths were "paying the penalty for (their) sins, and (they) are enduring these sufferings willingly, in order that by them (the Jewish people) may be purified."[31] Later he argued that martyrdom was the way to obtain forgiveness for sins committed after baptism.[32] Woven throughout the text were additional references to a witnessing death as a basis for rewards in the afterlife. These claims, to be sure, are founded in biblical references from which Origen draws. For example, he noted statements of Jesus (Matt. 5:10-12) and Paul (Rom. 8:18) regarding suffering and persecution as ways to, as Origen put it, "buy our salvation."[33] Drawing on the description in 2 Corinthians of Paul's sufferings, Origen urged Ambrose to "commend ourselves 'by scourgings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by watchings, and by fastings.' For behold the Lord is here with his reward in his hand to render to each one according to his works" (Isa. 40:10, 62:11, Ps. 60:12, Rev. 2:23, 22:12).[34]

However, Origen's *Exhortation*, a document roughly contemporary with the Akiva martyrology, also opened a window toward the idea that the motivation of love for God could sustain the martyrs' hope. He recalled the same Deuteronomy 6 text, on love for God with all the soul, that Boyarin claims shaped the emerging Jewish perspective on martyrdom.[35] In the midst of the recital of the Maccabean martyrs, Origen described the third brother as "trampling upon" his sufferings "for his love to God," an interesting addition to the Maccabean account which simply states that "he regarded his sufferings as nothing" (2 Macc. 7:12).[36] Origen advocated the imitation of Christ in martyrdom, and, with a quotation from Romans 5, tied this to the hope which grows out of martyr love for God.[37] Most strikingly, he reflected on the Song of Songs, repeating the call of the lover to "Arise, [to] come my friend, my lovely, my dove" after the "winter" of persecution is past.[38]

While Origen was thus poised in the border territory between older views of martyrdom as offering a reward for the faithful and the emerging perspective of martyrdom out of love for God, Clement had already articulated

a foundation for the martyrs' suffering firmly rooted in the love motivation, albeit shaped with a Platonic understanding of love as beyond the passions.[39] His most extensive comments are found in Book 4 of the *Miscellanies*, where he began his praise of martyrdom by challenging the reward understanding: "(N)or does (the martyr) sell his faith in the hope of the gifts prepared, but in love to the Lord he will most gladly depart from this life." Further in this same chapter, Clement insisted: "We call martyrdom perfection, not because the (person) comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love."[40]

In this same section Clement provided extended comments on the Beatitudes, beginning with Jesus' words: "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake." He underlined that these words have both spiritual and "sensory" meanings, an interesting admission for one so devoted to describing the life of the "gnostic" Christian. All of the conditions described in the Beatitudes grew out of the love of righteousness that led to persecution, including poverty "whether 'in spirit' or in circumstances." Clement's final Beatitude was "Blessed are the peacemakers." Peacemakers subdued "the menaces of anger, and the baits of lust" (notice the ascetic thread woven through this statement) and continue to understand "Providence as good." Concluding this section, Clement returned to the blessing on the persecuted: "It is the sum of all virtue, in my opinion, when the Lord teaches us that for love to God we must as gnostics despise death."[41]

He then quoted Paul's claim in Romans 8 that "all things work together for good to them that love God," adding, "You see that martyrdom for love's sake is taught." After proceeding through a lengthy refutation of the views of the Gnostics Valentinus, Heracleon, and Basilides, Clement returned to the Sermon on the Mount and its command of love for enemies. This command was part of the Christian's call to "emulate (Jesus') deeds in this earthly life," a claim which again reminded him of Paul's words that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[42] Finally, Clement listed a string of other scriptures that spoke of the martyrs' reality, including the Johannine command to love in word and deed (1 John 3:18-19), the claim that no fear is present in love (4:16-18), and the command to love God by keeping his commandments (5:3).

This reading of the three theologians has stressed first the understanding that ascetic practices, based on readings of the NT, were assumed to stand behind and sustain Christians facing persecution and martyrdom.[43] It has also suggested that, while not widespread among Christians, Clement's thinking joined with that of developing Jewish reflection to assert that a witness even to the point of death could be built on love for God more than in the search to appease God's anger or to obtain a reward after death. This study will not pursue such observations and questions into the martyr literature of the sixteenth century, but it will assume that such early Christian reflections have value for contemporary reflection[44] and that they lead us to the following questions: If "martyrdom," or sacrificial witness, "for love's sake is taught," what is that kind of love? How might we become caught up in such love, on behalf of a hopeful witness to the gospel in a world of despair?

Martyrdom, Love, and Hope

In a recent collection of articles in the Catholic journal *Concilium*, Teresa Okure, Jon Sobrino, and Felix Wilfred encourage Christians to "rethink" martyrdom in the twenty-first century. Building on the example of violent deaths such as those of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the six Jesuits and two women in their household killed in El Salvador, and Bishop Gerardi after the release of the document "Guatemala Never Again!", this collection declares that these martyrs are a witness to the gospel because of their defense of the victims of violence and injustice. "They show no trace of 'sacrificialism', or of fanaticism, or even of any directly mystical intention of identifying themselves with the Crucified One. At the heart of their actions is a love of the poor like that shown by Jesus . . . ."[45]

The way martyrdom for love's sake is linked to the life and death of Jesus is explored further by José Ignacio González Faus. He describes a Roman Catholic tradition emerging in the eighteenth century of insisting that, in order to be a martyr, one had to have experienced *odium fidei*, or hatred of the faith. However, he points out that some Roman Catholic thinkers, both medieval and modern, have continued to underline the link of martyrdom not to the martyr's experience of being hated but to the martyr's experience of loving. For Thomas Aquinas, the martyr was a "witness to the perfection of love."[46] The documents of Vatican II insist that "martyrdom in the church

has to be assimilated to the martyrdom of Jesus," and therefore "martyrdom is a gift: 'an exceptional gift,'" and "martyrdom is, above all, a proof of love." From a contemporary perspective, then, Christians in comfortable settings should express such love at the very least by being "uncomfortable" with the suffering of sisters and brothers around the world, if not experiencing suffering ourselves.[47]

Such observations concerning the connection of discomfort and love need further exploration, however. I suggest the connection can be made by taking on practices or disciplines that remind us of the family we are part of. As Hauerwas insists, he wants "to be part of a community with the habits and practices that will make me do what I would otherwise not choose to do and to learn to like what I have been forced to do."[48] Recent efforts in the churches of the global North to develop practices of spiritual discipline have been bolstered by a call for the importance of "self care." I do not wish entirely to repudiate this understanding, for when I arrive frazzled and exhausted at the end of a week of teaching, grading papers, preparing for presentations, travel to meetings, and care for family members, all at least in intent done in the name of Christ, I strongly sense a need for care of my own spirit in order to be able to continue. However, I do not think that spiritual discipline as self care alone can build in us the ability to be truly in solidarity with our global Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family of faith, not to mention the entire threatened human race. At the very least, disciplines of prayer and fasting, undertaken not individually but within the particular faith communities to which we belong, seem essential. Practices of self-denial, whether taxing the use of gasoline in recognition of how the demand for fossil fuels contributes to current global violence, or reducing food budgets by ten percent to acknowledge a connection with those who often go hungry, help us to remember to whom we belong.[49]

But undertaking ascetic disciplines requires a fierce struggle for those in societies where comfort, at least for the middle and upper classes, is a primary value. That in the face of the dominant structures of the global North, we have been so unable, if not unwilling, to find disciplines that really connect us to the world of the poor is a sign of our co-option by this value. Precisely for this reason as churches we need to reconsider our understanding of love as the foundation for witness, whether through disciplines and actions on

behalf of others or in facing more extreme suffering, even death. As in Clement and the rabbis a new understanding emerged of love rather than reward as motivation for martyrdom, so we must move from Clement's view of passionless love, a concept that has strongly influenced Christian proclamation, to a new understanding of how love works in the community of believers. Most of us, I suggest, have been influenced by the idea advanced in Anders Nygren's study of *agape* and *eros*. Nygren, working from the fact that the word *eros* never appears in the New Testament, sharply contrasted it with the NT term *agape*: "'Eros is a desire of good for the self'; 'Agape is self-giving.' 'Eros is man's way to God'; 'Agape is God's way to man.' 'Eros is determined by and dependent on the quality of its object, its beauty and value'; 'Agape is sovereign and independent with regard to its object, and is poured out on the evil and the good.' The two thus represent opposing attitudes to life and to the divine."[50] While Nygren's reading is no longer accepted by most scholars as an adequate portrayal of biblical understandings of love, the currency of his articulation remains strong in contemporary discourse, indicated for example in a wedding sermon I heard on Valentine's Day.[51]

But it is possible to reconsider this understanding, beginning with a rearticulation of the nature of God's love. "The God of Christian revelation wills the world into being and cares enough for what he has made to redeem it when it goes astray. . . . The evidence suggests that God wants a response of love, and that in this sense – because he is love, perhaps – the response of love is something that it is appropriate for God to need," contends Gary Badcock. [52] This passionate love is tied to God's nature as Creator, both in the cosmos and most particularly in the human being created in the image of God:

> In this way, God has an other that images his own capacity to love, to adopt a course of action for the good of the other, and thus to find himself in relation to it. . . . In giving life to the other, God has clearly made himself vulnerable; he has exposed his heart of love in a way that he could not otherwise have done, in a way that is absolutely universal, and to an extent that is comparable only to the great singular act of compassion that we have before us in the cross of Jesus Christ.[53]

It is this love that needs the other, and finds in that need the courage and the energy to work for the other's good that is also visible in human society, in the love of parents for their children in some stages of life, of children for their parents in other stages, of lovers for their beloved, and even in the sacrifice of many contemporary martyrs.[54]

Perhaps our hesitation to sacrifice on behalf of our sisters and brothers around the world comes not only from the lack of knowledge of the other because of geographical and economic distance. Perhaps we are also caught up in a concept of love that assumes it must be disinterested. Here we must push farther than Clement, whose understanding of the martyr's love defined it as "passionless." But if we, like God, love out of "need" for the other, what might that look like in our global family of faith? I suggest that the emotion and delight experienced by those who attend MWC assemblies, as pictured in the reporting from Africa 2003, are an evidence of this kind of love. While our North-South sharing in such a setting has often been articulated as a "rich but spiritually poor Northern need for materially poor Southern spiritual vitality," in fact the assembly simply makes it possible for those who attend to eat together, talk together, pray hand-in-hand with one another, and plan face-to-face for further ways of common witness. The needs expressed belong to all of us, and the gifts shared in response to those needs are also able, when we are together, to come from all present. But assemblies are rare events, and only those who live close to the meeting location, or who are brave and wealthy, are able to participate. In adopting the recommendations of the International Planning Commission, the MWC General Council underlined its desire for MWC to operate as something more than an every-six-year assembly, with the vision that "Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (*Koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness."

The natural enthusiasm for the relationships that can begin in settings such as an assembly faces many hurdles as it seeks to move in the direction of more concrete, longer-term sharing in fellowship, worship, service, and witness. Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind outline the impediments that challenge our global family: lack of means of communication, economic differences, lack of administrative capacity and centralization of decision-making in the churches, lack of broad vision, fear of cultural, racial, theological and other

differences, the view that some gifts are more valuable than others, and greed.[55] We cannot deny these obstacles or pass over them lightly. For those who have felt an internal impulsion to offer a gift because of deep care for the welfare of the other but have not found a way to act on that impulse, it is important to reflect on what stands in the way of the gift.

For those of us who are wealthy, at least compared to the vast majority of the world's population, one way we may be able to take steps away from the lure of greed (or the desire for comfort, which is perhaps closer to our hearts) is by coming to recognize the "'gift status' of money." We may be able to think more creatively, and with fewer worries, about the use of our money when we see it as sharing the gifts of enhancing communication of far-distant sisters and brothers, sharing educational opportunities, providing for the needs of mission and service workers who travel far from home, helping people to tell their own histories and to share them with the rest of the church, or making it possible for those without their own resources to travel to meet each other. In order for this gift understanding to take root, we must find ways to "de-individualize" our relationship with money. Individuals do indeed make choices for simplicity and generosity. But the freest, most generous, and most flexible gifts come out of a context where a community together are finding ways to share their gifts.[56]

Tshimika and Lind envision a global church family made up of

> . . . geographically dispersed communities, speaking different languages, worshiping with different styles, living in diverse socio-economic conditions, but sharing a common understanding of God's incarnational purpose of abundant life for all people, for the entire world. We see a church in the Philippines which, as it works toward this purpose in its local setting, calls on gifts of all kinds from sisters and brothers in Panama and in Italy. We see a Bible school in Zambia that welcomes students, teachers, and books from churches in Namibia and India and Canada . . . . We see a church with many gifts, many relationships, and with one spirit, one purpose.[57]

We cannot get there without sacrifice. Along the way, not only will we meet impediments but, if we become truly involved in our sisters' and brothers' realities, we may have to face the force, perhaps even the violence, of powers

that do not desire abundant life for all. The Zimbabwean Brethren in Christ Church, having graciously hosted 7,000 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ for a week in August 2003, continues to live in a situation of hunger, economic free-fall, and political intimidation. Its decision to create a special committee for peace and justice to monitor and to inform sister churches in the rest of the world of their situation represents a step of courage that might be costly. Pastors of the Mennonite churches in Vietnam have called for prayer and for information to be shared about the harassment they are experiencing as they seek to assure the right to live out their faith. Without concrete practices that allow us to sacrifice joyfully out of love, knowing more about what others are living with in Colombia, in India, in the Congo, and in rural and urban communities under stress in our own societies will only make it easier to give in to despair. If people are suffering from chronic unemployment and lack of health care, dying of hunger, being imprisoned or beaten for claiming their faith, or being threatened with extra-judicial execution because of their work for justice, it will seem all too often that the powers of darkness are triumphing.

Juan Hernández Pico insists it is exactly here that "the love of the martyrs leads to the birth of hope." It is first important to remember those who are suffering and those who have given their lives, and to bring that memory into our own work so that we can work with "constancy." "A constant memory of the martyrs that will lead to offering one's own existence, 'whether in tireless commitment or in sacrifice unto death violently suffered', as Ellacuría (one of the Jesuit martyrs in El Salvador) wrote in the year of his martyrdom, is a service to hope." Hernández Pico ties this expression of hope to the Eucharistic celebration, which remembers Jesus' sacrifice. For those in the Anabaptist tradition, we add to this memory the experience of the community gathered around the table, and now the knowledge that the community of which we are a part has grown to be worldwide. This memory and knowing that we belong to this community gives strength for our witness to the gospel.

Pointing to the picture of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, Hernández Pico notes the astonishment onlookers feel when they witness the love of the martyrs. Such astonishment, as the early Christians discovered, also made room for the invitation to others to join the community. So Tertullian, who commented that "the blood of Christians is seed,"[58] despite his failure to articulate the foundation of love for that witness, has continued to be accurate

throughout the centuries. Hernández Pico's contemporary reading of that ancient experience offers a challenge for this century: "The hope that sustained Jesus and his trusting faith in the Father, who appeared to have abandoned him, is the same hope that has sustained so many people to the point of martyrdom. Hope sustains faith and love. And then humble broken love, fragile and defeated, paradoxically victorious, brings hope laboriously to birth in us."[59] May Mennonites and Brethren in Christ around the world grow together in this hope and love in the days and years ahead.

Notes

[1] Nancy R. Heisey, "Women in Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Making a Difference," *Vox Benedictina* 9 (Summer 1992): 121-49.

[2] James E. Brenneman, "From Flaccid Whiners to Authentic Witnesses," *Gospel Herald* (Oct. 22, 1996), 1-3, 8. J. Lorne Peachey responded with an editorial, "So who wants to be a martyr?" GH (Oct. 22, 1996), 16.

[3] Stanley Hauerwas, "Whose Church? Which Future? Whither the Anabaptist Vision?" in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 65-78.

[4] Douglas John Hall, "Despair as a Pervasive Ailment," in Walter Brueggemann, ed., *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 83-94. See also Hall's assessment in "The Canadian Context," 35-38.

[5] Hall, "Despair," 86-7, 91-2.

[6] *Ibid*., 83-4.

[7] Prior Enzo Bianchi, as reported in a personal e-mail from Helmut Harder, 2 February 2004.

[8] Nicholas Lash, "What Might Martyrdom Mean?" and "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy," in *Theology of the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 75-119.

[9] For the details and specific citations related to these biographical comments, see Nancy R. Heisey, *Origen the Egyptian: A Literary and Historical Consideration of the Egyptian Background in Origen's Writings on Martyrdom* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000).

[10] Aline Rousselle, "La persécution des chrétiens à Alexandrie au IIIe siècle, » *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 2 (1974): 222-29.

[11] Tertullian, *To Scapula* 5; *Apology* 50.

[12] Tertullian, *On Flight* 5.

[13] Edward E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 1-8; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 356, 360; Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 250.

[14] Tertullian, *Apology* 50.

[15] Tertullian, *To the Martyrs* 2.8, 3.3.

[16] Tertullian, *On Patience* 13.
[17] Tertullian, *On Fasting* 12.2-3, 17.9.
[18] Clement, *Miscellanies* 4.8.
[19] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.2.4-6, 6.3.1-7, 10-12, 6.8.1-3.
[20] Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 1, 23.
[21] *Ibid.*, 36.
[22] Heisey, *Origen the Egyptian*, 76. See in particular Maureen A. Tilley, "The Ascetic Body and the (Un)making of the World of the Martyr," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (Fall 1991): 467-68.
[23] See Heisey, *Origen the Egyptian*, ch. 2.
[24] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 291-94, 351, 365, 367.
[25] Glen W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.
[26] Carole Straw, "'A very special death': Christian martyrdom in its classical context," in Margaret Cormack, ed., *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 40, 47-48.
[27] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 95.
[28] *Ibid.*, 107.
[29] Tertullian, *On Flight* 12.
[30] Tertullian, *Antidote to the Scorpion's Sting* 15, 7.
[31] Origen, *Ex.Mart*. 25.
[32] *Ibid.*, 30.
[33] *Ibid.*, 2, 4.
[34] *Ibid.*, 42.
[35] *Ibid.*, 3, 6, 15.
[36] *Ibid.*, 25, 27. It is significant that in the account of the martyrdom of Eleazar, the aged saint declares, "In my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear (the Lord)." (2 Macc. 6:30)
[37] *Ibid.*, 41.
[38] *Ibid.*, 31.
[39] Origen is known for his conversations with Jews and his particular relationship with a "Hebrew" teacher (see *On First Principles* 1.3.4, 4.13.14), which could suggest familiarity with the emerging Jewish discourse discussed by Boyarin. Clement, however, comes to more clear-cut understandings apparently without that dialogue.
[40] Clement, *Miscellanies* 4.4.
[41] *Ibid.*, 4.6. Note that the Ante-Nicene Fathers translation of this text uses instead the adjective "gnostically."
[42] *Ibid.*, 4.14.
[43] This discussion does not deal with the question, also controversial among Christians and debated among the three theologians studied here, of whether and when Christians should make an effort to escape persecution if possible.
[44] See my Bechtel Lecture 1, note 10, for comments on the value of reflecting on early Christian experience for twenty-first-century Christians.
[45] Teresa Okure, Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred, "Introduction," in Okure, Sobrino, and Wilfred, eds., *Rethinking Martyrdom* Concilium (London: SCM Press, 2003), 8.

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 11.11.9.125. art. 5.
[47] José Ignacio González Faus, "Witnesses to Love, Killed by Hatred of Love," in Okure, Sobrino, and Wilfred, *Rethinking Martyrdom*, 59-66.
[48] Stanley Hauerwas, "Whither the Anabaptist Vision?" 75.
[49] A group of Harrisonburg, Viriginia, citizens has formed such a gas tax group in response to the understanding that it was the lust for oil that led to the most recent war in Iraq. See www.voluntarygastax.com. The Brethren in Christ Church in 1974 set up a "World Hunger Fund" calling for a voluntary reduction of food expenditures in order to make food resources available to people in need. Recently, *Shalom*, a BIC journal for the practice of reconciliation, invited readers to continue to support this effort: *Shalom* 24 (Winter 2004) 12.
[50] Gary D. Badcock, "The Concept of Love: Divine and Human," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 33.
[51] Ysabel de Andia, "*Eros* and *Agape*: The Divine Passion of Love," *Communio* 24 (1997): 33-34. The ongoing influence of Nygrenian thought is demonstrated by the use of the terms eros and agape by a professor of history and geography in a journal of higher education: the liberally educated person is one who connects, or loves, not with "romantic or passionate love, but (with) the love that lies at the heart of all the great religious faiths: not eros, but agape." See William Cronon, "'Only Connect': The Goals of a Liberal Education," *The Key Reporter* (Winter 1998-99), 4.
[52]Badcock, "The Concept of Love: Divine and Human,"45.
[53] *Ibid.*, 46.
[54] *Ibid.*, 44; Andia, "*Eros* and *Agape*: The Divine Passion of Love," 47-50.
[55] Pakisa K. Tshimika and Tim Lind, *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 72-87.
[56] *Ibid.*, 93.
[57] *Ibid.*, 98.
[58] Tertullian, *Apology* 50.
[59] Juan Hernández Pico, "The Hope Born of the Martyrs' Love," in Okure, Sobrino, and Wilfred, *Rethinking Martyrdom*, 131-38.