Reflection

The Anabaptist Prison[1]

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> *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[2]

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.[3]

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.[4]

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.[5] As one ex-offender has put it, "prison is a school and violence is the curriculum."[6] 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."[7] 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.[8]

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."[9] 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.[10] 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.[11] 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.[12] 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?"[13] 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 ghettoes 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.[14] To secure capital, the established order has to segregate those at the bottom who threaten the authorized distribution of wealth and power.[15] 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.[16] 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."[17]

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.[18]

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."[19] 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."[20] 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.[21]

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."[22] Anabaptism was centered on the jealous love of the God of freedom.[23]

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.[24] 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."[25] 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.[26]

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.[27] 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.[28] 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 givenfor the freedom of one prisoner: Barabbas.[29] 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

[1] 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.

[2] 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.

[3] Thomas Müntzer quoted in Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, trans. Jocelyn Jaquiery, 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."

[4] 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).

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

[6] David Lewis, quoted in Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 34.

[7] Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 35.

[8] 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.

[9] David Gilbert, "These Criminals Have No Respect for Human Life," *Social Justice* 18.3 (1991): 78; quoted in Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 35.

[10] Logan, *Good Punishment?*, 25.

[11] 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).

[12] 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).

[13] Thomas Müntzer, "A Highly Provoked Defense," in *The Radical Reformation*, trans. and ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

[14] 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).

[15] 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.

[16] 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).

[17] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Meaning of Hope," Dec 10, 1967 (Atlanta, GA), quoted in Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 159.

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

[19] "[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.

[20] 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.

[21] 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.

[22] 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.

[23] For a discussion of God's jealous freedom, see Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (London: Continuum, 2003), 115-25.

[24] 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).

[25] "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.

[26] 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).

[27] 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.

[28] 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?).

[29] 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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