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Articles
Articles are original works of scholarship engaged with relevant disciplinary literature, written in a style appealing to the educated non-specialist, and properly referenced. Length limit: 7500 words, excluding notes, plus a 100-word abstract. Manuscripts are typically sent in blind copy to two peer-reviewers for assessment.

Reflections
Reflections are thoughtful and/or provocative pieces drawing on personal expertise and experience, and may take the form of homilies, speeches, or essays. While held to the same critical standard as articles, they are generally free of scholarly apparatus. Length limit: 3000 words.

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Foreword

This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR) comprises four articles, a reflection, and a handful of book reviews. The first two articles take up the theme of decolonization from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective with the first incorporating significant personal testimony into a thoroughgoing critique of Eurocentric Mennonite identity and the second by inviting and encouraging predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite congregations in North America to practice a kind of "relational vulnerability" by singing songs and praying prayers in worship that have connections to the First Peoples of the land they inhabit and embracing the complexity, uncertainty, and even discomfort that this often brings. The contested terrain of Mennonite identity continues in the second two articles with one article taking up the question of the disunity and fragmentation of the church as a theological problem and suggesting renewed attention to the practice of hospitality understood as a human practice grounded in the divine gift of unity. The final article, originally delivered as the 2024 Bechtel Lecture at Conrad Grebel University College, concerns two Mennonite colonies in Paraguay who paradoxically avoided each other despite shared histories and suggests that the formation of different collective narratives with contrasting mythologies that were demonstrably at odds with each other and, as a result, took different trajectories over time can help explain this paradox. Arguably linking up with the theme of Mennonite identity, the timely reflection also included here speaks with no small measure of urgency to the ongoing war in Ukraine and offers the often risky music of hope as a response to death and displacement.

With this, the penultimate issue of the CGR, submissions are no longer being accepted. This iteration of the CGR will come to a close with the next issue, which in addition to a number of excellent articles will also feature reflections on the history and impact of the journal over the years as we've sought to advance thoughtful discussions of theology, ethics, peace, society, history, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives.

Kyle Gingerich Hiebert
Editor

Uncanny Encounter with a Historic Peace Church: Reimagining Mennonite Identity through a Postcolonial Lens

Hyejung Jessie Yum

Abstract

This article aims to reorient Mennonite identity by unsettling Eurocentric Mennonite assumptions and practice that still predominate amongst North American Mennonites. Beginning by casting doubt on Eurocentric Mennonite identity as "authentic" by employing Homi Bhabha's notion of "the uncanny", the author shows that Mennonite identity is neither essential nor static but is rather a contextual construction subject to its own power dynamics. In the light of this, the author suggests that Mennonite identity in contemporary settler-colonial and multicultural contexts will necessarily involve an ongoing reassessment and redefinition of Mennonite identity itself.

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In the hot summer of 2013 in Phoenix, Arizona, I attended the Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) convention, "Citizens of God's Kingdom:

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Healed in Hope" as a church delegate.[1] I was a seminarian at the time, serving in a Korean American Mennonite church in Los Angeles as one of its core leaders, and fascinated by Mennonite peace theology. "Learning about Immigration" was one of the main themes of the convention.[2] A play based on a story from the Mexico-United States border was staged, and there was a keynote lecture on immigration and the Bible from biblical scholar Danny Carroll. Many small group sessions on immigration-related topics were also open: "Our God is Undocumented, Globalization and Solidarity: The Right to Migrate," "Civil Dialogue on Immigration," "Discussion About Undocumented Youth," "Border History," "Multicultural Urban Churches," "Immigration Reform for the Least of These," "Introduction to Antiracism Work," "Love Crosses Borders: Immigration Justice and Christian Hospitality," and so on.[3]

I participated in the meetings with other delegates from across the United States, and I recall one significant opening event of the delegate sessions. On the large front screen, many last names of Mennonites of European descent were listed, and I found my last name, "Yum," among them. As the main theme was immigration, this seemed to be an inclusive gesture towards Mennonites lacking the traditional Mennonite background.[4] How-

1 This article is part of a larger argument and due to limitations of scope and length it cannot address every relevant issue in detail. Consequently, certain significant aspects will be addressed more briefly and with a focused approach, prioritizing key elements central to the argument. More specifically, this article focuses on the North American Mennonite context, rather than global Mennonite communities. I have frequently observed a tendency among Mennonite communities in North America to extend their discussions of racial dynamics to the global Mennonite church, even though these issues are both present and pressing within North America itself. This approach often arises from an implicit assumption that racialized Mennonites are inherently 'global,' rather than being recognized as part of the North American context, despite the region's multicultural reality. While this framing may seem to demonstrate a broader concern for the global church, it more accurately reflects a form of othering. This occurs through the centralization of whiteness as the normative experience within Mennonite communities in North America, which inadvertently marginalizes racialized members.

2 Mennonite Church USA, *Program Book of Mennonite Church USA Convention 2013: Citizens of God's Kingdom: Healed In Hope* (Phoenix, AZ: Mennonite Church USA, 2013), 4.

3 Mennonite Church USA, *Citizens of God's Kingdom,* 54, 76, 78, 81, 82, and 89.

4 In this paper, "traditional Mennonites" refers to the Mennonite groups in North America with Swiss-German, Dutch, and Russian Mennonite family and cultural backgrounds, tracing their lineage to sixteenth-century Europe and the Mennonite colonies that migrated due to persecution.

ever, instead of feeling included, the list of names aroused my curiosity. I grew up in the Presbyterian tradition before joining the Mennonite church, where I hardly cherished or even thought about my last name as an important part of my faith. I was perplexed because when I confessed my faith in a Mennonite community, I took the meaning of believer's baptism seriously. Baptism was the distinctive and radical symbol for membership in the Mennonite community, as stated in their own confession of faith. By rejecting infant baptism, which was mandated by the state and religious authorities in the sixteenth century, Mennonites faced persecution and became known as "Anabaptists." The term Anabaptists literally referred to those who had been *re*baptized, based on their faith rather than their birth. So, I asked myself, "Why is it important for my family name to be included in order to be a Mennonite? Aren't Mennonites *Ana*baptists?" The use of the last names as an act of inclusion was unexpected, ironic, and even against my Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions. However, the more I have experienced how certain Euro-ethnic and cultural ties have been centralized in North American Mennonite communities, the more I have come to understand what the event meant. The gesture, intended to be "inclusive," ironically displayed the dominance of Euro-ethnocentric Mennonite identity and revealed where the "center of power" is in the Mennonite faith community.

More questions about Mennonite identity have arisen from my personal experiences of feeling estranged as a Mennonite without a European ethnic background. During a Mennonite leadership meeting, I was surprised to hear someone being introduced as the "Mennonite of the Mennonites" because of his family name and background. As someone who grew up in a Presbyterian church and later joined the Mennonite church, the emphasis on biological factors rather than faith struck me as strange and even ironic, especially given that Anabaptists originally formed as a church of "believers" against baptism by birth. I have encountered and heard more examples along similar lines. It is these experiences that have prompted me to question the criteria and perceptions that define who is considered an "authentic" Mennonite in Mennonite churches.

From my readings and conversations with other Mennonites, I found that I was not the only one to experience an unspoken rule of giving priority of place to those with Swiss German, Dutch, and Russian Mennonite family and cultural backgrounds. At the MC USA Conference 2021, Glen Guyton, the first executive director of color in MC USA, mentioned "different voices" that he was hearing across the denomination. While "some

liked the good old days and wonder if their voices matter anymore," others are crying, "well I guess I have to be white and Swiss German in order to matter."[5] These examples suggest that the Eurocentric Mennonite identity has significantly influenced racial dynamics in the multicultural Mennonite context of North America.

The aim of this present article is to reorient Mennonite identity by foregrounding the changed context, in order to unsettle Eurocentric Mennonite assumptions and practice in North America. The article begins by casting doubt on the status of Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity as *authentic*, in dialogue with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of "the uncanny."[6] The argument is that Mennonite identity in North America is neither essential nor static, but is instead a contextual construction, and one that is not free from power dynamics. In this sense, seeking a relevant Mennonite identity in contemporary settler-colonial and multicultural contexts is a significant part of renewing the Mennonite tradition as an ongoing tradition.

An Uncanny Encounter with Euro-ethnic Mennonite Identity, Part 1

Euro-ethnic identity is often accepted unquestioningly as the normative Mennonite identity, even within Mennonite faith communities in North America. This is despite the growing presence of Mennonite populations from diverse ethnic and racial groups.[7] Reconsidering the dominant Eurocentric representation of Mennonites, this section interrogates Mennonite Euro-ethnic identity through a postcolonial lens. Utilizing Homi Bhabha's particular reading of "the uncanny," I invoke an uncanny encounter with

5 Paul Schrag, "Guyton: 'Jesus Is Enough'; Get Ready for Transformation," *Anabaptist World*, July 11, 2021, anabaptistworld.org/guyton-jesus-is-enough-get-ready-for-transformation/?fbclid=IwAR1B7o3fFHtBkKaJOGDZe_b3m5tn0bemrWPbdSZWjl3m2OqrfdBCVm4FNhE.

6 Claiming "authenticity" is a way of maintaining the power of certain groups over other groups. For instance, European colonizers viewed themselves as authentic humans in a civilized culture, distinct from the colonized who they considered primitive, undeveloped, and mixed, that is, inferior, in the colonial context. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 83-84 and 136-137; David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Routledge, 2006), 43-44 and 54-56.

7 The "Mennonite" game and "Mennonite" last names are prominent examples of how Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity comes to be normative despite the confessions of faith of individuals in a believer's community. See David Swartz, "The Mennonite Game and Whiteness," The Anxious Bench, *Patheos*, January 14, 2020. https://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2020/01/the-mennonite-game-and-whiteness/.

Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity.[8] By demonstrating the contextual formation of ethnic identity, this section argues that Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity is neither essential nor purely predetermined by its inherited sixteenth-century European Anabaptist roots. Rather, the Euro-ethnic identity is a gender-selective and improvised dynamic, brought into being to cope with particular historical conditions, such as the constant migrations of European-descended Mennonites under persecution. This section thus reconsiders the unquestioned status of Euro-ethnic identity as authentic and determinative, by relocating it in the radically different context of Canada and the United States, where European-descendant Mennonites are no longer persecuted. They have, in fact, been assimilated into a privileged group as white Christian settlers, which itself functions to reinforce the racial marginalization of non-white Mennonites. The uncanny encounter of Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity is intended to move North American Mennonites towards renewing their sense of identity in light of a multicultural world beyond Eurocentric ethno-cultural boundaries.

Interrogating Euro-ethnic Mennonite Identity

The argument I am making here is that Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity is not pure, essential, or predetermined; rather, it has been gender-selective and contextually improvised, and is tied to particular historical conditions, such as persecution and forced migration. The argument will be advanced in relation to the case study of sociologist E. K. Francis, titled "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group." Francis's study demonstrates how an ethnically heterogeneous group was transformed into a newly distinct ethnic group under a unified religious ideology within a relatively short period.[9] In this discussion, my aim is to show the contextual construction of Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity in order to argue for the importance of reorienting contemporary Mennonite identities for contextual relevance, and not to provide a comprehensive or detailed account of the historical events and various European Mennonite trajectories that have formed Mennonite

8 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 136-137; Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 54-56.

9 E. K. Francis, "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 2 (1948).

identities.[10] Some examples are highlighted, particularly the case of Russian Mennonites, to demonstrate how this religious group, comprised of multiple ethnicities at the beginning, came to be considered a unified ethnic group—despite its internal complexity—in response to specific historical circumstances.

According to Cornelius Dyck, "Anabaptism had been an urban movement but under the pressure of persecution it quickly became rural, surviving best in small, isolated, ethnic communities."[11] Francis notes that the Netherlands was the location for the first stage, during which time a range of Anabaptist groups with heterogenous ethnicities were assimilated into a distinct religious body, all operating under a single institutional and societal system.[12] During the Reformation era, the Anabaptists were persecuted and prevented from growing into a larger group, because prominent leaders were executed by Catholics and Protestants. However, between the 1530s and 1560s in the Netherlands, Menno Simons and his followers, who differentiated themselves from the extreme Anabaptists in Münster, consolidated various Anabaptist groups into a structured system that became known as the "Menists" or "Mennonists." They also absorbed refugees from other parts of the Holy Roman Empire into their community.[13]

The Mennonites' shared language, unique practices, and prohibition of intermarriage contributed to shaping a distinct ethnic identity rather than simply a religious one. For instance, when Catholics regained control in the Netherlands during the counter-Reformation, many Protestants and other refugees sought religious tolerance in West Prussia, which was also called Polish Prussia. Since 1544, Mennonites have also been present in Poland and West Prussia. The Hollander Mennonite colonies on the Vistula eventually formed cohesive communities with their own distinct culture, including language, customs, dress, and religious practices, based on a Low-

10 It is not possible to comprehensively trace the formation of Dutch, Swiss, and Russian Mennonites within the confines of these pages. I have thus strategically chosen to focus on the case of Russian Mennonites. Despite the distinctions between these groups, Mennonites from different ethnic backgrounds gradually came to be regarded as a unified ethnic group throughout their migrations under persecution. This has significantly influenced the upholding of Euro-ethnic identity even within Mennonite "faith" communities.

11 Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 407.

12 Francis, "The Russian Mennonites," 103.

13 Ibid., 103. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 104-105.

German-Dutch social heritage.[14] As a particular religious observance, social intercourse and intermarriage were rendered strictly taboo.[15] While Dutch was initially used for rituals and for maintaining live correspondence with Mennonites in the Netherlands, German gradually emerged as the official church language. Specifically, "a composite of Low-German dialects" prevalent in West Prussia became the predominant language of daily life during the emigration to Russia in the late eighteenth century.[16] E. K. Francis argues that this language base provided a foundation for a unified socio-religious ideology and community among originally heterogeneous ethnic groups. Repeated persecution also fueled the desire for separation from the larger social environment.[17]

Among the significant developments that solidified the unified identity of the Mennonites was the migration of several European Mennonite groups to other parts of the world. For example, Mennonite cultural identity was consolidated once again by the specific social environment in Russia.[18] In 1772, the region of West Prussia was handed from Poland to Prussia, and discriminatory laws against Mennonites were issued.[19] Although Frederick the Great enacted the edict of toleration in 1780, a great number of dissatisfied Mennonites migrated to Russia in the late 1780s.[20] To gain social status in Russia, Mennonite groups that emigrated from Europe had to demonstrate their Mennonite membership. This meant that Mennonite membership acquired official civil status in Russia, which led to a paradoxical situation where being a Mennonite did not necessarily mean being a church member. As Francis explains, "[t]he church partly solved the dilemma by making it

14 Sovereignty over the West Prussia region was handed from Poland to Prussia in 1772. Francis, "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group," 103; Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 165; Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), 101, 144, and 213.

15 Francis, "The Russian Mennonites," 103. According to Dyck, starting from the year 1783, the Mennonites in Elbing, which was part of West Prussia, gradually shifted the language used in their worship services from Dutch to German. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 165.

16 Francis, "The Russian Mennonites," 103.

17 Ibid., 104.

18 James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525–1980* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press. 2006), 107.

19 Francis, "The Russian Mennonites," 104; Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 165.

20 Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 165.

customary that all members of the secular community who reached the age of about nineteen were baptized without any proof of individual conversion."[21] This development significantly influenced the shaping of Mennonite identity as a cultural group, rather than a solely religious group.

The trend of linking Mennonite identity with specific European ethnicities and cultures more than with religious characteristics has persisted over time in North America. In the 1870s, when the Russian government withdrew military exemption from Mennonites in face of the growing power of the German empire, a great number of Russian Mennonites migrated to North America.[22] Cornelius Dyck explains that for Mennonites who migrated to North America, "being Mennonites was something they inherited, rather than being a deliberate choice made by each individual between several religious options."[23] Throughout their migratory history, a Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity had gradually been constructed to cope with the particular historical conditions of persecution and migration. This identity was even developed in contrast to the early Anabaptist movement's radical emphasis on the confession of faith. As a result, this ethnic identity is not natural, essential, or predetermined, but rather has evolved within contextual historical conditions.[24]

It is crucial to note that while upholding kinships and closeness within certain ethnic groups is understandable, normalizing Euro-ethnocentric identity, which was in fact grounded in contextual development, is not convincing in faith communities where there are ethnically diverse people. It would be more convincing if Mennonite identity were to evolve in a way suited to the contemporary multicultural context of Canada and the United States, just as early Mennonites historically adapted to their contemporary situations. Since the number of Mennonite families leaving their religious faith has increased, and because Mennonite populations have become diversified in terms of ethnicity and culture in North America, there have

21 Francis, "The Russian Mennonites," 104.

22 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: 1786–1920, vol. 1* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan, 1979), 177.

23 Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History,* 407.

24 Royden Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity and Religion among Canada's Mennonites," in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 332.

been debates around Mennonite ethno-religious identity.[25] In the 1980-90s, there was a debate about the prioritizing of ethnic versus religious identity among Canadian Mennonites. Some Mennonite scholars refer to the predicament as "the Mennonite identity crisis."[26] For instance, Mennonites such as James Urry think that the concept of *peoplehood* is more suitable than *ethnicity* when referring to the particular cultural and social foundations of Mennonite identity.[27] While Royden Loewen also notes that "[e]thnicity for Canadian Mennonites is a cultural construction, established by time, tempered by space, and conditioned by social interaction," he argues that many Mennonite scholars agree that Canadian Mennonites have had "both a religious and ethnic identity."[28] He then classifies Canada's Mennonites into six groups according to their relationship to religious faith and ethnicity.[29]

Daphne Naomi Winland, however, challenges a dichotomous approach to Mennonite identity that involves employing religious and ethnic group identification in binary terms. She points out that this approach reduces the diverse views of Mennonite personhood. She instead attempts to understand Mennonite ethno-religious identity in terms of the ambiguous, dynamic, and improvised nature of group identity formation, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus."[30] According to Bourdieu, habitus produces practice that "organizes all aspects of social life" as "the basis of perception."[31] It is produced by structures under particular historical conditions. Habitus allows practice

25 Robert J. Suderman, *God's People Now! Face to Face with Mennonite Church Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2007), 41.

26 Calvin Redekop, "The Mennonite Identity Crisis," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 87-103.

27 Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood,* 6.

28 Royden Loewen, "The Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity and Religion among Canada's Mennonites," *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (2008), 332.

29 Ibid., 347-357.In their 1991 work, J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger explored the shift in Mennonite identity in the context of modernization. They argued that modern Mennonite identity in North America had become more pluralistic, shaped not only by religious factors but also by other dimensions, including family, culture, institutions such as schools, and the broader community. J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottdale, PA, Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1991), 41-42.

30 Daphne Naomi Winland, "The Quest for Mennonite Peoplehood: Ethno-religious Identity and the Dilemma of Definitions," *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne De Sociologie* 30, no. 1 (1993): 113.

31 Ibid., 114.

to be indeterminately formed through intersubjective interactions under particular conditions[32] For this reason, the inconsistency and ambiguity in a group's identity reflect the natural aspects of human lives coping with ever-changing contexts, as people in the group attempt to objectify the essence of their experiences, which is what Winland finds in the debate around the "Mennonite identity crisis."[33]

Given the complexity of the development of Mennonite identity over time, understanding the ambiguity in Mennonite ethno-religious identities can be more helpful than relying on binary distinctions between ethnic and religious. However, it is also necessary to address problematic aspects of the practices that have been produced by the habitus. As Winland notes, quoting P. DiMaggio, a problem arises because "systems of domination persist and reproduce themselves without the conscious recognition by a society's members."[34] Euro-ethnic identity was improvised to promote survival and protect Mennonite members in hostile historical contexts. However, the issue of "unconscious awareness of implicit rules" surrounding Euro-ethnic identity arises when the dynamic of the persecuted context shifts to a multicultural society where European-descendant Mennonites become white settlers. The habitually formed ethnic identity, which only certain groups of Mennonites acquired through an androcentric lineage, is an inherent part of the theological divergence of their origin as a believer's church.[35] Nonetheless, it continues to hold power by setting up boundaries around "authentic" Mennonites, even among faith communities in a radically changed context. Given that European-descended Mennonites are no longer persecuted, and neither are they forced migrants, it is important to acknowledge how the problematic aspects of habitus can perpetuate systems of domination in a new context.

The invisible power that normalizes Eurocentric Mennonite identity and culture can discourage and confuse racialized Mennonites, preventing them from fully embracing their Mennonite identity.[36] An early critique of the

32 Ibid., 114.

33 Ibid., 115.

34 P. DiMaggio, "Review Essay on Pierre Bourdieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 6 (1979): 1461, quoted in Winland, "The Quest for Mennonite Peoplehood," 113.

35 Other theological characteristics from the origins, such as nonconformism and the separation of church and state, were closely related to the rejection of the infant baptism enforced by the Catholic Church, which collided with the state power in the Reformation era.

36 The term "racialized" emphasizes the social processes that construct 'race' rather than viewing it as a biological or inherent characteristic.

Mennonite church's prioritization of culture over faith can be found in the Gospel Herald in 1963. Vincent Harding, a former Mennonite, Black activist, and theologian, stated, "We call ourselves a church, and yet we let our Mennonite culture become our God. We refuse to accept outsiders into our fellowship. Indeed, we often cut ourselves off from them by speaking a language they do not understand."[37] This critique was echoed almost a decade later in the work of another Black Mennonite, Hubert Brown, in *Black and Mennonite: A Search for Identity*. Brown writes, "Yet I have experienced a feeling that Anabaptism has been made so biological and so ethnic…Every time I hear the term 'our' forefathers or 'our' Mennonite heritage, I instinctively wonder if I'm included in the term 'our.'"[38]

More recently, in her article, "Ain't I a Mennonite?" Black Mennonite, Kelly Bates Oglesby, shares similar concerns. She has found that discernment is often a code for dismissal of innovation, questions, or strangers, that is, those unlike traditional or ethnic Mennonites. When she adopted an unconventional practice, she was asked about her understanding of the Mennonite faith, to which she responded, "Is welcome an invitation to assimilate or an opportunity to create a stronger community by treasuring our commonalities and sharpening each other with our uniqueness?"[39] Chinese Canadian Mennonite pastor Brian Quan has also expressed confusion about his Mennonite identity and that of his Chinese Canadian congregation, despite their clear adherence to the Mennonite confession of faith and Anabaptist theology and history. He finds it difficult to answer the question, "What does it mean for a church made up of Chinese Canadians to identify itself as Mennonites when they have never eaten *zwieback* or *borscht*?"[40] I have heard that even white Mennonites without Russian or Swiss ethnic backgrounds

37 Vincent Harding, "The Christian and the Race Question," *Gospel Herald*, August 6, 1963, 669.

38 Hubert Brown. *Black and Mennonite: A Search for Identity* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976), 78.

39 Kelly Bates Oglesby, "Ain't I a Mennonite?" *The Mennonite:* A Publication of Mennonite Church USA Providing Anabaptist Content, accessed April 19, 2023, 31, https://d37adozyy71gtb.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/We-need-to-help-each-other-8_2016.pdf.

40 *Zwieback* and *borscht* are known as Russian Mennonite foods. Brian Quan began his article with these foods to address cultural difference between Chinese Canadian Mennonites and European Canadian Mennonites from Russia. Brian Quan, "The Global Church Lived Out in a Local Congregation: The Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto" *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 19, no. 2 (October 1, 2018): 6.

share the feeling of being "half-Mennonite."[41] This gap is felt even more pronouncedly among Mennonites who do not share a European appearance, culture, or language.[42]

The struggles of non-ethnic Mennonites navigating between the dominant Eurocentric Mennonite culture and their own cultures are highlighted by the questions raised by Harding, Brown, Oglesby, and Quan. Certain social rituals around Mennonite Euro-ethnic ties and cultures, which are not gained through profession of a person's faith, have demarcated and policed invisible yet clear boundaries of who *authentic* Mennonites are. This invisible border informs a heightened sense of "otherness" in Mennonites who do not identify with European roots and subsequently feel inadequate or inauthentic as Mennonites. These issues go deeper and become multilayered in association with the power and privilege around whiteness.

Moreover, the patriarchal lineage of the Western family name system adds an intersecting layer that reinforces invisible yet persistent male-centric structures and gender inequality within Mennonite communities. Within the Western naming system, only male European Mennonites have been able to inherit and maintain "Mennonite" family names. In other words, the surnames were inherited through a patriarchal system that excludes Mennonite women who marry someone without the so-called "Mennonite" last name, and their children, who are not able to keep surnames that reflect Mennonite ethnic identity.

In terms of the radical convictions of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists to whom Mennonites refer as their origin, who are the *authentic* Mennonites? According to Homi K. Bhabha, claiming "authenticity" is a colonial strategy to maintain the asymmetrical power of European colonizers over others. He understands that such an imbalanced relationship stems from a binary demarcation between the authentic self and others. Bhabha challenges such a solid line, which has the distorting effect of emphasizing essential difference and thus legitimating inequality.[43] As I briefly trace how Euro-ethnic identity has been shaped, it becomes clear that Mennonite ethnic identity

41 Jeffrey Phillip Gingerich, "Sharing the Faith: Racial and Ethnic Identity in an Urban Mennonite Community" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 192-194.

42 In an interview with non-white Mennonites conducted by Gingerich, one Vietnamese pastor identified himself as "half-Mennonite" compared to Mennonites from Europe. The pastor said, "You see, you're Swiss-German and that is from Europe. Being Mennonite is also about being European. I'm Vietnamese. I am Mennonite, but I am only half-Mennonite. You see?" Gingerich, "Sharing the Faith," 192.

43 Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 4-5.

and culture is not essential, static, or predetermined, but is instead tied to a persecuted history and migrant conditions and hence habitually improvised and gender-selective. Although the recognition and remembrance of faithful journeys under harsh conditions in the past needs to be valued as part of the Mennonite faith heritage, it is hard to find in these essential grounds for continuously reinforcing the belief that European Mennonites with a certain ethnic background are more *authentic* than any other Mennonites, especially in the contemporary multicultural context of Canada and the United States.

In summary, Mennonite ethnicity, originally formed from heterogeneous ethnic groups, became unified under a religious ideology as well as through habitual improvisation in response to various socio-political conditions throughout their persecutions and migrations over a relatively short period of time.[44] However, this construction of ethnic identity was achieved at the expense of the theological roots of the group's emergence: believer's baptism with voluntary confession of faith. Instead, ethnic identity was shaped and maintained by a Western androcentric family system. This process was influenced by both determinate factors, such as a religious ideology, and indeterminate dynamics arising from interactions with changing contexts. Building on my analysis of the shift in the social status of Mennonites of European descent in the settler-colonial and multicultural context, this section shows that the Mennonite ethno-religious identity is contextually adaptive rather than static, essential, or authentic. Given this understanding, I argue that it is necessary for Mennonite identity to evolve into something that resonates better with the contemporary multicultural landscape of North America.

An Uncanny Encounter of Euro-ethnic Mennonite Identity, Part 2

Some white Mennonites may feel uncomfortable to hear that Mennonite ethnic identity is contextually improvised and gender-selective through being tied to particular historical conditions because this unsettles the nostalgia linked to a Euro-ethnocentric frame for many white Mennonites. Such

44 Winland, "The Quest for Mennonite Peoplehood,"115. Religious ideology was a significant factor in stabilizing this identity, although there were other unmentioned factors, such as public-facing considerations. For instance, under Canada's official multiculturalism policy, Mennonites have represented themselves as an "ethnicity," similar to other ethnic groups. For further exploration, see Jeremy Wiebe, "Performing Ethnicity in a Pluralistic Society: The 1974 Manitoba Mennonite Centennial," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 37 (2019): 285-303; and David Rempel Smucker, "Faith versus Culture? The Mennonite Pavilion at Folklorama in Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1980-1982," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 33 (2015): 234-250.

a feeling may also be aroused by encountering the contradiction embedded in ethnic identity because of the discrepancy with Mennonite theological origins in believer's baptism. I would call this an "uncanny" encounter with Euro-ethnic Mennonite identity.

Homi K. Bhabha utilizes the notion of uncanniness to explain the feeling someone has when encountering the unhomely reality of something they have long considered home yet find ambivalent and ambiguous in a way not previously imagined.[45] The term "uncanny" is a translation of the German word "*unheimlich*" as it was first used by Sigmund Freud in "Note on 'The Uncanny.'"[46] The *unheimlich,* which literally means "unhomely," comes from what was once "home-like, familiar," but which "has been estranged in the process of repression."[47] The uncanniness refers to a "frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" when someone has a past that they have to face but want to avoid.[48]

For Bhabha, uncanniness is experienced in the moment when silence is broken over the history that has been suppressed in order to maintain a desire for home. David Huddart illustrates this uncanny feeling with an example from the second Renaissance, when Europeans discovered the similarities between Sanskrit and their languages. Europe, which boasted the superiority of its civilization, was forced to encounter the uncanniness. Huddart writes:

> Instead of remaining self-sufficient in its identity, confident in its superiority, the West was forced to reconsider its place in the world. Most importantly, rather than concluding that Eastern civilization was completely other, the West was actually unable to draw solid lines around itself. These texts forced the recognition of similarity, and their doubling qualities brought about an uncanny feeling, the sense that something long denied was gradually making itself felt.[49]

Here, Huddart points out that Europeans had to acknowledge that

45 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 22 and 26.

46 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, ed. Hugh Haughton, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

47 Ibid., 51 and 151. Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 55. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 62.

48 Freud, *The Uncanny*, 124.

49 Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha,* 60.

Centering Relationship: The Necessity and Complexity of Worshiping with Songs and Prayers with Connections to Indigenous Communities

Katie Graber, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, and Anneli Loepp Thiessen

Abstract

Despite making formal commitments to Indigenous justice in recent decades, Mennonites have rarely made a connection between these commitments and gathering for communal worship. In order to enact justice in worship, we suggest that predominantly settler Mennonite communities attend to multiple types of relationship when engaging songs and worship resources connected to Indigenous communities. Using the *Voices Together* (2020) hymnal and worship book as a case study, we analyze relationships of collaboration, resurgence, and hybridity that are present in worship material. We invite settlers to practice relationships of vulnerability through embracing uncertainty regarding origins and narratives, recognizing imperfection in decision-making and performance practice, welcoming discomfort in worship for the sake of just transformation, and committing to ongoing learning.

Hundreds of Mennonites from across Canada gather in a large hotel ballroom in Edmonton, Alberta in July 2022 for the biennial Mennonite Church Canada nationwide gathering. The first worship service begins with Cree Elder Marilyn Buffalo welcoming those gathered to Treaty 6 Territory. After the greeting, the musicians climb onto the crowded stage and Anneli introduces the song, "There's a River of Life," which is found in the Voices Together *hymnal and projected on the screens. She notes the song was written by Jonathan Maracle, a Mohawk songwriter from Tyendinaga territory, and explains that it uses vocables as an expression of praise. She teaches the spoken rhythm and then the sung melody of these syllables, gesturing for the congregation to repeat back:*

The Conrad Grebel Review 41, no. 1 (Winter 2023): 18-52.

"Way ya hey yah, way yah hey yah, high ya way." Anneli turns to the drummer, who is playing a West African djembe (which they both know is not an ideal instrument for this song), and together they establish a beat. Anneli raises her voice as confidently as she can and sings out the melody. The congregation joins in quickly, their voices raised in unison, and their uncertainty replaced by growing confidence as they repeat the song a second time through.[1]

One year later in a university lecture hall in Montreal, Quebec on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka, members of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada gather for a hymn festival led by Jonathan Maracle that includes the same song, "There's a River of Life." Speaking to the primarily settler audience, Jonathan introduces this song as a Mohawk drum song and describes the drum he built when he wrote it twenty years ago. Jonathan leads from the drum, with two other drummers joining him, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, with another non-Indigenous leader playing a shaker. The song begins entirely in vocables before transitioning into the English text. Jonathan's voice is strong as it slides over the melody with the vocables pulsing comfortably with the resonant drum. The song is repeated many times, with Jonathan offering encouragement to those gathered to "sing it again." Anneli is present and joins in confidently—this is a song that she knows well having learned it through the Voices Together *hymnal. Any lingering uncertainty is dampened by Jonathan's open invitation. While this event is the first time she has met Jonathan, the song had already started to establish a relationship between them.*[2]

We encourage predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite congregations in Canada and the United States to enter into the complexity of singing songs and praying prayers in communal worship that have connections to Indigenous peoples as one small step toward deepening relationships with the First Peoples of this land. As these two stories show, while uncertainty, im-

1 *Friday Evening Worship*, Mennonite Church Canada nationwide gathering, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Db0rSXBYk8. 34:46-37:00.

2 *An Evening with Jonathan Maracle*, Hymn Society in the United States and Canada annual conference, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IL29REj7hE. 22:45 - 28:35. For more on Maracle's journey as an Indigenous Christian musician, see Jonathan Maracle, "The Call of the Drum: A Mohawk Musician's Perspective," *Journal of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community* 21 (2023), 42-66.

perfection, and discomfort may be associated with this practice, relationship can emerge and deepen between people and traditions through shared song. In this article, we center relationship as a framework for exploring the opportunities and challenges associated with Mennonite congregations singing songs and praying prayers with connections to Indigenous communities. Relationship is central to the ongoing process of truth telling and reconciliation, to the practice of Christian worship, and to understanding evolving and intersecting traditions. Various forms of relationship are present in the ways songs and prayers are created and received. We invite predominantly non-Indigenous congregations to practice relational vulnerability by engaging uncertainty, imperfection, and discomfort in their use of this material in worship, and to commit to a process of ongoing learning, solidarity, and action.

Since the 1960s, Anabaptists have made formal commitments to Indigenous justice and decolonization. In 2021, Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Church Canada published more than 90 documents that trace this history, and called Mennonites to act on these commitments.[3] With a couple of notable exceptions, Mennonites have rarely made a connection between these formal commitments and the most consistent practice of Mennonite communities: gathering on Sunday for communal worship.[4] The disunion between Indigenous justice and Mennonite worship practices is conspicuous given the common claim that singing and praying together

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

4 Sarah Augustine explores the possibilities of enacting and representing Indigenous justice in worship. Sarah Augustine, "Expanding Our Identity in Worship," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 23, no. 1 (May 7, 2022). https://press.palni.org/ojs/index.php/vision/article/view/757. Geraldine Balzer critiques the relative absence of songs with connections to Indigenous communities in North America in Mennonite hymnals. Geraldine Balzer, "Singing New Stories: Provoking the Decolonization of Mennonite Hymnals," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 33, no. 2 (2015): 284.

in worship expresses and forms faith and action.[5] If this is indeed the case, a commitment to Indigenous justice should be manifest in worship practices, and worship practices should strengthen a commitment to Indigenous justice.

Three common concerns emerge for predominantly non-Indigenous communities considering whether and how to incorporate material with Indigenous connections into communal worship. One concern is *uncertainty* regarding the context of origin of the material, either because stories have been lost, told in conflicting ways, or are otherwise inaccessible to worship leaders. A second concern is associated with *imperfection* in performance practice, including anxieties about cultural misappropriation. A third concern is connected to a tendency to avoid *discomfort* in worship, and awareness of resistance discomfort can provoke in congregations. These are important concerns to consider, especially with attention to past and present imbalance of power between settlers and Indigenous peoples. However, these are not reasons to abandon the possibility of aspiring to foster right relationship through song and prayer.

This article draws on research undertaken as part of creating and introducing the *Voices Together* hymnal and worship book published by Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA in 2020.[6] Over the past half century, Mennonites in the United States and Canada have learned many songs and prayers from around the world, aided by denominational hymnals

5 Don E. Saliers, "Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 2 (1979): 173-89; Don E. Saliers, "Afterword: Liturgy and Ethics Revisited," in *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God*, ed. E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 209-24; Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 101-136.

6 Bradley Kauffman, ed., *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020). Each of the authors was part of the hymnal committee: Sarah Kathleen Johnson as the worship resources editor, Katie Graber as the intercultural worship editor, and Anneli Loepp Thiessen as the co-chair of the Popular Idioms committee. In addition to scholarship cited in this article, research around the creation and introduction of this collection has included committee-conducted surveys, focus groups, interviews, and church visits, as well as interacting with a variety of historical and contemporary worship and song collections.

and Mennonite World Conference songbooks.[7] Leaders such as Mary Oyer have advocated for singing songs from around the world to enrich North American hymnody, to show respect for all of God's people, and to engage in practices of the world-wide Church.[8] While this international repertoire has grown from around a dozen songs in the 1969 *Mennonite Hymnal* to well over 100 songs in *Voices Together*, many congregations have overlooked materials from Indigenous communities closer to home. In a 2015 article, Geraldine Balzer asks: "Have North American Mennonites, by drawing on the music of other places, forgotten to listen to this place?"[9] By singing songs from around the world while ignoring local Indigenous songs, Mennonites in Canada and the United States have reinforced a notion of cultural diversity as a distant reality rather than an aspect of our shared, lived environment. Sarah Augustine, co-founder of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, likewise asks, "What is invisible in our worship? What is visible? What do these things say about us as a people?"[10]

In response to these kinds of questions and the broader quest for Indigenous representation and justice, *Voices Together* includes thirteen songs[11]

7 Some of the most widely used Mennonite hymnals that have been published in the past 50 years include: *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969); *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992); *Sing the Journey* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2005); *Sing the Story* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2007), as well as the songbooks published for Mennonite World Conference.

8 Rebecca Slough, "Following the Way, Seeking the Truth, Loving the Life" in *Nurturing Spirit Through Song: The Life of Mary K. Oyer*, ed. Rebecca Slough and Shirley Springer King (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007): 24-87. On Oyer's hymnody and international work, see especially pages 47-51, 68-70.

9 Geraldine Balzer, "Singing New Stories," 284. We are grateful to Geraldine Balzer for reading a draft of this article.

10 Augustine, "Expanding our Identity in Worship," 58.

11 Songs with connections to Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States in *Voices Together:* "Creation Is a Song / Hoë enemeohe," 181; "Dawk'yah towgyah thawy báht-awm (Take the Saving Word of God)," 400; "Dooládó' Shi Diyinda (What a Wonderful Savior)," 562; "Ehane he'ama (Father God, You Are Holy)," 59; "Heleluyan," 85; "Hey ney yana (I Walk in Beauty)," 836; "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus," 443; "Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome (Jesus Lord, How Joyful)," 8; "Lord, Have Mercy (Moosonee)," 651; "O Great Spirit", 51; "There's a River of Life," 24; "Wakantanka (Many and Great)," 128; and "Way way way," 742. There are also two translations into Navajo: "Peace Be With You," 850; "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" 443.

and five worship resources[12] with connections to a diversity of First Nations in North America.[13] Five of these resources come from Indigenous Anabaptist contexts.[14] While this remains a small number, it represents a substantial increase from the four songs included in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.[15] The material with connections to Indigenous communities included in *Voices Together* was selected by a consulting group with lived experience and expertise in this area.[16] Following the release of the hymnal and worship book, the authors of this article undertook further research and developed a free online "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources with Connections to

12 Worship resources with connections to Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States: "Peace be with you," 850; "Creator, we give you thanks," 861; "We offer thanksgiving to our Creator," 864; "We acknowledge that we are gathering," 878; and "May the warm winds of heaven," 1061. An in-depth discussion of how to use land acknowledgements is beyond the scope of this paper. For more on this, see: Geraldine Balzer, "Land Acknowledgement," in *Worship Leader Edition*, ed. Sarah Kathleen Johnson, *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020), 64; Becca Whitla, "The Theological Challenge of Territorial Acknowledgements in Liturgy," *Worship* 96, (2022); Augustine, "Expanding our Identity in Worship," 60-61.

13 *Voices Together* does not include songs or resources with connections to Métis or Inuit communities. For an exploration of other Canadian hymnals that have incorporated global and Indigenous songs, see: Hilary Seraph Donaldson, "Toward a Musical Praxis of Justice: A Survey of Global and Indigenous Canadian Song in the Hymnals of the Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches of Canada through Their History," *The Hymn* 63, no. 2 (2012), 18-26.

14 "Creation Is a Song / Hoë enemeohe," 181; "Dooládó' Shi Diyinda (What a Wonderful Savior)," 562; "Ehane he'ama (Father God, You Are Holy)," 59; "Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome (Jesus Lord, How Joyful)," 8; "We offer thanksgiving to our Creator," 864.

15 *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992): "Many and great, O God" (35); "Ehane he'ame (Father God, you are holy)" (78); "Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome (Jesus Lord, how joyful you have made us)" (9); "'Twas in the moon of wintertime" (142). For more on why "'Twas in the moon of wintertime" was not included in Voices Together, see Geraldine Balzer and Katie Graber, "'Twas in the moon of wintertime' not included in new Mennonite hymnal" *Menno Snapshots*, Dec. 10, 2019, https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/moon-of-wintertime-mennonite-hymnal/. Of note, there are also translations in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*: "What a friend we have in Jesus" (574) includes a Cree translation; "Amazing Grace" (143) includes Northern Ojibway and Cheyenne translations. *Sing the Journey* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2007) includes one song with a connection to Indigenous communities: "Creation Is a Song" (24).

16 The consulting group included Geraldine Balzer, Willis Busenitz, Steve Heinrichs, Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, Tamara Shantz, Katie Graber, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, and Bradley Kauffman.

Indigenous Communities in Canada and the United States" to provide additional background and support for predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite congregations worshiping with this material.[17] This article shares research and reflection from the past eight years of working with these questions while expressing our long-term commitment to ongoing learning.

As three settler Christian academics and church leaders who live, work, and worship on Turtle Island, we believe that each person living in relationship with this land is called to act within our own sphere of influence to reckon with the colonial past and present, and to take steps toward repair and reconciliation.[18] For us, this includes attention to the music and worship practices of Mennonites in Canada and the United States as a site for action toward justice and reconciliation. At the same time, we recognize limitations to this article and to what we can offer as settler scholars of Mennonite worship and music. We do not represent Indigenous perspectives on this topic. This article cannot grant permission to use the resources we discuss. It remains important for each community to do their own reflection and research before worshiping with these songs and prayers. We hope this article

17 For more concrete ideas on how to integrate teaching and learning in worship with these resources, see: Katie Graber, Sarah Kathleen Johnson, and Anneli Loepp Thiessen, "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources with Connections to Indigenous Communities in Canada and the United States" (MennoMedia, 2023), https://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Indigenous-Communities-Guide.pdf.

18 We acknowledge that we are writing this article together on the limestone shores of Lake Erie on the homelands of the living nations of the Miami Tribe, the Shawnee Tribe, the Eastern Shawnee Tribe, the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe, the Wyandotte Nation, the Seneca-Cayuga Tribe, the Seneca Nation, the Ottawa Tribe, the Peoria Tribe, the Pokagon Band Potawatomi, and the Forest County Potawatomi, the Tonawanda Seneca, and others where we are surrounded by the song of rustling leaves, buzzing insects, and calling birds. This land, now called Kelleys Island, was "granted in 1662 by King Charles II to the Colony of Connecticut…[and] by Connecticut in 1792 to those of its citizens who had suffered losses" from the British raids in 1779. In addition, "it was made a part of the Province of Quebec by act of Parliament, 1774…[and was] granted or given away by a treaty held at Fort McIntosh January 1st, 1785 to Wyandotte, Delaware, Chippeway, and Ottawa Indians and confirmed by the Treaty of Greenville in 1794 to the Miami Indians and their allies." In 1802 Ohio became a state that included Kelleys Island, and "in 1805 by the treaty at Fort Industry (now Toledo, Ohio), the Indians relinquished their claims on the land west of the Cuyahoga River." Norman E. Hills, *A History of Kelley's Island, Ohio* (The Toledo Printing Co., 1925, repub. by The Kelleys Island Historical Association, 1993), 20.

serves as an invitation to enter into these complex questions.

Part 1: Theological Framework of Relationship

For centuries, Christian theology has condoned violent and unjust relationships between Indigenous and settler populations. Navajo Christian author Mark Charles and Pueblo (Tewa) Mennonite Sarah Augustine have each offered forceful critiques of the theological foundations of colonization in the Doctrine of Discovery, fifteenth-century church edicts that have been institutionalized and continue to be operative in shaping Indigenous settler relationship in North America and worldwide.[19] Indigenous injustice is in part a Christian theological problem, and therefore demands a theological response from the Christian tradition, including in the context of Christian worship, as Augustine describes:

> Because the Doctrine of Discovery is a Christian doctrine, it is evidenced in many church narratives, images, and rituals. To effectively dismantle it, it is necessary to think about ways that we reproduce it from one generation to the next in our theology and ritual.[20]

Augustine suggests that the values of humility and yieldedness are "elements of Anabaptism [that] call us to engage in decolonization, acknowledging our role in the context of settler colonialism."[21] Significantly, humility and yieldedness are elements of community *relationships*, as Augustine describes: "We can discern together our response in community, engaging with Indigenous relatives to form a decolonizing stance."[22]

One way to build these right relationships—and therefore to counter the

19 Mark Charles, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), (see page 15-23 for specific history of the Doctrine of Discovery); Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2021). (See page 18-19 for specific history on the Doctrine of Discovery).

20 Augustine, "Expanding our identity in worship," 59.

21 Sarah Augustine, "Five Hundred Years of Anabaptism and Colonization," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 25, no. 1 (March 19, 2024): 66.

22 Augustine, "Five Hundred Years," 67.

deeply-embedded remnants of destructive theologies—is to intentionally engage in worship practices that foreground settler humility and yieldedness toward Indigenous people and ways of life. Caribbean-American Presbyterian biblical scholar Margaret Aymer offers the following bold proposal in her 2021 keynote address at the annual meeting of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada: "Christian churches should make hymnody from all parts of the world and all corners of the church normative in weekly worship, regardless of how inconvenient, awkward, or difficult."[23] The purpose of this proposal is to invite relationship.

> As we sing, *this music expands whom we think of as our siblings of faith, our teachers in the faith, and the church of Jesus Christ overall*. With Pentecost(al) humility, we like Peter will come to the realization that God has indeed poured out God's Spirit on more people than even we could imagine. And that they, and we, are all welcome in the great polyrhythmic, multi-tonal, multilingual, Spirit-filled Pentecost(al) church of God.[24]

The songs communities sing reflect and form the relationships that are recognized and honored within those communities. As Deb Bradley notes, "It's a thin line between 'I don't like that music' and 'I don't like those people.'"[25] Learning to value a community's songs is therefore one way to learn to value the community connected to the songs. Church musician and scholar Jorge Lockward urges singers to think of songs as not just music but a way to pray with and for one another.[26] A focus on relationship as central to engage-

23 Margaret Aymer, "As The Spirit Gives Us Utterance: Singing with Pentecost(al) Humility," *The Hymn* 72, no. 4 (2021): 11.

24 Aymer, "As The Spirit Gives Us Utterance," 17. Italics added.

25 Deb Bradley, "Antiracism and Your Music Ministry" (United in Learning: Music United, Online, 2022). A related sentiment is expressed by Elder Adrian Jacobs: "If you do not love a style of music, you are in no credible place to opine about it." Adrian Jacobs, Ray Minniecon, Sam Chapman, John Grosvenor, Jerry Goins, and Fern Cloud, "Our Music Our Way: NAITTS Elders Panel on Ethnomusicology," *Journal of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community* 21 (2023), 16-41.

26 "What Limits Do We Place on Global Song?" Panel at The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada's Annual Conference, July 16, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKgZvfQa1wI

ment with Indigenous song intersects with three themes that undergird this article: truth telling and reconciliation as relationship; Christian worship as relationship; and tradition as relationship.

Truth Telling and Reconciliation as Relationship

Relationship is central to the work of truth telling and reconciliation, and specifically right relationship. Settlers and Indigenous peoples have been in relationship with one another for centuries, yet this relationship has often been characterized by physical and cultural genocide, displacement and dispossession of land, and oppression in many other forms. The purpose of truth telling about this history and embarking on the long journey toward reconciliation is to transform relationships of domination into relationships of self-determination, mutuality, and respect, as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[27] Cree theologian Ray Aldred describes this "journey toward proper relatedness" as requiring: (1) a shared narrative that "does not replace our individual stories but makes sense of how it is that we are here together"; (2) a shared spirituality "that supports our unity, but does so recognizing our diversity," and (3) a shared relationship with the land.[28] In Canada, Treaties are fundamental to these relationships and are a way of "finding belonging."[29] Aldred describes how Treaty includes a "making relatives" ceremony in which relationships are expressed and formed ritually. These relationships include not only the human parties making Treaty, but all of Creation, and must be honored over generations.[30]

Indigenous authors and activists critique the ways in which decolonization can become a metaphor for societal improvement rather than squarely

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

28 Raymond Aldred and Matthew R. Anderson, *Our Home and Treaty Land: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Altona, MB: Friesen Press, 2024), 1-3.

29 Ibid., 3.

30 Ibid., 3-8.

focused on the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.[31] "Solidarity is not symbolic," writes Sarah Augustine, "[solidarity] is a conscious change in position, where those who are not threatened with oppression step across a line—from the sidelines to sharing the fate of the oppressed."[32] We agree. Worshiping with songs and resources with connections to Indigenous communities is not a replacement for solidarity that "steps across a line"—but it may be a step toward the kind of relationship that makes solidarity that "shares the fate of the oppressed" possible. Christian churches are not specialists in legal and political advocacy (although some individuals may be and church can partner with those who are[33]); churches are instead specialists in ritual and symbol, and it is in this area that Christians are positioned to offer a distinct contribution to right relationship.

Christian Worship as Relationship

Rituals and symbols bring people together. As theologian Gail Ramshaw describes, at its most basic level, Christian worship consists of rituals and symbols. Rituals—repeated symbolic communal activities—rely on symbols: water, bread and wine, raised hands, names and images for God. Symbols combine different meanings, and as people share in these layers of meaning, they are brought together in and through symbols. As Ramshaw writes, "A symbol not only is something, it does something."[34] Far from being "just symbols," symbols reflect, intensify, and create new meaning; they expand and deepen communal life. Cultures can be described as communities of shared symbols. Religions can be described as immense symbol systems about the meaning of the past, value in the present, and imagination about the future.[35] Rather than being empty, rote, or shallow, rituals and symbols are the heart

31 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012), 1.

32 Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty,* 169.

33 The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery is an example of this in the Mennonite church. "About," The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, June 10, 2015, https://dismantlediscovery.org/about/.

34 Gail Ramshaw, *Christian Worship: 100,000 Sundays of Symbols and Rituals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 16.

35 Ibid., 17.

of Christianity in all its forms. When understood in this way, the rituals and symbols of Christian worship do not remain in abstraction, but draw participants more deeply into relationship with one another, and more concretely into relationship with the materiality of their time and place, often in ways that are beyond conscious cognition.

Christian worship weaves together three relationships according to Anabaptist liturgical theologians June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough.[36] First, Christian worship is about relationship with God manifest in openness to encounter with God's presence, Word, and call. Sarah Augustine emphasizes the need to hear God's call to justice and peace proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19.[37] Second, Christian worship is about relationship within the church as the body of Christ, including the relationships worshipers have with one another and with themselves. This can include reflection on settler complicity in colonialism, both as churches and as individuals. Third, worship is about relationship with the wider world through empowerment by the Holy Spirit for faithful living. This can include faithful action for Indigenous justice. Marlene Kropf emphasizes the formative power of singing in each of these relationships: singing forms a vision of God, forms the Christian community, and forms the life of people of spirit in the world.[38] All three of these formative relationships are facilitated through ritual and symbol and may either foster or undermine right relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Tradition as Relationship

The concept of tradition is one way to name how rituals and symbols not only forge relationship within a specific context, but can also foster relationship across time and space, marked by both continuity and discontinuity.

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36 June Alliman Yoder, *Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 38.

37 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty*, 39.

38 Marlene Kropf and Kenneth James Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 110.

As Anabaptism marks its 500th anniversary in 2025, recent scholarship reframes Anabaptism as a living tradition or chain of memory in contrast to an ethnicity or set of theological "distinctives."[39] As a tradition, Anabaptism necessarily includes both good and evil, mutuality and domination.[40] Drawing on philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Anabaptist theologian Laura Schmidt Roberts argues that being in relationship with a tradition requires ongoing reinterpretation of its content: "We do not simply receive the content of a tradition; we must *engage it and interpret it* to discern what it means to live and believe as persons in this tradition today."[41] Drawing on sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Sarah Kathleen Johnson argues being in relationship with a tradition requires ongoing renegotiation of belonging: "Connection to the chain of memory depends not on genetics or cognitive affirmation of a checklist of distinctives but on *claiming a lineage and belonging to a community*, on invoking the authority of tradition."[42] The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association in its Statement on Indigenous Identity Fraud reminds us that belonging to a tradition requires mutuality: "Belonging does not arise simply from individual feelings—*it is not simply who you claim to be, but also who claims you*."[43] In these ways, both Indigenous traditions and Anabaptism as a tradition have recognizable content and community that are dynamically and continuously renegotiated through relationships.

A central question of this paper is how songs and resources with connec-

39 Laura Schmidt Roberts, "The Workings of Tradition: From 'Distinctives' to a Living Tradition," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 25, no. 1 (2024), 21; Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "Tradition and Hope: A Mennonite Chain of Memory," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 25, no. 1 (2024), 17.

40 Schmidt Roberts, "The Workings of Tradition," 25; Johnson, "Tradition and Hope," 20.

41 Schmidt Roberts, "The Workings of Tradition," 22. Emphasis added.

42 Johnson, "Tradition and Hope," 17-18.

43 Approved by NAISA Council, "NAISA Council Statement on Indigenous Identity Fraud· Native American and Indigenous Studies Association," *Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* (blog), September 15, 2015, https://naisa.org/about/council-statements/naisa-council-statement-on-indigenous-identity-fraud/. Italics added. African American Choctaw Pawnee scholar Kenneth Wallace writes, "When a practice is passed from one generation to the next, practiced in community, and is communal, that practice becomes a tradition and is then a way of passing and preserving cultural identity." Kenneth L. Wallace, Jr., "Chahta Uba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymnbook," *Journal of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community* 21 (2023), 164-174; quotation p. 168.

tions to Indigenous communities might bring these internally diverse and complex traditions closer to right relationship through shared symbols and rituals as part of an ongoing relational journey toward truth and reconciliation, while also acknowledging that the misuse of this material has the potential to cause further damage and division.

Part 2: Relationships in Songs and Resources

One way communities can participate in tradition, worship, and reconciliation as described in the previous section is to sing songs that can evoke and deepen relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These relationships, both material and symbolic, can be produced in songs and worship resources through a series of interactions from the inception of a song through its reception and engagement by other individuals and communities. In this section, we describe different types of relationships that are reflected and created in songs and prayers.

Each of the songs and resources in *Voices Together* was formed through a distinct set of relationships, although we can recognize patterns. We identify three ways that songs and resources' *origins* integrate Indigenous and Anabaptist traditions in the context of worship in ways that can foster or impede reconciling relationships: first, through *collaboration* among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; second, through *resurgence* enacted when Indigenous people sing Christian songs in Indigenous idioms; and third, through the *fusion* of multiple cultural and artistic traditions in one Indigenous artist's output. Similar to these originating relationships, the resources in *Voices Together* were also *received* through different types of relationships, as facilitated by the hymnal committee.

The categories outlined here are not intended to be exhaustive, and one song or resource may exist in multiple categories. We offer these categories not as a prescriptive structure, but as a way to explore the kinds of relationships that have been formed and extended through Mennonite worship material.

Relationships of Collaboration

Relationships of collaboration between people who identify with Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions are one way that worship resources may

emerge from relationships. Right relationship requires these collaborations to be mutual and reciprocal, forged through dedicated listening and reflection, and clear invitation and ongoing consent from Indigenous participants. As discussed in relation to tradition, collaborators and allies cannot simply self-identify as belonging to a tradition but must also be claimed by that community.

An example of this kind of collaborative relationship can be found in "Creation is a Song" (VT 181). This piece was written by Doug and Jude Krehbiel, two settler Mennonites who were inspired by the teachings of Cheyenne peace chief and Mennonite pastor Lawrence Hart. The Krehbiels listened to recordings of original songs that were received by Maude Fighting Bear, reviewed scores from the songbook *Tsese-Ma'heone-Nemeotse* (*Cheyenne Spiritual Songs*), and analyzed field recordings of Cheyenne drum circles to get a sense for the kind of song they would write. They were taught by Cheyenne mission workers how to make and play a Cheyenne shaker.[44] Hart's sister Lenora Hart Holliman translated the refrain lyrics into Cheyenne and taught Jude Krehbiel how to sing the words. Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, a friend of Doug and Jude and a Cheyenne Mennonite, describes the way this song has been considered disrespectful because it was written by white people, causing some settlers to wonder if it is a misappropriation of an Indigenous style of music. However, she suggests that the collaborative relationship offers an entryway in.

> Doug and Jude received this song from Creator, the way Cheyennes receive songs, after building a relationship with Cheyennes both in Oklahoma and in Montana, where I'm from, including with myself...They didn't just try to figure it out on their own using Google; they went to the sources for the translation. And so with that relationship, and that back and forth, that makes it a very respectful song, and I absolutely enjoy this song.[45]

44 *Voices Together: Reference Notes*, 181.

45 Quote from Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, taken from the Anti-Racist Worship and Song webinar, part II (45:25–47:19), hosted by MennoMedia as part of the launch of *Voices Together.* The recording is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhQsXnluNjQ&ab_channel=MennoMediaInc.

The close collaboration between settlers and Indigenous peoples gives integrity to this songwriting process.

Another resource that emerged from a collaborative relationship between settlers and Indigenous people is "We offer thanksgiving to our Creator" (VT 864). This prayer of thanksgiving was used at the beginning of each Sunday service at Riverton Fellowship Circle, a Mennonite congregation in Manitoba that was initiated by a group of Indigenous people. It operated from 1985 to 2020, and the community's legacy lives on in many ways, including in this prayer of thanksgiving that draws on Ojibwe spirituality.[46] Cree leader Barb Daniels and former pastor Neill von Gunten described the significance of the directions in an email exchange with committee members.

> The Prayer of Thanks was adapted from an Ojibwe 4-direction prayer and added to because we thought that it was important for the church people to also be reflective and introspective about ourselves and our relationships to God and others as we commit ourselves to follow life this way.[47]

People connected to Riverton have brought this prayer to a variety of congregations over the years. At the 2009 Mennonite World Conference gathering in Asuncion, Paraguay, the Indigenous delegation from North America also led the prayer, of which Daniels notes "it is amazing to know that we've done something that everyone can be part of."[48]

Relationships of Resurgence

Relationships of resistance and resurgence between imposed and Indig-

46 Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe, "Riverton Fellowship Circle's legacy lives on," *Canadian Mennonite* 25, no. 1, December 30, 2020, https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/riverton-fellowship-circle%E2%80%99s-legacy-lives.

47 Personal correspondence between committee members and Neill von Gunten on behalf of Barb Daniels, March 7, 2019.

48 Quote from Barb Daniels, taken from a video of Daniels and Neill von Gunten sharing the story behind the resource (1:30–1:47): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjY8GG9Xa3U&ab_channel=MennoMediaInc.

enous traditions are another way that songs and resources can emerge. In colonial North America, Indigenous music and language have been brutally suppressed. In the context of Canadian residential schools, Becca Whitla writes that "Christian ritual, including hymn singing, was used as a way to discipline and 'civilize' the children as an intentional means to eradicate their sacred Indigenous practices and Indigenous culture."[49] In response to this devastating obstruction of Indigenous religion and culture, Indigenous communities today are working to reclaim language, spirituality, and artistic expression.[50] In the context of worship, this resurgence can happen through congregational song that is written in Indigenous languages and musical idioms.

An example of this resurgence is "Ehane he'ama (Father God, You Are Holy)" (VT 59).[51] In the early twentieth century, Cheyenne Mennonites were largely singing Cheyenne translations of English or German hymns. In the 1930s, Harvey Whiteshield (Cheyenne name Heskovetseso, which means Little Porcupine) began collaborating with John Heap of Birds in an effort to promote hymns with traditional Cheyenne music and words in the first major effort to integrate Cheyenne culture with Christian community.[52] The song is included in *Tsese-Ma'heone-Nemeotse (Cheyenne Spiritual Songs)*, a collection of Indigenous tunes and translations of English hymns published by Faith and Life Press in 1982. Today, the song is sung regularly in worship

49 Whitla, *Liberation, (de)Coloniality, and Liturgical Practices*, 118. For more on this, see also: Sarah Kathleen Johnson, "On Our Knees: Christian Ritual in Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," *Studies in Religion* 47, no. 1 (2018): 3–24.

50 For more on Indigenous resurgence, see: Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, Aimée Craft, and Hōkūlani K. Aikau, *Indigenous Resurgence in an Age of Reconciliation.*, 1st ed. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2023).

51 The song is copyrighted with the Mennonite Indian Leaders' Council, although traditionally Cheyenne poets and musicians were not considered to own their creations as they were viewed as gifts from God. Printed words were justifiably not trusted because of many broken treaties, so the Mennonite Indian Leaders' Council (now administered by Native Mennonite Ministries) is to be contacted with any reprint requests. Joan A. Fyock, *Hymnal Companion*, ed. Lani Wright (Elgin, IL; Newton, KS; Scottsdale, PA: Brethren Press; Faith and Life Press; Mennonite Publishing House, 1996), 84.

52 Lois Barrett, "Whiteshield, Harvey (Heskovetseso) (1860-1941)," in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, accessed September 13, 2023. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Whiteshield,_Harvey_(Heskovetseso)_(1860-1941).

at White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana.[53]

Relationships of Hybridity

Relationship between traditions may also emerge when Indigenous creators integrate multiple cultural influences in a single song or resource. Many creators recognize multiple artistic influences on their work, regardless of background or culture. Hybridity of cultural practices is a common—perhaps even inevitable—process in a globalized world, and various types of hybridity arise.[54] In the context of North American Christian resources with connections to Indigenous communities, hybridity often demonstrates relationships between Indigenous and Western cultural and artistic expressions. Rather than a loss of Indigenous culture, representing these relationships in songs and resources can be a way to empower multiple layers of identities.[55]

An example of this is the dual Pentecostal and Indigenous influences in the music of Jonathan Maracle, who we encountered earlier through his song "There's a River of Life" (VT 24). Throughout his ministry, Maracle has prayed "God, come, live in and inhabit the praises that I sing on this drum." This prayer reflects the emphasis on Psalm 22:3 that is foundational for the praise and worship theology and Pentecostal convictions that influence Ma-

53 A video of White River Cheyenne Mennonite church discussing their songs and singing Ehane he'ama is available on YouTube. *White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym3lj4k8umI.

54 Scholars analyzing cultural hybridity often note that the term can become meaningless if one focuses on the prevalence of fusion and exchange—"everything is hybrid" is not a helpful framework; instead, a focus on specificity and power dynamics can lead to a more productive understanding of the meanings and functions of cultural production. See, for example, Frank Camilleri and Maria Kapsali, "On Hybridity," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 25 no. 4 (2020) 1-6.

55 In other words, non-Indigenous people should not expect Indigenous people to produce a romanticized "pure" cultural artifact. For more on value judgments attached to perceptions of purity and hybridity, see Sarah Weiss, "Listening to the World but Hearing Ourselves: Hybridity and Perceptions of Authenticity in World Music," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 58 no. 3 (2014), 506-525.

racle's spirituality.[56] Based on their conversation with Maracle, Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong note that this prayer "launched him on a new trajectory toward more Indigenous ways of music making in Praise & Worship."[57] Maracle's music represents the joining of several forms of worship and music in order to create an expression that is informed by non-Indigenous influences while maintaining a unique Indigenous voice. In drawing on a Mohawk drum song in a way that suggests resurgence, alongside the theology and practice of praise and worship, multiple traditions are invoked.

Relationships of Reception

In addition to various patterns of relationship that inform the *origin* of songs and prayers, there are also relationships that inform the *reception* of this material into predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite congregations. Here we focus on how hymnals and hymnal committees foster these relationships, which congregations can build on through developing their own knowledge of and appreciation for the material. For example, relationships may be formed with text writers when creating an English translation, with musicians when consulting on whether a drum would be appropriate instrumentation, or with copyright holders when securing publishing permission, whether the copyright holder is the creator of the resource or a descendant of the artist. When congregations sing these songs, they are enacting and reinforcing these institutional or second-hand relationships.

Several of these types of relationships are represented in *Voices Together*. In some cases, the copyright holder was *a non-Indigenous collaborator in relationship with an Indigenous community*. An example of this is Doug and Jude Krehbiel's "Creation is a Song," where the committee included this song with the knowledge that the Krehbiels were in good relationship with the Cheyenne community that was also part of receiving the song.

In other cases, the *Voices Together* team pursued relationships with *communities that had close connections to the song or resource*. For example, the copyright for "Ehane he'ama (Father God, You Are Holy)" is held by the

56 For more on the significance of this verse, see: Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 21-23.
57 Ruth and Lim, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship*, 120-121.

Mennonite Indian Leaders' Council (now administered by Native Mennonite Ministries). The hymnal committee both received permission from Native Mennonite Ministries to include the song, and members of the committee also visited White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church in Busby, Montana where they built relationships and experienced the song with the community.[58]

In still other cases, the relationship was developed through *connection with a living Indigenous resource creator*. When the *Voices Together* committee contacted Maracle to ask permission to include "There's a River of Life," the Broken Walls office administrator replied, "Jonathan would be honored if you were to use his song." The committee thus included the song with the knowledge that the songwriter himself enthusiastically affirmed its use. When Jonathan led this song at The Hymn Society in 2023, he shared that in the past, "I was so persecuted for playing the drum—I was put down, I was put out of communities"; but now, he said, "The Mennonite Church of Canada has adopted this into their hymnal, the United Church and the Anglican Church of Canada have both adopted it into their hymnals, too."[59] His ongoing, public interest in sharing his songs affirms the relationships built by these processes.

In some cases, the *Voices Together* connection to a song is based upon *relationships established through other hymnal processes*. This is a complicated relationship since, for good or for ill, it means that the *Voices Together* committee trusted other hymnal committees to do rigorous work securing permission for the resource's inclusion. An example of a piece that is widely published in other hymnals is "Heleluyan" (VT 85).[60] It is one of the most well-known hymns among people of the Muscogee (Creek) nation and is suggested to be like the Creek national anthem. When this song was included in *Voices Together,* Mennonites joined the ambiguous network of relation-

58 Katie Graber, "White River Cheyenne Mennonite Church," in "Mennonite Voices" Gallery for the American Religious Sounds Project, 2020. https://gallery.religioussounds.osu.edu/mennonite-voices/white-river-cheyenne/

59 *An Evening with Jonathan Maracle*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IL29REj7hE. 23:45-58.

60 According to hymnary.org, the piece is included in 19 hymnals. "Heleluyan," Hymnary.org, accessed May 23, 2024, https://hymnary.org/text/heleluyan_heleluyan.

ships surrounding the song.

Part 3: Inviting Settler Vulnerability in Complex Relationships

While the intentional relationships formed through the hymnal creation process offer a basis for the inclusion of these resources in the collection, local congregations are also responsible for receiving songs and prayers through their own relational networks. This form of investment invites predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite communities to embrace the uncertainty of not knowing as much about the resource's origins as they might like, to recognize the imperfection that will inherently be present in a congregation's use of the resource, and to welcome the discomfort that may come from entering an unfamiliar way of singing and praying. This section explores the attitudes communities may choose to adopt in relation to complex relationships of reception.

Embracing Uncertainty

The uncertainties surrounding origins, uses, and functions of songs and resources with connections to Indigenous communities can lead to uncertainty about whether or how they should be used in Christian worship. A deep history of colonial Christian missionaries maligning and repressing Indigenous music and ritual has meant that many songs' histories and contexts have been obscured.[61] Furthermore, stigmas against Indigenous ways of singing and worshiping may linger in some white Christian contexts, for example, in suspicions against Indigenous spirituality or in implicit and explicit devaluing of unison songs and non-English texts.[62] This legacy of criticism and repression has led to an understandable resentment toward Christians among many Indigenous communities and may make Indigenous Christians hesitant to embrace and share traditional forms of music

61 For example, Becca Whitla describes the use of Christian music to replace Indigenous traditions at residential schools. Whitla, *Liberation, (de)Coloniality, and Liturgical Practices,* 118-121.

62 Katie Graber and Anneli Loepp Thiessen, "Publishing Privileges the Published: An Analysis of Gender, Class, and Race in the Hymnological Feedback Loop," *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): 1273, 16.

in worship beyond predominantly Indigenous worshiping communities. At the same time, there is a long history of Indigenous Christians collaborating and worshiping with settler Christians. Considering these various sources of uncertainty, we explore two examples.

The song "Wakantanka (Many and Great)" (VT 128) is an example of a song with an uncertain story that raises questions about who should sing it, when, and how. While the publishing history is verifiable,[63] stories about the song's use are less certain. Most significantly, a common account links it to the largest mass execution in U.S. history in 1862, when thirty-eight Dakota men were hung without fair trial. Many sources include the detail of the men singing on their way to the execution,[64] and many believe that song was "Wakantanka."[65]

While the story is uncertain, the reality that "Wakantanka" has come to be connected with this horrific event is significant. We cannot know for sure whether the Dakota 38 sang "Wakantanka" with the tune LACQUI-PARLE precisely as it appears in its original publication *Dakota Odowan* and in many current hymnals. However, understanding *tradition* and *relationship* as described earlier (as acts of ongoing interpretation, a chain of memory, and a community process) allows us to understand the song in a series of contextual acts in which many people have participated in various ways. When told in the context of meaningful relationships, the story of the Dakota 38 singing "Wakantanka" (whether historically accurate or not) is a significant addition to the tradition of interpretation of this song. If singers today embrace the uncertainty—that is, if they do not need to *know* the true history in order to *feel* the meaning of this story—they may be able to enter into the singing as an act of solidarity.

Embracing uncertainty does not mean that questions of ownership and permission are void, as a second example demonstrates. An uncertain story

63 For more on the history of "Wakantanka," its publication in the Dakota language collection *Dakota Odowan*, and its author Joseph Renville, see "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources," 21.

64 For example, "US-Dakota War of 1862 | Minnesota Historical Society," accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.mnhs.org/lowersioux/learn/us-dakota-war-1862.

65 For example, *Dakota 38 + 2 (HQ Full Movie)*, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLjzUNXMbhM. See around 1:04:15-1:05:30. The "+2" of the documentary's title refers to two additional men who were "mistakenly" executed that day.

surrounding the prayer "May the warm winds of Heaven" (VT 1061), attributed as a "Cherokee blessing," has led us to recommend that worshipers not use it as a representation of Cherokee spirituality. This worship resource came into the *Voices Together* process through a complicated lineage of previously published collections, including a collection edited by Juanita Helphrey, a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation, and a council of thirteen Indigenous leaders.[66] Despite this group's commitment to justice and representation, the resource did not have a clear attribution.

The *Voices Together* committee sought to balance trusting other committees' work with our own ongoing learning. Members of the *Voices Together* committee reached out to the Cherokee Arts Center, and when we did not hear back within the timeline toward publication, we trusted the previously published source.[67] As part of ongoing research several years later, Sarah Kathleen Johnson contacted the Cherokee Arts Center again and received a response from Matthew Anderson, Entrepreneurial Development Cultural Specialist.

> As Cherokee Christians do not historically refer to God as the great spirit, it is my opinion that this is simply a romanticized rendering that is not at all associated with us. Most Cherokee songs or prayers call God Father, Creator or are simply in Cherokee.[68]

This prayer may or may not have Indigenous origins and seems unlikely to be Cherokee. As with the story about "Wakantanka" being sung by the Dakota 38, we can define the tradition of "May the warm winds of heaven" as a series of acts of ongoing interpretation, a chain of memory, and a community process. In the former case, the community process of interpretation has

66 For more on this history, see "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources."

67 "Cherokee Nation Cherokee Arts Center," Cherokee Nation Cherokee Arts Center, accessed May 23, 2024, https://artscenter.cherokee.org/.

68 Personal communication between Sarah Johnson and Matthew Anderson, May 16, 2023. Sarah Fite James, Archival Coordinator at the Cherokee National Research Center, shared similar insights into the origin of the prayer: "Unfortunately, we could not find any information on this 'Cherokee blessing.' We believe that this might be misattributed to the Cherokee tribe, and alas we have no way of knowing its origin, or whether or not this was an actual Cherokee blessing." Personal communication between Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Sarah Fite James, May 22, 2023.

led to enduring understanding of the song being connected to the Dakota 38. In the latter case, the community understanding does not appear to link "May the warm winds of heaven" to Cherokee spirituality.

In his communications about this worship resource, Anderson offered this story that models embracing uncertainty.

> There is a grain that has a hollow core that makes for a perfect bead. It has a hard exterior and is very durable. The hollow center allows for ease of a string and makes for an attractive necklace. This grain has several common names and one is Cherokee Tears of Corn. It is said that our ancestors wept along the route of removal from our homeland and where their tears fell, these plants grew. Horticulturalists however will tell you that the plant is of Asian origin and did not arrive here until after the Vietnam War. So when there is discussion about corn beads, I also share that another common name is Job's Tears and it was used as a rosary by monks as early as the 14th century and although it is unlikely that it was here during the removal of 1838, it could possibly have been.[69]

This story exemplifies the meaning and feeling of embracing uncertainty in understanding tradition. Anderson's willingness to tell all three stories side by side demonstrates how communities might embrace uncertainty as they engage tradition as a continually negotiated process.

Many people want to feel certain about the origins and ownership of a song. Music scholars Dylan Robinson (xwélmexw (Stó:lō/Skwah)) and Patrick Nickleson argue that in Western music studies the very idea of "knowing" music is often associated with a sense of mastery and ownership.[70] That is, an instrumentalist saying they know a piece of music means they have "mastered" its technical difficulties and it is possessed as part of their repertoire list. They know who wrote it, and they feel qualified to play it. Similarly,

69 Personal communication between Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Matthew Anderson, May 18, 2023.

70 Dylan Robinson and Patrick Nickleson, "The Feeling of Knowing Music," in *The Affect Theory Reader 2*, ed. Carolyn Pedwell and Gregory J. Seigworth (New York: Duke University Press, 2023), 273-4.

Eva Mackey writes about the certainty that settler people feel about their ownership of land, noting that this "certainty and entitlement to land and superiority have been created and naturalized over centuries of colonization and nation-building."[71] Historically, ideas about musical ownership in Euro-North America have been built on the same types of assumptions of settler entitlement and superiority as governments and educational institutions recorded, transcribed, and circulated Indigenous songs with varying levels of permission and consent.[72] Today, people who wish to engage in Indigenous song are rightfully wary of this history, and yet, they may participate in the same logic of desire for certainty (a clear understanding of the history of a song resulting in a clear statement of permission) that can lead to entitlement to sing a song.

Instead of certainty, Mackey proposes "a principled, historically aware stance of self-conscious refusal to mobilize axiomatic knowledge…[which] may open space for genuine attention to alternative frameworks and seed possibilities for creative and engaged relationships and collective projects."[73] This description assumes an attention to power dynamics and respect; we are not advocating a rejection of seeking permission and attending to responsibility in using songs and worship resources. Instead, we hope alternative frameworks of understanding music—for example, as process and participation rather than as objects to move and own—might allow further creativity and engagement. We propose that embracing uncertainty about songs and worship resources can help settler worshipers approach these cultural performances with humility, seek further knowledge, and commit to deepening relationships with Indigenous people.

71 Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 241.

72 Robinson also tells a story of an Indigenous song that has been recorded and circulated in print despite its community of origin asking for it not to be used outside of their community. The Western composers and listeners who felt entitled to use and listen to this song were operating on the feeling of familiarity with the song (its already widespread circulation) whereas a better understanding would include its meaning in community function. Robinson and Nickleson, "The Feeling of Knowing Music," 286-9.

73 Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 250

Recognizing Imperfection

In addition to uncertainty, some settler Christian communities fear imperfection. Rather than denying or avoiding imperfection, we invite communities to recognize that they will make mistakes and to take responsibility for correcting them. Even when the origins of a song are certain, knowing this history can reveal other problems that may be associated with singing it. Sometimes, knowing the history of a song highlights imperfections embedded in its story: histories of misattribution, theft or unequal exchange of culture, and incorrect transcription of songs.[74] Some leaders may be concerned with misappropriating resources with Indigenous connections to the extent that they refuse to engage them at all. This hesitation may be rooted in legitimate concerns associated with the harmful extracting and decontextualizing of Indigenous music or connected to anxiety associated with imperfect performance practice. However, this fear can become problematic when it is associated with a desire for perfection—for being "right" or a being seen as a good person—rather than concern for relationship and addressing harm. Perfectionism can be a substantial barrier to the truth telling required for reconciliation when people are unwilling to face hard truths about being imperfect or take the risks necessary for relationship.[75] Anyone singing songs from a culture other than their own needs to recognize that they will make mistakes; however, this must not lead to either avoidance or carelessness. Recognizing imperfection should be an attitude of humility that is part of a process of settler people giving up power, and using their power to correct mistakes, rather than an acceptance of low standards.

Recognizing imperfection means accepting the reality that it is impossible to make one correct decision about whether or how to sing a particu-

74 Incorrect transcription may sound innocuous but has historically been paired with bias and value judgments. For an example in the history of Coptic singing, see Carolyn M. Ramzy, "Modern Singing Sons of the Pharaohs: Transcriptions and Orientalism in a Digital Coptic Music Collection," *Ethnologies* 37 no. 1 (2015): 65-88.

75 In her discussion on seeking conciliation/reconciliation through worship practices, Sarah Travis frames imperfection in this way: "Settler fragility does not rely on the binary of good/bad but assumes that all are caught in a web of complicity." Sarah Travis, Unsettling Worship: Reforming Liturgy for Right Relations with Indigenous Communities (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 30.

lar song; a community may need to make different decisions about a single song in various contexts. There are innumerable stories about disrespectful circulation of songs, and there are also many stories of Indigenous people asking settler people to worship with them in solidarity. In many cases, there are equally weighted arguments that we *should* sing a song and that we *shouldn't*—engaging our inability to resolve this perfectly could be one key to breaking cycles of colonization and appropriation.[76] It also involves acknowledging that the tools that many settler congregations have access to are deeply imperfect, including hymnals. Here we share two contrasting examples of recognizing imperfection and correcting mistakes through relationships.

The song "O Great Spirit" (VT 51) is an example of recognizing and correcting an imperfect copyright permissions process. The song initially came to *Voices Together* through the United Church of Canada hymnal *Voices United* where it is attributed to Nuxalk elder Doreen Clellamin.[77] Clellamin gave Pablo Sosa, an Argentinian hymnologist, permission to transcribe and share the song, which she had adapted from young people's singing in her community.[78] The first printing of *Voices Together* also gives copyright credit to Doreen Clellamin. However, following the publication of the hymnal, we realized that legal copyright permission for the song had not been secured.[79] Members of the hymnal committee further pursued this permission, which led to communication with Doreen Clellamin's nephew, David Clellamin, who now holds the copyright for the song. With David's permission secured,

76 For more on cultural appropriation, see: Eric Hatala Matthes, "Cultural Appropriation without Cultural Essentialism?" *Social Theory and Practice* 42 no. 2 (2016): 343-366; Rebecca Tuvel, "Putting the Appropriator Back in Cultural Appropriation," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 61, no. 3 (2021): 353–72.

77 *Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of the United Church of Canada*, First Edition (United Church Publishing House, 1996). "A Voices United Intercultural Hymn Festival" with hymns selected by Bruce Harding, 2014, available online: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Funited-church.ca%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fworship-ideas_cultural_hymn.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK. Accessed June 4, 2024.

78 *Voices Together: Reference Notes*, 51.

79 It is common for material to go to print without formal legal copyright permission when the publisher pursued permission but was unable to locate the contributor.

later printings of the hymnal reflect this change.[80] The copyright process surrounding this song was imperfect, and addressing it led to deepening relationship with the context and origin of the song. However, the fact that this happened reveals broader problems with copyright processes. There are cultural differences surrounding ideas about songs' origins and ownership.[81] Many non-Western songs (including many Indigenous songs) exist by law in the public domain and, when they are copyrighted, it is under the imperfect national and international system that typically privileges notated music as source material.[82] Although the permission and copyright information for this song is now accurate, it would still be possible for individuals and communities to sing it in ways that disregard its cultural heritage. Decisions whether to sing these songs need to consider relationship beyond legal permission.

The song "Hey ney yana" (VT 836) is an example of recognizing imperfection in the attribution of a song and attempting to address it through an ongoing learning process. "Hey ney yana" was published in the 2007 United Church of Canada hymnal supplement with Brooke Medicine Eagle credited as writer and copyright holder. When the *Voices Together* committee contacted Medicine Eagle for permission to share the song, she told us, "The song came from Ute Indian children, I was told." Because of this information, the committee made clear in the *Voices Together* ascription that Medicine Eagle did not write the song but has been instrumental in recording and sharing it. After the publication of *Voices Together*, committee members were informed that Medicine Eagle has faced controversy over misrepresentation of Indig-

80 In an exchange about including this song in *Voices Together*, David requested to have a copy of *Voices Together* as a keepsake associated with his aunt Doreen and other Nuxalk family and history.

81 Marcell Silva Steuernagel, "A Tangled Web: Intellectual Property and Christian Global Song," *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 72, no. 3 (2021), 34-42.

82 For more on the history of music copyright in the U.S., see Katherine Leo, *Forensic Musicology and the Blurred Lines of Federal Copyright History* (New York: Lexington Books, 2021).

enous spirituality and her Indigenous heritage.[83] This knowledge prompted us to wonder whether her relationship to this song and to Ute people was as significant as we had believed. In light of this further learning, although the song is printed in the hymnal, the authors advise that communities only sing this song if they learn new information about its background or are led to sing it through relationship with Indigenous leaders or communities.[84] We hope this statement recognizes the imperfection of this type of decision: it is not always incorrect or disrespectful to sing this song, but we feel more permission is needed in this case, to the extent that the song likely would not be included in the hymnal if that decision were being made with the information we have now.

The work of accepting imperfection well takes time and effort, and it relies on continually building and maintaining relationships. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway, in her book *Staying With the Trouble*, describes this process: "The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present."[85] This description does not indicate a complacency with mediocrity, or paralysis in the face of difficult contexts. Rather, Haraway is describing continual action, deep and creative engagement, and participation even as we know we need to continually do better and learn more. Worship can be a pathway toward what Haraway describes as "inventive connection"—ways that we can encounter other humans (as well as all creation) and experience other cultures deeply and respectfully. "O Great Spirit" and "Hey ney Yana" both presented opportunities to "stay with the trouble" and to aspire to continually learn more, correct mistakes, and do better in relation to whether and how to sing these songs.

Accepting imperfection in worship involves moving beyond the sense of

83 One example is an archived statement from 2012, "Alert – Re: Brooke 'Medicine Eagle' Edwards: Abuse and Exploitation of American Indian Sacred Traditions, A Statement from the Center for the SPIRIT," accessed on September 14, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20120528144422/http://www.sonomacountyfreepress.com:80/features/brooke-edwards.html. Brooke's website offers more on her background: "Meet Brooke," Brooke Medicine Eagle, accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.medicineeagle.com/meet-brooke.

84 "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources," 13.

85 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

accomplishment at "doing it right." Congregations may find themselves between multiple truths, or in the middle of competing values. Singing with Indigenous Christians may invite settler congregations to the imperfection of prioritizing some principles over others at certain times. American liturgical theologian Nathan Mitchell suggests that meetings with God in worship, which are intimately connected to encounters with other people across difference, are bound to be harrowing: "We should probably leave our churches limping, rather than congratulating ourselves on a 'job well done.'"[86]

Welcoming Discomfort

Songs emerging from Indigenous settings may be musically and linguistically *uncomfortable* for worshipers accustomed to musical expressions based in European traditions. Because singers may be required to sing unfamiliar rhythms and words, as well as both higher and lower notes than in European-style hymns, some may experience the songs as uncomfortable or even unpleasurable, at first. Assumptions about how music should feel upon first encounter challenge communities to confront deeper biases against non-Western sounds and the problematic elevation of certain expressions of music in worship.[87] The discomfort associated with engaging this material calls into question a common expectation that Christian worship should be *comforting* or *comfortable*. As Elder John Grosvenor urges, "those of us who know Jesus should have the maturity to leave our comfort zone to meet people where they are."[88]

This desire for comfort in worship can be equated with conversations we often hear among congregational song practitioners, who desire songs they describe as "singable." Congregations value songs that feel accessible, invite vocal harmonies, and have words that resonate with existing theological convictions. "Singability" may be valued before other meaningful

86 Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), xvi.

87 Graber and Loepp Thiessen, "Publishing Privileges the Published," 15-18 (Section 4).

88 Adrian Jacobs, Ray Minniecon, Sam Chapman, John Grosvenor, Jerry Goins, and Fern Cloud, "Our Music Our Way: NAITTS Elders Panel on Ethnomusicology," *Journal of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community* 21 (2023), 16-41; quotation p. 21.

features, like stretching theological content or composer representation. Of course, singability is unstable ground—a piece is comfortable depending on training, background, or preferences of the singer. What is singable to one community may not be singable to another. Part of singing songs with connections to Indigenous communities may be recognizing that they will not necessarily match what feels comfortable to a congregation. Understanding this discomfort as a learned response to Western musical styles may help worshipers engage these songs as prayer and solidarity with Indigenous neighbors. Instead of seeking comfort in worship, we invite communities to engage resources with connections to Indigenous communities even when it means moving *toward* this discomfort.

One song that may create *musical* discomfort is "Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome, (Jesus Lord, How Joyful)" (VT 8). The vocal range spans a large space of an octave and a half, beginning on a note that is lower than typical for unison songs.[89] This unison piece may be both lower and higher in range than non-Indigenous singers might consider to be "singable." While it may be tempting for singers to switch octaves to reduce the melodic range, it is symbolically important that they do not. Bringing God and humankind together—represented by the high and the low—is the point of the hymn.[90] In addition, there is no indicated time signature or recurring meter in this song. Singers trained in the Western classical tradition often rely on time signatures to make sense of the beats within a bar. In this song, the musical line follows the Cheyenne text, and there are different numbers of beats in each linguistic phrase.[91] This can lead to a sense of disorientation when a non-Cheyenne singer first encounters the song, feeling as if some of the notes "should" be longer or shorter than they are. Furthermore, the song may be uncomfortable because the Cheyenne text includes long words (such as "Nahetotaetanome," in the title). When entering into this piece, it is important for singers not to resist the discomfort, but to welcome it as part of the worship experience. It may be helpful to remember that this piece is singable

89 The range of this song is A3 to E5. The *Voices Together* tune and accompaniment committee largely tried not to begin unison pieces lower than a B3.

90 *Voices Together: Reference Notes,* 8.

91 For example, the first linguistic phrase contains 19 eighth notes, and the last linguistic phrase contains 11 eighth notes.

and comfortable to some, and it is only a lack of familiarity and training that make it uncomfortable for others. The piece may never feel fully comfortable to non-Indigenous people who only sing it occasionally, but it is important for settler Mennonites to prioritize right relationship over comfort, while embracing being learners who may not get it fully "right."

An example of a piece with connections to Indigenous communities that may produce *textual* discomfort due to tension between values is "There's a River of Life" (VT 24). The text of the hymn includes male pronouns for God throughout: "There's a river of life that's flowing from *his* throne." When Maracle led this piece at the conference of The Hymn Society, as described in the opening vignette, some participants felt uncomfortable with the male language for God and provided feedback to conference planners that God should be presented in a gender-neutral way. As the authors of this article, we sympathize with this desire, and frequently advocate for a range of gendered ways of referring to God.[92] However, we also recognize Maracle's agency in choosing language for God and acknowledge that using his language is a way of singing in solidarity with his artistic and theological voice. In this case, singing with Maracle as an Indigenous Christian—who invited the community to share in his song—may require embracing a text that may be uncomfortable.[93]

Experiencing discomfort in worship may be difficult, especially for those who expect worship to be consistently soothing or reassuring. Yet in contexts where worship aspires toward Indigenous justice, congregations must become acquainted with worship that disrupts. In her book *Unsettling Worship,* Canadian theologian Sarah Travis says the following.

> Christians often come to worship to "feel better" or more comfortable. The great challenge of decolonizing worship is that it will make us uncomfortable. Worship is designed

92 Sarah Kathleen Johnson and Adam Tice, "Our Journey with Just and Faithful Language: The Story of a Twenty-First Century Mennonite Hymnal and Worship Book.," *The Hymn* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 17–27. See also: "Expansive Language in *Voices Together*: Gendered Images of God." https://voicestogetherhymnal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Expansive-Language-in-VT-2.pdf (accessed 7/22/24).

93 Of note, it is also possible for congregations to sing "God's throne" instead of "his throne," as indicated with an asterisk in the music.

> to unsettle us—we should be disturbed by the word of God. Reconciliation is a word that should disturb us because it requires leaving behind comfortable spaces and entering into relationships that are fraught because of historical and contemporary colonialism and racism. None of this is easy. God's word and activity in worship are disruptive—they interrupt our systems and our plans.[94]

Sarah Augustine articulates similar ideas in her question, "Are church and worship a 'safe space' where we find rest from the conflict that surrounds us or a staging ground where we struggle together to seek justice collectively?"[95]

Conclusion: Committing to Ongoing Learning

Mennonite denominational, congregational, and personal commitments to Indigenous justice must be expressed in congregational worship. In this article, we encourage predominantly non-Indigenous Mennonite congregations in Canada and the United States to commit to "staying with the trouble" of singing songs and praying prayers that have connections to Indigenous peoples in communal worship. These songs emerge through different forms of relationship, including collaboration, resurgence, and hybridity, and are received into hymnals through various relational networks. Singing these songs evokes these relationships and can also strengthen other symbolic and material relationships. We invite settlers to practice relationships of vulnerability through embracing uncertainty regarding origins and narratives, recognizing imperfection in decision-making and performance practice, and welcoming discomfort in communal worship for the sake of just transformation. Despite the challenges—including the risk of ongoing harm—receiv-

94 Sarah Travis, *Unsettling Worship: Reforming Liturgy for Right Relations with Indigenous Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 3.

95 Sarah Augustine, "Expanding Our Identity," 58. Augustine concludes her essay with this hopeful statement: "What may have been invisible in Mennonite worship traditionally, a preference for homogeneity and comfort, may be receding as the call for justice becomes more prominent in our worship together. As we incorporate into our worship commitments to mutual identity that actively seeks justice, inclusion and repair, we expand our 'safe space' to include the vulnerable and excluded," 63.

ing symbols and rituals associated with Indigenous traditions in Mennonite traditions of worship introduces the possibility of forming renewed relationships with God, within the church, and beyond the church as one small step toward the right relationship required for truth telling and reconciliation.

One final example of relationship expressed through song is "Dooládó' Shi Diyinda (What a Wonderful Savior)" (VT 562), a song Daniel Smiley wrote in Navajo and which was translated into English for the first time for *Voices Together*. After being taught it was wrong to engage with any aspects of his Navajo culture as a Christian teenager, Smiley now embraces his Navajo tradition in his leadership of Black Mountain Mennonite Church in Arizona, which he serves in both Navajo and English. In response to receiving the final English translation of "Dooládó' Shi Diyinda!" Smiley said in an email, "I just got through singing the song for a crowd of young Navajos, there are tears and lots of joy!! Wow, the song has come together very well, I am satisfied with the translation. Very close to what it says in Navajo...thank you."[96]

Through songs like "Dooládó' Shi Diyinda," *Voices Together* offers new opportunities for Mennonite congregations to raise their voices in worship with a diversity of Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States. These songs and prayers with connections to Indigenous communities have been offered as gifts to the wider church. Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone speaks from her context as a Cheyenne Mennonite and describes giving and receiving songs as a process of forming relationships through giving and receiving gifts.

> I'm offering you a gift. I'm sharing these songs with you as a gift. And that makes us bonded—in relationship. And in that relationship, I trust you to honor the songs that we're sharing. You're not going to get it perfect; it's not going to sound just right…I trust you to hold that song with respect and with honor, to say, 'I'm going to carry this, and that makes us brothers and sisters, we're connected in that way.' And so when white Mennonites approach this, I want them to approach it with

96 "Guide to *Voices Together* Songs and Resources," 10.

respect and with a level of understanding.[97]

To receive these songs and prayers as gifts, it is necessary to sing them rather than set them aside. To sing these songs respectfully, with attention to relationship, is not misappropriation—it is the intention of those individuals and communities who gave permission and encouragement to share these resources in Christian worship through *Voices Together.* Learning to love these songs and to pray these prayers, to know them in mind and heart and body, to invite them to transform individuals and communities, is the best way to receive these gifts. At the same time, it is very possible to misuse these songs in ways that further damage relationship. Songs and prayers can be a force for harm or healing, and sometimes both simultaneously. A commitment to ongoing learning in relationship is crucial for Christian worship to be a step toward solidarity, and for solidarity to be a source of action. Action in solidarity, with insight and leadership from Indigenous communities, is needed to address the harm of colonialism and to live into God's vision of liberation for all people and all creation.

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97 Quote from Keshia Littlebear-Cetrone, taken from the Anti-Racist Worship and Song: Part Two webinar (28:04–29:18), hosted by MennoMedia as part of the launch of *Voices Together.* The recording is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhQsXnluNjQ&ab_channel=MennoMediaInc.

Resisting the Proliferation of Fragmentation: The Unified and Hospitable Body of Christ

Paul Doerksen

Abstract

Pointing to the fragmentation of the church into a veritable plethora of denominations of seemingly endless varieties, this essay argues that such dynamics display a form of disunity that is a theological problem. Through an examination of diversity and inclusion, the author suggests that the unity of the church is best understood not as a state that results from human effort but rather as a gift from God. This subsequently opens out onto a discussion of what the author suggests is the fundamental ecclesial practice capable of resisting division, even and perhaps especially in the face of deep disagreement: hospitality.

My ecclesial identity has recently undergone a significant shift, and this is not the first such change. I grew up and was baptized on confession of my faith in the *Chortizer Mennonite Conference* (now the *Christian Mennonite Conference*). After earning my first degree at a non-denominational Bible College, I spent a year with an evangelistic mission organization (*Venture Teams International*), and then worked for nearly four years as a youth pastor at a non-denominational church, all without relinquishing my membership in the church of my baptism into the body of Christ. When Julie and I married, we became members of a Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church, where we've retained our membership despite several years at different times during graduate studies where we became involved in a Mennonite Church that is not Mennonite Brethren. Over the past nine years, Julie has been a pastor in a Mennonite Brethren congregation. That is, until several months ago, when the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Manitoba removed our congregation from membership, citing non-compliance with the MB *Confession of Faith*. Our congregation has now been accepted as part of Mennonite Church Manitoba with a temporary affiliate membership status.

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While this personal account isn't comprehensive, I describe these moves and changes to bring to view a reality of ecclesial life in our time. Namely, there are any number of options available for a person seeking to find a church, and untold numbers of reasons that people change from one 'unviable' option to one more suited to their (current) taste. Another way of putting this is to simply admit that the church is fragmented, not only into long-term identifiable streams of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant, but within those streams, and especially so in Protestantism where further fragmentation has become endemic, with smaller and smaller groups emerging out of conflicts of seemingly endless varieties. Given this reality, it's hard to imagine just what might staunch the proliferation of fragmentation. My own account, played out largely in Anabaptist circles, merely displays these dynamics on a personal basis. What I'm describing anecdotally is more than just that; the disunity of the church is sociologically describable, but more importantly, it's a theological problem of the first order, or so I want to argue at the outset of this article. I will also briefly show how one Anabaptist approach, that of insisting that a divided church has the merit of giving and receiving 'gifts' with other ecclesiological traditions, does not recognize the problematic nature of embracing what is frequently called 'diversity.' Diversity is one of those notions that often goes unexamined, as the practice of such diversity carries on as though its meaning is self-evident and beyond scrutiny. Then, instead of celebrating fragmentation, even in the form of denominationalism, I will explore the essential importance of the unity of the church, understood ***not*** as a state that results from human effort, but seen and embraced as a gift from God. Embrace of unity on this basis leads me then to an emphasis on the importance of active resistance to splitting, and on the significance of sticking together even in the face of deep and important disagreements—my hope here is to have churches greatly reduce the number and kinds of disagreements that lead to actual schisms. Therefore, I will conclude with a call to the ecclesial practice of hospitality, offered by Christians to other Christians (and beyond).

Disunity and Fragmentation as a Theological Problem

Jesus, in his prayer for his disciples in John 17, beseeches God to "protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we

are one." And later in that same passage, Jesus asks, "not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17: 11, 20-21). This unity for which Jesus prayed does not describe the current ecclesial landscape. As Peter Leithart asserts rather dramatically, "The church is divided. It is *not* that the church has remained united while groups falsely calling themselves churches have split off. It is *not* that we are spiritually united while empirically divided…This is not the church that Jesus desires. So long as we remain divided, we grieve the Spirit of Jesus, who is the living Passion of the Father and the Son."[1]

Perhaps one of the most influential Protestant theological voices addressing issues of unity and disunity of the church is Ephraim Radner, who takes up these matters in a long series of articles, chapters, and book-length studies. Radner's concern begins with the problem, as he sees it, with the church's ignoring of its reality as "figured prophetically in the people of Israel."[2] Radner's figural reading of the Bible enables him to see in Israel the "figure that historically embodies the Christian church's present endeavors to overcome denominational separation."[3] The uniting of Old Testament Israel shows Radner that the church that remains divided is a church that lacks integrity. Further, "in parallel with the fragmentation experienced by Israel, the church's divisions are to be seen as a judgmental commentary on the single whole of the People of God…"[4] Radner sees this lack of integrity in the divided church as a state that is far from benign, and therefore he offers a neologism to highlight the deep problem of division, arguing that terms such as 'schism' are hardly up for the descriptive task. He puts forward the term "eristology," which "is the study of *hostility* in its disordering forms and forces," and is a more accurate term to analyze the realities of "human

1 Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 1.

2 Ephraim Radner, "The Cost of Communion: A Meditation on Israel and the Divided Church," in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopalian Concordat,* ed. Ephraim Radner and R.R. Reno (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 135.

3 Ibid., 134.

4 Ibid., 135, quotation at 140.

hostility, deeply embedded in Christian behavior, whose consequence is destructive and often death dealing."[5] According to Radner, then, the church is not just divided, it is in an eristological condition.

Radner expands his concern with his description of the problem of speaking of the church as 'denoted reality,' by which he means "something that can be pointed to, examined, analyzed, and wherever possible, manipulated according to whatever current theories of cultural resistance or viability are at hand, all supposedly for the sake of God." This "grasping after ecclesial denotion" reveals the ignoring of a range of spiritual dangers, namely that "when the reality and meaning of the Church are simply linked to the objective references of space and time, they become slaves to the standards by which these references are regularly…analyzed by the cultural instruments of measurement—size, longevity, numerical expanse, ethnic representation, financial viability, and so on."[6] Since these are precisely the standards by which the world is analyzed, then the dismay and even despair over the world carries with it despair over the Church, despair that Radner sees as the "great vice of modern Christianity…"[7]

Radner's bracing analysis of the theological problem of church division includes criticism of what he refers to as "vague theological principles" embraced and enacted by the church, principles such as mutual love, the nature of the Eucharist, and misguided treatments of Trinitarian relations, which he sees as largely free-floating notions that simply can't carry the freight assigned to them.[8] The result of all of this is that the claims of divided churches need to be limited, since the church's "pinched condition" has resulted in self-assertion, or the seeking of acquiescence, or, the search for solace and direction in the face of assaulted hegemony.[9]

5 Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2012), 4, 5. Radner observes that his term derives from the Greek word associated with the goddess of discord.

6 Ephraim Radner, *Hope Among the Fragments: The Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 8, 9.

7 Ibid., 9.

8 Radner, "The Cost of Communion," 136.

9 Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), vi.

Anabaptist Ecclesiology: Separation and Unity

Radner's bleak view of church division sees very little constructive possibility within that division; to argue, for example, that denominationalism affords the potential for the exchange of gifts between divided groups bears little weight for Radner, as such a notion is ultimately illusory.[10] My own tradition of Anabaptism does not see the landscape of denominationalism nearly as despairingly as does Radner, embracing constructive, positive, and faithful possibilities for the divided church, as long as the divisions are understood in a functional sense, subsumed under the greater, ultimate reality of unity of the Church. Historically, Anabaptist ecclesiology has tended toward a unique emphasis on both uniformity and exclusivity. That is, early Anabaptist ecclesiology tended toward an emphasis on the purity of the church, which can lead and has led to uniformity and rejection of multiplicity.[11]

During the early days of the Anabaptist movement, as this stream of the Radical Reformation sought some measure of stability and consistency, a clandestine meeting in the Swiss town of Schleitheim produced a series of articles, written by Michael and Margareta Sattler. In these articles, Anabaptists described seven areas of ostensible agreement, ranging from their practice of believer's baptism to a rejection of the use of the sword. The Schleitheim Articles, often referred to as the Schleitheim Confession, do not take on the role of a creedal statement of beliefs, but are more descriptive of practices, although of course practice and belief are not easily or definitively pulled apart.[12] This influential series of articles clearly emphasizes the unity of the church, but that unity is, in part, premised on the strong emphasis on separation from the world and from the unfaithful church, as seen in the eyes of those early Anabaptists. The preamble to the seven articles makes this relationship between concerns about separation and subsequent unity of those separated Christians clear.

10 Radner, "The Cost of Communion," 141.

11 Karl Koop, "Holiness, Catholicity, and the Unity of All Christians," in *Creed and Conscience: Essays in Honour of A. James Reimer*, ed. Jeremy Bergen, Paul Doerksen, and Karl Koop (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 67, 69.

12 The Schleitheim Articles are often read as assuming the undergirding of the Apostles Creed.

> Dear brothers and sisters, we who are assembled together in the Lord at Schleitheim, are making known through a series of articles to all who love God, that as far as we are concerned, we have agreed that we will abide in the Lord as obedient children of God, sons and daughters, and as those who are separated from the world—and who should be separated in all that they do and do not do. And may God be praised and glorified in unity, without any brother contradicting this, but rather being happy with it. In doing this we have sensed that the unity of the father and our common Christ have been with us in spirit. For the Lord is the lord of peace and not of dissension, as Paul shows [1 Cor.14:33]. You should note this and comprehend it, so that you understand in which articles this unity has been formulated.[13]

This set of concerns is further developed in the second article, concerning the practice of the banning of recalcitrant church members, which should be done before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, "so that we are all of one mind, and in one love may break from one bread and eat and drink from one cup."[14] Similarly, the article that focuses on the Lord's Supper as remembrance of Christ's sacrifice highlights that participants must "be united in the one body of Christ—that is, God's community, of which Christ is the head—namely, through baptism."[15] Whether addressing separation from abominations as a separate issue or describing the use of the sword as something that can only be undertaken by those "outside the perfection of Christ,"[16] the Articles confirm the embracing of unity based on separation.

The ecclesiological dynamic of separation and *subsequent* unity of a separated body is confirmed and extended in the work of Menno Simons, who provided influential leadership and significant stability to a movement that experienced persecution and ambiguous development in the late 1520s and 1530s. Simons emphasized separation of the true church not only from

13 Michael Sattler, "The Schleitheim Articles: The Brotherly Agreement of Some Children of God Concerning Seven Articles," in *The Radical Reformation,* ed. Michael Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 173.
14 Ibid., 174, 175.
15 Ibid., 175.
16 Ibid. 177.

the world but also from any part of the church that was not pure. According to Simons,

> The true messengers of the Gospel who are one with Christ in spirit, love and life, teach that which is entrusted to them by Christ, namely repentance and the peaceable Gospel of grace which He Himself has received of the Father and taught the world. All who hear, believe, accept and rightly fulfill the same are the church of Christ, the true believing Christian church, the body and bride of Christ, the ark of the Lord, etc…Christ's church consists of the chosen of God, His saints and beloved who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, who are born of God and led by Christ's Spirit, who are in Christ and Christ in them, who hear and believe His word, live in their weakness according to His commandments and in patience and meekness follow in His footsteps, who hate evil and love the good, earnestly desiring to apprehend Christ as they are apprehended of Him. For all who are in Christ are new creatures, flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone and members of His body.[17]

Simons's consistent emphasis in deploying images of the church is on those that highlight separation, as seen in his choice of descriptors such as "chosen of God," "the true believing Christian church, the body and bride of Christ, the ark of the Lord." Further, Simons goes on in his writings to reject any interpretations of parables which might suggest that the church is a 'mixed body.' Says Simons,

> …many intermingle with the Christians in a Christian semblance, and place themselves under the Word and its sacraments who in fact are no Christians, but are hypocrites and dissemblers before their God; and these are likened unto the refuse fish which will be cast out by the angels at the day of Christ; unto the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps; unto the guest without a wedding garment and unto the chaff, For they pretend that they fear God and seek Christ; they receive baptism and the

17 Menno Simons, in *Menno Simons' Life and Writings: A Quadricentennial Tribute 1536-1936*, ed. Harold S. Bender, trans. John Horsch (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Pub. House, 1936), 72, 73.

> Lord's Supper and outwardly have a good appearance, but do not have faith, repentance, true fear and love of God, Spirit, power, fruit, works and deeds.[18]

Menno Simons's emphasis on separation from the world and other churches in the name and pursuit of purity of Christ's body as the pure bride of Christ, while deeply influential, has not survived intact in current Anabaptist circles. That is, the unity within Anabaptism has given way to multiple divisions in whatever geographical region Anabaptists inhabit, even when migration to a new region was ostensibly pursued to remain separate from the world.[19]

Considering separation and unity in current Anabaptist theological reflection shows that while an embrace of unity has not dropped away entirely, the notion of separation from the world and other churches has taken on a different emphasis. For example, in an essay titled "The One and the Many," Sheila Klassen-Wiebe makes a strong case for the unity of the church, but not as something which human striving can accomplish. Rather, drawing especially on John 17, she argues that the starting point for church unity is the work of God, and especially the grounding of the unity of the Father and Son. Christians everywhere and always are united with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, united not just 'as' the Trinity is united but 'in' the Trinity, all of which is a gift from God.[20] However, for Klassen-Wiebe, the God-given gift of unity does not imply that differences and divisions are erased. Rather, she argues that it does no violence to the John 17 text to "see in that varied body of disciples a representation of the diverse nature of the church today. Like the disciples we are each individually, and as congregations and denominations, called to different ministries. We each have different strengths and different gifts…and the Gospel of John calls us to rejoice in

18 Ibid., 73, 74.

19 It's beyond the scope of this essay to trace the migrations of Anabaptists from their origins to many destinations around the globe, and to show the multiple divisions that developed and continue to proliferate through to the present day. See https://www.astudyofdenominations.com/denominations/anabaptism/ for one of any number of descriptions of the diversity of Anabaptism; see also https://ecumenism.net/denom/anabaptist.php

20 Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, "The One and the Many," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Helmut Harder, Karl Koop, and Helmut Harder (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 8–19.

the fact that God in Christ has made us one and continues to sustain us as one body in the Holy Spirit with diverse gifts."[21] This positive understanding of a certain kind of diversity which offers and receives gifts is echoed in Bruce Guenther's analysis of denominationalism. He also embraces the true unity of the church as a gift from God. However, that understanding does not, in his view, forestall the constructive role of denominations. Guenther asserts that "true unity among Christians is based on the common gospel and overshadows other differences that may exist among Christians. True unity should be expressed through cooperation between denominations." It follows for Guenther that "denominational diversity is not necessarily schism," and thus, "denominations that are able to adjust to such a pluralistic cultural reality, that are able to avoid expressing their particular identities in exclusive, arrogant ways, and that are able to celebrate the collective diversity that is embodied by denominations as necessary for seeing more clearly the mysteries and complexities of the kingdom of God, may still have a future."[22]

God's Gift as the Basis of Unity

Ephraim Radner's vision of church unity supports neither an ecclesiology of separation and subsequent unity, nor a positive embrace of denominationalism, even one that embeds such particularities within a broader vision of church unity. According to Radner,

> Our ecumenical strategies of 'dialogue across difference' or, alternatively, our purifying strategies of withdrawing from compromised churches and starting new, allegedly 'pure' denominations are both alike strategies of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Even if we manage to secure some limited good, like greater sympathy and cooperation between Christians, or greater public fidelity to theological doctrines, we are all still located in churches whose very existence contradicts Jesus's

21 Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, 28, 29.

22 Bruce Guenther, "Life in a Muddy World: Historical and Theological Reflections on Denominationalism," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, Karl Koop (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 68, 69, 72.

prayer 'that they may all be one' (Jn 17:21).[23]

The importance of recognizing the grounding of our vision of church unity can hardly be overstated. That is, the reality of that unity cannot be found in ecumenical or denominational strategies, or claims to embrace some abstract notions of dialogue, diversity, or purity as expressions of some deeper, more 'real' unity. John's gospel, especially chapter seventeen, serves as one of several key Scriptural bases for understanding and embracing unity that really is not a human initiative. The heart of John's vision for the church is the unity of believers, seen in the repetition of the phrase "that they all may be one"; John 17 contains "the strongest concentration of references to the unity of believers, the one church…"[24] These references are of course parts of Jesus's prayer to the Father, in which Jesus asks for God's work to be done in the world, which means that these calls for unity are not instructions for Jesus's disciples; they are not being commanded to strive for unity, but to receive God's gifts. The formation of the church lies in the hands of God; "Jesus is not commanding us to be one; Jesus is asking his Father that we might become one. And God answers prayer."[25]

Explicit references to unity can also be found in the Pauline epistles. For example, Radner refers to the book of Ephesians as "the great declaration of Christian unity," referring specifically to Ephesians 2:13-15, Paul describes Jesus's "blood, his flesh, his cross: one."[26] It is the 'shape' of Jesus, argues Radner, that we see the "fulfilling form of Christ," in which we can "discern the meaning of the promised restoration of God's people to unity."[27] Ephesians 4 offers a further depiction of the unity of the church, which Paul Minear describes as revealing a cosmic struggle between God and cosmic powers in which victory is achieved by the Messiah, a victory which is the ultimate "source and guarantee of 'the unity of the *Spirit* in the bond of

23 This is Wesley Hill's take on Radner's view in Wesley Hill, "When Christians Disagree," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no. 1 (February 2021): 10.

24 Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, "The One and the Many," 8. She quotes Daniel Harrington as describing John 17 as the chapter which "expresses the hope of all who are concerned with church unity."

25 Ibid., 10.

26 Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, 429.

27 Radner, "The Cost of Communion," 141.

peace.' The unity of the body was here proclaimed as a fully ontological and a fully eschatological reality."[28]

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6)

Minear's work is extremely helpful here, especially his emphasis on the repetition of the declarations of oneness, and on the fact that the unified body of Christ "is constituted by a single calling and a single hope…defined by its one God whose rule extends without limit over, through, and in all. That the body included the specific human community was indicated by the distinctiveness and historical particularity of its call, its hope, its faith, its baptism."[29]

The reality of the unity of the church is not one constituted by human endeavor. Rather, that unity is a gift from God in the light of which humans find themselves. And, "while Christians are always located in particular historical, cultural, and theological streams, they are nevertheless a part of a universal communion of saints, the *communio sanctorum* through God's redemptive work in Christ and through the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit."[30] It is clear by now that the oneness, the unity to which I am referring, is not something that can be generated by any power but God's own. Indeed, the oneness here is God's oneness, from which any other oneness gets its reality and shape. The human path of oneness, marked as it is by compromises and strategies, is not the path of the Church's oneness, rather, "the 'communion' of the Church is given in the particular 'oneness' of God… Oneness is not other than this."[31] Put another way, the unity of the church is not identical with the unity to which (whom) it points, namely the unity

28 Paul Sevier Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Pub. Corp., 2004), 216. See also Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*, 17–20.

29 Minear, *Images of the Church*, 217.

30 Karl Koop, "Reading Tradition Through Catholic Lenses," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2010), 127.

31 Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, 14.

of God; the church exists only by the virtue of God's work.[32] Differently, it is crucial to recognize and acknowledge the asymmetry of divine and human action as these pertain to the unity of the church. The distinction between those two types of action is important for the purpose of right relation—the priority is divine action; human action receives and responds to divine action. The church lives in light of God's prior action.[33] William Stringfellow, in his exposition of an argument in which a unified church generates the faithful witness of the church, nicely summarizes that unity:

> The unity of the Church of Christ is a gift of God bestowed in the birth and constitution of the Church at Pentecost.
>
> The unity of the Church is a gift, not something sought or grasped or attained, but, as with any gift, something which may be refused or dishonored or misused.
>
> The gift of unity is, in the first instance, in its origination, something which belongs to God. He gives at Pentecost something of His own, something of Himself, His Holy Spirit, to the Church.
>
> The unity given to the Church at Pentecost is vouchsafed for all men baptized into the body of the Church since Pentecost. It is this same unity received and enjoyed within the Church among the members of the Church and manifested and verified in the life of the Church in this world which is the witness of the Church to the world.[34]

Resisting Division by Practicing the Hospitality of the Unified Church

God's work in and gift to the church, which gives her unity, calls for Christians to face the problem (sinful state) of the proliferation of fragmentation. Rather than finding ways to provide warrants or positive rationale for ongoing

32 John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 168, 169.

33 John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 196.

34 William Stringfellow, "The Unity of the Church as the Witness of the Church," *Anglican Theological Review*, 100 no. 3, (August 2021; originally published October 1964) 523.

division, the church at a minimum is called to deliberately reduce acceptable reasons for splitting and resist further fragmentation over more and more issues which Christians deem as worthy of schism.[35] The propensity for division stands in need being replaced by a commitment to live in light of God's gracious gift, and thus be committed to the difficult work of sticking together in the face of significant disagreement, along with pursuing the healing of ruptures that have already occurred. Perhaps the most urgent of those commitments is to stay put despite our current fragmented condition, remaining where we find ourselves as a way of giving witness to hope for realized unity, even while we endure the broken state of the church.[36] That state of the church, its current condition, is not permanent, as God will reconstitute the church in his time. Therefore,

> this means that our task in the meantime is not to separate from one another and try to escape the church's inevitable death and hoped-for resurrection…Just as Israel's faithful remnant was not a replacement for the people as a whole, so neither should today's divided churches congratulate themselves on their theological rightness and use that as a justification for not living in light of God's promised restoration and reunification of the church at the last day. Rather, we should be prepared to suffer the judgement of division together, recognizing that by virtue of our common baptism and shared confession, our fates are inextricable from one another's. The only hope we have of salvation is journeying with Christ into the darkness of exile, judgement and death, and being caught up together with him

35 The question of identifying theological warrants for any kind of legitimate church division is beyond the scope of this paper. However, one thinks here of the Confessing Church splitting from the German Church during the Nazi regime as one extreme example. Ephraim Radner has suggested in passing that perhaps the church might need to split over the question of supporting Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) in Canada. See "Death is part of life, but euthanasia should not be," Ep. 217 – SoundCloud:"

36 Radner, *Hope Among the Fragments*, 54, 199-214. Radner generates a list of benefits for staying put—I'm less interested in living in light of benefits than his emphasis on living by a logic of faithfulness, a dimension of the discussion that is clearly important to Radner's much larger project.

in the triumph of the resurrection.[37]

I conclude my discussion of God-given church unity with an exploration of what I consider to be a central ecclesial practice for a broken church: namely, the practice of hospitality. A word of caution is in order here; we need carefully recognize that before we speak of the church as constituted by practices, we ought to remember that the church is fundamentally a creature of the Word. This recognition reminds us of and keeps intact the asymmetry between divine and human action.[38] Further, church practices as I'm referring to them here cannot be relegated to churches of one denomination or another, or to churches described as 'high' or 'low.' That is, the unified church is 'higher' than many (high) churches realize—images such as the people of God and new creation "point to a reality which is pre-existent and postexistent, which transcends the boundaries of time and space, of present and future, of life and death. This reality is as high as the Most High God who lives within it and moves through it to accomplish his divine purpose."[39] The New Testament concept of the church is also 'lower' than any (low) church might believe. "The height of the people of God is accomplished by the depth of his condescension in love for those who are not his people."[40]

Keeping these cautions in mind, I want to make the case for the importance of hospitality as a *human* ecclesial practice that is generated by and grounded in the *divine* gift of unity. Here I am not making the case of some all-encompassing notion of 'inclusivity,' especially of the kind that might be based on some lowest common denominator of either belief or behavior.[41] Rather, I want to think *theologically* about inclusion, the understanding of which is not transparently self-evident. Much of what I've learned theologically about inclusion comes from the world of disability theology, especially from two scholars: John Swinton, whose book on dementia has been very in-

37 Hill, "When Christians Disagree," 10. Hill is narrating Radner's work in this passage. Regarding remaining in the ruins of the church, see R. R. Reno, *In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub. Group, 2002). Reno's impassioned plea for Christians to remain in the church in which they find themselves lost some of its persuasive power when Reno left his church not long after publishing the book. See my discussion of that book in Paul G. Doerksen, *Take and Read: Reflecting Theologically on Books* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 1–6.

38 Webster, *Word and Church*, 228.

39 Minear, *Images of the Church*, 259.

40 Ibid.

41 Radner, "The Cost of Communion," 147, 148.

fluential for me, and Brian Brock.[42] In *Wondrously Wounded*, Brock includes a section titled "Theologizing Inclusion" where he makes what appears at first to be a surprising claim, namely, that inclusion language is not traditionally Christian or even biblical. Instead, he argues, "Christian theology offers a politics of *redeemed communion* that displaces the politics of both exclusion *and* inclusion."[43] The language of inclusion suffers from a deficit, much like models of charity which go no further than giving things to those 'less fortunate.' The problem is the conceptualization of a 'needy them' whom 'we' need to help become more like 'us'; a patronizing stance which can't get beyond the notion that there is a group of people, 'us,' who hold the keys to determining which 'them' we'll include. Even if the circle of inclusion on this model expands, it's still 'us' that determines who is included. These are different politics than those offered to us by a deep understanding of the nature of the church, the body of Christ. Says Brock, "The politics of the body of Christ arise from an economy of service to one another for mutual upbuilding."[44]

John Swinton urges his readers to think about the importance of the practice of hospitality for the Christian church. He counsels us to push beyond the notion that we should be hospitable to strangers to the point where we recognize that as Christians, there's a very real sense in which we are all strangers in a strange land as we make our way as pilgrims, as aliens in this world (cf. I Peter 1). But recognizing that we are all strangers doesn't remove the importance of hospitality. Rather, it changes things to where we recognize the call to be hospitable as strangers to other strangers. As he puts it, "Strangers among strangers…the object of extending hospitality to strangers is to stop them from being perceived as strangers, not just offer them welcome."[45]

St. Paul writes about these matters at length in 1 Corinthians 12 in his discussion of the body of Christ, the differing roles of the variant parts, and the gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church. What Paul is saying, clearly, is that all parts of the body need each other. Gifts are characterized by being given graciously; they're used to serve the whole body and are only gifts when they are being used. They're not something that can be held in storage

42 John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). Brian Brock, *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2019).

43 Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 201.

44 Ibid., 203.

45 Swinton, *Dementia*, 277.

for the future.[46] The Holy Spirit energizes each part to serve the other parts. And the body of Christ needs the different perspectives and gifts brought by very different people. Brock says that the church Paul is describing "is aware that God is so big and so active that no one of us can grasp what God is doing."[47]

So, when we talk about inclusion in the body of Christ, we remember that we are not the ones extending a welcome, but it is God's gracious spaciousness that is the welcome to all of us. Jesus is in our midst, and he brings with him all his friends, with whatever language, social status, bodily health, and mental state, with everyone as they are. The church exists not, as Rowan Williams says, because we decided it should; the church exists because God wants it to exist.[48] The church, every part of the body of Christ, exists to pray, praise, worship, and witness to God's announcement of gracious welcome, and where each of us are called to grow in faithfulness. The term 'inclusion,' it seems, can't bear the freight that it's being called to carry. The church, God's unified body, redeemed by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit, calls us all to be part of that one body even though we are strangers. As strangers and pilgrims, we practice hospitality among strangers, asking ourselves and each other in perpetuity: what message from God is being announced by my fellow stranger? What is God doing in each constitutive member of the body of Christ? Having been welcomed as a stranger by strangers, what kind of transformation, redemption awaits me, awaits all of us, as we practice being vulnerable, adjusting our gaze to see the proclamation of others as God sees them, and to live patiently in God's time? May God grant us the grace to be faithful.

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46 Brock, *Wondrously Wounded,* 125 ff.

47 Ibid., 128.

48 Williams makes some version of this claim in various places. See for example, https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12670/rowan-williams-condemns-richard-dawkins-as-bad-philosopher-

Identification, Narrative, and Mythology in the Mennonite Diaspora[1]

John Eicher

Abstract

This article concerns two colonies of Mennonites who settled in Paraguay's remote Gran Chaco during the interwar years of the twentieth century. The Menno Colony, established in 1926, was composed of voluntary migrants from Imperial Russia via Canada. The Fernheim Colony, established in 1929, was composed of refugees from the Soviet Union via Germany. Despite their shared isolation, apparent similarities, and histories of movement, the colonies paradoxically avoided each other for nearly two decades. The article resolves this paradox using social theorist Rogers Brubaker's concept of "groupness" and literary theorist Northrop Frye's "Theory of Modes." Combined, Brubaker and Frye help us understand how all kinds of ostensibly similar communities formulate national and religious identifications, how they attach those identifications to collective narratives, and how those narratives take different trajectories across time.

This article concerns two colonies of German-speaking Mennonites who settled side-by-side in Paraguay's remote Gran Chaco during the interwar years of the twentieth century. The Menno Colony, established in 1926, was composed of voluntary migrants from Imperial Russia via Canada. The Fernheim Colony, established in 1929, was composed of refugees from the Soviet Union via Germany. Despite their shared isolation, apparent simi-

1 This article is based on my 2024 Bechtel Lecture, presented at Conrad Grebel University College on March 21, 2024. Both the lecture and the article draw extensively on my chapter entitled "Comparative Narratives: *Russlanddeutsch* Migration Stories," in *Jenseits der "Volksgruppe": Neue Perspektiven auf die Russlanddeutschen zwischen Russland, Deutschland und Amerika,* ed. Victor Dönninghaus, Jannis Panagiotidis, and Hans-Christian Petersen (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2017). Permission to reprint reworked material from this chapter has been granted by the editors.

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larities, and histories of movement, the colonies paradoxically avoided each other for nearly two decades. I resolve this paradox using social theorist Rogers Brubaker's concept of "groupness" and literary theorist Northrop Frye's "Theory of Modes." Combined, Brubaker and Frye help us understand how all kinds of ostensibly similar communities formulate national and religious identifications, how they attach those identifications to collective narratives, and how those narratives take different trajectories across time (that is, as "tragic" or "comic" plot progressions). I argue these identifications and narratives add up to unique group mythologies that give communities a sense of purpose, unity, and continuity, but that they also place groups in tension with others who have created different mythologies out of similar components.

First, a caveat. When Eugen Weber described the fin-de-siècle French peasantry's broad yet amorphous "death of tradition," he noted "a general statement need be right only in a general way."[2] This article necessitates a similar justification as it offers a broad and hopefully stimulating paradigm for conceptualizing 500 years of Mennonite migrations. For those wishing to delve further into the specifics and sources used to support this gambit, please refer to my 2020 monograph, *Exiled Among Nations: German and Mennonite Mythologies in a Transnational Age*.[3]

At the outset, it is important to define what I mean by "mythologies." I use the word to describe collective cosmologies that exist alongside (or outside) history and empirical fact but are intuitively understood by group members as the transcript of reality. Unlike history, which entails evidence-based representations of past events that may be tested (or argued over) as "correct" or "incorrect" via its sources, mythologies presuppose what group members perceive as "correct" or "incorrect" from the outset.[4] Once a person renounces a particular mythology (for example, Christianity) they generally enter another (for example, atheism, Islam, etc.), if they are to make

2 Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1976), 471.

3 John P. Eicher, *Exiled Among Nations: German and Mennonite Mythologies in a Transnational Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2020).

4 Here, I am not arguing along old positivist lines that history is an "objective" or "neutral" interpretation of the past. Rather, I argue that history rests on the logical ordering and careful interpretation of documented evidence, while mythology rests on received tradition and intuition.

moral sense of the world.[5] Hence, the power of the "conversion experience" as one's perception of "true" and "false" or "good" and "evil," shifts from one mythology to another. Indeed, even on an individual level, humans create and live inside personal mythologies—identifications and stories from a person's past, which may not be historically accurate, but nevertheless bestow a sense of clarity and coherence on an individual's life.

Perhaps the most important features of mythologies are that they enhance group cohesion and order the passage of time. Take for example the mythology of Bolshevism.[6] It existed as a mythology insofar as it provided a set of shared assumptions and beliefs for Soviet citizens that plausibly accounted for the past, present, and future (that is, dialectical materialism led to the creation of the Soviet Union, which will lead to the triumph of global communism). It also drew on a range of past events (for example, the French Revolution, the Revolutions of 1848, the 1871 Paris Commune) and shared practices (for instance, May Day) to not only explain and commemorate the movement of time, but also to unify disparate individuals around a shared set of symbols. Though we may disagree with a Bolshevik interpretation of the past, and though its ideas and practices were always contested, Bolshevism as a mythology served the purpose of unifying the Soviet citizenry and determining what they accepted as "true" and "false." The same may be said for the mythologies of nationalism, organized religions, and Western science.

Ultimately, mythology prioritizes social unity over historical accuracy while history prioritizes historical accuracy over social unity. This, of course, is not to denigrate mythology and uphold history. Societies need both so they may share a sense of cohesion (via mythology) but still learn from the past (via history). Yet as this article demonstrates, the "rub" is that not all like groups—no matter their ostensible similarities or perceived unity—agree

5 It is possible for individuals to combine disparate mythologies based on their circumstances, such as a peasant who supplements Roman Catholicism with folk beliefs and practices, or a Christian biologist who rejects the Genesis creation story in favor of evolution.

6 Of course, Bolshevism was challenged both within and without the Soviet Union for the duration of its existence, but it nevertheless informed the way most Soviet citizens interpreted the past and understood the world. In this context, I also resist using the politically-tinged word "ideology" when describing Bolshevism because the term suggests a programmatic philosophy or interlocking set of ideas. Alternately, "mythology" is a more encompassing and organic term insofar as it accounts for a society's socio-cultural and religious/spiritual valences, which may or may not correspond to ideological doctrine.

on the same mythological interpretations, which leads to different assumptions about the past, divergent expectations of the future, and incoherence when they attempt to communicate with each other. This is especially true of mobile, ethno-religious, minorities like the Mennonites whose discrete mythologies bumped into or borrowed from a range of competing mythologies during their sojourns.

The first section of this article is a "historical" account of how the Menno and Fernheim colonies found their way to Paraguay. The second defines the terms "identification" and "narrative" and describes how they relate to group mythologies. The last section provides a "mythological" explanation of how and why the colonies interpreted the past differently, which contributed to their separation and suspicion of each other.

Mennonites and the Problem of Collective Narratives

Mennonites have a long history of mobility, extending back to the confession's inception in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement.[7] Anabaptists wished to establish a pure and literal understanding of the Bible and purge all ecclesial traditions from Christianity that did not originate in scripture. Under the loose direction of a former Catholic priest named Menno Simons, the Mennonites emerged from the skein of the Anabaptist movement believing that Christians should follow the example of the early, persecuted church in the Roman Empire. In general, they believed in the practices of adult baptism and closed communities and the principles of non-violence and the separation of church and state.

These positions were antithetical to European laws so Mennonites either acquiesced or migrated to the edges of Europe's expanding empires. Ironically, as Mennonite's consolidated their new landholdings and utilized the metropole's expanding transportation networks, they invited the scrutiny of the state authorities they originally wished to avoid.[8] Consequently, be-

7 I use the word "confession," rather than "denomination" or "church," to describe groups who call themselves Mennonites since the latter terms imply centralized, ecclesiastical authority, often with government oversight. According to Thomas Finger, "Mennonites are neither a creedal church nor a confessional one in the sense of adhering to a single authoritative confession. They are confessional, however, in the sense of having authored numerous confessions that at times have played important roles in church life." See Finger, "Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76 (2002): 277-297.

8 This point is elaborated in Eicher, *Exiled Among Nations*, 16-7, 35-6, 40-1, 43-4.

tween the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, large numbers of Mennonites migrated from the Netherlands to Prussia's Vistula delta and thence from Prussia to the Russian Empire. In the 1860s and 1870s, the Empire's 50,000 Mennonites grew increasingly troubled by the Tsar's Great Reforms, which included Russian-language education programs, greater bureaucratic control over the provinces, and universal military conscription.[9] By 1880, a third of the Empire's Mennonites, about 17,000 individuals, migrated to America's vast plains and Canada's western prairies.

After the First World War, Canada likewise lost its appeal for thousands of Mennonites who were frustrated by provincial education reforms that aimed to nationalize, or "Canadianize," the country's children. Mennonites were not opposed to education or learning English.[10] They were simply opposed to British and Canadian nationalisms embedded in the public-school curriculum. Mennonites feared that sports drew children away from home, school marches resembled military drills, and that advanced skills encouraged youths to move to the city.[11] As a result, in 1926 about 1,800 Mennonites departed Canada to establish Paraguay's first Mennonite settlement, the Menno Colony, in the country's remote Gran Chaco.

Meanwhile, thousands of Mennonites remained in the Russian Empire after the 1870s migration and slowly integrated themselves into Russian society and its emerging nationalist mythology. They did so by teaching the Russian language in their schools, providing alternative military service to the state, and eventually electing representatives to various political posi-

9 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 185; James Urry, "After the Rooster Crowed: Some Issues Concerning the Interpretation of Mennonite/Bolshevik Relations During the Early Soviet Period," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (1995); Urry, "The Russian State, the Mennonite World and the Migration from Russia to North America in the 1870s," *Mennonite Life* 46, no. 1 (1991), 14. For more on Russia's late-nineteenth century reforms see Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova, eds., *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994).

10 It is important to remember that Mennonites' first language was Plautdietsch. In addition to High German, which was used for religious purposes, English would effectively be their third language. See E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955), 167-168; Titus F. Guenther, "*Ältester* Martin C. Friesen (1889–1968): A Man of Vision for Paraguay's Mennogemeinde," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005), 189.

11 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940,* 105. See also "Leaving the 'British Empire' in Canada: Promises in the South, 1916-1921," in Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* (Toronto, ON: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013), 14-39.

tions.[12] Nevertheless, the chaos of the Russian Civil War (1917-22), and Joseph Stalin's war against the so-called kulak class of farmers beginning in 1929, prompted thousands of Mennonites to recognize they had no place in the emerging Bolshevik mythology and consequently fled the Soviet Union.[13] In the closing months of 1929, 3,885 Mennonite refugees capitalized on their status as Germans living abroad and fled to Weimar Germany.[14] Over the next two years, 1,572 of these refugees departed Germany for Paraguay's Gran Chaco with the help of the German government and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).[15] They established the Fernheim Colony, adjacent to the Menno Colony, which was supplemented by fifty-seven migrants from Poland and 370 refugees from Harbin, China over the following years.[16]

Once in Paraguay, the two settlements negotiated relationships with their Indigenous neighbors, the MCC, the Weimar and Nazi governments in Germany, and the Paraguayan government during the Chaco War (1932-1935). They did so with astonishingly different results. The Menno Colony Mennonites remained mistrustful of all outside entities, including their Fernheim Colony neighbors. They maintained that although they happened

12 John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonites: Some Introductory Comments," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1974): 403–8, 405; Peter Braun, "Education Among the Mennonites in Russia," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, last modified August 23, 2013. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Education_Among_the_Mennonites_in_Russia&oldid=91640 (accessed September 6, 2024).

13 The flight to Moscow is documented in Harvey Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia 1926–1933: A Study in Diplomatic Instability* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966); Colin Neufeldt, "The Flight to Moscow, 1929," *Preservings* 19 (2001): 35-47; Erwin Warkentin, "Mennonites Before Moscow: The Notes of Dr. Otto Auhagen," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 199–218. It was a highly disorganized movement and included a number of German-speaking Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, and Adventist families, many of whom lived near Mennonite settlements. See Fritz Ernst Albert von Twardowski, "Memorandum by Twardowski," November 5, 1929, Russland Politik. Mennoniten – Deutschstämmige. Deutsche in Russland, GFM 33/4538: L192441, National Archives, Kew, England.

14 Neufeldt, *Flight to Moscow*, 43.

15 Peter Letkemann, "Mennonite Refugee Camps in Germany, 1921–1951: Part II – Lager Mölln," *Mennonite Historian* 38, no. 4 (2012): 10.

16 See John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933–1945* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999), 76–77; Peter P. Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay Volume 1: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of This World*, trans. Gunther H. Schmitt (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Peter P. Klassen, 2003), 81–82.

to live in Paraguay, they were neither Paraguayans, nor did they desire a place in its national mythology. Importantly, they also believed that their "Germanness" and "Mennoniteness" were part of their local community, but their community was not part of the German nation or a global Mennonite church via the MCC (that is, a German national mythology or an emerging global Mennonite mythology). Altogether, the Menno Colony believed that escaping the organizational strictures of "worldly" governments and denominational bodies was the necessary path of Christian discipleship. This sentiment is what led Gerhard Wiebe, an Ältester in Manitoba's (West Reserve) Chortitzer Gemeinde, to record a meandering chronicle of the Christian church, which was defined by moments of rupture, restoration, and most importantly, the rejection of deceptive outside influences. An excerpt from this chronicle is as follows.

> For approximately three hundred years God had upheld the teaching of humility, but then through arrogance it sank to an animal level. The Jews foundered due to false prophets and amorous alliances with the Assyrians. Four hundred years after Christ the Christians denigrated to an animal level through worldly wisdom and false priests, yet the Lord always safely hid his own. We have seen that God's Word first came from southern France to Bohemia, and a hundred years later to Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Poland and Austria. In 1789 the Mennonites began to move to Russia, and by 1862 or 1863 the rest of the Mennonites had left Germany. Now they were all gathered together in the vast Russian empire, and nowhere else have they been able to live out their faith and principles of freedom as undisturbed as in Russia. Yet, through arrogance, quarreling and contentiousness they departed more and more from the simple life until the beast could dare to enter into battle with them.[17]

17 Wiebe published this account in 1900. See Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, trans. Helen Janzen (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981), 15. For Menno Colony deliberations about whether to support Paraguay during the Chaco War (1932-35) or establish connections with Nazi Germany, see "Troubled Tribes in the Promised Land (1930–1939)" and "Peanuts for the Führer (1933–1939)," in Eicher, *Exiled Among Nations.*

Alternately, the Fernheim Colony Mennonites struggled to assemble a collective narrative from the flotsam and jetsam of individual and collective identifications they carried with them. They held a Dutch heritage, Plautdietsch language, German culture, Mennonite culture, Christian faith, and Paraguayan residency. They were drawn from a range of Mennonite subconfessions and had lived in communities extending from Soviet Ukraine to Siberia, each of which perpetuated its own local culture and history. Once in Paraguay, the Fernheim Colony aided the Paraguayan government during the Chaco War, cultivated a missionary alliance with MCC to support an Indigenous mission, and ingratiated themselves to the Nazi regime in a bid to be resettled on the Ukrainian steppe. In one instance that occurred in 1940, colony leaders gathered the signatures of 240 families who pledged to "do our duty unto the utmost for the German Fatherland" since "the ten colonial years and the conditions in this country have persuaded us that we will never find a homeland here."[18] Unlike their neighbors in the Menno Colony, the Fernheim Colony lacked a shared interpretation of their past and their future remained entirely unclear. As a result, they struggled to create an internal mythology or adopt an external mythology (for example, Paraguayan or German nationalisms) that made sense of their fate and future.

The colonies' different understandings of their pasts and destinies raise questions about how groups of people formulate and articulate identifications and collective narratives as communities, religious bodies, and nations. In this instance, how did each colony identify themselves to themselves and to each other? How did they identify themselves to a range of outsiders? How did they express their various movements across Eurasia and the Americas in narrative form? Once settled in Paraguay, how did their narratives lead them to reject or incorporate the mythologies of outsiders? At the broadest level, how do groups of people create collective narratives and how do these narratives resonate with national and religious mythologies?

Group Identifications and Collective Narratives

In the 1980s, scholars advanced structural explanations of nationalism by focusing on its political and social dimensions. Yet they did not generally engage its mythical qualities. For example, Ernest Gellner regarded nationalism as a social byproduct of industrialization, Eric Hobsbawm

18 "Application of Russian-German Colonists of the colony Fernheim for citizenship," May 26, 1940, in Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., From the Files of MCC (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 56.

contended it was a political instrument of bourgeoisie social control, and Benedict Anderson treated it as a modern placeholder for religion.[19] Although Anderson's famous concept of "imagined communities" gets at nationalism's transcendent nature, he does not account for its affective and moral qualities, which breathe the phenomenon to life.

During the 2000s, historians such as James Bjork, Pieter Judson, and Tara Zahra reevaluated the structuralism of earlier theories by analyzing nationalism from below.[20] They focus on local expressions of "national indifference"—moments when individuals identified themselves outside (and in defiance of) national strictures. These scholars were aided by sociologist Rogers Brubaker's concept of "groupness," which he defines as "moments of intensely felt collective solidarity" that may or may not crystallize into group mobilization.[21] These scholars succeed at describing the presence or absence of collective identifications within a group at a given time, but they do not connect them to larger mythologies. In other words, moments of groupness happen when individuals collectively identify themselves in a certain way, but questions persist about the longer narratives in which they are embedded. Like Hobsbawm's "traditions," mythologies and the narratives that bring them to life may be "invented" and ahistorical but naming them as such does not diminish their power.

If we are to understand national mythologies, I argue that we must understand the plot structures of nationalist narratives and how group identifications (that is, "groupness") are maintained across time. Key to this are the subaltern identifications and counter-stories that run parallel to nationalist identifications and narratives. By tracing the fluctuations of local narratives that reject supra-local associations (for example, the Menno Colony migrants) and the formation of new local narratives (for example, the Fernheim Colony refugees), historians can denaturalize governing assumptions about a particular group: national, religious, or otherwise. The center of a dominant identification or narrative can be illuminated from the periphery.

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19 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 11–12; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983).

20 James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2008); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial* Austria (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 98.

21 Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 12.

Next, it is important to delineate the difference between group identifications and group narratives. On a fundamental level, identifications are a shorthand way of making a particular group legible to others. Identifications such as nationality and religion are often singled out from a range of possibilities for the sake of simplicity, efficiency, or to convey a desired sentiment. For example, Canadian officials identified incoming Mennonite settlers as "Germans" in order to lump them together with a well-known and well-respected ethnic group.[22] Alternately, some Mennonites referred to members of their confession as "Germans" when "Russian" or "Mennonite" was distasteful to their audience.[23] In short, I argue that identifications are used for a specific purpose, within a specific context to suggest group cohesion.

Collective narratives also describe groups of people, but they include the element of time. A collective narrative is a curated assembly of identifications and events that runs like a red thread through the clutter of history. It may be substantiated in part by historical scholarship but finds its most robust articulation as the story of an allegedly distinct culture, from the smallest community to the largest nation. Since collective narratives are embedded in time, they are susceptible to transformations as groups experience new events and incorporate and dismiss various identifications.[24] For example,

22 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 185-186; Jonathan Wagner, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada, 1850–1939* (Vancouver, BC: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 2006), 76.

23 "Statement to Hon. Robert F. Forke," March 6, 1929, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, Immigration Movement I, c. Organizations, Individuals and Transactions related to Immigration and Relief, 1923–1946, vol. 1270, 605, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB; Fritz Kliewer, "Letter to Landesleiter des VDA Landesverbandes Weser-Ems, November 18, 1937," R127972d, 52, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Germany.

24 On like groups' construction of different narratives for a shared event, see Liisa Malkki's discussion of "mythico-histories" in *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995). On the challenges of reconciling competing historical narratives, see William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1347–76. On the relationship between historical narratives and communities, see David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *History and Theory*, 25, no. 2 (1986), 117–31. In a similar vein, Susan Schultz Huxman and Gerald Biesecker-Mast point out that when speaking to governments, "Mennonites typically adopt paradoxical rhetorical strategies: separatist arguments derived from their faith's tragic orientation; assimilative arguments derived from the comic orientation of their yearning to be good citizens." See "In the World but Not of It: Mennonite Traditions as Resources for Rhetorical Invention," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7, no. 4 (2004): 539–54.

the Menno Colony colonists emphasized the continuity of their narrative despite being labeled as "Russians," "Canadians," and "Paraguayans" and the gradual reduction of their numbers across three continents. Alternately, the Fernheim Colony was composed of sundry individuals and families, each of whom was torn from preexisting narratives as members of specific religious communities in the Soviet Union. In order to create a narrative and make it work, they had to collectively acknowledge a set of shared identifications that they could then use to fashion a shared story.

Ultimately, collective narratives err more towards mythology than history. Their moments of rupture, or "plot points," are often historical events but burnished with mythological meaning. For instance, it is a historical fact that none of the ships carrying the 1870's migrants to Canada sank in the Atlantic Ocean. However, in their view this fact was only meaningful and worthy of remembrance because God protected them.[25] Likewise, historians go to great pains to interrogate and clarify historical causality. For example, did Mennonites leave Canada due to the threat embedded in public education or were they motivated by other reasons? By contrast, the Menno Colony Mennonites' interpretation—as channeled through its leader Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968) and his son Martin W. Friesen (1912-2000), is entirely clear on the point. They left Canada because it had turned into "Babylon."[26] In short, histories plunge into detail; mythologies float above nuance. Finally, histories move outward, seeking to incorporate more factors into their analysis, while mythologies remain tightly focused on a specific and highly meaningful thread.

How then do historians analyze national, communal, or religious mythologies without becoming entangled in them? In the words of historian Timothy Snyder**:** "Refuting a myth is dancing with a skeleton: one finds it hard to disengage from the deceptively lithe embrace once the music has begun, and one soon realizes that one's own steps are what is keeping the old bones in motion."[27] I propose that we do not ignore mythologies or try to kill them (after all, one cannot kill a skeleton), but rather treat them as objects of historical inquiry. One way of doing this is to examine the narrative structures that are embedded within them.

25 Wiebe, *Causes and History*, 40.

26 Guenther, "*Ältester* Martin C. Friesen (1889–1968), 189. See also, Martin W. Friesen, *New Homeland in the Chaco Wilderness*, 2nd ed., trans. Jake Balzer (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Cooperativa Chortitzer Limited, 1997).

27 Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 10.

"Plotting" Collective Narratives

Like other religious groups, Mennonites interpreted the world through the Bible. This book is not simply a collection of laws and prophecy but, in the words of theologian Don Cupitt, it is a "story to live by."[28] Yet owing to the open-ended nature of biblical exegesis, a more apt description of the Bible is that it provides "stories to live by," since it is always uncertain which biblical events and teachings a particular group of people will connect across time. Bible stories are not simple "morality plays," but provide existential meaning to a group's historical and contemporary developments. The Bible animated Mennonites' ambivalence to nation-building schemes, mediated their relationship to the environment, and helped them make sense of their migrations. According to literary theorist Northrop Frye, "the literal basis of faith in Christianity is a mythical and metaphorical basis, not one founded on historical facts of logical propositions."[29] The same could also be said of the "literal basis of faith" in nationalism or communism, since they are perpetuated by their own myths and metaphors.

Frye's "Theory of Modes," which is discussed in his seminal *Anatomy of Criticism*, is useful for interpreting how Mennonites applied biblical concepts such as "wandering" and "exile" to their migration stories. In chronological order, Frye's modes, or literary epochs, are "mythic," "romantic," "high mimetic," "low mimetic," and "ironic."[30] The point of using Frye's modes is not to suggest a collective "progress" of Mennonite theology or a Hegelian culmination of history, but rather to arrive at a better understanding of how mythology is expressed in narrative form and changes through time. When Mennonite migration is viewed from this perspective, a new layer of interpretation arises in the Mennonites' longue durée.

Two of Frye's modes, romantic and high mimetic, are useful for mapping the trajectory of the Mennonites' wanderings. Mennonites emerged from the Anabaptist movement with a narrative corresponding to Frye's romantic mode. In a variety of times, places, and circumstances they understood themselves to be perpetual wanderers, trying to follow the spiritual precedent

28 Don Cupitt, *What Is a Story?* (London: SCM Press, 1991), xi.

29 Northrop Frye, *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion* (Toronto, ON: Univ. of
Toronto Press, 1991), 17.

30 See Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto, ON: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006).

of the early, persecuted church in Rome.[31] Protagonists in romantic narratives are killed when there is a "tragic" plot structure (for example, the stories recorded in the Mennonite's *Martyrs Mirror* martyrology) or survive in a "comic" plot structure when the hero is absorbed into a pastoral life (for example the cliché of Mennonites as "the quiet in the land").[32] Either way, Mennonites repeatedly took the path of diaspora. They remained separated from society and lived (or died) in opposition to the world.[33]

With the increasing affluence and physical expansion of the Russian Empire's Mennonite colonies in the nineteenth century—what some historians have dubbed the "Mennonite Commonwealth"—Mennonites began interpreting their story in a high mimetic mode, which is thematically associated with a city or a nation. The "Commonwealth" represented a happy resolution to the Mennonites' wanderings. Their Russian "homeland" was the gathering place of God's people on earth since it appeared to be free from corrupting influences and was secure under the protection of a benevolent monarch's eternal protection. [34]

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31 Ibid., 40, 54.

32 The full title of Thieleman J. van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* is *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, from the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950). On folk literature as a social behavior in exiled groups, see Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 11.

33 On diaspora as a rule rather than an exception in the Bible, see John Howard Yoder, "Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation," *Cross Currents* 23 (Fall 1973): 304.

34 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 54. For an appraisal of the term "Mennonite Commonwealth" as a description of Russia's Mennonites, see James Urry, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Imperial Russia Revisited," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (2010): 229–47. In Russian Mennonites' "Whig" interpretation of their history of Russian settlement—exemplified by Peter M. Friesen's book *Die Alt Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland (1789-1910), im Rahmen der Mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt, Russia: Raduga, 1911). —Russia's Mennonites viewed the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a "golden age" of Mennonite organization in the country. Burnished by the subsequent tragedies of war and revolution, twentieth-century histories and memoirs subsequently eulogize this period as a lost paradise. See John B. Toews, "The Calm Before the Storm: Mennonite Brethren in Russia (1900-1914)," *Direction* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 74-75. In a prior article, Toews labels this type of historiography "Favorite Opinions on the Russian Mennonite Past," though he also tends to perpetuate the "golden age" myth. See Toews, "Russian Mennonites," 406. For an analysis of fictional commemorative retellings of the so-called "golden age," see Robert Zacharias, *Rewriting the Break Event: Memories and Migration in Canadian Literature* (Winnipeg, MB: Univ of Manitoba Press, 2013), 2.

Most of the Empire's Mennonites accepted this high mimetic interpretation of Mennonite history and likewise accepted a slate of modernizing and nationalizing reforms introduced by the Empire during the late-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in the 1870s, a third of the Empire's Mennonites rejected this development and again followed a "romantic" path by migrating to North America. Fifty years later this process repeated itself when a smaller number of Canada's Mennonites sustained their romantic path by rejecting Canadian nationalism and moving to Paraguay.

The Mennonites who fled from the Russian Empire to Canada and thence to Paraguay interpreted their collective story as a "comic" plot progression: They experienced a falling out with government authorities and their co-religionists who disagreed with them, underwent the physical and moral test of immigration, and were spiritually renewed in subsequent locations.[35] Thus, when Mennonites, such as the Menno Colony colonists, confronted nationalism and "worldliness" in a given country, they moved to a new location by God's gracious hand knowing full well that they may have to move again in the future.

Alternately, the Mennonites who remained in Soviet territory after the Bolshevik seizure of power found themselves to be an ostracized minority of German-speaking kulaks after the failure of Vladimir Lenin's New Economic Policy. Consequently, several thousand of these Mennonites, including the future members of the Fernheim Colony, fled the country in 1929. In doing so, they experienced what scholar Robert Zacharias describes as a "break event" between their past and future lives. They interpreted their individual and collective stories as tragedy: These stories rose to a point of peripety when they fled the Soviet Union and plunged downward to catastrophe when they were "exiled" to Paraguay.[36] The Fernheim Mennonites felt as if they were thrown out of their homeland, and they remained divided over the possibility of embracing a new collective story and a new homeland

35 Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, ed. Alvin A. Lee (Toronto, ON: Univ. of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2006), 190. For an analysis of the theological underpinnings of this group's rationale for migration, including their belief that permanent settlements fostered spiritual complacency and "exodus" brought spiritual renewal, see Guenther, "Theology of Migration: The Ältesten Reflect," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 18 (2000): 173.

36 Ibid., 197. Zacharias argues that retelling the story of the Mennonite Commonwealth and its swift dismemberment by those who fled from the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution "has taken on the status of a supplementary scripture." See Zacharias, *Rewriting the Break Event*, 2. On understanding exile from the subjective point of view of the exiled, see Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless*.

or waiting for a future repatriation.[37]

Beyond any question of the Menno and Fernheim Colonies' shared history, religion, language, and family ties, their overarching mythologies and collective stories as German-speaking Mennonites from the Russian Empire/Soviet Union were mutually incoherent. The Menno Colony colonists viewed their settlement as a self-contained unit that moved through time and space toward a "homeland" that was only found in death. They happened to have lived in the Russian Empire and they happened to speak German, but they believed that Russian, German, Canadian, and Paraguayan nationalisms were simply new manifestations of an old threat to their local autonomy.[38]

In contrast, the Fernheim Colony colonists viewed their settlement as the direct result of unanticipated political processes that ejected them from their homeland. This unexpected event led them to create new alliances with the Paraguayan government, the Nazi government in Germany, and MCC in the United States who articulated contrasting mythologies of Paraguayan, German, and Mennonite unity. Yet it remained unclear to the Fernheim Colony colonists as to which of these mythologies best described their situation or if they could create their own unique mythology in the Chaco. Were they Paraguayan citizens who should colonize new territory for the state? Were they an evangelical community called by God to proselytize to Indigenous groups in the Chaco? Were they ethnic Germans who must simply bide their time in South America until Nazi conquest restored them to eastern Europe? Or could they simultaneously be all three: socially Paraguayan, culturally German, and religiously Mennonite?[39] These questions, and the discussions

37 For a detailed treatment of this observation, see "Troubled Tribes in the Promised Land (1930–1939)," "Peanuts for the Führer (1933–1939)," and "Centrifugal Fantasies, Centripetal Realities (1939–1945)" in *Exiled Among Nations*, 128-66; 206-42; 243-90. Novelist Robert Kroetsch writes that the history composed by Mennonites who fled the Soviet Union was "a story of the fall from a golden age (the departure from an ideal world somewhere in the past, which was apparently in Russia, somewhere, in the late 19th century)." See his chapter "Closing Panel," in *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada*, ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen and Peter Hinchcliffe (Waterloo, ON: Univ. of Waterloo, 1992), 225.

38 Guenther speaks to this sentiment in *Theology of Migration*.

39 These debates played out in the Fernheim Colony newspaper *Menno-Blatt* during the 1930s and 1940s. They are also discussed by Mennonite historians including, notably, Peter P. Klassen and John D. Thiesen. See Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay Volume 1*; Klassen, *Mennonites in Paraguay Volume 2: Encounter with Indians and Paraguayans*, trans. Gunther H. Schmitt (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Peter P. Klassen, 2002); Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi?*

that they generated, were intensely presentist. The Fernheim Colony colonists drew on Mennonite history and mythology, German nationalist history and mythology, and the Bible to interpret current events, even as they disagreed over *which* past and *which* future created the "correct" story.

Both colonies ultimately remained in the Chaco. They now worship together, intermarry, and cooperate in shared economic activities. Nevertheless, each colony's understanding of the Chaco and each other was originally shaped by their separate histories and anticipated trajectories. Colonists initially drew on past contexts, but they increasingly drew upon present circumstances until it became difficult to tell which sentiments they had brought with them and which they had developed locally. Eventually these contexts merged into a shared, fluid narrative (that increasingly appears to be of the "high mimetic" variety) about all the Mennonites in Paraguay—like metronomes moving at different tempos that eventually come into phase—but this took a great deal of time and stress, and it was never predictable.

Conclusion

Historians Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny note, "Culture is more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over."[40] Cultural battles, in turn, give rise to a remarkable amount of "groupness" as populations from the biggest nation to the smallest community sort out and weave together the stories that affirm or threaten their mythological "truths."[41] The ever present now is always a handmaiden to memories and expectations, plans and happenstances, (plot "twists") that gel, however abstrusely, into a story. These narrative umbilical cords give life to collective mythologies, and we must unravel them to understand them. Practically speaking, this article makes an argument for understanding group identifications and narratives through the lens of mythology, which allows us to understand why one community's "intuitive" beliefs and actions may be entirely antithetical to another. Beyond accurately identifying historic communities or documenting the realities behind of their collective narratives (that is, getting the story historically "right"), examining group mythologies lets us understand how collective

40 Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, "Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 9.

41 See Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12.

identifications and narratives combine to give nations and communities meaning and purpose.

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Ukrainian Loss, Displacement and Courage—Finding Music of Hope

Carol Ann Weaver

"We need hope; hope makes miracles happen!"
– Nataliia Kurhan, Ukrainian who fled to Canada at the start of the war

Preface and Context

In a sense, the work of a composer is to allow oneself to be a kind of musical reporter, whether as a praise singer, storyteller, grief responder, mystic, muse, or medium (and sometimes all of these together). When parts of the universe are endangered, distressed, or destroyed, song is never enough. But song can contain hope and can sometimes say more than can words. The war in Ukraine calls for more than words. Finding hope through music has never been more important than now.

A brief exploration of the following can provide important context for this discussion: Ukrainian displacements, Ukrainian music in response to war (both in Ukraine and in the diaspora), my own music in response to tragedies before and during the war in Ukraine, and stories told to me by Ukrainians which explain how I could not keep silent during this current war. No matter where we live, it matters that we *report* on this war from our own vantage points.

Planet of Displaced People—Focus on Ukraine

We are fast becoming a planet of displaced people, as an increasing culture of diasporas expands daily. Within our global population of over 8 billion, some 110 million people are considered refugees or displaced persons, with many more leaving dangerous war zones by choice, resulting in more than 1.2% of the global population having to flee their homes. The word "refugee" cannot include all who are displaced (some internally) or suffer immeasurable loss.

While the International Rescue Committee Agency listed Ukraine as sustaining the largest and fastest displacement crisis in 2023, international response has helped provide considerable assistance, so that the 2024 emer-

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gency watchlist has removed Ukraine from its list of top ten crises.[1] However, of the ten most recognized crisis events in 2023, including Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan among others, the scope of the crisis in Ukraine was shown to be third, with Syria at the top of the list.[2] Within Ukraine alone, some 30,000 people are currently reported missing.[3]

Having marked the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion into Ukraine on February 24, 2024, this war shows few signs of early resolution. Men ages 18 to 60 cannot leave the country due to conscription, thus bearing the brunt of the fighting and creating untold tragedies. It is largely women who must leave their communities or their country, creating yet another unique saga of displacement, family disruption, grief, pain, and hardship both at home and in the diaspora.

Ukrainian Composers Expressing Pain and Grief

For musical context, it is important to understand the impact of certain Ukrainian composers who, over the decades, have expressed their sensibilities about war and loss. Hope amid pain and loss is a common thread throughout their music. The selection of composers mentioned here range from Stefania Turkewich-Lukianovych (1898–1977) to various contemporary composers whose dynamic music has been carving out visceral expressivity about grief, invasions, wars, dislocations, and political turmoil of this beleaguered land both before and during the current Russian invasion. Turkewich-Lukianovych dealt with the Nazi occupation during World War II, fleeing first to Austria, then to the United Kingdom after the war, composing large form orchestral works, operas, ballets, and choral works all of which were banned in Ukraine by the Soviets due to their Ukrainian content

1 See International Rescue Committee's 2023 Emergency Watchlist reports, "The Top Ten Crises the World Can't Ignore in 2023," www.rescue.org/article/top-10-crises-world-cant-ignore-2023, (accessed December 15, 2023), and "The Top Ten Crises the World Can't Ignore in 2024," www.rescue.org/article/top-10-crises-world-cant-ignore-2024, (accessed May 17, 2024).

2 UNHCR calculations of global refugees, published in "The ten largest refugee crises to know in 2024," Concern Worldwide, www.concern.net/news/largest-refugee-crises, December 18, 2023 (accessed May 17, 2024).

3 Janice Dickson, "Desperate Families Fight to Find Ukraine's Missing Civilians," *The Globe and Mail*, May 17, 2024, A1.

and impact.[4] Lviv-born Mariana Sadovska's 2014 solo-vocal-with-harmonium *Widow Song* encompasses Ukrainian folk styles which she gleaned from rural women in the Carpathian Mountains and Eastern Ukraine. As she revives cultural/musical values almost shattered by the Soviet occupation, she expresses a grief deeper than typical songs of loss. To her, she is "playing with fire."[5] Kyiv-based Iryna Aleksiychuk's vivid, dramatic work for women's choir, *The Game from the Other Side,* focuses on the 2013-2014 Maidan protests against Russian influences which resulted in riots and multiple deaths. Her 2022 *Glory to Ukraine*[6] is a stirring symphonic band anthem of solidarity for her country, and *The Song*[7] for a cappella treble choir is a heartrending setting of lyrics by Lesya Ukrainka, leading Ukrainian writer and feminist activist. Lviv-based Bohdana Frolyak's *Kyrie Eleison* represents a consummate, timeless plea for mercy as it is performed in a ruined synagogue near Lviv.[8] Frolyak's 2022 *Cello Concerto*, a highly evocative, disturbing piece in classical concerto format, is part of the "Ukraine-2022. Muses Are Not Silent" concert series in Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian musicians during the Russian invasion.[9] And Kyiv-based Victoria Poleva's hauntingly poignant 2022 orchestral *Bucha. Lacrimosa* transports the unbearable tragedies of that butchered city straight to our hearts. The solo violin, intoning a sorrowful song, seems to speak for individual as well as collective grief, sounding above a muted and sustained symphonic background. At the Dortmund

4 Stefania Turkewich, Ukrainian Art Song Project, www.ukrainianartsong.ca/new-page-1 (accessed March 7, 2024).

5 "The Deep Well of the Past: Mariana Sadovska Plays with Fire, Bringing Ukrainian Tradition into New Musical Territory," archive.rockpaperscissors.biz/index.cfm/fuseaction/current.press_release/project_id/365.cfm, (accessed September 10, 2023).

6 *Glory to Ukraine* by Iryna Aleksiychuk for symphonic band, soundcloud.com/iryna-aleksiychuk/iryna-aleksiychuk-glory-to-ukraine-national-academic-symphonic-band-of-ukraine (accessed January 15, 2024).

7 *The Song* by Iryna Aleksiychuk, set to a poem by Lesya Ukrainka, performed May 21, 2023, by Young Women's Chorus of San Francisco, conducted by Martin Benvenuto as part of a "Sing for Ukraine" Consortium, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vpdPVsTuvc (accessed January 12, 2024).

8 *Kyrie Eleison* by Bohdana Frolyak, performed April 17, 2020, by "Dudaryk" Lviv State Academic Male Choir and "INSO-Lviv" Symphony Orchestra, Oksana Lyniv, Conductor, www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf_JP6O8Kuw&list=PL50iDE8EQHC3L73V7HMVMns0v35GXwMd1&index=5 (accessed March 7, 2024).

9 Cello Concerto by Bohdana Frolyak, performed May 21, 2022, with Oksana Lytvynenko, cello and Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine, Volodymyr Syvokhip, conductor, www.youtube.com/watch?v=byL853gHpdQ (accessed February 5, 2024).

(Germany) rehearsal of this piece, conductor Oksana Lyniv said, "despite all the pain, we must tell the world about the war in Ukraine and the victims. If not us, then who?" Violinist Andrii Murza commented, "Everyone had tears in their eyes. Everyone is doing their best to hear the long-awaited word 'peace' as soon as possible."[10]

Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra, an architype of Ukrainian musicians playing during diaspora, reveals pride and defiance. Their performance at the BBC Proms on July 31, 2022 was followed by subsequent performances in Europe and the United States. The orchestra, conducted by Canadian-Ukrainian Keri-Lynn Wilson, consists of Ukrainian refugee musicians as well as European-located Ukrainians. At the Proms they performed the Ukrainian National Anthem as well as *Symphony No. 7* by leading Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov who fled Kyiv for Germany in March 2022.[11] This triumphant performance milestone is being echoed by other Ukrainian composers and musicians in the diaspora whose music is being performed internationally, as noted above with Iryna Aleksiychuk's choral music being performed in San Francisco.

Ukrainian-themed Performances in Ontario—A Small Sampling

Many cities and cultural centers across North America and Europe have been holding benefit concerts, festivals, rallies, and events celebrating Ukrainian culture and music. Even a small sampling of concerts in the province of Ontario reveals rich Ukrainian-themed musical activity. In Parry Sound, the May 2022 fundraiser with Whispering River Orchestra featured music by Ukrainian composer Ilya Levinson, while the Elmer Iseler Singers sang the same month in honor of Ukraine at Festival of the Sound. In Toronto, "The Sound of Ukraine—An Immersive Concert" at Toronto Ukraine Festival featured music by Tymur Polianskyi, while "United for Ukraine" at Meridian Hall featured Ukrainian opera singers, the Vesnivka Choir, and members of Ukrainian dance schools. "Healing Through Music" at the Arts and Letters Club and the "Stand with Ukraine" concert series represent but a drop in the bucket for all that has occurred in Toronto in 2022 and 2023.

10 Comments about and performance of Victoria Poleva's *Bucha. Lacrimosa,* August 16, 2022, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1596043777464350 (accessed May 17, 2024).

11 BBC Prom with Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra, www.bbc.co.uk/events/em34mb, and part of their live performance of the Ukrainian National Anthem, July 31, 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rjDrhJYA5M (both accessed February 2, 2024).

In Kitchener-Waterloo, Jeff Enns's a cappella choral piece *Litany for Ukraine* has been repeatedly performed in schools and churches. Also in Kitchener-Waterloo, the November 2022 Wilfrid Laurier University Ukraine Benefit Concert contained music by both Ukrainian diasporic and Canadian musicians. Ukrainian folk songs by Meliora Choir, most of whose members had recently arrived from Ukraine, were performed, along with music by Ukrainians Yurij Ishchenko, Stephen Zurakowsky, Mykola Kolessa, Vasyl Yemetz, and Hnat Khotkevych, most composers living/having lived in the diaspora and having faced hardships while in Ukraine. My *Singing to the Children of Ukraine* was one of the Canadian tributes within that concert.[12]

"In Transit Everywhere"—Musicians in Ukraine

While music by Ukrainians and about Ukraine has proliferated in the diaspora, it has often been risky for Ukrainian musicians to play music in their own country. Some of the most notable and brave Ukrainian folk musicians performing today include Ukrainian singer/bandura player celebrity Maryna Krut, whose first cross-country Canadian tour included a spirited, emotive candlelight concert in Kitchener, Ontario on February 2, 2024. In Canada she raised funds for her country, playing in safe space; however, in Ukraine she frequently performs in combat zones.[13] And the Dyvyna Ensemble (*dyvyna* means miracle) originally consisted of five women who sing Ukrainian folk songs in colorful traditional garb. Hailing from the eastern city of Donetsk, which was taken by pro-Russian separatists in the 2014 war and now again by the Russians in the current war, Dyvyna has been singing in defiance of Putin who incorrectly claims that largely Russian-speaking Donetsk is also Russian-allied. After moving to Kyiv and suffering impos-

12 Sources containing information about concerts are found here, respectively: www.myparrysoundnow.com/66546/news/whispering-river-music-concert-to-fundraise-for-ukrainian-aid-on-sunday/, www.elmeriselersingers.com/author/eis/page/4/, www.nowplayingtoronto.com/event/the-sound-of-ukraine-an-immersive-concert/, ucctoronto.ca/events/united-for-ukraine-benefit-concert, www.eventbrite.ca/e/healing-through-music-a-fundraiser-for-ukraine-tickets-703583646627?aff=erelexpmlt, www.eventbrite.ca/e/stand-with-ukraine-benefit-concert-series-for-humanitarian-needs-of-ukraine-tickets-433319960667, September 11, 2023 email with Jeff Enns and www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDcMv4qpDJA, kitchener.ctvnews.ca/laurier-university-hosts-ukraine-benefit-concert-1.6161529 (all accessed February 11, 2023).

13 Maryna Krut, Ukrainian-Canadian Cultural Society of Vancouver Island, uccsvi.ca/krut-2/ (accessed March 6, 2024).

sible circumstances due to the current war, three members of Dyvyna moved to Germany where they perform for Western European audiences. One of the singers, Medviedeva, speaks for millions of fellow Ukrainians when she says: "I don't understand at all in what dimension I am, like I am in transit everywhere."[14]

Composing Music in Response to Tragedy

While much of my music has been joyous, life-affirming, and celebrative, I have, at times, felt compelled to compose music in response to tragedies which have shaken me to the core, music which also seeks hope. I know of few Canadian women who did not feel personally affronted by the horrific shooting of fourteen women at Polytechnique Montréal, December 6, 1989. I was one of various Canadian women composers to respond musically. My *Fourteen Women/Quatorze Femmes,* 1990, performed by Hemispheres Orchestra in Toronto in 1990, created musical statements for each woman killed. I almost miscarried my baby as I travelled to Montreal to commemorate their lives.

The events of September 11, 2001 shocked me into immediately composing an anthemic piece, *How Can We Know,* the very afternoon of 9/11. This was the first time North America had been "invaded" by outside forces in this manner. I knew the great American myth of physical security had been shattered, and we began to have but a *taste* of what much of the world experiences on a daily basis. I asked for guidance within this short song, not knowing how to hope.

My long-standing passion for Africa, and my many trips to South Africa, brought me close to various traumas. One such trauma was hearing a Zulu woman scream for help in the middle of the night. Racing to find her surrounded by violent gang rapers, I surprised them as I silently stood by her; they then disappeared into the night. *Stand by You*, 2003 was my song of solidarity with her.

Being American-born, my sense of outrage knew no limits when the United States invaded Iraq. I contacted John Sloboda, founder of Iraq Body

14 Mansur Mirovalev, "A displaced Ukrainian women's choir sings in defiance of Putin: Dyvyna's repertoire of 300 folk songs from Donetsk is an artistic refutation of Russia's claims over Ukrainian culture," Aljazeera, April 11, 2022, www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/11/ukrainians-sing-in-defiance-of-russias-invasion (accessed September 11, 2023).

Count,[15] an organization devoted to listing the names of Iraqi victims, and with his permission, inserted many of their names into *Piece of a Rock*, 2003. (The title is a pun, of course, for "Peace of Iraq.") Again, hope seemed illusive.

In 2006, Lowell Ewert, a colleague and faculty member at Conrad Grebel at the time and former Chair of Grebel's Peace and Conflict Studies department, suggested I compose music for children dying from war, famine, and disease. Such a topic was too large—how could I address all of these children with integrity? However, my time spent in South Africa brought me into contact with the searing effect of AIDS, not only on adults, but also on children. Thus, *Every Three Children*, 2006, was composed for South African children dying of AIDS. The piece, ranging from sorrow to hopeful courage, was performed multiple times in South Africa, and the CD (bearing the same name) includes guitar tracks by a close friend and leading South African guitarist, Mageshen Naidoo.[16]

Several other songs relating to child tragedies followed, one of which inadvertently led me to Ukraine. *Lobsang* for five Amish girls gunned down in their Amish school in 2006 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was composed the afternoon of the tragedy. Since these girls came from my own Swiss-Mennonite background, with my family roots stemming from Lancaster, my grief was as if they were my own daughters. Hope was hard to find. And *The Blessing*, bringing gentle hope for our friend's daughter who sustains life-time disabilities from a hit-and-run driver, was coincidentally performed by the Ukrainian Philharmonic Orchestra in Kiev before the war.

Composing for Ukraine—Finding a Voice of Hope

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, I had to respond musically. The people of my husband, Lyle Friesen, had lived in Ukraine for nearly a century,[17] so this was an invasion of his people's *homeland*. I tried in vain to find a Mennonite poet from this background who would write lyrics for a song, so I had to create my own text. I hoped to find a voice which, while expressing my own outrage, would resonate with the grief and pain felt

15 Iraq Body Count, listing Iraqi victims during and following the American 2003 invasion, https://www.iraqbodycount.org (accessed May 17, 2024).

16 *Every Three Children*, CD, 2008, , (accessed May 17, 2024).https://carolannweaver.com/cds-2/ (accessed May 17, 2024).

17 Lyle Friesen's people were among the group of Mennonites who were invited by Catherine the Great to settle in what is now Eastern Ukraine in the 1780s, and who began to leave in 1874, moving to Manitoba and the United States.

by Ukrainians. I was surprised by the hope I also found.

Singing to the Children of Ukraine,[18] my first Ukraine-themed piece, was intentionally scored for women's rather than men's voices, plus piano. Since women are suffering their own tragedies, often being separated from men who are conscripted into the army, I wanted to allow this piece to be a uniquely woman's response to the war. Three sections developed—an a cappella wordless outcry stirred by tragic deaths and destruction in Mariupol, a choral/piano song of grief for children and others who have passed away, and a song of hope for recovery and returning home for all who have had to flee.

While composing this work, I met various Ukrainians who were fleeing the war, such as Nataliia Kurhan who left Dnipro, landing in Ontario soon after war broke out. From her first-hand accounts and those of her family and friends, she informed me of many devastating effects of this war.[19] While sounds of this tragedy seeped into my music, I also included a hopeful section, asking Nataliia if this was appropriate. "Yes, keep the hope," she replied, further saying, "Ukrainians need to be optimistic; we need hope; hope makes miracles happen."[20] Her words continuously inspire me to try to better understand what Ukrainians are living with today, both in Ukraine and in the diaspora.

Singing to the Children of Ukraine was premiered at Hawkesville Mennonite Church in Ontario on May 3, 2022, with multiple subsequent choral and solo-vocal performances in Ontario, including the WLU Ukraine Benefit Concert and other university and community-based performances. The American premiere occurred at Mennonite/s Writing 2022: an International Conference, at Goshen College, Indiana on October 3, 2022.

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18 *Singing to the Children of Ukraine* composed in March 2022, is recorded with Rockway Women's choir, Jenny Enns Molodo, soloist, Kitchener, Ontario, June 12, 2022, soundcloud.com/caweaver/singing-to-the-children-of-ukraine (accessed June 14, 2022).

19 Stephanie Villella, "'I had to save my daughters': Ukrainian woman flees to Kitchener," CTV News, March 31, 2022, kitchener.ctvnews.ca/i-had-to-save-my-daughters-ukrainian-woman-flees-to-kitchener-1.5843255. See also Anam Latif, "'We need to help the people who are left back there," *The Record*, March 31, 2022, www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2022/03/31/we-need-to-help-the-people-who-are-left-back-there-ukrainian-family-who-fled-to-kitchener-worry-about-loved-ones-left-in-war-torn-country.html?rf. Also see the gofundme page to raise funds for Ukraine, gofund.me/dbc18edb (all accessed April 2, 2022).

20 Spoken by Nataliia Kurhan as part of *Ukraine Grief* soundscape.

Ukrainian Stories—How Can I Keep Silent?

In May 2022 when Nataliia received news of her relative Ihor being captured and tortured by the Russians, I felt compelled to compose music for him. At the same time, I was being commissioned by Canadian pianist Amelia Grace Yates[21] to compose a piano solo, so I wrote *Spirit Unbound* for Ihor. This short piece attempts to portray the fear, harshness, and cruelty of confinement, beginning with somber statements similar to the beginning of Victoria Poleva's *Bucha. Lacrimosa.* Then, as in Iryna Aleksiychuk's *Glory to Ukraine*, fragments of the Ukrainian National Anthem are presented, but in high register with echo effects as if to suggest a mere phantom of freedom. Finally, hope takes over in a boisterous, gospel-style, declamatory manner, inspired by the uplifting spirit frequently found in traditional music of once-enslaved African Americans. After Nataliia was able help bring Ihor's 16-year-old son, Nikita, to Canada, he recounted his father's capture and torture, which help to explain the anguish expressed in *Spirit Unbound*:

The russians came in the middle of the night and took my father. We had a lot of fear. We had to hide for three weeks. I hid in a closet. We also found out that my father was fed once every three days and tortured by having electrical charges clamped to his fingers, with power turned to the max, until he fainted. Some people couldn't bear this and died. People living nearby have heard constant screams from this place, ever since the russians occupied the town.

Then after three weeks, they put a sack over his head. He thought he would be shot. Instead, they brought him home, but forced him to give them money, otherwise our whole family would be shot. I've never seen my father so scared. The russians told him he had to do everything they demanded, or next time they would take him back to the same pit where he was tortured, but it would be five times worse! They said that the first imprisonment would seem to him like paradise!

My father is under *total control* and cannot leave the immediate area, let alone the country. Yet when he calls me, he still has strength to speak in

21 Amelia Grace Yates, pianist, adjudicator, teacher, www.ameliagraceyates.com/about/ (accessed March 30, 2023). Amelia's words, received by email on April 6, 2023, are used with permission.

Ukrainian, which is risky.[22]

Spirit Unbound was world-premiered by Amelia Grace Yates on March 26, 2023, in Burlington, Ontario, and subsequently performed by her in multiple concerts. As preface to her Burlington performance, she said this: "The solo piece I will be performing is composed...in honour of a Ukrainian man who was captured and tortured by the Russians. If he were free today, this piece would not be so relevant. In the piece, one can hear the tumult of this deadly invasion, balanced with music of hope, and fragments of the Ukrainian National Anthem. Those listening may reflect on the war and the impact on the people of Ukraine."[23] Amelia goes on to describe her role in commissioning and performing this work:

As a musician I am incredibly touched that I can make even a small impact performing music inspired by current world issues. *Spirit Unbound* can encapsulate events of the day that will remain with us. I feel honored to share the story of this heroic man, who represents the strong people of Ukraine.[24]

I then created a composite soundscape, *Ukraine Grief*, in coordination with Nataliia Kurhan, incorporating her voice as she talks about the grief of war. Within this soundscape her *single* voice represents a cantus firmus of spoken word both in English and Ukrainian, allowing the languages to dialogue with each other. By using a calm, steady, almost uninflected voice, she reveals the gravitas and poignancy of millions who are also suffering due to this invasion. Additional layers in the soundscape include air raid sirens from Dnipro[25] plus fragments and loops of my *Singing to the Children of Ukraine* and *Spirit Unbound*. Similarly, Ukrainian composers such as Mariana Sadovska, Iryna Aleksiychuk, Bohdana Frolyak and others work

22 As spoken by Nikita in Russian (spoken by various pro-Ukrainian people in Eastern Ukraine) and translated to English by Nataliia Kurhan in an interview with the author, April 8, 2023, Kitchener, Ontario. "Russian" is intentionally spelled with a small "r", as requested by Nikita and Nataliia. (Surnames withheld for security reasons). It remains unsafe for Ukrainians in occupied Ukraine to speak Ukrainian.

23 *Spirit Unbound*, soundcloud.com/caweaver/spirit-unbound-caweaver-amelia-grace-yatespnomar2623 performed by Amelia Grace Yates in the "Teachers in Concert" at Hamilton Halton ORMTA [Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association] at Port Nelson United, with Yates' words spoken at the concert.

24 All quotes from Amelia Grace Yates, sent by personal email on April 6, 2023, are used with permission.

25 Air raid sirens, sent to Nataliia Kurhan by her friends, Maryna Atanova and Edward Ma in Dnipro, Ukraine, in response to her request for on-site air raid siren recordings, used with permission.

with spoken word and singing to evoke passion, pathos, and empowerment. *Ukraine Grief* is circulated internationally and housed in the library of WFAE (World Federation for Acoustic Ecology).[26]

The Sagas and Music Go On

Many Ukrainians are expressing appreciation for music written in their honor. Mariia Smyrnova, who miraculously escaped Mariupol during the war and now is Theological Studies Graduate Coordinator at Conrad Grebel University College, feels this music "reflects the tragedy of the war in Ukraine very precisely."[27]

However, many disconnects are experienced by those who are relocating to Canada and elsewhere. Recently, a woman who fled Ukraine from Lutsk (her name withheld for security reasons) said, "I don't know where I will be tomorrow," her words echoing those of Medviedeva of Dyvyna, mentioned above. This woman had just moved to her *third* temporary location in a handful of months, working at a job with a salary that does not allow her to rent even a small apartment for her and her two girls. Nor does she know how she can go on. "Yet, we will be fine. I have to be strong," she says, speaking inadvertently for Ukrainians, whether in the diaspora or at home.

In September 2023, I found myself composing a new piano solo, *Beginnings*, for all those who must start again after leaving Ukraine and are attempting to settle into a new country and culture. The piece contains many seemingly false starts, redirections, changes, and almost illogical transitions from one rhythmic/harmonic/tonal area and texture to yet another, as I attempt to reflect what I am hearing from many Ukrainians relocating in Canada. However, I am inspired by their hope that they, along with their country, can survive this war. In tribute to these people, *Beginnings* contains tinges of hope, with the final note being plucked inside the piano on the lowest string. I premiered it September 10, 2023 at Rockway Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario.

It is a high honor and privilege for me to be in touch with these Ukrainians who fled to Canada.

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26 *Ukraine Grief*, soundcloud.com/caweaver/ukraine_grief_with_nataliia_kurhan (accessed April 5, 2023). The piece is housed in the WFAE Library, wfae-library.librarika.com/search/detail/8278205 (accessed June 5, 2023).

27 Mariia Smyrnova, sent by personal email on September 4, 2023. For details of her story, see CTV News interview, www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2408308.

My music can only address even a tiny fraction of their pain, loss, and hope. However, along with pianist Amelia Grace Yates, I too believe in the "small impact" each of us can make by responding in our own voice(s) to this ongoing war. Ukrainian composers and musicians, as mentioned above, are courageously expressing the pathos and bravery of Ukrainians in these challenging days. Their music is indeed a blessing as it expresses the pains of loss and dislocation, while giving voice to courage, inspiring us to listen and respond. Hope can rise out of grief. But in order to compose music of hope, any composer would first need to deal with grief so that miracles could possibly come forth, as Nataliia Kurhan suggests.

Singing to the Children of Ukraine
(Words and music by Carol Ann Weaver, April 2022)

Singing now to the children
Singing now in their day
Singing now to the children
Who are passing now away
Singing now to the mothers/fathers/people
Listen now, a sounding whisper/sound of voices/sound of healing
Ringing 'round the world
Listen now, a sound of courage/sound of returning/coming back to home
Crying all our sorrows
Building for tomorrow
Singing all together
Hoping now, forever.

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Book Reviews

Dora Dueck. *Return Stroke: Essays & Memoir*. Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2022.

Dora Dueck's *Return Stroke* is a memoir and personal essay collection providing vignettes and analyses that span Dueck's life, from her childhood, throughout her time in Paraguay, to the present. The primary threads that run throughout the book are the complexity of motherhood in all its forms and the questions of how to tell a true story—whether through biography or fiction. These foci are used to shepherd the reader through experiences and ideas as varied as the death of a spouse, interactions with food, researching her father-in-law's life, her daughter's coming out, and issues of colonialism in missionary work in the Chaco.

Dueck smoothly uses wit, humor, and poignant imagery to convey relatable stories into which she invites the reader to participate, finding themselves in her journey. This, as Dueck claims in her introduction, is her goal: to "give you to yourself" (2). I was with her, trundling down the alternatingly muddy and dusty roads of the Chaco and vividly absorbed in the immediacies of domestic life. Through her words I was brought out of myself and, surprisingly, back into my own body, my own story, my own locality, retransported to my own southern Manitoba gravel roads and to my children, filled simultaneously with the joy and wonder as well as the overwhelming reality of motherhood, academia, patriarchy, and faith.

The thesis of this collection, as Dueck claims, is that life is change and "creates a story full of plot" (2). The process of reflection upon the changes of the past—in essence, the practice of biography—creates a conversation between the current self and the self of the past. As the title piece suggests, the work as a whole is a practice of "Return Stroke"—drawing on the metaphor of the visible aspect of lightning (38)—"gaining understanding, seeing patterns...enjoying the playful circularity of *then* and *now*" such that "send[ing] inquiry into [the] past...sends something back" (2).

Dueck plays out her process of "return" as a dialectical process of linguistic truth-finding throughout the collection: in her consideration of the interchange between the power of words and writing to shape one's life and

identity; in language as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion—a symbol of the insider/outsider dyad in the case of her experience with Low German in Paraguay (107); and in the possibilities of truth in biography and fiction. She plays out this final idea in various ways, bringing along the works and ideas of famed biographers, journalists, and theorists. She engages them in conversation, tackling ideas such as the paradoxical relationship between memory as unreliable but simultaneously a fundamental locus for identity (in "The Knot at the Beginning"), bringing these voices to bear on her research into the life and death of her father-in-law whom she never met (in "Return Stroke") through archives, hearsay, and his own diaries. Questions of appropriation of story, falsely claiming intimate and special knowledge of the person or group (37), and issues of the writer's own bias and motives (39) are raised as a real influence on the work of truth-telling. Dueck asks if it is even possible to access truth in any viable way (40). Eventually, it seems, she lands on the ultimate mystical, paradoxical nature of writing: that, mysteriously, the writer is able to know one's subject (47)—whether that subject is her father-in-law, the Mennonites of Paraguay, or herself. In some ways, Dueck claims, it is the very act of writing, and of not belonging to the in-group (119; 183; 187), that gives one the ability to know and speak truth, even in fiction. This truth may emerge, perhaps, only after a period of wordlessness, as Dueck details in her own inability to speak the languages of the Chaco which forced her into a time of silence, marginality, and removal from the power to control the story and others (161). As an outsider, she claims, one is "[u]nbeholden to those inside. At an angle to see and hear differently, but also what [is] true" (187).

While *Return Stroke* is an achievement in terms of its portrayal of the beauties and hardships of motherhood, the truth of writing, and insider/outsider dynamics, more could be said about areas she only touches on throughout the collection: the effects of patriarchy and colonialism. Further teasing out the complicity of the Mennonites and mission work in deforestation and colonization (214), supporting violent political regimes because of personal benefit (218-29), and the Mennonite Church's persecution of Queer folks (in "Mother and Child") would strengthen the power of Dueck's collection. But this is a book that invites the reader in, ultimately to learn about themselves. In this goal, she has undoubtedly succeeded.

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Marika Rose. *Theology for the End of the World*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2023.

> *No revelation, however stark or horrible, seems enough to effect real change in the world we inhabit.*
> – Marika Rose

> *Desperation to stave off the worst at any cost turned out to be the path toward the very worst.*
> – Adam Kotsko

These two quotes, both in the introduction, set the scene and tone for Marika Rose's *Theology for the End of the World*. Perhaps beginning to wane just a little, apocalyptic theology remains popular and understandably so given the grand arc and damage of colonialism and capitalism. Could previous generations have imagined that the "success" of wealth and accumulation would turn out to lead to our complete undoing? And while the history is not completely clean and linear, Christianity has been the figure and foundation to many of the challenges we face today.

In an earlier review I wrote[1] comparing Philip Ziegler's *Militant Grace* and Thomas Lynch's *Apocalyptic Political Theology* Ziegler reflects what I call "confessional" apocalyptic theology which tends towards a more assured eschatology about what will happen at the end of the world, while Lynch reflects a more "contingent" or immanent theology that explores the internal dynamics of the situation without appeal to an external authority or any assumption as to the role of the church. I am tempted to say that Rose's work lands squarely in Lynch's stream. However, while Lynch does not tip his hand towards any confessional or ecclesial context, Rose does so. She affirms both that "Theology Can't be Saved" (the title of chapter 2) as well as the possibility of thinking "about what use we might make of Christianity…for the project of taking sides with God against the world" (11).

Rose begins as most apocalyptic accounts do with clarifying that "the world" is not the earth; the world refers to the existing order of things, the symbolic structures of power. It is the task of this book to unpack the way in which the church and its attendant theology have both shaped and remain entangled in the world and how we might respond.

Rose begins with a thoroughgoing pessimism. She argues that "Christi-

1 See *The Conrad Grebel Review* 39.2 (Spring 2021): 151-154.

anity" should be named as one of our sins. It is the name of myriad harms. This statement is not performed in the service of some "spiritual" truth that escapes religion, but simply names the condition we must sit with if we also wish to identify as Christian. This leads to an acceptance that "theology can't be saved." Christians and theologians have a knack for redeeming themselves in the end; it sort of seems baked into the theology! But this has led to endless shifting of blame for what went wrong. Rose attempts to put a stop to this process by claiming that "if we think that there's a good version [of Christianity] that we can work out, we'll never come to terms with…actually existing bad versions of Christianity" (43).

From here chapters unfold, wrestling with "actually existing bad versions of Christianity." The middle section of the book is an extended engagement with the Bible and the church's relationship with family, race, and economics. Each chapter demonstrates how neither the Bible nor Christian history should be understood as an unequivocally "good" approach to these matters, and that even progressive changes were often blind to unintended consequences.

In the final chapters, Rose offers suggestive responses to the situation. In keeping with her use of provocative titles, chapter 7, "God is Useless," outlines the rise of work as next to godliness in the modern age. Despite the massive production of wealth, employment has become more precarious and basic standards of living unattainable. Here the Kotsko quote beginning this review is appropriate. Despite our dramatic doctrines of creation, the fall, and redemption, modernity and the church remain fixated on the fear that what is bad will shackle the possibility of creative and substantial changes. This leads Rose to the next big question: "Why did God create the world in the first place?" To which she replies, we are created for joy. "It's not useful: it's just good" (158). The purpose-driven life valorizes use at the cost of curiosity, play, and ultimately love. Chapter 8 unpacks the fraught history of Christian ideas of slavery and freedom. She covers familiar terrain of Christian endorsements of slavery while connecting this to liberal and modern notions of individual freedom. Here "freedom" becomes the price for the individual to become fully responsible and therefore fully blameworthy. Freedom gives us the "choice" of a just purchase but not a just society.

So, how to seek the end of the world? For some of us it will mean divesting from the world as we are able in acts of dispossession. There are two sides to this. First, it means seeing that some have already been dispossessed by the world. For some, the apocalypse has really and truly already happened. We must learn to align our lives to such people and places. The second is to

recognize the dispossession within. From Paul to Augustine to Freud there is an acknowledgement that we are not even sovereign over ourselves. Such acts require faith.

This is a book the church should be reading. At times the language skews academic, but it is very accessible given the concepts and thinkers it engages. Above all, *Theology for the End of the World* lays down the challenge to be honest about our God, ourselves, and our world: a world regularly revealing its suffering, a world made worse by our fear of the worst, a world perhaps worth ending.

David Driedger, independent scholar and minister of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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Hildi Froese Tiessen, *On Mennonite/s Writing: Selected Essays*. Ed. Robert Zacharias. Winnipeg, MN: CMU Press, 2023.

Remarkably, this new collection of Hildi Tiessen's essays is the first book of her own writing to be published, despite her long and distinguished career as critic, editor, and tireless promoter of "Mennonite/s Writing," a phrase Tiessen coined for the landmark conference celebrating this then-nascent literature at (what was then) Conrad Grebel College in 1990. Tiessen's legendary generosity and crucial role in the flourishing of what is now a widely recognized and ever-expanding body of Mennonite literature in Canada and the U.S. has been widely recognized. Yet it has taken half a century for Tiessen to be convinced to publish a selection of her ground-breaking critical essays. Ably edited (and introduced) by fellow critic Robert Zacharias, himself among the best of the next generation of Canadian Mennonite critics, *On Mennonite/s Writing* is well worth the long wait.[2]

The essays gathered here, as Zacharias notes, reflect the growth of both creative writing by and about Mennonites and scholarly attention to that work, beginning with Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), gener-

2 A disclaimer: Tiessen and I have been fellow travelers, conversation partners, and friends since even before that 1990 conference. My own work (both critical and creative) is given generous attention in some of her essays, and her critical work and organization of readings and conferences have been personally and professionally important to me. This review will not be objective, but I do hope it is fair.

ally regarded as the ur-text of modern Mennonite writing. Arranged chronologically from a graduate school essay on Rudy Wiebe's early novels to a wide-ranging, reflective afterword written for this volume, the pieces form something of a history of Mennonite/s writing over the last half century, especially in Canada. They trace the evolution of both creative and critical writing by and about Mennonites from a few major texts and authors to fields so broad and deep that they defy, or at least resist, neat categories and generalizations. Tiessen's essays also display major developments in her own critical approaches and categories; always searching for relevant criticism and theoretical frameworks, she brings a series of increasingly sophisticated resources to bear on both individual texts and broader questions about the field.

Some of these essays have become iconic, especially those offering broad overviews of the field at particular moments—many delivered at one of the nine "Mennonite/s Writing" conferences that began with the 1990 gathering at Grebel (a tenth is planned for Canadian Mennonite University in summer 2025). The essays grapple repeatedly with key questions of identity and audience: what makes a text, or an author, or a reader "Mennonite"? Tiessen insists from the start on relatively broad definitions, and resists church membership or faith statements as boundary markers; early on she craftily defines Mennonite art and literature as "work produced by individuals who were nurtured within a Mennonite community, who—especially during their formative years—had access to the inside of the *Gemeinschaft*" (40). A second qualifier, often noted, is recognition from both within and outside the Mennonite community; lists of authors, texts, and the awards and plaudits they have received frequently anchor the essays, although Tiessen also pays sustained, welcome attention to lesser-known authors like Ephraim Weber and Dallas Wiebe.

Among Tiessen's strongest, most consistent themes is that Mennonite literature should *matter* to Mennonites. "Critical Thought and Mennonite Literature" notes that her Grebel colleague Jim Reimer once "unselfconsciously" called his new Mennonite theology course "Contemporary Mennonite Thought," "as if to claim all serious Mennonite thinking for theology alone" (127). In fact, Tiessen argues, "the texture of our communal and personal existence as Mennonites and Canadians is nowhere more evocatively (and sometimes, also, provocatively) registered than in the published work of the creative writers our communities have produced" (135).

Tiessen worries, however, that this role for Mennonite writing in Canada—in effect, helping Mennonites understand their own experience—may

be vanishing as that writing becomes less focused on the traumatic dislocations of civil war, anarchy, immigration, and settlement. She returns repeatedly to a 1990 remark by critic Clara Thomas that "the work of Margaret Laurence was able to identify her to herself as the works of Rudy Wiebe were not" (197). Early on, Tiessen argues that Wiebe's work (among others) *does* "identify her to herself" in a way that Laurence's does not. But by 2013, as Canadian Mennonite literature becomes both more diverse and more "mainstream," she worries that this "universal" status will result in Mennonite texts that will be "in effect no longer recognizable as a 'Mennonite' text," and that only a trace might remain "to identify the Mennonite reader to herself" (199).

It is surely true, as Tiessen notes in her rich concluding essay, that over the half-century these essays trace, Mennonite literature has grown from something "remarkably definable and limited" to something much larger, more diverse, and more amorphous. But if the great wave of this literature has evolved into something less easily defined or even named, Tiessen notes, we can still celebrate "the simple fact that Mennonites are writing—about any number of things and for a world-wide audience" (278).

Tiessen modestly attributes her own place in all this to merely being in the right place at the right time, but as any number of writers, critics, and readers who have benefited from her long engagement with Mennonite/s writing will attest, she deserves a great deal of credit for helping to bring this writing into prominence, encouraging writers and critics, and guiding the critical discourse with her clear-headed, deeply researched, rigorous, unfailingly generous critical essays. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in what Mennonite/s writing has been and what it may become.

Jeff Gundy, Emeritus Professor of English and Writer in (Non)Residence at Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio.

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Lauren Friesen and Dennis R. Koehn, eds. *Anabaptist ReMix: Varieties of Cultural Engagement in North America.* New York: Peter Lang, 2022.

How are Mennonites today influenced by the Anabaptist tradition? Editors Lauren Friesen and Dennis R. Koehn cast a wide net as they seek to explore how people within or coming out of Anabaptist contexts engage culture in North America. The editors claim the diversity and pluralism of the perspec-

tives in this book as a sign of the strength of the tradition.

This is an interdisciplinary collection. The editors and some of the contributors have an academic background in theology, but most are writing from their fields of practice or study that include education, literature, agriculture, ethics, medicine, music, theatre, and history (among others).

The book is structured into eight sections: "The Frame," "Anabaptism and the Shifting Terrain," "Ethics of Peace and Justice," "Race and Identity," "Pilgrimage, Trauma and Renewal," "Pushing the Boundaries," "Poetic and Artistic Expression," and "Ethics of Institutional Engagement." It will have been challenging to wrangle such varied chapters into this structure; some chapters could just as easily have gone into other sections since there is often thematic overlap.

There are so many thoughtful writers reflecting on their disciplines and life experience, I found the book exhilarating to read, like jumping jacks for the Anabaptist mind. The themes of peace and nonresistance emerge in surprising ways, along with community and discipleship, justice, and love. The question of identity surfaces again and again.

This book explores Anabaptism as a way of life, often apart from faith in God. The opening essay by Koehn signals this approach by speaking of God as a useful metaphor, and faith as a mirror that tell us about ourselves, rather than having anything to do with divine reality (44). Few of the articles look directly at a living faith, but the articles show that even once faith in a God disappears or is jettisoned, the impact of a faithful community can linger for generations.

Identity is often most clearly articulated at the margins. Race and gender emerge as important locations from which to examine the tradition. In Darla Schumm's contribution, "Musings from a Blind Mennonite Misfit," she combines autobiographical reflection, disability theory, and Mennonite culture in a challenging and memorable way.

Education is one of the most dominant themes in the book. Five articles found in different sections of the book stand out. Doug Hostetter reflects on a lifetime of teaching peace, and the challenges and rewards of interfaith work. James Samuel Logan explores the methodology for teaching about black bodies and incarceration. Lisa Schirch provides an incisive survey of the failure of Mennonite institutions to apply peace in their contexts. Clayton

Funk's analysis in his chapter, "Walking a Tightrope Across the University: Following my Ethical Compass and Hacking Higher Education," and Sofia Samatar's poignant ode to the teaching of Bill Lindsay, continue to resonate in my mind long after an initial reading.

Another dominant theme is the creative expression of Anabaptists in the fields of theater, visual arts, literature, and music. Most of these articles are not found in the section "Poetic and Artistic Expression." Lauren Friesen muses on theater and restorative justice. Bryan Rafael Falcón outlines how his work in theater was influenced by the identity he inherited from his Puerto Rican father and Swiss Mennonite mother. Katie Graber worked on the new Mennonite hymnal, *Voices Together,* and recounts the challenges of reflecting diversity in its pages. Charlene Gingerich describes growing up Mennonite, and how beauty and love for music remained even when family and faith crumbled.

This is a collection that has something for everyone, but not everything is equally accessible. There are some long academic articles with very involved arguments (such as those by Koehn, Kennel, and Ortman in the fields of psychology, religion, and history, respectively). They provide insight to those in their discipline, however general readers will likely find their vocabulary too specialized or the points too detailed. On the whole, however, most of the articles are very accessible, with the authors reflecting autobiographically on their Mennonite upbringing and how it impacts their current cultural reality.

Most of the writers in this book have graduate degrees, and all have university education. Perhaps that explains why there are no current Amish or Conservative Mennonite voices in this collection, since those communities don't encourage or allow their members to pursue higher education. However, those communities are engaging with culture in dynamic ways that can be instructive for all Anabaptists; I think that the absence of their perspectives in the mix of a book like this is unfortunate.

Vincent Harding's short and sharp contribution, "The Beggars are Rising: Where are the Saints?" is a reprint from the 1960s (several of the articles in this collection are reprints). His topic of faith and economic inequality is so important in today's world, yet it's a theme that is not taken up by other authors in this collection. Perhaps if the editors had included more voices

from Mexico or the very southern parts of North America where economic inequality is more pronounced (all the writers are either American or Canadian), this theme would have been more developed.

This is a valuable book for Anabaptists: a harmonious and dissonant symphony of modern Anabaptist life, constantly being remixed for the twenty-first century. As Rachel Epp Buller writes in her poem, "Letters to the Future, 2018 –," "We will become something other than we were." This book is a valuable signpost pointing to these new identities and directions.

Carol Penner, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

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Josiah Neufeld. *The Temple at the End of the Universe: A Search for Spirituality in the Anthropocene.* Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press, 2023.

"I sat in a café, nervously stirring a bowl of lukewarm soup, mustering up the courage to tell my mother I no longer believed in God" (8). That line captures the earnestness with which Josiah Neufeld narrates his spiritual quest. Neufeld grew up in Burkina Faso, where his parents served as missionaries. He moved back to Canada when he was 19 and enrolled in the Bible college his parents had attended. He went on to study journalism and become a writer. Gradually the demerits of the evangelical faith he was raised in added up to an unbearable sum: the supernatural divine interventions that never happened, the appalling ideas of hell and the rapture, the complicity of Christianity in patriarchy and colonialism, the silliness of the Cornwall Alliance and the MAGA movement. Neufeld writes, "I remember the moment I realized that I no longer believed in the story of the saved and the damned. . . I knew, quite suddenly, that none of us were going to heaven and none of us to hell. All of us . . . were simply wanderers in a tragic and beautiful world" (33).

The Temple at the End of the Universe is the narrative of this "no longer believing" and the search that came after. That continued search, and the honesty with which Neufeld relates it, sets the book apart from many other ex-evangelical tales. For instance, Neufeld disarmingly says, "I had no coherent story that explained the world. Having set aside the narrative that sheltered me as a child, I had none to give my children" (4). Honesty and

openness form the channel through which Neufeld's story flows, not only his departure from the Christian faith but also his deep concern for the state of the earth and the research and activism this concern prompted. Note that Neufeld's concern is at times hauntingly rendered: "The good weather held until the last night of our trip. . . The river below us looked like a channel of fire between walls of rock. We'd had a good run, but the weather had finally caught up with us" (13). The narrative context is a canoe trip, but Neufeld is really thinking about climate change.

Neufeld may have set aside his evangelical faith, but he never loses his missionary zeal. The worry that Trump-loving white men driving jacked up pick-up trucks will lead the earth to its fiery doom replaced the earlier missionary concern that dark-skinned inhabitants of southern continents would spend eternity in hell. The former remains a disturbing proposition, and so Neufeld embarks on a quest to find a set of spiritual practices and beliefs in which to root his reborn mission. This eventually leads him, as it did John the Baptist, to solitary days spent fasting (and hiking naked) in the desert.

As the sketch above reveals, *The Temple at the End of the Universe* is essentially a memoir. Someone, the author maybe, or an editor, wanted the book to be about the ecological crisis more generally and the worldviews entangled with it. That book, however, would have needed to engage more deeply with alternative points of view, including alternative views about the solution(s) to the ecological crisis. That kind of a book would have also needed to be more careful with its scientific claims. Early in the book Neufeld writes, "In my lifetime we'd destroyed more than half the wildlife populations on earth" (14). In chapter five Neufeld says, "A warming planet had helped trigger the most catastrophic floods the Midwest had yet seen" (79). Both claims point to distressing realities, but neither is relayed with sufficient precision.

There are two things I often find strange about the memoirs of ex-evangelicals. One is that they often mistake evangelicalism for the totality of Christianity. The other is that, as much as these narrators are generally aware of the curious sociology at work in evangelical communities, they are often blithely unaware of the sociology underwriting their own exodus. Neufeld's memoir gives evidence of a wide exploration of Christianity, but I would have appreciated more wrestling with the second matter. The path out of evangelicalism is by now well worn, and its goads are not only the MAGA movement and the thorny branches of disagreeable doctrines.

The Temple at the End of the Universe is a timely book, and one that offers a helpful snapshot of the spirituality of our time. Neufeld is to be commended for his earnestness and the integrity of his quest. Reading the book alongside

the work of other writers like Paul Kingsnorth or Christian Wiman would provide an interesting study in shared concerns and contrasting paths.

Anthony G. Siegrist, Ontario Director of A Rocha Canada, recently appointed Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

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