

INTRODUCTION

Exploring Theological, Practical, and Cultural Dimensions of Global Mennonite Peacebuilding

Jeremy M. Bergen, Paul C. Heidebrecht, Reina C. Neufeldt

The Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival (GMP hereafter) was held June 9 through 12, 2016, at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. The event brought together people who speak about, write on, and pursue peacebuilding globally from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective, and generated new conversations that otherwise might be separated by roles, academic disciplines, or areas of focus. Planning for the event, several years in the making and co-chaired by Marlene Epp and Reina Neufeldt, drew in many people, including colleagues from other Mennonite institutions. Some 203 people attended the conference and festival, coming from twenty countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. There were several plenaries, thirty-three concurrent sessions, a banquet, a play, a music concert, six art exhibits, several worship services, and conversation cafés.

This special edition of *The Conrad Grebel Review* offers a window into some of the thoughtful offerings that were part of the GMP. It includes articles employing material presented at the conference that have subsequently been peer-reviewed and edited. It also offers brief profiles of peacebuilding initiatives presented at the event (but not otherwise researched, analyzed, or peer-reviewed—a rare format for academic journals to employ). The overall goal of the articles and the profiles is to contribute to scholarship and reflection on global Mennonite peacebuilding.

In this introduction, we first reflect on the conference itself—its purpose, structure, and participants—as the structure was intended to reflect key aspects of Mennonite peacebuilding practice. We then introduce and review the contributions included in this issue. After drawing out some of the unique contributions made by the material in this volume, we suggest

future directions for scholarship and practice.

GMP Background: Purpose, Structure, Participants

Why hold a conference or festival on global Mennonite peacebuilding? After all, at least two dedicated volumes have already been published on the peacebuilding and conflict transformation work carried out by this faith tradition, and ongoing conversations on peacebuilding and peacemaking can be found in various venues, including the Mennonite World Conference and peacebuilding institutes hosted by Mennonite educational institutions.¹ What, then, was GMP's purpose? How did the structure reflect that purpose? Who came, and what did the conference contribute to our understandings of global Mennonite peacebuilding?

Intriguingly, prior to 2016 there had not been a gathering quite like this one, with its purposive engagement of multiple audiences, subjects, and perspectives under the umbrella of peacebuilding. Organizers stated their aspirations in the initial call for proposals as follows:

This conference and festival will bring together academics, practitioners, artists, and church workers from around the world, to dialogue and reflect on Mennonite peacebuilding accomplishment, failures, challenges, and opportunities in varied international settings, past and present. Its purpose is: to explore traditions and contemporary expressions of Anabaptist/Mennonite peace beliefs and practices; to bring together academics and practitioners to learn from each other; to give expression to peacebuilding ideals through the arts; and to assess and re-envision Mennonite peacebuilding practice.

The intention was to bring people together to talk across lines that sometimes unintentionally divide, and this required broad consultation and careful consideration. An international advisory committee provided

¹ Volumes on Mennonite peacebuilding include Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, eds., *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); Andrew P. Klager, ed., *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

helpful input and feedback along the way.²

Each word in the title of the event spoke to a particular part of its purpose. First, the intent was to hear from people who engage with, work on, support, theorize, envision, narrate, or enact peacebuilding around the globe. This was to be a *global* event. Second, GMP would focus on one religious tradition, *Mennonite* or Anabaptist/Mennonite, with reflections offered by people who self-identify with this tradition, by friends and partners who work with Mennonites, or by others rooted in Mennonite peacebuilding models.³ Third, the term *peacebuilding* was chosen to describe the broad array of activities that Mennonites have pursued in order to bring about peace. We recognized that Mennonites have historically prioritized words like nonresistance, pacifism, nonconformity, and peacemaking,⁴ but using the term “peacebuilding” highlighted the practitioner dimension of GMP. It also reflected the current state of scholarship that regards peacebuilding as an active, ongoing process of conflict transformation which occurs at different points and in different ways within and across a conflict spectrum.⁵ Finally, the event was described as both a *conference* and a *festival* in order to signal a desire to include artistic as well as academic and practitioner voices. Planners did not want the event to be purely cerebral, and wanted to make space to engage in, and with, peace through all the senses.⁶

² This committee included representatives from the Peace Commission of the Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and Christian Peacemaker Teams.

³ We recognize that the label “Mennonite” is restrictive, and in most of our documentation for GMP we used the phrasing “Anabaptist/Mennonite” to indicate an intent to include Brethren in Christ and other groups that understand themselves to be Anabaptist but not Mennonite. We retained “Mennonite” in the title because of its continued broad use and recognition in the literature related to peacemaking and peacebuilding. However, this may have limited attendance and participation by people who identify as Anabaptist but not Mennonite.

⁴ Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994).

⁵ Peacebuilding, as defined in the literature, refers to actions undertaken before, during, or after a conflict to address deep-rooted structural and relational causes of conflict, as well as actions that mitigate the effects of conflict. See John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005); John Paul Lederach and R. Scott Appleby, “Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview,” in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

⁶ One fear was that the word “festival” might suggest that we wanted to celebrate and laud

Response to the GMP call for proposals was substantial. The program committee received 180 submissions for consideration, and selected 82 to be included as workshops, individual papers clustered on panels, group roundtable discussions, and artistic exhibits. This meant that, as with many conferences, there were too many concurrent sessions for any one person to attend. Organizers sought to counter this challenge by privileging multiple voices, including artistic performances, and by building in conversation and attention to a deliberate learning agenda on Anabaptist/Mennonite peacebuilding.⁷

A common thread in Mennonite peacebuilding is an emphasis on grassroots efforts and concomitantly engaging multiple voices. GMP planners decided that this was an important ethos to build into the conference structure beyond concurrent sessions and exhibits. This meant that all the plenaries intentionally featured multiple voices engaged in or with Mennonite peacebuilding. We strove to avoid privileging any one particular voice, profession, affiliation, or geographic location. This meant we had three opening plenary speakers from three different continents, four morning storytellers, and a facilitated conversation on giving up privilege and pursuing decolonization for the banquet program. Finally, it meant a commitment to ensure that the conference program was fully available in Spanish and French, and that interpretive services were offered for Spanish-speakers throughout.

Serendipitously, the evening artistic performances that were part of the festival also featured multiple voices. The music concert, *Voices for Peace*, premiered a composition called “Earth Peace” by Carol Ann Weaver. This work drew together stories about peacebuilding and the environment. It also featured the Grebel Balinese Gamelan, the University of Waterloo

all that Mennonites have done, when we are fully cognizant there are problems and failures, and that much peacebuilding work occurs in settings of deep violence and pain—the idea of a celebration then seems misplaced. In the call for papers we noted explicitly a desire to learn from failures and challenges. Yet, partly because we could come up with no better term to signal the intention to include the arts, “festival” remained in the title to counter-balance any dry connotations of the word “conference.”

⁷ The full program and further details are available on the GMP website—<https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/global-mennonite-peacebuilding-conference-and-festival>.

Choir, the Factory Arts string quartet, and soprano Stephanie Kramer.⁸ On Saturday evening, Theatre of the Beat premiered the play *Yellow Bellies*, an exploration of several stories of conscientious objectors in Canada during World War II. The aural and visual modalities opened space to imagine and explore the nuanced dimensions and emotions in Mennonite experiences of peacebuilding. Drum circles welcomed participants on two occasions, one to the conference itself and one to the Friday banquet. The circles were part of a spiritual welcome and acknowledgment of the land upon which Conrad Grebel University College is located, the traditional territory of the Neutral (Attawandaron), Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples, and part of the Haldimand Tract. Yet the beating of the drum and songs of welcome also enabled participants to hear and learn, in a different register, about current challenges in addressing Canada's history of colonialism.

Finally, grafted into the structure of GMP was a learning agenda. The spirit of this agenda was nurtured through afternoon conversation cafés following the concurrent sessions, and through a listening team composed of "surprising pairs." Five questions, developed in consultation with advisory group member John Paul Lederach, guided the conversations: Who are Anabaptist/Mennonite peacebuilders? What do we do? What has changed over time? With what do we struggle? Where are we going? The listening team members spread out over the conference, and drew together their observations in visual and oral form during the closing plenary. Responses to these questions, from the cafés, student recorder notes, and listening team members, appear in "Reflections and Gleanings: A Learning Document of the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival."⁹

Who presented and who came? The GMP aspired to be global, and it met this aspiration, albeit with significant limitations. The majority of participants were local; most held Canadian citizenship (141 of 203 participants or 69 percent). Of the 62 participants who joined from outside Canada, 30 (15 percent) were US citizens; several individuals came from

⁸ Two short excerpts from the concert are available for viewing at <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/events/global-mennonite-peacebuilding-conference-and-festival/multimedia>.

⁹ Compiled by Chinenye Bolaji Chukwuma-Nwuba, Reina Neufeldt, Marlene Epp, Listening Team members, and Conversation Café Team members, with layout by Aurrey Drake. June 2017. Available at https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/sites/ca.grebel/files/uploads/files/gmp_booklet_final_2.pdf.

Colombia (4 percent), India (2 percent), and the Netherlands (2 percent). A significant disappointment was that 15 international participants were unable to attend because of visa challenges or other problems. It is noteworthy that of the presenters who did make it to Waterloo for concurrent sessions, 57 percent were men and 43 percent were women.¹⁰ This is a positive signal that formal discussions of peace in Mennonite circles will no longer be male-dominated.

It was heartening to see a broad range of professional profiles among attendees. Moreover, many presenters in concurrent sessions were identifiable by multiple labels, including academics and practitioners, church workers, formal mediators, or other professionals such as writers, artists, and musicians. A rough coding of contributors' primary professional identity suggests that the presenters included 50 academics, 27 development and peacebuilding practitioners, 25 church activists, and 11 persons with other professional backgrounds, including writers and musicians.¹¹

This CGR Volume

Though the present volume must be understood as emerging from a particular event, it stands on its own as a contribution to written discourse about global Mennonite peacebuilding. It is neither a "conference proceedings" nor a truly representative sampling of presentations. All presenters were invited to submit manuscripts for review, and many more were submitted than could be included. In addition to criteria such as clarity and originality, we gave priority to papers that engaged the three realities—"global," "Mennonite," and "peacebuilding." The result, we believe, is a volume that constitutes multi-disciplinary conversations among scholars, practitioners, and artists about the past, present, and future of global Mennonite peacebuilding.

In general, this volume includes two types of articles. Part I comprises scholarly articles that emerged from presentations at the conference. Some are traditional scholarly pieces engaged with textual sources. These articles, grounded in such disciplines as theology, biblical studies, history, peace and

¹⁰ This assessment is based on presenting gender, and does not represent a nuanced assessment of gendered identities at the conference.

¹¹ This tally does not include plenary speakers unless they also presented in a concurrent session, nor does it include performers in the evening concert or play.

conflict studies, and literary criticism, generally exhibit an appreciation of the beliefs and practices that inform Mennonite peacebuilding, but they also identify substantial criticisms, gaps, and patterns that undermine peace. Other articles are more reflective in tone, engaged in analysis and rumination on peacebuilding initiatives or personal experiences, or both, yet are also constructive and critical. The contributions by Rhonda Harder Epp and Lisa Schirch explicitly integrate visual art.

Part II consists of Peacebuilding Initiative Profiles. These short, invited contributions come from presenters who describe one Anabaptist/Mennonite-related peacebuilding initiative or program, and highlight lessons learned from implementing the initiative. We had expected that Part I would include more articles written by practitioners reflecting on projects with which they have been involved, but in the end we received many more submissions from people working in theology, biblical studies, and history. The inclusion of the Peacebuilding Initiative Profiles in Part II thus helps us present a broader picture of realities on the ground, as well as points of departure for reflecting theologically and practically on the capacity such initiatives to build peace and to re-shape Mennonite understandings of peace witness. Among the many gaps in this volume, we acknowledge that none of the articles or profiles explicitly addresses peacebuilding in the context of Indigenous-Settler relations in North America, although this topic featured prominently in the program.¹²

Insights on Global Anabaptist/Mennonite Peacebuilding Theology and Practice

The contributions in this volume add to an understanding of Mennonite peace theology and peacebuilding practice, and they engage with different, sometimes overlapping literatures, on Mennonite peacebuilding, as we will discuss briefly here.

In a formative study of Anabaptist/Mennonite peacebuilding, *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, Quaker anthropologist Sally Engle Merry offers a cultural analysis of Mennonite

¹² Resources on this theme include Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2013), and special issues of the periodical *Intotemak*, published by Mennonite Church Canada.

mediation and peacebuilding. She observes that “Mennonite religious faith, conceptions of community, and theories of social justice shape the practices of Mennonite peacebuilding.”¹³ She proceeds to identify a series of concepts and practices that seem to guide Mennonite approaches, which Christopher Mitchell and Marc Gopin echo and expand upon in the same volume as external observers of Mennonite peacebuilding.¹⁴ In the present volume, we see not only continuities of these practices and themes, but also new perspectives that question, deepen, or offer a rethinking of the usual norms and practices.

Anabaptist/Mennonite commitments to building relationships and “standing with” people in conflict settings were hallmark features noted by Merry. More recent work has contributed the idea of “empathetic solidarity,” which suggests Mennonite peacebuilding is marked by historical experiences of exclusion and being targets of violence.¹⁵ The strong commitment to solidarity continues to be prominent in peacebuilding work and evidenced in the present volume. It comes through particularly in the Peacebuilding Initiative Profiles, such as the activity in Nigeria, Colombia, and Bangladesh. It also appears in Peter Sensenig’s analysis of Mennonite peacebuilding in predominantly Muslim contexts in East Africa.¹⁶ Additionally, it is manifest in the article by Alain Epp Weaver, who questions the expression of a core religious commitment, pacifism, as part of standing with those in conflict. When Mennonite commitments to nonviolence result in a quiet smugness, which he names as “triumphant pacifism,” they undermine efforts at being in relationship with those in conflict. In this way, Epp Weaver’s article helps expand and uncover a tension in Mennonite peacebuilding that is linked to its firm religious foundation. As Merry and Gopin noted in 2000, while

¹³ Sally Engle Merry, “Mennonite Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation: A Cultural Analysis,” in *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 203.

¹⁴ Marc Gopin, “The Religious Component of Mennonite Peacemaking and Its Global Implications,” in *From the Ground Up*, 233-55; Christopher Mitchell, “Mennonite Approaches to Peace and Conflict Resolution,” in *From the Ground Up*, 218-32.

¹⁵ Janna Hunter-Bowman, “From Resolution to Transformation,” in Klager, *From Suffering to Solidarity*, 115-39.

¹⁶ The interfaith context of some Mennonite peacebuilding is notably developed in Peter Dula and Alain Epp Weaver, eds., *Borders and Bridges: Mennonite Witness in a Religiously Diverse World* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House; Scottsdale, PA; Herald Press, 2007).

Mennonite peacebuilders were often humble and exhibited an extraordinary amount of cross-cultural sensitivity, their commitment to their particular religious beliefs and traditions at times contradicted their commitment to cultural sensitivity, and had the potential to lead to exclusion or unhelpful pressures on people to convert ideologically.¹⁷ Epp Weaver illustrates how this contradiction occurs, and points to the need for careful deliberation on how values and theological convictions shape peacebuilder responses.

In 1991, the Peace Office of Mennonite Central Committee published a booklet entitled *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types*. That document provided a descriptive typology of various approaches to peace theology, including “historic nonresistance” represented primarily by Guy F. Hershberger, the “pacifism of the Messianic community” as developed by John Howard Yoder, the “realist pacifism” of Duane Friesen, the “social responsibility” approach of J. Lawrence Burkholder, and the “nonviolent statesmanship” of Gordon Kaufman, among others. While their own experiences undoubtedly shaped the convictions of proponents of specific types, the booklet categorized ways of thinking about being in the world rather than reflecting on actual practices on the ground. Many authors in *Panorama* may see their work as prophetic, in that they are calling for (Mennonite) communities of faith to view God, the church/world relationship, and Christian discipleship in certain ways. They are commending their constituencies to embody a vision of faithful peaceableness. Thus, John Howard Yoder’s account of the practices of peace both within the church and beyond may be taken not simply as descriptive of Mennonite churches but as a call to Mennonites and other Christians to live up to them. The work of biblical scholars such as Willard Swartley and Perry Yoder, and of theologian J. Denny Weaver, may also be understood in this way.¹⁸

While a vigorous theological discourse about peace is vital, several

¹⁷ Merry, “Mennonite Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation,” 215; Gopin, “The Religious Component of Mennonite Peacemaking and Its Global Implications,” 254.

¹⁸ See especially Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); J. Denny Weaver, *God Without Violence: Following a Nonviolent God in a Violent World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

authors in this GMP volume engage with its limitations. Jennifer Otto responds to the sweeping generalizations that Mennonites have made about the apparent pacifism of the church prior to Constantine, claims that fit a narrative about continuity between early Christianity and Anabaptism but do not do justice to the historical record. Kimberly Penner criticizes the ways that an idealized self-perception of peace churches has often blinded these churches to forms of violence within their communities, including violence against women. She identifies ways that peace theology itself has masked particular arrangements of power that harm, and sketches new directions for a more just and holistic approach. Tom Yoder Neufeld warns against taking just one strand of the biblical witness as normative for peace, and rather recommends a deeper engagement with the wide diversity of voices in the Bible, an orientation that he argues must be in constant, vigorous conversation with the increasing array of practical approaches to peacebuilding.

Mark Jantzen and Grace Kehler address the complexities and contradictions in Mennonite peacebuilding from historical and literary perspectives respectively. Jantzen explores the circumstances in which some Prussian Mennonites dropped their historic commitments to nonresistance. Kehler's analysis of Miriam Toews's novel *All My Puny Sorrows* exhibits the violence that lurks within supposedly pacifist Mennonite communities.

In recent decades, there have been concerted efforts to connect the theological, biblical, and ethical discourses of Mennonite peace theology with the experience and reflection of peace practitioners, peace educators, and concrete peacebuilding initiatives.¹⁹ This was a primary objective of a project that resulted in the edited volume *At Peace and Unafraid*,²⁰ in scholarly engagement with the work of specific peacebuilding organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC),²¹ and in discussions of

¹⁹ J. Robert Charles, "The Varieties of Mennonite Peacemaking: A Review Essay," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76 (2002): 105-19; J. Denny Weaver and Gerald J. Mast, eds., *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Peace Theology in Transition: North American Mennonite Peace Studies and Theology, 1906-2006," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81 (2007): 77-96.

²⁰ Duane K. Friesen and Gerald Schlabach, eds., *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005).

²¹ Alain Epp Weaver, ed., *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding*

contentious issues such as policing and the responsibility to protect.²² The GMP event was itself premised on the assumption that peace theology and peace practice should not be separate silos but mutually informing and challenging discourses. While an earlier mode of peace theology assumed that one sorted out one's views of God, Jesus, church, world, and then lived accordingly, voices such as Epp Weaver's and others draw attention to how experiences on the ground shape not only peace practices but also conceptions of who God is and how God acts.

Mennonite peace theology has also developed in the past seventy years through various levels of ecumenical engagement. Earlier conversations among historic peace churches were primarily theological and European/North American in orientation,²³ while more recent engagements include global and practitioner perspectives.²⁴ Beyond the historic peace churches, the ecumenical contacts and writings of John Howard Yoder, conversations stimulated by bilateral dialogues involving Mennonites and Catholics,²⁵ and the work of Mennonite theologian and ecumenist Fernando Enns are significant.²⁶ The article in this volume by Fernando Enns and Andréas

Networks of Mennonite Identity (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011); *The Mennonite Central Committee at 90: Case Studies and Perspectives*, theme issue, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2011). The *Peace Office Newsletter*, published by MCC from 1998 to 2012, contains substantial theological reflection on practical issues raised by MCC's work.

²² *Mennonites and Policing: An Ongoing Conversation*, theme issue, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2008); *The International Criminal Court and the Responsibility to Protect*, theme issue, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2010); Gerald W. Schlabach, ed., *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

²³ Donald F. Durnbaugh, ed., *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace Issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches 1935-1975* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1978); Douglas Gwyn et al., *A Declaration on Peace: In God's People the World's Renewal has Begun: A Contribution to Ecumenical Dialogue* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991).

²⁴ Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann K. Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004); Donald E. Miller, ed., *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories from African Peacemakers* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007); Donald E. Miller, Gerard Guiton, and Paulus Widjaja, eds., *Overcoming Violence in Asia: The Role of the Church in Seeking Cultures of Peace* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011).

²⁵ For example, Gerald Schlabach and Margaret R. Pfeil, eds., *Sharing Peace: Mennonites and Catholics in Conversation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013).

²⁶ Fernando Enns, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the*

Pacheco shows how ecumenical contacts have shaped and deepened peace church theology, just as peace church theology has prompted a broadening of the discourse of peace within the ecumenical movement and in other Christian traditions. Mennonites have much in common with many Christians—not only a commitment to seek peace but more basically the conviction that God’s reality and agency in the world matters for all aspects of life, including peacebuilding. Moreover, as Mennonite peace theology has developed a more complex vocabulary for the complexities and ambiguities of peace, there is in turn greater potential for substantial, fruitful exchanges between theologians and the practitioners who have long recognized and worked within those complexities.

An important feature of Mennonite peacebuilding that Merry identified was a practice she termed “not taking charge.”²⁷ It refers to a deliberate effort to avoid power. She identified this practice as a positive feature of Mennonite peacebuilding, one that focuses on Mennonites playing a background, facilitative role rather than stepping in and introducing processes from the outside or being strong-arm mediators. The theme of not being in charge has also emerged also in peace theology discourse. It may refer not only to the refusal to take charge in political or social settings but also to an epistemological humility that detects violence in attempts to seize control of knowledge.²⁸ More fundamentally, it is rooted in a trust in God’s power and agency in the world, an agency epitomized by Jesus’ self-giving love.

Several authors in this volume draw attention to blind spots that emerge from this practice of Mennonites disavowing, or claiming to disavow, particular kinds of human power. Lisa Schirch provocatively outlines how power affects conflicts within Mennonite communities, and how Mennonites

Ethics of Nonviolence, trans. Helmut Harder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007). Various World Council of Churches (WCC) initiatives, such as the Decade to Overcome Violence, reflect Enns’s influence. See World Council of Churches, *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 2011).

²⁷ Merry, “Mennonite Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation,” 208-09.

²⁸ See Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006); John Howard Yoder, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder’s Nonviolent Epistemology*, ed. Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

have tended to align themselves with external powerful structures (such as having their enemies defined by the state) that contribute to injustice and conflict. Tobin Miller Shearer examines the blind spot of Mennonite peacebuilding with respect to race, racism, and whiteness. Kimberly Penner does so with respect to violence against women within communities of faith.

At times, Mennonite peacebuilding work displays “keen attention to differences in social power and the forces that produce these differences” as part of confronting social inequality.²⁹ This is present in Geraldine Balzer’s examination of how a service learning trip to Guatemala for high school students helps them understand the effects of colonialism and globalization. This initiative is part of one Mennonite secondary school’s efforts to prepare students for a life of faith, service, and a commitment to building peace. At the same time, as Schirch and Miller Shearer point out, the many good intentions informing any peacebuilding practice must continually be re-examined.

Where to Go from Here?

Mennonite peace theology discourse has moved beyond traditional questions of non-participation in war to examining peace within a more holistic view of the nature of the church and its mission in the world. Similarly, the value of “not being in charge” may extend beyond discussion of whether Christians or Mennonites should hold certain high political offices to broader questions of how to embody vulnerability, openness to others, and deep humility. Peace theology is not only seeking to move from text and theory to practice, it is being challenged and reshaped by attending to blind spots and harm in actual practice, as well as by experiences of those engaged in practical peacebuilding work. These are areas well worth further examination and exploration.

At the same time, there may be a tension between the value of not being in control and greater attention to practice, especially if attention to best practice becomes a means of taking control. Theologically, the logic of not being in control is premised on trust in the reality and agency of God. Humans are not the only agents in any given situation, though they often speak and write as though this is the case. To raise this issue is not to imply

²⁹ Merry, “Mennonite Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation,” 211.

that God's presence can either be discerned on any "side" of a conflict (the danger of projection is perennial), or be in any way specified in advance. One key question emerging from the GMP and this volume is how the reality of God matters for Mennonite peacebuilding. This is not the same question as how *faith* in God matters, which attends to the human side of the equation, though indeed faith will be part of how the difference that the reality of God makes will be discerned. It is equally not a question that is necessarily particular to *Mennonite* peacebuilding. It is a basic question for Christians, and indeed for theists of other religious traditions who are engaged in the work of peace.³⁰

In concluding this introduction, it seems fitting to return to the question of Why? Beyond articulating a rationale for the conference and festival, why do conversations about global Mennonite peacebuilding continue to matter? Would we answer this question differently either in light of the way the GMP event unfolded or in light of the outputs captured in this volume?

Judging from the level of interest, the diversity of participants, and the multiplicity of ongoing agendas celebrated by the GMP, much work remains and new challenges are certain to emerge. There is a strong interest among conference participants in continuing to gather and cultivate closer relationships. As well, there is more need than ever for critical reflection and renewed practices, and it is not too soon to begin dreaming about a follow-up event in the coming years. However, this raises the question as to who is best placed to carry this agenda forward in a sustained way. Are institutions of higher education able to convene conversations that fully address the needs of practitioners, church leaders, and artists, as well as academics? The contributions to this volume suggest that academic institutions bring scholarly strengths but also have limits. Perhaps the next time around, another kind of host should be encouraged to initiate the gathering. For example, could a globally representative organization, such as the Mennonite World Conference Peace Commission, marshal the resources to conduct such an undertaking? Might the proposed Global Anabaptist Peace Network

³⁰ Developing better practices for evaluation of religious and interreligious peacebuilding is a current focus in peacebuilding assessment efforts, such as the "Effective Inter-religious Action in Peacebuilding" initiative of the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium.

be a source for organizing it?

Another lesson from the GMP is that conversations about global Mennonite peacebuilding matter to more than just Mennonites. Countless partners and friends have been inspired by their interaction with Mennonite peacebuilders, and many Mennonites have been profoundly shaped by their interaction with peacebuilders beyond the Mennonite tradition. As these conversations continue in person and in print, we recommend further expansion of the range of voices and the agenda addressed.

Jeremy M. Bergen is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theological Studies, Director of Theological Studies, and Editor of The Conrad Grebel Review, at Conrad Grebel University College. Paul C. Heidebrecht is Director of the Kindred Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement, and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Conrad Grebel University College. Reina C. Neufeldt is Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College.