"My Peace I give to you, not like the world gives": Peace and the Multi-varied Wisdom of God

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Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.
(John 14:27)

This Johannine text has been appearing at the bottom of recent Christian Peacemaker Teams e-mails. We might be surprised, since peace-oriented Anabaptist Mennonites typically prefer Luke's Jesus, the poverty worker and peace activist, or Matthew's preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, to John's divine "mystic." Paul is often deemed even less "Anabaptist." With the exception of the great peace hymn in Eph. 2:14-16 or his trenchant words regarding the "powers," Paul's conceptualizing the "gospel of peace" as first and foremost reconciliation with and by God seems increasingly distant from much of our peace discourse.

Jarring in another sense is the Johannine text's positing of a stark dissonance between peace as offered by Jesus and as offered by "the world." Does such a harsh distinction fit contemporary Mennonite understandings of peace and peacebuilding? I wish to respond to this question by exploring the Bible's wisdom tradition. As I will show, that tradition is highly variegated, marked by deep tensions, even fissures, but also by a tension-filled unity. As such, it can shed light on the likewise variegated and tension-filled Anabaptist Mennonite understandings of peace. Moreover, it holds the promise of drawing together what often wants to come apart.

I will begin by acknowledging with deep gratitude the courage, passion, creativity, and wisdom that has marked recent decades of Mennonite peacebuilding. Only a few short decades ago, Mennonite public engagement for peace was mostly restricted to refusing to take up arms, either in self-

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defence or in service to the state. Even though we called it "our peace position," we spoke less of peace than of conscientious objection or of nonresistance. "Peace" would more likely have referred to having "peace with God." In fact, many Mennonites, including influential teachers and writers, were explicitly suspicious of the "worldly" (my word) political objectives and aggressive methods of peacemakers we today revere, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.[1] This aspect of the Mennonite peace tradition no doubt instilled a peaceable communal character of humility and solidarity with those in need, most especially with those within the household of faith.[2] At the same time, the church/world dichotomy made it difficult to know whether and how to engage the violence of the world, and also often masked the presence of violence, physical and systemic, in home and congregation.

Things have changed dramatically in recent years, as has been well documented.[3] The separated ones of yesteryear have become determinedly "worldly," taking cues from Jeremiah's famous letter calling on the exiles in Babylon to "seek the shalom of the city" (Jer. 29:7).[4] The reactive stance of refusing to take up arms has given way to peace*making*, and then peace*building*, that is, to a decidedly active stance. "Peace" is thus typically paired with "justice" (as in Fernando Enns's "just peace" or Glen Stassen's

[1] E.g., Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1946), 220. For debate among Mennonites regarding the civil rights movement, see Tobin Miller Shearer, *Daily Demonstrators: The Civil Rights Movement in Mennonite Homes and Sanctuaries* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010).

[2] E.g., the founding of Mennonite Central Committee in 1920.

[3] See, for instance, John R. Burkholder, "Peace," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Peace&oldid=134475, accessed August 15, 2016; Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1996); Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Varieties of Contemporary Mennonite Peace Witness: From Passivism to Pacifism, from Nonresistance to Resistance," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 243-57; John D. Roth, "The Emergence of Mennonite Peacebuilding in an International Perspective: Global Anabaptism and Neo-Anabaptism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (2015): 229-52.

[4] This highly influential *Leitmotif* was introduced into Mennonite peace discourse by John Howard Yoder. See John Howard Yoder, "See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun," in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-78; reprinted in John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 183-204.

"just peacemaking"[5]), which too is conceptualized as social activism. Such peacemaking takes in wide-ranging resistance to violence, war, injustice, and oppression, from the domestic realm to the public realm, but more importantly finds expression in positive engagement—hence "peace*building*." Let me illustrate briefly with some examples. Mennonites have been highly influential pioneers in restorative justice.[6] At the instigation of Ron Sider in his famous Mennonite World Conference address at the Assembly in Strasbourg in 1986,[7] we have been "getting in the way" of hostilities and standing in solidarity with victims as Christian Peacemaker Teams, deliberately collaborating with those who do not share the Christian faith.[8] We have responded to sexual abuse with increasing determination, most especially within the context of the church.[9] In short, Mennonites have contributed to an exponentially expanding fund of practical and theoretical knowledge in conflict analysis and transformation, which we then teach in peace studies programs at Mennonite institutions and beyond. In short, Mennonites have deliberately become "worldly" in peacemaking and peace teaching. This is to be celebrated, I believe, as integral to what the Bible calls "wisdom."[10]

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[5] E.g., Fernando Enns and Annette Mosher, eds., *Just Peace: Ecumenical, Intercultural, and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013); Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992); Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

[6] The contributors to this field, in both practice and writing, are too numerous to cite. Two of the most influential pioneers are Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1990), and John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principles by a Pioneer in the Field* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003).

[7] Ron Sider, "God's People Reconciling," address to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Strasbourg, 1986, www.cpt.org/resources/writings/sider.

[8] See the overview of the history and development of CPT, as well as a literature review of writings by CPTers in Alain Epp Weaver, "'Getting in the Way' or 'Being-With': Missiologies in Tension in the Work of Christian Peacemaker Teams," *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 19 (2011): 260-77.

[9] The case of John Howard Yoder is most notorious, given his singular role in Mennonite peace theology. See the whole issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015).

[10] Illustrative of this deliberate and increasingly confident "worldliness" is *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross*, ed. Duane K. Friesen and

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Biblical wisdom is not a homogeneous tradition, or even a literary genre. It encompasses Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and many of the psalms, but also the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus (or Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach) and the Wisdom of Solomon, and shapes a good deal of the New Testament as well. Followers of Jesus drew heavily on the wisdom tradition to articulate their convictions about Jesus, his mission, and his identity. The wisdom tradition carries within it all of the tensions and contradictions of real life.[11]

With respect to "worldly" peacemaking as reflective of biblical wisdom, we note especially in Israel's proverbial wisdom a profound, if discriminating, openness to the manifold learnings from human experience.[12] Such openness is informed by the fundamental conviction that this world has been created with and by Wisdom[13] who permeates "all things" (Prov. 8:22-31; Wis. Sol. 7:15-8:1). Not surprisingly, the popular and courtly wisdom of Egypt, Babylon, and Greece thus left its fingerprints all over this practically and experientially oriented wisdom in the Bible. Important for us as heirs to a separatist and nonconformist tradition is to recognize that this aspect of biblical wisdom provides both context and precedent for the wisdom of our present-day peacebuilders, theoreticians, and teachers, who both contribute to and learn from the wisdom of "the world." We may not have Solomon to whom we can attribute such wisdom, as the Bible typically does, but we do have a growing number of peace sages whose impact is felt far beyond

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Gerald W. Schlabach (Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2005). Immediately relevant to our present focus is Lydia Harder, "Seeking Wisdom in the Face of Foolishness: Toward a Robust Peace Theology," in ibid., 117-52.

[11] Among countless introductions to biblical wisdom, see my introductions in *Ephesians. Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2002), 362-64, and *Recovering Jesus: the Witness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 317-25.

[12] "Discriminating" because wisdom was conceived not only as the architect of creation (Prov. 3:19; 8:22-31), but also as Torah personified (Sirach 24), that is, a cosmic embrace running up against the specificity of Torah. This necessarily invited a constant process of discernment among the wise, accompanied inevitably by sometimes fierce debate—akin to the debates among Mennonites regarding the nature of peace.

[13] With a suggestive touch of whimsy, Wisdom (Hebrew: *hochmah*; Greek: *sophia*) was personified as God's first creation, daughter, and 'master architect' of creation (see esp. Prov. 8:30; cf. Wis. Sol. 7).

the Mennonite and broader church community. There is profound biblical/theological warrant for such engagement.

Israel's variegated wisdom tradition contains unresolved, indeed unresolvable, tensions. This too is relevant to our peacemaking. Proverbial and practical wisdom, rooted in everyday experience and responsibility, with its clear sense of justice tied to cause and effect, and thus to a rather straightforward calculus of punishment and reward, stands in stark contrast to the tired cynicism of the Preacher (Qohelet/Ecclesiastes) or Job's obstinate protest against incomprehensible, unprovoked, and unjust suffering. That too is wisdom, rooted in human experience, only grappling now with the foundation-shattering mystery of implacable suffering of the righteous or innocent.

Let me suggest that our peacebuilding efforts, most particularly our pedagogy, have in the past half-century less in common with Qohelet and Job than with the more confident and optimistic wisdom of Proverbs and Sirach. Such recent efforts appear to be largely informed by the conviction that violence, war, and injustice can and will give way to peace through better information, education, and strategies, and that enlightened efforts at peacebuilding will be rewarded by success.[14]

To be sure, not all Mennonites have shared this confidence. For example, the older Mennonite ethic of nonresistance, forged in experiences of oppression and violence, was grounded both in the expectation of divine vindication of the faithful and in a clear distinction of church and world. It was aligned with a very bleak view of a "fallen" world and sinful human beings, who would and *could* know no peace apart from divine redemption in Christ. Such a stance has some affinity with the darker strain of wisdom in Ecclesiastes, with regard to what can be expected from efforts to change the world through education and more enlightened strategies. Further, many working for peace have had their efforts repeatedly stymied by spiritually and culturally deeply-rooted systemic violence and oppression. Christian

[14] The mission statements of peace studies programs at Mennonite colleges and universities, as presented on their websites, illustrate this abundantly. Indeed, the rapid expansion of such programs, well beyond the Mennonite or religious community, is in no small measure related to the optimism of the past decades that society is on a trajectory toward less violence and more peace, an optimism strained by the rise of xenophobic and militaristic populism.

Peacemaker Teams have thus placed great stress on spirituality and prayer as sustaining peacemaking in contexts where the odds are stacked against their efforts—which they typically are.[15]

More broadly, the rise in our day of authoritarian populism, notably in Europe and North America—symptom and cause alike of ignorance, impotence, anger, and fear—may be a harbinger of a future in which the optimistic wisdom that has marked our peace activism, advocacy, and teaching in the past half-century is met with incomprehension, even hostility, rather than receptivity—including from Christians. This is sure to force peace-oriented Mennonites into the kind of crisis that biblical wisdom itself experienced in the face of unremitting violence and oppression, and the shattering of confidence in the connection of effort and success. We may be revisiting the wisdom of our forebears—biblical, Anabaptist, and Mennonite—and rediscover that suffering is a close companion to peaceableness.

Are we prepared for this, not just personally but theologically and ideologically? Are our peace study programs preparing us for a world in which violence, war, and oppression are gaining ground? Do we give thought to what might sustain hope and commitment to peacemaking in such a world? It is, of course, a world in which many of our sisters and brothers in the faith already live out their commitment to peace, whether we think of the violence visited upon vulnerable minorities in our cities, upon First Nations in North America, or upon our sisters in brothers in war- and oppression-torn areas.[16]

There is yet another strain of wisdom, visible for Christians in greatest relief in the wisdom writings we know as the "New Testament." It is a wisdom of hope amidst despair, of faith and trust in the face of doubt, of love amidst hostility, of violence subverted through suffering, of deliberate vulnerability[17] as combat against "the powers." It is a wisdom of baffling patience, persistent

[15] Epp Weaver, "'Getting in the Way' or 'Being-With,'" 260-77; see also the trenchant observations by C. Arnold Snyder, growing out of his directing Witness for Peace in Nicaragua: "The Relevance of Anabaptist Nonviolence for Nicaragua Today," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 123-37.

[16] Roth, "The Emergence of Mennonite Peacebuilding," 246-52.

[17] Might this be a more fitting way of capturing *Wehrlosigkeit* (defencelessness) as a chosen stance than "nonresistance"?

hope, and urgent anticipation—eschatological confidence and flexibility, all at once. Such wisdom is participation in the patient love of the creator, expressed most fully in Jesus.

The connection between wisdom and Jesus is critical for us. Much of the NT's portrait and narrative of Jesus is drawn from Israel's rich and variegated wisdom tradition.[18] Jesus is a peaceable sage, speaking in parables and aphorisms, many of them proverb-like, drawing on and illuminating everyday human experience. He appears announcing the reign of God, inviting people into a relationship of trust and intimacy with God, evoking the striking words from Wisdom 7:27, where "in every generation [Wisdom/*Sophia*] enters holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets." The narrators of Jesus' life go so far as to identify him explicitly with the personified wisdom of Proverbs 8 and 9, as well as Sirach 6 and 24, where Wisdom/Hochma/Sophia created the world and loves to hang out with humanity, incarnating God's gracious Torah. When Jesus is accused of having too good a time associating with sinners as a drunk and glutton, Matthew has him counter: "Wisdom is vindicated by all her deeds!" (Matt. 11:19;[19] cf. Luke 7:35). John's narrative begins with a wisdom poem of the *Logos*. It could just as easily have been of *Sophia*. Like Wisdom in Proverbs 8, *Logos* is intimately identified with God from before creation; indeed, it is through *Logos* that all things were created (John 1:1-4). This theme is no less forcefully present in the great christological (or sophiological) hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, where Christ is the one through whom all things in heaven and earth, including the powers, have come into being.

I draw attention to this nexus of Jesus-wisdom-creation to show that NT writers saw in Jesus a Messiah, a liberator, but just as much a wisdom that is world-generating, world-friendly, and world-befriending. By confessing Jesus as *Sophia* incarnate, the poor Galilean village teacher and healer is linked to both Torah and creation, to all that God demands of humanity (e.g., Matt. 5:17; 11:25-30; cf. Sirach 6:18-37; Sirach 24), and to all creation in its endless variety ("all things," Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:10). This is what James,

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[18] Instead of christology (or messiology), we might, given the prominence of wisdom (*sophia*) in relation to Jesus, also speak of "sophiology." It is not an exaggeration to speak of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate (logos/Sophia becoming flesh; Matt. 11:19; John 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:23-24).

[19] Compare also Matt.11:28-30 with Sirach 6:23-29.

in the letter linked by tradition to Jesus' brother, calls the "wisdom from above," a wisdom that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of justice is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17-18). Creation, peace, and justice are intimately connected both in scope and purpose, and are fully expressed in the love of God in Christ, as Paul would put it (e.g., Rom. 5:1-11).

To link the biblical tradition of Wisdom as engaged in creation, at home in the world, and "delighting in the human race" (Prov. 8:31), with the Jesus of John 1 and Colossians 1, provides strong warrant for followers of Jesus to see their passion for peacebuilding as nothing less than participation in the Creator's love for, and delight in, the world and its inhabitants.

I return to the complexity of the wisdom tradition. Just as there is a collision between the practical optimism of Proverbs and Sirach and the disorienting wisdom of Job and Ecclesiastes, so there is a collision in the NT between *Sophia/Logos'* joyful creation of the world and its inhabitants, on one hand, and the reception she/he receives when coming to "what was his own" (John 1:11; cf. in contrast Sirach 24), on the other. *Logos* is not welcomed but met with lethal resistance to the offer of peace—death by torture on a cross. Just prior to being executed, Luke's Jesus looks down on Jerusalem, weeping, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:41). Jesus' lament echoes that other weeping prophet, Jeremiah:

> *They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,*
> *saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.* (Jer. 6:14; 8:11)

In the eye of evangelists and apostles, the killing of Jesus was nothing less than rejection of divine Wisdom. Jesus as both emissary and enactor of peace was brutally rebuffed. These sages reached back to the wisdom trope of the suffering righteous one who falls victim to the violent and callous.[20] Importantly, that sapiential story line also contains the promise of divine vindication of the innocent righteous one, along with retribution on his

[20] Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and quite possibly Wisdom of Solomon 2, among other texts, have left their mark on how evangelists shape their passion narratives. See also Acts 3:14, 7:52.

tormentors.[21] But that is exactly what did not happen in the case of Jesus.[22] Yes, the righteous one was raised, and thus vindicated. But what about his tormentors?

It is precisely here that we begin to plumb the depth of the "gospel of peace."[23] The most intense moment of rejection becomes the most intense moment of reconciliation. The crucifixion of the messenger and enactor of peace comes to stand not for the defeat of peace, but for its greatest enactment (Eph. 2:14-16). As Paul rightly recognizes, this is scandalous, conventional-wisdom-shattering craziness, where the violence of the human rejecting of peace becomes the divine making of peace. But he recognizes too that in this moment Wisdom shows herself at her wiliest. Listen to his taunt: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [. . .] Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor. 1:20-25). However crazy in the eyes of "the world," the cross is nothing less than the saving [peacemaking] power of God (1 Cor. 1:18; cf. Rom. 5:6-11).

Such divine foolishness, such "wisdom from above," is not captured by system or theory, but is expressed best in poetry and hymnody. The great hymn at the center of Eph. 2:11-22, one of the greatest peace texts in the Scriptures,[24] speaks of Jesus as "*our* peace," where "our" always means "of us *and* our enemies." Jesus comes as an evangelist of peace and as a maker of

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[21] See, e.g., Wis. Sol. 2-5.

[22] Compare, e.g., the parable of the vineyard or "wicked tenants" in Matt. 21:33-46 (parallels Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), which is placed within the passion context precisely to sharpen the surprise.

[23] Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17, 6:15. The "gospel of peace" must not be taken as shorthand for an Anabaptist stress on peacemaking and pacifism. As consistent as such peaceableness is with the gospel of peace, that gospel runs deeper and wider in scope. The "gospel of peace" is synonymous with the more frequent "gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 1 Thess. 2:8, 9; 1 Pet. 4:17), "gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 4:4, 9:13; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 3:2), or the "gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13). While current in Roman political propaganda, its use in the NT is consistent with, and arguably dependent on, Isa. 52:7.

[24] See my explorations of this text in Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians,*106-37, and "'For he is our peace': Ephesians 2:11-22," in *Beautiful upon the Mountains: Biblical Essays on Mission, Peace, and the Reign of God*, ed. Mary H. Schertz and Ivan Friesen (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies/Scottdale, PA, Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2003), 215-33; also Ulrich Mauser, *The Gospel of Peace: A Scriptural Message for Today's World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 151-65.

peace (2:13-16)—indeed, as Peace personified (2:14). But he makes peace, reconciling hostile and estranged persons and groups, and between them all and God, by "killing enmity" (Revised English Bible), murdering hostility through his own murder on the cross (2:16). He makes peace, moreover, by creating a "new human" in one body, where new creation and raising to life becomes the reward not simply of the righteous but of "us and our enemies," liberated together by grace (cf. also 2:1-10).

This is wisdom against wisdom, divine craziness against the "wisdom of the world." This is peace against peace; justice against justice; gospel against gospel. Such wisdom does not fit the cause-and-effect kind of wisdom that pervades analysis and strategy, nor the "eye-for-an-eye" wisdom, in which the law of *talion* is employed to restore order after harm. It decidedly does not share in Qohelet's skepticism. The wisdom of the cross makes sense only in light of the creator's love for recalcitrant humanity.[25] Such wisdom is ingenuity, driven not by stratagems and theories but by fathomless love for creation, a love so fierce it is willing to pay any price. This is truly just peace, true restorative justice, a peace that not only reconciles but recreates godless sinners into a new humanity (Eph. 2:15), into the justice of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

How much is such wisdom—scandalous, suffering, self-giving, and life-giving to enemies—intrinsic and essential to our peacebuilding and teaching? We should ask ourselves as Mennonites committed to peace whether we still hear in the call to peacemaking the call to take up "our" cross (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) or to preach a crucified Messiah (1 Cor. 2:2)? Is the anticipated surprise of resurrection a premise of our peacebuilding? Or does our passion for better methods and strategies of peacebuilding have the potential to blind us to the *miracle* of love, which will always be scandalously patient, ravenously urgent, hopeful beyond hope, and ingenious as only love can be? Is it possible that our commitment to nonviolence can become an ideological blinder to the wonder of the wisdom

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[25] Cf. Wis. Sol. 11:20-12:2; Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 5:6-11; cf. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Power, Love, and Creation: The Mercy of the Divine Warrior in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Loren L. Johns (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 1999), 174-91.

of the cross, the wonder of divine foolishness "in Christ"?[26] I do not intend to suggest here that we should be any less committed to nonviolence, or that we should not deepen and expand the wisdom of experience in practical peacebuilding, and eagerly offer such wisdom to others. These commitments are clearly in the spirit of seeking the shalom of the city. However, I am concerned that cross and resurrection, so essential to any biblical account of the gospel of peace, not be forgotten: more, that this gospel serve as the motivation, vision, and deep content of our peacemaking.

I anticipate the objection that this is *Christian* tradition, too specific, and in its claims too exclusivist—too hegemonic, even—for the "worldly" context in which we wish to build peace. After all, we did not invent peace and justice, nor do we own them. As true as that is, it was no less true in the time of Jesus. Jews, Greeks, and Romans all knew peace: for Jews it meant the end of Roman occupation; or the end of hunger and disease; or the reestablishment of the royal house of David; or, more broadly, the establishment of God's kingdom, cleansed of godless sinners. For Romans peace meant the subjugation of restive peoples to the vaunted *pax Romana*, an empire unthreatened by internal and external enemies. The Roman "gospel" was peace premised on superior power and cultural hegemony—"peace and security," as Paul references the imperial slogan (1 Thess. 5:3). Greeks and Romans went so far as to deify Peace/Pax/Eirene as a goddess. And they

[26] In part because of the commitment to peace and nonviolence, Mennonites have often privileged the NT at the expense of an appreciation of the whole canon. More recently, commitment to nonviolence has subjected the NT itself to critique and large swaths of it to disuse. Recently atonement, most particularly as centered on the cross, has become the focus of intense debate. E.g., Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); Ted Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement: The Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013); Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, eds., *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US/Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 73-96.

certainly all knew justice: for Jews, reward and punishment premised on adherence to God's will; for Romans, a notion of blind impartiality that still shapes much of our judicial and legal system.

Thus, when our biblical forebears in the faith employed terms like "peace," "justice," and "gospel," they were employing terminology already at home in the wider world. They intended thereby not only to find common ground with their interlocutors, but to challenge "peace as the world gives it." When they used terms like "peacemaker" in close proximity to "son of God," as they did for Jesus and for his followers (cf. Matt 5:9), they both mimicked and challenged Caesar's claim to those cherished descriptors. Are we content to employ "peace" as given to us by "the world"? Or is our terminology, our meaning, informed by the wisdom of the cross—more broadly, by "the gospel of peace"?

There will undoubtedly be contexts in which a full understanding of peace informed by biblically grounded faith may need to be muted or placed in the very fine print, because it might not fit or be intelligible. Tragically, it may at times be unintelligible in relation to peace because of betrayal by a church that has used the cross as weapon. We may thus need to talk of peace and justice in Esperanto, as it were. We may have to let our actions—peace*making*, peace*building*—do our talking for us. Regardless of context, "seeking the peace of the city" places witness at the center of our peacebuilding. Translation is thus unavoidable; more, it is our calling.[27] The more problematic the contexts of our peacebuilding, the greater the urgency not to forget our "first language,"[28] which knows peaceable justice and just peace as centered in the Wisdom coming in the peacemaking, peace-teaching, crucified, and resurrected Christ. Such particularity of content dare not get lost in translation. After all, the Christ who is "our Peace" is also the world's peace. That is what the identification of Jesus with wisdom tells us. The memory of such wisdom, even when not always fully articulable "out there," and never without translation, is nurtured in prayer, worship, and

[27] John Howard Yoder repeatedly stressed the missiological dimension of such "bi-lingualism," as in "See How they Go with Their Face to the Sun" (note 4 above).

[28] This point has been made repeatedly by many Mennonite scholars. For examples, see Ted Koontz, "Thinking Theologically about War against Iraq," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77 (2003): 93-108; Duane K. Friesen, "In Search of Security: A Theology and Ethic of Peace and Public Order," in Friesen and Schlabach, *At Peace and Unafraid*, 55.

shared confession. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood this when, during the darkest days of the Third Reich, he spoke in his secret seminary and wrote in his letters from prison of *Arkandisziplin*, the secret disciplines the church has resorted to in times of persecution.[29]

Israel's sages traded in the terminology and ideas of their captors, whether Egypt, Babylon, or Rome. But every time they identified wisdom with Torah (as in Sirach 24), even when they spoke "exilic," they were reminding themselves of who they were, who their God was, and the true nature of Wisdom. Just so, we today may "seek the *shalom* of the city" (Jer. 29) and talk the language of "Babylon," offering the very best of our insights and abilities to a receptive world—as we should. But every time we identify *Jesus* as the wisdom of God, we remind ourselves at the same time that we are to share in the love of the creator for this world in all its wonder and brokenness, and of the cross as the "foolish" means of peace. Both together constitute the deep wisdom that comes into force most particularly when our peace efforts are resisted.

III

In conclusion, we should be endlessly grateful for a biblical canon that has bound into one volume the many facets of wisdom, the multi-varied wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10)—wisdom(s) arising out of contexts of great receptivity, positive "worldly" experience, but also out of times of abject despair, apparent failure, and lethal resistance. Most important, the canon contains the wisdom that appears to make no sense, namely, the deliberate vulnerability of divine *Sophia*, the Creator's love at its most intense and cunning, willing to give her very self to and for her enemies in order to restore her beloved creation. Such peaceable wisdom may not be *of* the world, but it is *for* the world (John 3:16-17).

To recognize the great diversity of wisdom(s) in the biblical canon is not to say that there is a wisdom for all seasons, that one can pick and choose from the store of wisdom as one deems fitting. It is rather to recognize that this variegated tradition emerges out of often clashing perspectives

[29] "Arcane" or "secret" discipline. Bonhoeffer in letters of April 30 and May 5, 1944. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 8 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 361, 371.

and radically different life settings and experiences. We should thus not be surprised to find very real and deep tensions within and between the strands of biblical wisdom, as noted in this survey. Could it be that the sometimes tension-filled differences within the Mennonite community as to what truly constitutes peace—tensions between "Evangelicals" and "Anabaptists," between evangelists and peacebuilders, between theologians and practitioners, between conservatives and progressives, between those with access to power and opportunity and those who have suffered violence—mirror the tensions within the multi-varied wisdom of God? The inclusion in our one canon of Scripture of such diversity ensures that some arguments will not be settled, and should not be. This is also the case with respect to the varied perspectives on peace among us.

The Talmud records ongoing argumentation not as a sign of hermeneutical failure but as lively evidence of Torah's presence with real people in real places and times.[30] Perhaps as Mennonites we need to be more Talmudic in our thinking about and teaching of peace. Our own places in the world vary greatly, as do our opportunities to engage it. The arenas of conflict, oppression, and injustice vary, as do our explanations and perspectives of the roots of the absence of peace. Theological accents sometimes make it difficult to understand each other. Such is the wonder and challenge of the body of Christ. It is the one who is "our Peace" (Eph. 2:14) who has tethered us to each other with "chains of peace," to render Eph. 4:3 quite literally. We should honor that calling by engaging each other on what constitutes peace and how to build it, and by seeing such engagement, even when conflictual, as evidence of Peace at work. The "yeshiva of peace" will and *should* be a noisy place, filled with peace activists, justice advocates, social scientists, politicians, theologians, ethicists, Bible students and scholars, preachers, pastors, evangelists, and everyone else who confesses Christ to be "our Peace." Our syllabi—both actual and metaphorical—will and should vary, from the problem of war to all the "-isms" that alienate, oppress, and destroy, to the positive challenge of shalom in relation to the earth, and, finally, to agendas now typically marginalized or even seen as entirely outside

[30] See David A. Frank, "Arguing with God, Talmudic Discourse, and the Jewish Countermodel: Implications for the Study of Argumentation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41 (Fall 2004): 71-86.

the purview of peace discourse: church planting, evangelism, pastoral care, spiritual direction, or, to put it in theological categories, soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology. After all, "our Peace" saw the social dimensions of peace and justice, the restoration of relationship with God, and the birth of a community of peace as one seamless whole. Should not the curricula of our yeshiva be striving for such seamlessness too?[31]

There is and must be room for a division of labor. Not everyone can or should work at peace in the same fashion. Our practice of peacebuilding and our reflections on it need to be hospitable and attentive to a diversity of sages and practitioners, gifted variously by the same Spirit. But just as the facets or dimensions of biblical wisdom rub up against each other in often conflictual fashion, so there is room for argument and disagreement, for productive meddling in each other's spheres of competence. For this to be realized, for our disputes and vigorous arguments to contribute to and build peace, we need the shared experience of worship, prayer, and confession of Jesus the Christ, Jesus *Sophia*. The task for all of us, then, is to remember the "gospel of peace" and from whom we receive it:

> *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

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[31] We can be grateful for the many Mennonites who have modeled such seamlessness—peacebuilder activist-theologians like John Paul Lederach, Ched Myers and Elaine Enns, Ron Sider, and Howard Zehr, to name just a few, who in their writing, teaching, and building peace have taught us the art of knitting.