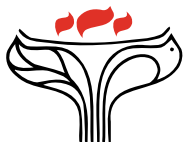


# THE CONRAD GREBEL REVIEW



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# The Conrad Grebel Review

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# The Conrad Grebel Review

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Foreword	3
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## REVISITING MENNONITE PEACE THEOLOGY

A Jesus-Centered Peace Theology, or, Why and How Theology and Ethics are Two Sides of One Profession of Faith <i>J. Denny Weaver</i>	5
A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service <i>Karl Koop</i>	28
Shalom Political Theology: A New Type of Mennonite Peace Theology <i>Malinda Elizabeth Berry</i>	49
Reframing Mennonite Political Engagement as Christian Formation <i>Paul C. Heidebrecht</i>	74

## BOOK REVIEWS

- Anthony Paul Smith. *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 96  
Reviewed by David Driedger
- Cornelis Bennema. *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 98  
Reviewed by Randy Klassen
- Sheila E. McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, Ahida, Calderón Pilarski, eds. *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 100  
Reviewed by Marty Troyer
- A. James Reimer. *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*. Edited by Paul G. Doerksen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014. Reviewed by Maxwell Kennel 102
- Paul Born. *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 2014. 104  
Reviewed by Melanie Neufeld.
- Bernard V. Brady. *Be Good and Do Good: Thinking through Moral Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014. 107  
Reviewed by Margaret R. Pfeil.

## Foreword

Articles in this issue are responses to a call for papers on the topic of Revisiting Mennonite Peace Theology. We invited contributors to use *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991) as a point of departure. J. Denny Weaver and Malinda Elizabeth Berry propose new types, respectively Jesus-Centered Peace Theology and Shalom Political Theology. Paul C. Heidebrecht develops the themes of political engagement and advocacy which resonate across a range of types. Karl Koop explores the writings of the 19th-century Prussian Mennonite leader Wilhelm Mannhardt, whose arguments in favor of military service are part of diverse Mennonite reflections on peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mandate statement in our masthead now reads as follows: *The Conrad Grebel Review (CGR) is a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry devoted to advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives.* The mandate itself has not changed, but the new statement more closely reflects our reality as well as our aspiration.

The change from “interdisciplinary” in the former statement to “multi-disciplinary” signals the fact that while few articles may be themselves be interdisciplinary, the journal does seek to publish contributions from diverse disciplines. Where the former statement had “spirituality, theology, and culture,” the new one has “theology, peace, society, and culture” on the understanding that theology includes spirituality. It is important that our mandate explicitly identifies both peace and society. Finally, the new statement asserts that there is no single “Mennonite perspective” but rather a range of “Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives.”

Readers will also notice the new cover design, which reflects our intention to give the journal a fresh, contemporary look. We welcome responses to all the changes.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have established a formal editorial board, comprising the editorial staff, several faculty members of Conrad Grebel University College, and two external scholars. The board is responsible for CGR's overall intellectual direction and content. We also gratefully acknowledge the counsel and advocacy provided by the consulting editors who have completed their term, and we welcome six new consulting editors.

*Jeremy M. Bergen*  
Editor

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# A Jesus-Centered Peace Theology, or, Why and How Theology and Ethics are Two Sides of One Profession of Faith

J. Denny Weaver

## Introduction

In 1991 the Mennonite Central Committee published *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (hereafter, *Panorama*).<sup>1</sup> It was an effort to bring clarity to an increasing variety of positions on peace and nonviolence within the broad Mennonite tradition in North America. With material reworked from an earlier conference, *Panorama* described ten types of peace theology. Much has happened in the world since 1991. As well, in these past twenty-five years Anabaptist theologians have engaged in vigorous debates about the orientation and content of acceptable theology for Mennonites. It is thus appropriate to ask to what extent the descriptions in *Panorama* are still relevant, and even whether the category of “types” is still useful.

This essay contributes to the discussion of *Panorama* and Mennonite peace theology in two ways. Its first and primary agenda is to sketch and advocate a type of peace theology not found in that document. I use the narrative of Jesus to develop an atonement motif with Christological implications. The result is a theological motif that has rejection of violence as an intrinsic element and provides a theological justification for nonviolence. Two of my books and several articles are the most significant examples to date of the results of deriving theology from the narrative of Jesus;<sup>2</sup> the present essay offers a brief sketch based on these writings. It is a theology

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<sup>1</sup> John Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> J. Denny Weaver, “Narrative Christus Victor: The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence,” in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1-29; J. Denny Weaver, “The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship and God,” in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 316-55; J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

that can guide the Christian life, a theology for what the Anabaptist tradition calls discipleship.

Stated another way, the narrative of Jesus from the New Testament is the norm of both theology and ethics. Deriving an atonement motif from this narrative produces theology and ethics that cannot be separated, and in fact neither is properly developed without reference to the other. The theology of this sketch has affinity with the type that *Panorama* called “Pacifism of the Messianic Community” as well as the types emphasizing active pursuit of social justice. However, methodology and outcome place my sketch in a new category.

As a seemingly new way to do theology (but with methodological roots already visible in the NT), my work has generated some opposition. Demonstrating that my approach can withstand such challenges is an important part of articulating and defending it. It is also important to identify validating, supportive voices. Thus, in this essay I respond to three challenges and identify two supportive statements from what may seem like surprising sources.

That theology and ethics are developed from the narrative of Jesus identifies a norm. However, the Bible’s text is not an absolute, the narrative comes in several forms and is subject to interpretation, and actually applying the narrative is open to critique. Thus the narrative is a functional, rather than an absolute, norm. Virtually every theology and ethic developed within contemporary Anabaptist and Mennonite or peace church circles also claims to be “biblical.” The discussion below compares the result of the narrative as a functional norm with the functional norms from the three conversations I engage. The comparisons result in a suggestion for revising what *Panorama* called “types” of Mennonite peace theologies.

### **Theology Derived from the Narrative of Jesus**

There is space here for only a brief, thematic sketch of Jesus’ life and ministry. My sketch highlights Jesus’ social agenda, and emphasizes the activist and at times confrontational dimensions of his ministry—challenging opponents, teaching, plucking grain and healing on the Sabbath, traveling in Samaria and interacting with a Samaritan woman, speaking against making an idol of wealth, forgiving rather than condemning a woman taken in adultery, and



cleansing the temple. These actions provoked hostility, and the action in the temple precipitated a plot to have Jesus killed. He was tried and condemned, and executed by crucifixion. Three days later, God resurrected him from the dead.

With the confrontational element in mind, this narrative can be read as an atonement motif in the general category of *Christus Victor*—the idea of a cosmic confrontation in which Christ is victorious over Satan with the resurrection—but a *Christus Victor* located on earth and in terms of the events of Jesus’ life. Since Jesus embodied and made present the reign of God on earth, his life and his deeds confronted the powers of evil, the spiritual dimensions of structures in the world.<sup>3</sup> However one understands the evil powers, God has triumphed over them with Jesus’ resurrection—hence the motif I call “narrative *Christus Victor*.”

As an atonement motif, narrative *Christus Victor* differs markedly from the inherited images. The classic version, which exists in several variations in the writings of the early church fathers, pictures the confrontation as a cosmic battle without specific earthly application. Narrative *Christus Victor*, in contrast, locates the confrontation on earth in the events of Jesus’ life. When we recognize that the evil powers which killed Jesus still abound in the world, Christians who live in the story of Jesus continue this confrontation and participate now in the victory of God’s reign wrought by Jesus’ resurrection.

Some version of the “satisfaction” atonement theory has been dominant for perhaps the past eight centuries. Its first full version was in *Why the God-Man?* published by Anselm of Canterbury in 1098. Anselm assumed the outlook of Norman feudalism, in which order in the realm depended on the feudal lord’s ability either to punish an offender or to exact satisfaction. Anselm pictured God as the ultimate feudal lord, with Jesus’ death as the satisfaction that restored the order of creation after human sin had offended God. The feudal system has long disappeared, but the idea

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, The Powers, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*, The Powers, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, The Powers, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

of Jesus' death as offering some kind of satisfaction to God remains. In the 16th century, Protestant reformers shifted the object of Jesus' death from satisfying an offended God to paying the penalty demanded by divine law.

Some version of satisfaction remains the dominant motif today, with multiple suggestions for what Jesus' death satisfies. A minority opinion against Anselm still current among some liberal Protestants is the "moral influence" motif. Here Jesus' death is not directed toward God but is aimed at sinful humankind. It is said that when rebellious humans see that God loved them enough to send the Son to die, they will cease rebelling and return to a loving God.

Violence serves divine purposes in both the satisfaction and the moral influence images of the atonement. These images picture a God who sanctions violence for God's purposes. In the satisfaction motifs, God sent Jesus to die to satisfy a divine need or to pay what God's law required. In the moral influence motif, God needed Jesus to die in order to show God's love for sinful humankind. In both, this divine need for death makes God the ultimate agent behind Jesus' death. God's need for Jesus to die not only shows God's sanction of violence, it puts the people who kill Jesus in the position of both opposing the reign of God by killing God's Son, and in a way helping God by killing Jesus to supply the death that was needed. The example posed by Jesus in these images constitutes a serious problem, in that he models passive submission to abuse perpetrated by an authority figure. This model is unhealthy and even dangerous for women in an abusive relationship and children in an abusive home, as well as for people living under oppressive regimes and military occupation, or in conditions of systemic violence such as racism or poverty.

In contrast to these inherited motifs, narrative Christus Victor is a nonviolent image. The violence that killed Jesus was perpetrated by people. It is not attributed to God or needed by God. Neither does God require the suffering of Jesus for redemptive purposes. The death of Jesus does not do anything to or for God, whether satisfying God's honor or in any other way serving God's purpose of redemption. Rather than emphasizing Jesus' death, narrative Christus Victor focuses on resurrection as God's saving act. I sometimes call this motif "nonviolent atonement."

This sketch of Jesus' life in no way denies that he suffered. My objection is to the idea that Jesus' purpose was to suffer, or that suffering

itself has a salvific quality. Rather, suffering was the consequence of Jesus carrying out his mission. He could have avoided suffering by forsaking it, but since he chose to be faithful to it, he accepted the inevitable suffering that resulted from it. This point is important for discussions of living in the narrative of Jesus, which Anabaptists traditionally call discipleship, and for understanding the character of the God revealed in Jesus. The sketch of Jesus' life, his death and, most important, his resurrection identifies Jesus as one in whom God is fully present. The resurrection validates him as God's very presence and reign on earth. Thus, alongside the possibility of identifying this narrative as an atonement image, it is also the beginning of a narrative-based Christology linking Jesus to God. There is yet more.

If one accepts that God and God's reign were present in Jesus, the narrative description of Jesus, culminating with the resurrection, also identifies God. Classic language displayed the link between God and Jesus with the claim that Jesus "was one substance with the Father." When the slain but resurrected lamb in Revelation 5 and 6 is the only being able to open the sealed scroll in God's hand, and the heavenly host breaks out in glorious adoration, that is another statement that Jesus reveals God and is equal to him. Whatever language one uses to say that Jesus' life makes present God and God's reign on earth, the narrative says something important about God: God does not use violence. In contrast to the evil powers which annihilate enemies by killing, the resurrection makes clear that God's way is to give life and to restore life. If God is revealed in Jesus, then Jesus reveals a nonviolent God.

Identifying the nonviolent character of God requires rereading the Old Testament. Alongside the frequently referenced fact that the OT pictures a God who resorts to violence, the OT has a number of nonviolent images and practices as well. These include the refusal of patriarchs Abraham and Isaac to fight about territory, Gideon's defeat of the Midianites with trickery, Elisha's turning away an invasion with divine assistance and a feast, the nonviolent cultural resistance of the Hebrew exiles in Daniel, and more. The conversation about the character of God in the OT is not resolved by citing a specific story but by recognizing which side of the conversation is continued by the narrative of Jesus, the Messiah who is a son of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Using the narrative of Jesus to resolve the OT's conversation about the character of God is

### **Theology and Salvation**

The narrative of Jesus is a saving story. Telling it displays God's reign in the world. Those who would participate in that reign then live in this narrative. They are saved. In line with Paul's paradox of grace (1 Cor. 15:10), the resurrection constitutes a grace-filled invitation, paradoxically to live in God's reign, which we cannot accomplish on our own but which nonetheless engages our own volition. Resurrection also includes the promise one day to experience the restoration of life that has occurred for Jesus.

Identifying this story as the story of salvation reflects what is reported in the book of Acts. When questioned in whose name or whose authority they acted, the Apostles told this story (see Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:36-43; 13:17-41). God sent the resurrected Jesus "to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (3:26). The story is identified with salvation (4:12). On the day of Pentecost, those who welcomed the message were baptized (2:41), and following verses describe the new way of life that they entered. To those who hear the story, it is an invitation to join in, and live in it as saved people.

People are saved by identifying with Jesus and living in the story. They "find God" by living in the story of Jesus, the one who makes God and God's reign visible on earth. In this light, salvation and ethics are inseparable, two sides of the proverbial coin. To ask "Who is Jesus?" requires telling this story. And asking how a Christian, a follower of Jesus, should live requires telling it. To answer either question is to provide the basis for answering the other.

Identifying with Jesus means making a commitment to him. Ethics is the lived expression of that commitment; theology is the words used to describe the Jesus of that commitment. Theology and ethics should proclaim the same message, but they neither properly match up nor worship the God revealed in Jesus when we profess faith in the Jesus who rejected violence but accommodate the use of violence by a nation's military forces. This critique includes all versions of two-kingdom theology, which presume that

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in line with the approach of John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 94-95; Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), chapters 19-25; and Eric Seibert's distinction between the "textual God and the actual God" in determining that Jesus reveals the character of God: see Eric Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 185.

although nonresistant Christians do not participate, military engagement by government is appropriate and the discussion of policy decisions is best left to the US State Department and social scientists at elite eastern universities.<sup>5</sup>

Ethics that matches theology is reflected in the constructions of this essay. Narrative Christus Victor proposes a way to understand the saving dimensions of the story as participation in it. Identifying the nonviolence of God means that nonviolent practitioners are working with God's purposes revealed in the nonviolent life of Jesus. This profession of a nonviolent God thus counters two common appeals to a violent God: the assertion that Christians may use violence to assist God's cause, and the claim that because God uses violence, the followers of Jesus need not resort to it.

### **Nonviolent Ethics**

An ethic derived from the narrative of Jesus is intrinsically nonviolent. "Nonviolent" or "nonviolence" are here not abstract terms with a transcendent meaning apart from that narrative. When referring to the "nonviolence" of Jesus I use it as a descriptive term to include both Jesus' rejection of the sword as a means to advance God's reign and his active confrontation of injustice without mirroring it. A "nonviolent ethic" has nonviolence as an intrinsic element. It should be a contradiction in terms to have a Christian ethic without nonviolence as such an element. Further, a nonviolent ethic derived from the narrative of Jesus engages the world we live in. It is a social justice-oriented ethic.

We can readily see that Jesus did not kill anyone or try to obtain power behind a military force. Nonviolence is thus directly derived from him, not an abstraction read back into the story. A statement at his trial demonstrates that his rejection of a military uprising was a principled action. He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.<sup>6</sup> But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Since Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> For my response to two kingdom theology, see J. Denny Weaver, "Living in the Reign of God in the 'Real World': Getting Beyond Two-Kingdom Theology," in *Exiles in the Empire: Believers Church Perspectives on Politics*, ed. Nathan E. Yoder and Carol A. Scheppard (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 173-93.

<sup>6</sup> This kind of reference to "the Jews" has been greatly misused in the course of Christian history. It is sufficient to say here that "the Jews" does not mean all Jews or the Jewish religion.

engaged in a great variety of social activities, this latter phrase cannot mean that his kingdom was an inner, spiritual kingdom. It means that the values and orientation of his kingdom differed from the values and orientation of Pilate's kingdom.

In addition to these specific instances of rejecting violence, consider Jesus' teachings that convey nonviolence. These include the well-known sayings from the Sermon on the Mount, which in the King James Version commanded that "ye resist not evil." In the Mennonite world I grew up in, these statements taught "nonresistance"—meaning stand passively, offer no resistance, and go out of your way to do more than was required. Now, as a "recovering nonresistant Mennonite," I follow an activist interpretation of the texts of Matthew 5. When Jesus said not to resist evil, he meant not to resist with similar evil. He gave three examples of nonviolent resistance: refuse to accept an insult by turning the other cheek; expose an exploitative debt holder by handing him your last stitch of clothing to act out being stripped naked; and turn the tables on a soldier by carrying his pack farther than regulations allowed, which might get him in trouble with his commander. The culmination was love your enemies.<sup>7</sup> Love of enemies is not to be confused with romantic love. It means "do not respond to evil with more evil." As Walter Wink has said, in responding to violence with equal violence "we become what we hate." A violent retaliation to a violent attack merely continues the cycle of violence. To reduce evil, to respond to an enemy with love, means to act in such a way as to change the situation, to stop a cycle of vengeance and retaliation.

Jesus' three examples suggest ways to respond to a provocation without mirroring evil. Paul follows Jesus' line when he writes,

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them to drink; . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17, 20, 21).

1 Thessalonians 5:15 and 1 Peter 3:9 offer similar statements.

Examples from the narrative of Jesus illustrate changing the situation.

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As used in this essay, it designates one of the several religious parties in Jesus' time.

<sup>7</sup> For this interpretation, see Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 175-84.

For example, consider his response to the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). Rather than compound the sin of adultery with a death, he changed the situation in a way that exposed the sin of the accusers as well as giving the woman a chance to change her life. Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus is a confrontation that changed circumstances (Luke 19:1-10). As a tax collector employed by the Romans, Zacchaeus would have been despised by the local people. In addition, his position allowed for graft and thievery. But rather than express hostility, Jesus spoke to him with respect and suggested staying at his house. The result was a radical change in Zacchaeus's outlook. He promised to give half his wealth to the poor, and he would restore four-fold—that is, principal and generous interest—to those he had defrauded. When Jesus broke through social tension by treating a dishonorable man with respect, Zacchaeus changed his life. In modern terms, it is an example of “restorative justice.”

These excerpts from Jesus' life and teaching illustrate the basis of an intrinsically nonviolent ethic rooted in the NT narrative. These incidents and others from Jesus' life become the basis for discipleship. To be identified with Jesus means to live in his story, which means to embody its nonviolent dimensions. And beyond the intrinsic nonviolence of this narrative are broad social connotations. Jesus' interactions with women and Samaritans have implications for how the church today speaks to racism and the treatment of women. Other stories have implications for forgiveness, economics, the justice system, and more.

Christian ethics—how Christians live—is the lived expression of theology. Not only is the narrative the basis of a nonviolent, social-justice oriented ethic, it is the beginning of a nonviolence-shaped theology. This theology is an atonement image that invites us to salvation without any kind of satisfaction to God. When we take seriously that God is revealed in this narrative, it opens a view of God's nonviolence. This is theology and it is ethics, an integrated statement of theology-ethics with the narrative of Jesus as normative.

In a sense, the term “peace theology” in the *Panorama* document's title now takes on new meaning. As used for that publication's original focus, “peace theology” referred to the theological justification of peace, nonviolence, and social justice. My discussion has rooted this justification

in the narrative of Jesus. In addition, I argue that theology as usually understood—namely, discussion of such topics as atonement, Christology, and the nature of God—should be theology in which peace and nonviolence are intrinsic elements.

### **The Difference It Makes: Three Recent Conversations**

Posing the narrative of Jesus as the norm of ethics and theology raises the question of other possible ethical and theological norms. The significance of this question becomes clear in conversation with three kinds of challenges to my approach. The analysis below concerns types of peace theology and their potential to accommodate violence.

#### *Stanley Hauerwas*

The first conversation is with Stanley Hauerwas. One of his major contributions is his determined defense of pacifism. But, as reported by Peter Dula, one of his Mennonite students, Hauerwas objects to the idea of developing theology that specifically reflects the peace church or Anabaptist traditions. He has expressed rather strong objection to my approach to Christology and the consequent move to address nonviolence in theology and ethics. Dula writes that Hauerwas worries about the “reduction of theology to ethics” in my work. The example cited for this supposed reduction is *The Nonviolent Atonement*, described as making nonviolence “a principle reigning over all dogmatic assertions or scriptural exegesis.”<sup>8</sup> Further, as a self-proclaimed “high church Mennonite,” Hauerwas also objects to efforts “to purify Anabaptism of any Catholic, Creedal or magisterial Protestant influence.” The example of this alleged purifying is a quotation from *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*, in which I suggested that Anabaptists, Mennonites, or the peace church might have a “specific perspective on theology,” and that such a stance “might produce a different view of classic questions from that of the majority Christian tradition.”<sup>9</sup> Hauerwas is said to object to the kind of approach just sketched,

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8 Peter Dula, “For and Against Hauerwas Against Mennonites,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 3 (July 2010): 178 and n11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 379 and n15, citing J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, co-published with Herald



which poses a theology for the peace church that is in conversation with, but not beholden to, the classic tradition of Nicea and Chalcedon.

Hauerwas favors a “high church Mennonite” ecclesiology, described as “Catholicism for which pacifism is a cultural norm.”<sup>10</sup> He fears that a church without “a hierarchical teaching office or a robust account of sacramentality” and a theology not beholden to Nicene-Chalcedonian tradition has been, or will be, captured by “Harnack’s Hellenization thesis: namely that the essence of the Gospel was distorted almost beyond recognition by the influence of Greek philosophy and the growth of the medieval church.” The result, Hauerwas believes, will be the error of stripping away a “husk” with only “peace” remaining as the ethical kernel, a “peaceful version of liberal Protestantism” associated with Kant and Harnack.<sup>11</sup>

Rejecting the idea of a distinct Anabaptist perspective assumes that the standard or classic tradition is the norm, the only acceptable way to discuss the nature of Jesus and his relation to God. The implication is that the Anabaptist tradition speaks from only a particular, limited perspective, whereas the Nicene-Chalcedonian tradition, backed by the teaching authority of the church of Christendom, is a universal stance transcending historical particularity. I suggest that Hauerwas’s critique arises from a failure to recognize that the classic tradition, equally as much as an Anabaptist orientation, speaks from and reflects a particular place and context.

#### EXCURSUS ON THE CONTEXTUAL CHARACTER OF CHRISTOLOGY

Stepping out of the main conversation for a moment, in order to analyze the contextual nature of formulas from Nicea and Chalcedon, will clarify the issues at stake with Hauerwas, and by extension the two conversations to follow. As enshrined in the Nicene Creed, Jesus was proclaimed *homoousios* or “one in being with” or “of the same substance” as the Father. In the formula of Chalcedon, the *homoousios* phrase was repeated for Jesus and the Father and then also applied to Jesus and humanity, which produced the claim that Jesus was “fully God and fully man” or “truly God and truly man.” This language has been handed down as the supposed universal norm

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Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Dula, “For and Against,” 383.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 380.

for discussions of Christology. These time-honored expressions deal with questions posed but not answered specifically by the NT: “How does Jesus relate to God?” and “How does Jesus relate to humankind?” If one wants the answer to these questions in language reflecting their context and worldview, these are the correct answers, even the best answers.

However, the problem is that these classic answers do indeed reflect a context and worldview. They define the relationship of Jesus to the Father in terms of *ousios*, that is, ontology or being, which presumes a philosophical system that does not describe our contemporary reality. Further, these terms reflect a three-tiered cosmology, with God who resides in the upper realm manipulating events in the world below, and the essence or being of God above is the same as the essence or being of Jesus in the earthly realm. For an example of this three-decker universe, see Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Canto XXVIII of *Paradisio* describes the nine circles of heaven with God located above them. The classic assumptions of reality and the accompanying cosmology do not describe our reality today. Our cosmology consists of an unfathomably large, still infinitely expanding universe. Pointing to the context of the classic formulas does not discredit the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulas in that context; their language reflects assumptions about reality at that time. These formulas reflect a context different from our own.

Questions immediately arise. Within our contemporary worldview, might there be other ways to deal with NT questions of the relationship of Jesus to God? The answer is yes. The classic language was developed by dominant men using the philosophical assumptions and accepted cosmology of their time. Is it appropriate to separate their language from its context and then to elevate it to the status of above-history, transcendent, universal givens applying to all contexts and worldviews from the 4th century to the distant future? I think not. Is a 4th-century phrase—*homoousios*—from the Nicene Creed the only way to assure ourselves that God was in Christ? I suggest it is not. I noted earlier that the resurrection validated Jesus’ life as God’s presence and reign on earth, with the slain and resurrected lamb of Revelation as another statement of Jesus’ equality with God. It thus becomes clear that Nicea is one way to profess that God was in Christ, but that other expressions in other contexts and worldviews are appropriate.

Theology is never finished; it is always part of an ongoing conversation.

The narrative of Jesus locates him in a particular social location. Discussing the meaning of that narrative in other locations is always open-ended. Suggesting the possibility of different expressions in other worldviews of course requires caution. Although our picture of the infinitely expanding universe is the reality we know and the one in which we try to make sense of the God revealed in Jesus, this cosmology is nonetheless an image reflecting our particular “givens.” However, one day our reality may be as outmoded as the three-tiered universe of Nicea-Chalcedon (and Dante) is now. Theology is always tentative. The given in our theologizing is the narrative of Jesus, to which we return continually to shape the theology that results from transporting that narrative into new and different worlds and cosmologies.

Acknowledging the narrative of Jesus as the given points to an additional problem posed by the classic creedal tradition. Nicea’s formula of *homoousios* or “one substance with the Father” says nothing about the life of Jesus, and is therefore of little direct assistance for ethics. I will cite two examples. Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas writes that while she learned in seminary to accept the Nicene-Chalcedonian debates and faith statements as part of the wider Christian tradition, she had long believed that “Jesus was Christ because of what he did for others, particularly the poor and oppressed.” She noted aspects of the creedal formulation “that appear inconsistent with Jesus as he was presented in the Gospels.” For example, using the incarnation to establish Jesus as Christ “diminishes the significance of Jesus’ actions on earth. His ministry is virtually ignored.” When the confession jumps from incarnation to the crucifixion, “The implication is that what took place between Jesus’ birth and resurrection—the bulk of the Gospels’ reports of Jesus—is unrelated to what it means for Jesus to be the Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

After extensively discussing how imperial politics shaped the formulas of Nicea and Chalcedon, Joerg Rieger states that “It is hardly an accident that the life of Christ is not mentioned in the creeds; . . . The challenge to empire posed by the life of Christ would have just been too great.” Rieger seeks to find the potential to subvert empire within the creeds, which is possible if “they are connected to the deeper realities of Christ’s particular life.” However, he concludes, “where the creeds without particular attention to the life of Christ

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 111-13.

are considered sufficient . . . the challenge is lost, which makes the ‘orthodox’ position so convenient for the empire.”<sup>13</sup>

#### RETURN TO THE CONVERSATIONS

With the contextual nature of the classic Christological tradition now in view, it is as legitimate to develop theology out of an Anabaptist perspective as out of the Nicene-Chalcedonian tradition. A primary characteristic of Anabaptism is its commitment to discipleship, which points back to the narrative of Jesus as the basis of theology and ethics.<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of peace and social justice as intrinsic to that narrative, this is a better place to begin theologizing than the classic formulas, which lack the narrative. As noted earlier, this approach is strongly biblical and explicitly Christological. It appeals to a robust view of the resurrection to validate God’s presence in the life of Jesus. This is far from the bare peace kernel that Hauerwas fears. None of these assertions is acceptable to the liberalism that he dislikes and calls a “Kantian reduction of theology to ethics.”

My excursus has pointed to the accommodation of the sword by the classic creedal tradition. As well, there are well-known arguments concerning the violence in the received atonement motifs, including the image of Jesus as a model of passive submission to unjust suffering that is offensive to women and people experiencing racial, colonial, or economic oppression; and the image of a violent God who demands blood or death as reparation for sin. Standing on traditional theology, with a wistful desire for a teaching magisterium to enforce it, makes Hauerwas vulnerable to such critiques.

However, an inconsistency in classic theology between a pacifist Jesus and violent images of atonement or accommodation of violence appears not to bother Hauerwas at all. In fact, Dula points out other contradictions in Hauerwas’s theology—the “desire for Yoder and nostalgia for the papacy” and his rejection of Karl Barth’s ecclesiology while making Barth the hero of the Gifford lectures. Hauerwas proceeds, says Dula, in line with the adage

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<sup>13</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 96-97.

<sup>14</sup> See comments throughout Gerald J. Mast and J. Denny Weaver, *Defenseless Christianity: Anabaptism for a Nonviolent Church* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House; co-published with Herald Press, 2009).

from Ralph Waldo Emerson: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of simple minds.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of adjusting his theology to conform to a Mennonite pacifism that maintained itself without magisterium or sacramentality, Hauerwas proceeds to “ignore what he found incomprehensible.”<sup>16</sup> To defend peace theology alongside the standard Nicene tradition, he ignores problems and contradictions. In contrast, I choose to rethink theology on the basis of the narrative of Jesus. It is misguided to label this effort as “reducing theology to ethics.”

*Darrin Snyder Belousek*

Darrin Snyder Belousek believes that Jesus’ rejection of violence is incumbent upon all Christians. Nonetheless, he seeks to defend the classic creedal tradition, traditional satisfaction atonement, and the idea of a God who resorts to violence, against those representing the new “ethical orthodoxy” adopted by “many Mennonite writers.”<sup>17</sup> This new orthodoxy includes the development of nonviolent atonement and culminates with arguments for a nonviolent God. Belousek claims that his view is guided both by scripture and by the standard account of the Nicene-Chalcedonian creedal tradition and the Cappadocian language of the Trinity, which become his functional norm for interpreting scripture. The relationship of scripture and creed is self-referential: “Scripture is the criterion of the truth of the creed, and the creed is the criterion for the interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>18</sup>

In his most recent article Belousek makes a false assumption concerning the new orthodoxy. He states that in John Howard Yoder’s work and in my own recent writings, theology is reordered to serve the ethic of nonviolence. “To wit: beginning with the presupposition of nonviolence, one interprets Scripture through the prism of nonviolence, which interpretation

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<sup>15</sup> Dula, “For and Against,” 394-95.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>17</sup> Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, “God and Nonviolence: Creedal Theology and Christian Ethics,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 2 (April 2014): 234. See also Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 68-79; and Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, “Nonviolent God: Critical Analysis of a Contemporary Argument,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 49-70.

<sup>18</sup> Belousek, “God and Nonviolence,” 239.

of Scripture supports the postulation of a nonviolent God, which theology reinforces the initial presupposition of nonviolence.”<sup>19</sup> However, as the sketch at the beginning of this essay demonstrates, nonviolence is derived from the life of Jesus and is not a presupposition read back into that story.

The circular validation of scripture and creeds presents Belousek with a problem. At first glance, he acknowledges, linking Jesus the Son and God the Father as the “same substance” at Nicea and in Trinitarian doctrine would point to a nonviolent God. Thus Belousek uses a great deal of scholastic argument in order to maintain that Jesus taught and practiced non-retaliation (passive rather than active nonviolence), and that God is fully revealed in Jesus in line with the equation of God the Father and Jesus the Son in Nicene and trinitarian doctrine, while simultaneously preserving the biblical images of divine violence and the prerogative of God to use violence. To make the rejection of violence seen in Jesus’ life a dimension of Nicea, Belousek argues that the creedal phrase “For us humans and our salvation” includes “not only the cross, but also Jesus’ birth, resurrection, and ascension”<sup>20</sup> as well as Jesus’ teaching and self-emptying, a claim challenged by Kelly Brown Douglas, Joerg Rieger, and others.

Establishing the creedal tradition as the functional, unquestioned norm apparently makes it nearly impossible to acknowledge the critiques made by feminist, black, and womanist theologians of the violence and harmful model posed by Jesus in traditional atonement imagery. Rather than respond directly to such critiques, Belousek restates satisfaction atonement, with only an incidental mention of the challenges. For him, the self-referential relationship of scripture and creedal tradition raises the creedal statements above context or historical particularity, and thus in his view the historical context had no impact on the Christological formulas. For a recent, seemingly total refutation of such a claim, see Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*.<sup>21</sup>

Belousek and I agree that traditional theology has a God who can

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>20</sup> Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 14, and Belousek, “God and Nonviolence,” 243-44, 263-64.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

resort to and sanction violence. However, Belousek employs scholastic argument to defend the classic creedal statements as the required theological norm, along with defending the various dimensions of divine violence in scripture, in inherited theology, and in satisfaction atonement, all the while claiming both that Jesus taught the nonviolence of non-retaliation and that God is revealed in him. In contrast, I pose a theology which is derived from the narrative of Jesus and for which that narrative serves as the functional norm. In this theology, it is assumed that God is revealed as nonviolent in the life of Jesus, who made visible God's reign in the particular history of first-century Palestine, and that the meaning of this story can be expressed in other contexts in ways not beholden to the classic creeds.

*Ronald Sider*

Ronald Sider rejects both my view of a God who does not resort to violence and my articulation of a nonviolent atonement image. He defends satisfaction atonement against the charge that it models violence and defends the idea of a God who uses violence.<sup>22</sup> His functional norm is a literal or flat reading of the biblical text, with the truth of the interpretation supposedly vouchsafed by inspiration of scripture. Appealing to inspiration is intended to stifle dissent from his view, but it only signals that he interprets the Bible differently than I do. For the question of divine violence, Sider assumes that citing biblical texts in a literal manner proves God's violence. He accounts for contradictions in the biblical images of God by asserting that we cannot know everything about God. He dismisses the argument that the character of God is revealed in Jesus with the claim that Jesus does not reveal everything about God.

Sider accepts the inherited atonement motifs as unquestioned givens. His methodology is to fit individual biblical texts into inherited atonement images, accompanied by the claim that any other interpretation of these texts violates biblical truth. Internal problems and contradictions within the motifs are ignored or passed off as due to our inability to know, and problems with one view are compensated for by another view. Sider does not fathom alternative interpretations such as those developed by David

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald J. Sider, "A Critique of J. Denny Weaver's *Nonviolent Atonement*," *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 35, no. 1 (April 2012): 214-41.

Brondos, who interprets the entire Pauline corpus to show that Paul does not support satisfaction atonement.<sup>23</sup> Sider also lacks awareness of the feudal background from which Anselm developed the idea of satisfaction as atonement, nor does he acknowledge the sequence in which Christus Victor was rejected by Anselm in favor of satisfaction, which was in turn rejected by Abelard. One can claim that these motifs are complementary rather than logically incompatible only by ignoring sequential, historical rejections, separating motifs from their contexts, and elevating motifs to the level of unquestioned givens.

Despite these major disagreements, Sider affirms my emphasis on the nonviolence of Jesus and on nonviolence as an intrinsic element of Christian discipleship. In effect, he agrees with me in seeing the problems of violent images of God, and of violence in traditional atonement motifs, but we disagree on how to respond. He preserves the violence of God and accepts contradictions by appealing to a literal interpretation of the Bible, with a claim of inspiration used to discount other understandings. In contrast, I suggest that the narrative of Jesus is the norm, and that biblical exegesis and critique of inherited images should conform to it.

Hauerwas, Belousek, and Sider represent three different approaches to defending inherited views of atonement, Christology, and a God who can resort to violence against challenges posed by the assumption that the narrative of Jesus is the norm for theology. Now we must consider two other conversations.

### **Fellow Travelers**

Support for using the narrative of Jesus as the reference point for theology and ethics comes from quite diverse places. One example is *Servant God*, a book written largely by Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>24</sup> This volume's major premise is that if we take the incarnation seriously, then when we see Jesus, we see God. And when we observe that Jesus responded to all situations with love and mercy, it follows that God is a God of love and mercy. As the culminating

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<sup>23</sup> David A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Dorothee Cole, ed., *Servant God: The Cosmic Conflict Over God's Trustworthiness* (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda Univ. Press, 2013).



act of God's plan to achieve reconciliation with sinners, God came in Jesus. Jesus' mission was to "reassure us that the omnipotent God of the universe is exactly like Jesus in character: non-coercive, humble, and other-centered in his love. . . . to reveal that God's Kingdom is not defined by conquering our enemies in battlefields or courts of law but rather through our service and love for them."<sup>25</sup> When God's true character is seen, the writers believe, sinners need not fear returning to God. *Servant God* portrays the idea of a merciful God seeking reconciliation with sinful humanity throughout the Bible, down to and including the book of Revelation. There will be a last judgment, in which people's choice for or against God will be made final, but it will reflect God's merciful character made visible in Jesus.

The authors position this merciful God over against the traditional view of a wrathful God, "an angry and punitive deity" who will punish sinners eternally in a fiery hell. "This angry picture of God creates angry 'Christians.'" This "false idea about God," the editor continues, has contributed to most atrocities committed by Christians through history. "Our wrong conceptions of God have led us to treat our enemies just as our god would—burning, strangling, shooting, or bombing them, rather than staying faithful to Christ's way."<sup>26</sup>

*Servant God* might puzzle some readers. It assumes a so-called literal, six-day creation, that Adam and Eve were real people, and that the fall and the great flood were historical events. Satan is a real, supernatural being engaged in cosmic warfare with God. Fundamentalists might welcome these views but object to the book's rejection of substitutionary atonement and divine violence, its treatment of final judgment, and its nonviolent interpretation of Revelation. Chapter 8—"Inspiration (The Bible Says It, But That Doesn't Settle It)"—will not help: inspiration is not posed as a first principle with the intent of forcing acceptance of the views to follow. The writers do not assume that merely quoting a scripture text will settle a disputed question, such as the character of God.<sup>27</sup> Although the Bible is inspired, it still has to be interpreted, and the hermeneutical key is not the doctrine of inspiration but the story of Jesus.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., xxiv-xxv.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xxiv.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 131.

If fundamentalists dislike the conclusions of this book, readers at the other end of the Christian spectrum, where I place myself, will not accept its assumptions about creation, Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, and Satan. However, I applaud *Servant God's* solid critique of penal substitutionary atonement, and its understanding of God's judgment and God's character as merciful, loving, and nonviolent. I support its view that salvation means to cease rebelling against God and that reconciliation to God means to live within God's kingdom, which includes practicing the social activism and nonviolent resistance to evil made visible in the life of Jesus.

*Servant God* implies an important point beyond the authors' intention. That readers of my theological persuasion can agree with the book's conclusions, despite our rejecting its underlying assumptions about the Bible's mythological sections, demonstrates that the truth of Jesus is not defined by one particular methodology. It comes from the story of Jesus itself. A literalist approach and a historicist approach to the early chapters of Genesis and the Bible generally can reach similar conclusions on the larger question of the mercy and nonviolence of God, as long as the narrative of Jesus guides the methodology. Alongside *Servant God's* assertion of God's nonviolence, equally significant is its demonstration of the narrative of Jesus, rather than any stripe of received creedal tradition, as the norm of Christian truth.

Two recent books on racism in theology also use the narrative of Jesus as the norm for theology and ethics. J. Kameron Carter and Willie James Jennings point to the disastrous results that followed when Christian theology separated Jesus from his Jewishness.<sup>28</sup> It is his Jewishness, they contend, that located him in a particular history, place, and time. Carter and Jennings argue that separating Jesus from his Jewishness led to the accommodation and eventual support of racism by standard theology. This separation began with the early church fathers and is seen in the standard Christological definitions of Jesus as "one in being with the Father" and as "truly God and truly man."

With Jesus located above history, European theologians could then

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<sup>28</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008); Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).

define him in generic, supposedly universal terms, but in ways that in fact reflected themselves. Jesus became white, and European white identity became the norm. When slaves from Africa entered the picture, the idea of “pure” blood developed, with European white as the norm of purity. Deviations from this norm, whether in color or form of government, produced varying degrees of “lesser” or inferior, and gave Europeans a sense of superiority over other ethnic peoples. This sense characterized Portuguese, Spanish, and later French and English colonization efforts in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Carter uses Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor to show that standard Christian theology could have avoided this disastrous path. He and Jennings issue a heartfelt call to rethink theology of any shade—whether the orthodox or standard tradition or otherwise—around the Jewishness of Jesus as the way to develop and/or restore theology that specifically confronts racism.

Earlier I said that understanding Jesus as the continuation of the story of Israel validated the nonviolent images in the OT as the truest picture of God’s reign. This linking of Jesus to the OT means, most obviously, that Jesus was a Jew, which dovetails with the call of Carter and Jennings to construct theology around his Jewishness. Here I would add one element to their agenda. Since Jesus’ rejection of violence continued a strand visible in Israel at least since the time of Jeremiah, I suggest that Jesus was a pacifist, an element that should be intrinsic to theology about the Jewish Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has argued that the narrative of Jesus is the appropriate norm of both theology and ethics for Christians. If God is revealed in Jesus, then we should understand God in nonviolent terms. With the narrative of Jesus as the reference point, to ask how Christians should live requires telling his story as the basis for Christian ethics, and to ask who Jesus is requires telling his story, which makes it the beginning point for theology. Theology and ethics are inseparable; each is an expression of the narrative of Jesus. This linking is important. At least an indirect link exists between theology and the way people live. For example, note the correlation between strong belief in penal substitutionary atonement and the practice of harsh retribution in

the system of criminal justice.<sup>29</sup> I agree with the assertion in *Servant God* that the image of a punitive God leads people to treat their enemies in a punitive way as well. In this light, consider American civil religion, with its OT divine warrior orientation, and its self-proclaimed righteous wars against unredeemable enemies, whether yesteryear's communists or today's terrorists and "Islamic extremists."

My assumption is that the biblical narrative of Jesus locates him in a particular place in time. That place is the defining link in an ongoing history. Christians and churches today are the current leading edge of the narrative passing through Jesus. Recognizing it is an ongoing story means acknowledging that contexts change over time, and that taking Jesus' story into new contexts requires restating the meaning of Jesus in new terms. Recognizing this ongoing story means accepting that theology is always in process, always in the mode of continually returning to the narrative to ask again about its meaning in order to guide the story's contemporary trajectory. Narrative Christus Victor, *Servant God*, and the new black theology are three such examples. In contrast, Hauerwas, Belousek, and Sider each display a quite different orientation, locating the norm for interpreting the narrative either in later creedal statements or a flat Bible text and Anselm's satisfaction atonement image, with the assumption that theology's task today is to conform to these norms and to defend them against challenges posed by new contexts.

The strength of my approach is its posing of a consistently nonviolent picture—from commitment to Jesus to an understanding of God to living out those images as a Christian. Linking nonviolence to Jesus and to the God revealed in him directly challenges Christian support of violence. My project will not stop war and violence and oppression. But to the extent that it is heard, it proclaims that war, violence, and oppression are inimical to Jesus Christ and the God revealed in him. This is a missionary message relevant for people who are not Christians, and particularly for those experiencing war and occupation from the receiving end of weapons supplied by or wielded on behalf of a self-proclaimed "Christian nation."

In terms of the *Panorama* document's use of the language of "types," I

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<sup>29</sup> For one example, see Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

suggest refining the idea of a type so that it identifies the choice of functional norm that would shape a peace theology. Beyond the question of types, the more important question is whether the functional norm is allowed to compromise the rejection of violence visible in the narrative of Jesus, or whether the narrative's rejection of violence shapes the approach to the concern in question. I have identified three uses of norms allowing violence to remain integral to Christian theology. My choice of the narrative of Jesus as functional norm makes nonviolence or rejection of violence integral to Christian theology and ethics. It does not reduce theology to ethics or nonviolence. Rather it recognizes what becomes intrinsic to theology when theology is derived from the narrative of Jesus. A tongue-in-cheek response to the charge of reducing theology to ethics is this: theology whose beginning point is the classic Christological formulas as unquestioned givens is theology about Jesus separated from ethics based on Jesus.

*J. Denny Weaver is Professor Emeritus of Religion at Bluffton University in Bluffton, Ohio.*

## A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service

Karl Koop

Between 1868 and 1870, Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880), a Mennonite leader from Provincial Prussia,<sup>1</sup> wrote a seven-part essay in the German Mennonite periodical *Mennonitische Blätter*, in which he addressed the question of whether Mennonites should participate in military service. He concluded that they should give up their traditional position on nonresistance. They should perform military service, preferably as medics, and those choosing to participate fully in the armed forces should remain in good standing in their congregations.<sup>2</sup> Mannhardt's arguments favoring military service may have appeared out of character at the time, given that only a few years before, in 1863, he had defended the traditional Mennonite position of nonresistance at the behest of the Mennonite leadership.<sup>3</sup> He had done so by documenting the history and practices of the Mennonites in a comprehensive volume entitled *The Military Service Exemptions of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*.<sup>4</sup> However, in that publication he wasn't

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<sup>1</sup> "Provincial Prussia" refers to the combined province of West and East Prussia. See Mark Jantzen, "Introduction" to Wilhelm Mannhardt, *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, trans. Anthony Epp, edited and annotated by Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2013), xvi-xvii. This volume was translated from the German original, Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreuussischen Mennoniten: Eine Geschichtliche Erörterung* (Marienburg: Altpreuussischen Mennonitengemeinden, 1863).

<sup>2</sup> "Zur Wehrfrage," *Mennonitische Blätter* 15, no. 9 (December 1868): 74-76; 16, no. 1 (January 1869): 5-8; no. 2 (February 1869): 12-15; no. 4 (May 1869): 31-34; no. 5 (June 1869): 37-41; no. 6 (August 1869): 48-50; 17, no. 1 (January 1870): 3-4. Here I am following Abraham Friesen's translation of the essay, which is entitled "Concerning the Question of Military Service." See in the appendix to Mannhardt, *Military Service Exemption*, 297-358.

<sup>3</sup> Mannhardt used the term *wehrlosigkeit* to refer to the traditional Mennonite position. In Mennonite literature, the term is typically translated by "nonresistance," which is what the translator of the Mannhardt volume has done. I follow this convention, although "defencelessness" would be an equally good translation.

<sup>4</sup> See note 1.

writing to convey his personal views. He had been a supporter of military service since his youth and was a German nationalist by 1848, when the German Confederation used mostly Prussian troops against Denmark. At the time, he wrote patriotic poetry lamenting that ill health kept him from fighting for Germany.<sup>5</sup> So, in the foreword to his 1863 work on Mennonite nonresistance, he intimated that the opinions contained therein were not necessarily his own and that he reserved the right to present his personal views in another setting.<sup>6</sup> This he proceeded to do a few years later in the *Mennonitische Blätter* essay.

Mannhardt's personal views on military conscription may have been out of step with official Mennonite teaching on nonresistance but they were not idiosyncratic within the broader Mennonite context. Since the mid-18th century, at least some Dutch Mennonites had viewed the practice of bearing arms as compatible with their religious convictions.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the century, Mennonites were involved in the Patriot Movement (1780-1787) that included the use of force.<sup>8</sup> Among the educated, several Mennonite ministers and seminary students were active Patriots, even participating in a key revolutionary organization, the Free Corps (*Vrijcorpsen*), a citizens' militia that exercised resistance against the state. One prominent Free Corps participant was Leiden Mennonite preacher Francois Adriaan van der Kemp, "an outspoken supporter of the American Revolution and a friend of the future American president John Adams."<sup>9</sup> According to some observers,

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<sup>5</sup> Jantzen, "Introduction," xxiv-xxv. For a sampling of Mannhardt's poetic writings in translation, see Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 184.

<sup>6</sup> Mannhardt, *Military Service Exemption*, xxxviii.

<sup>7</sup> See observations by the German Lutheran Simeon Friderich Rues, *Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem Gegenwärtigen Zustande der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten wie auch der Collegianten oder Reinsburger* (Jena, 1743), 103.

<sup>8</sup> James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Driedger, "Anabaptists and the Early Modern State: A Long-Term View," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 536. See also Michael Driedger, "An Article Missing from the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*: 'The Enlightenment in the Netherlands,'" in *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002), 106-107, 112-113; Nanne van der Zijpp, s.v. "Patriots and Mennonites,"

from the 1780s on, “the peace tradition among Dutch Mennonites became virtually extinct, at least among the dominant liberalist party.”<sup>10</sup>

In other parts of Europe, Mennonite views on nonresistance were also wavering, although official pronouncements maintained the traditional perspective. For example, in southern Germany in 1803, church leaders reaffirmed the doctrine of nonresistance through their so-called “Ibersheimer Resolutions,” but a number of young men inspired by the ideals of equality, freedom, and brotherhood emanating from the French Revolution chose to go to war for their country.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, as in the northwest German city of Krefeld, the Mennonite community seemed indifferent to the traditional teachings. After 1816, according to some estimates, they served in the military to the same degree as non-Mennonites.<sup>12</sup>

The revolutionary era and its aftermath also influenced Mennonite

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*Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*; Sjouke Voolstra, “‘The Hymn of Freedom’: The Redefinition of Dutch Mennonite Identity in the Restoration and Romantic Period (ca. 1810-1850),” in *From Martyr to Muppie: A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, ed. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1994), 190. Piet Visser, “Enlightened Dutch Mennonitism: The Case of Cornelius van Engelen,” in *Grenzen des Täufertums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen*, ed. Anselm Schubert, Astrid van Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (Heidelberg: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 2009), 369-91; Yme Kuiper, “Mennonites and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Friesland,” in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic: Studies Presented to Piet Visser on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. August den Hollander, Alex Noord, Mirjam van Veen, and Anna Voolstra (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 249-67.

<sup>10</sup> Annelies Verbeek and Alle G. Hoekema, “Mennonites in the Netherlands,” in *Testing Faith and Tradition*, ed. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 70.

<sup>11</sup> For a further discussion of this context, see James Jakob Fehr and Diether Götz Lichdi, “Mennonites in Germany” in *Testing Faith and Tradition*, 115-19; John D. Roth, “Context, Conflict, and Community: South German Mennonites at the Threshold of Modernity, 1750-1850,” in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 120-44; C. Henry Smith, *Smith’s Story of the Mennonites*, fifth ed., rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1981), 202-204.

<sup>12</sup> Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 111; see also Wolfgang Froese, “Weltflucht und Weltzuwendung: Die Aufgabe des Prinzips der Gewaltlosigkeit in der Krefelder Mennonitengemeinde im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert,” *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 47/48 (1990/91): 104-24.



attitudes in Provincial Prussia. While leaders endeavored to maintain traditional Mennonite privileges and exemptions, some individuals fought for the Prussian cause against Napoleon. This suggests that in the Napoleonic wars there were most likely Mennonite soldiers on both sides of the battlefield.<sup>13</sup> As the century wore on, even prominent persons within the Mennonite community voiced support for some form of military service. For example, Carl Harder (1820-1896), a young university-educated pastor in the city of Königsberg, distanced himself from traditional Mennonite teachings, arguing that for the sake of the state the use of weapons was sometimes necessary to maintain order and justice.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most outspoken proponent of military service was Hermann von Beckerath (1801-1870), a member of the Mennonite church in Krefeld. In 1848, he emerged at the Frankfurt National Assembly as a prime spokesperson for freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, and equal rights for all groups, including Jews. He had been elected by parliamentarians as minister of finance for the cabinet formed to lead the future German government.<sup>15</sup> When the issue of military exemption came to the floor, von Beckerath argued for no exceptions to the conscription laws. If groups such as the Mennonites embraced equal rights before the law, and if they anticipated benefitting from the same rights as other citizens, they should not expect to be exempted from any responsibilities, including military duty.<sup>16</sup>

In the end, the aims of the National Assembly were not achieved, as champions of the monarchy led by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck defended

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most publicized example was the Mennonite David von Riesen, banned for his military involvements from the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation in 1816. He subsequently filed a formal complaint against his congregation and its leadership. The case ended up at the High Court in Berlin, which ruled in 1818 in favor of the leadership. See Mark Jantzen, "Vistula Delta Mennonites Encounter German Nationalism, 1813-1820," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78, no. 2 (April 2004): 205-11.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Harder, *Monatsschrift* (May 1848), 16, quoted in Peter Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), 182.

<sup>15</sup> Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia*, 183.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. For an excerpt of van Beckerath's speech, see Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), 416. For context to events surrounding the Frankfurt National Assembly and subsequent developments, see Mark Jantzen, "Equal and Conscribed: Liberal Rights Confront Mennonite Conceptions of Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 32 (2014): 65-80.

the status quo. During this time, Mennonites continued to negotiate terms allowing for military exemptions. As the years passed, however, their situation grew more tenuous and finally reached a turning point. In 1868, a Royal Order from Berlin allowed Mennonites to serve as non-combatants, but they could no longer avoid military service altogether.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this development, an estimated 2,000 Mennonites left the Vistula Delta for Russia or North America, while the majority stayed and accepted the new conditions of German citizenship.<sup>18</sup> Most would come to share, at least in broad strokes, the views that Mannhardt articulated in *Mennonitische Blätter*. As early as 1870, the Danzig Mennonites allowed individuals to decide for themselves how they would follow the demands of the state,<sup>19</sup> and by 1886, Article 7 of the Danzig church constitution was modified to read: “Whenever the fatherland requires military service, we allow the individual conscience of each member to serve in that form which satisfies him most.”<sup>20</sup>

In subsequent decades, while some would object to serving *Volk und Vaterland* in combatant roles, the general movement toward militarism proceeded at an accelerated pace.<sup>21</sup> According to Diether Goetz Lichdi, in World War I, “2000 Mennonites or 10 percent of their number fought in the army” and 400 Mennonites died on the battlefield.<sup>22</sup> Immediately after

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<sup>17</sup> Jantzen, “Mennonites in Prussia Becoming Germans: The First Hundred Forty Years,” *Preservings* 33 (2013): 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 29. For more background to the conflict that ensued among Mennonites during this time see, for instance, John D. Thiesen, “First Duty of the Citizen: Mennonite Identity and Military Exemption in Prussia, 1848-1877,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72, no. 2 (April 1998): 161-87.

<sup>19</sup> H. G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*, trans. Victor G. Doerksen, ed. Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2007), 205.

<sup>20</sup> Emil Haendiges, “Catastrophe of the West Prussian Mennonites,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth Mennonite World Conference, Goshen, Indiana, and North Newton, Kansas, August 3-10, 1948* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1950), 126, quoted in James Peter Regier, “Mennonitische Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Prussian Mennonites, The Third Reich, and Coming to Terms with a Difficult Past,” *Mennonite Life* 59, no. 1 (March 2004): 3.

<sup>21</sup> For background to German Mennonite attitudes during World War I, see Walter Klaassen, Harry Loewen and James Urry, “German Nationalism and the First World War: Hermann G. Mannhardt’s *Heroic Deeds and Heroes*,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 4 (October 2014): 517-36.

<sup>22</sup> Diether Goetz Lichdi, “The Story of Nazism and its Reception by German Mennonites,”

the war years, Mennonite views in support of militarism softened, but as social and economic conditions grew desperate and sentiments grew more nationalistic, many Mennonites joined a new wave of patriotism.<sup>23</sup> After Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in the 1930s, the Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden im Deutschen Reich, the central organization of Mennonite churches in northern Germany, officially renounced the principle of nonresistance.<sup>24</sup> Not all Mennonites in Prussia were willing to take up arms, and some continued to hold, at least in their hearts, to the traditional position. Nevertheless, most Prussian Mennonites would come to embrace Germany's nationalistic rhetoric, and especially in early stages of the war effort would celebrate the Reich's victories. Only after the end of the Second World War did these Mennonites reaffirm some form of nonresistant or peace position.

These aspects of Mennonite history, together with events pertaining to Wilhelm Mannhardt, raise questions about how Mennonites today should come to terms with their history, especially with narratives falling outside normative expressions of belief. Together with the Church of the Brethren and the Society of Friends, Mennonites have long been associated with the historic peace churches. Virtually all official teachings of present-day Mennonite denominations affirm a form of nonresistant or peace position.<sup>25</sup>

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*Mennonite Life* 36, no. 1 (April 1981): 26.

<sup>23</sup> A summary of literature on how far Mennonites were warming to nationalistic sentiments in the interwar years is in Klaassen et al., "German Nationalism," 527, notes 47 and 48. For a comprehensive discussion of this topic, see Jeremy Robert Koop, "The Political Ramifications of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine in the Nazi Period: A Comparative Study of the German Christians, the Confessing Church, and the Mennonites" (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2011), especially 261-317.

<sup>24</sup> As recorded in the June 1934 edition of the *Mennonitische Blätter*. See Regier, "Mennonitische Vergangenheitsbewältigung," 8.

<sup>25</sup> The term "Historic Peace Churches" first appeared at a meeting of representatives of the Church of the Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites in Newton, Kansas in 1935. The meeting focussed on a wide range of issues related to conscientious objection, alternatives to military service, relief efforts, and the peace witness. See Melvin Gingerich and Paul Peachey, "Historic Peace Churches (1989)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, [www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Historic\\_Peace\\_Churches-&oldid=88064](http://www.gameo.org/index.php?title=Historic_Peace_Churches-&oldid=88064), accessed July 5, 2014. The link between Anabaptism and pacifism was perhaps made with greatest force by historians associated with Harold S. Bender's vision of Anabaptism, and the work of Guy F. Hershberger. See Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary*

In light of these realities, should Mennonites, who hold to teachings on peace, simply bracket out historical and theological narratives that do not fit their ideal? Or can these narratives provide fertile ground for further reflection?

In what follows, I outline how Mannhardt reasoned theologically in his defense of military service. I begin by broadly summarizing the historic Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching on nonresistance as articulated from the 16th to the 18th centuries. I then examine Mannhardt's writings, specifically the *Mennonitische Blätter* essay, to argue that his way of reasoning presumed a modern, individualistic mindset that failed to take seriously the Christocentric hermeneutic and ontology at the root of traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings. Along the way, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of engaging with the past, even when history may not align with current sensibilities.

### **Identification with Christ**

Mannhardt's departure from Anabaptist-Mennonite traditional understandings was not due to ignorance. In *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, he had included a fifty-seven page compendium which in his time was the most representative and comprehensive collection of Mennonite texts on nonresistance. While excluding Swiss and South-German Anabaptist sources, the collection included a goldmine of excerpts from Menno Simons (1496-1561), the *Martyrs Mirror*, various leading Mennonite figures, and representative confessional and catechetical writings adopted by Mennonite communities in the Low Countries.

A wide range of themes emerges in the compendium. Several passages, for example, maintain that the weapons of a Christian differ from those of the world. "We have no weapons," Simons is quoted as saying, "except patience, hope, silence and God's Word."<sup>26</sup> A quotation from the Dordrecht confession of 1632 likewise asserts that the weapons of Christians are not steel or iron but "the armor of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, [and] the

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*Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), and Guy F. Herschberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953).

<sup>26</sup> Mannhardt, "The Military Service Exemption," 215.

sword of the spirit. . . .”<sup>27</sup> Christians do not carry out vengeance; vengeance belongs to God. It may be that true believers must flee from one city or country to another, or suffer loss of their goods or even their lives. Rather than exercising vengeance, they are called upon to pray for their enemies. If their enemies are hungry or thirsty, they should be assured that the Christian community desires the good of all. In this way evil is overcome with good.<sup>28</sup> Pure love involves praying for persecutors, rendering good for evil, and loving one’s enemies.<sup>29</sup>

An excerpt from Engel Arendszoon van Dooregeest (1645-1706), preacher of the Anabaptist congregation at De Rijp, notes that the traditional Mennonite position on nonresistance is not an innovation but was already present in the early church. Many church fathers believed that even a just war should be avoided.<sup>30</sup> According to van Dooregeest, war is a “sea of suffering” and a wasteland of horror. Political leaders often use the language of justice as a smokescreen or excuse to engage in conflict. Ultimately, no one benefits from war and no wars can ever be just. Van Dooregeest asserts that most military leaders admit that the rules of fair and just engagement are almost always ignored in warfare, and that many innocent persons become victims of violence and oppression.<sup>31</sup>

Another voice in Mannhardt’s collection is that of Kornelius van Huyzen (1667-1721), a church leader at Emden. Van Huyzen observes that animals have instincts and abilities to destroy their attackers in self-defense, but humans possess “a distinct voice capable of speech and a reasonable consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> Thus it is entirely wrong to kill a murderer, even if there is no other way to preserve one’s own life, because if that person dies it will cost him his eternal damnation.<sup>33</sup> Turning to problematic texts for nonresistant Christians, van Huyzen affirms that the wars of Israel were ordered by God but argues that God needed these wars “to serve as the rod in His hand in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 217, 210, 232.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 252.

order to punish the nations and those who had fallen so low.”<sup>34</sup> However, the way God directed Israel cannot be a pattern for Christians. At most, Israel’s wars are a metaphor for how the new Israel, the church, is called to wage war “with the sword of the spirit” and “the word of God.”<sup>35</sup> This new order, van Huyzen observes, was anticipated by the prophets who taught that the new spiritual Israel would be peaceful and all weapons would be banished.<sup>36</sup> In the New Testament he concedes there are still examples of the old dispensation, as when John the Baptist spoke to a soldier without requiring him to lay down his sword. But with the coming of Christ’s kingdom, the rules have changed and Christians are called upon to follow a new order.<sup>37</sup> What matters in defense of the nonresistant position is the example of Christ, along with his apostles, who under no circumstances picked up the sword. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught the disciples that they should not resist evil but love their enemies and do good to those showing hatred. Christians are guests and aliens in the world; they have no permanent city. Their obligation is to be patient and to follow the example of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

The arguments of van Dooregeest and van Huyzen in Mannhardt’s compendium are reiterated in various confessions and catechisms. Frequently these documents, like the Confession of Faith of the Mennonites in Prussia of 1792, formulated by Gerhard Wiebe (1725-1796) at Ellerwald, acknowledge that the OT contains much divinely sanctioned violence. There is a recognition, for instance, that the Patriarchs were called to blot out the memory of various Canaanite peoples. But Jesus inaugurated a new day in which hatred of the enemy was no longer permitted. “We should follow the lamb where he leads us,” the Prussian confession states, “not repaying evil for evil or abuse for abuse but instead we should bless silently if we want to inherit blessing.”<sup>39</sup> Thus Christians are called to avoid the office of worldly power and are prohibited from waging war. True Christians follow Christ’s “nonresistant life and cross-bearing footsteps.” This ethical stance is taken because they are citizens of a heavenly kingdom; they are a community of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 252-53.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 266.

faith “without spot or wrinkle.”<sup>40</sup>

Kingdom theology also surfaces in excerpts from the writings of Menno Simons. There are two opposing kingdoms—the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. Because Christians belong to the heavenly kingdom, they are messengers of peace. With Christ as king, there is nothing but peace in his kingdom. “Everything that is seen, heard, and done is peace.”<sup>41</sup> The ontological basis of this citizenship is the new birth, which implies that Christians “are flesh of Christ’s flesh and bone of His bone.”<sup>42</sup> Regenerated Christians are clothed with the garment of righteousness, and refreshed with the living water of the spirit and the bread of life which is Christ.<sup>43</sup> Having been born of God after the Spirit, they are substantively changed; they have a new inward disposition “of one mind and one nature with Christ.”<sup>44</sup> In the depths of their being they have become united with him. The inward disposition of true Christians has been transubstantiated, and thus believers outwardly conform to Christ, imitating him and following in his steps.

What becomes apparent in surveying Mannhardt’s compendium is that the Anabaptist-Mennonite position on nonresistance is not based simply on proof-texting, where one slate of biblical passages is highlighted at the expense of others. Rather, a particular Christocentric hermeneutic is at work in which identification with Christ—his teaching and example—is foundational and becomes the lens through which the entire Bible is read. Further, Christian discipleship is rooted in a particular ontology in which Christians are citizens of a heavenly kingdom entered through the experience of a new birth. Recipients of this new birth do not simply follow a particular law of nonresistance; they have a new identity, having been united in the very being of Christ that compels them to live in a radically different way.

This view has much in common with the classical notion of *theosis* found in patristic writers and late medieval mystics, in which the incarnation, Christ’s salvation, and the new birth makes possible humanity’s “deification” or “divinization”—participation in the divine nature.<sup>45</sup> It presupposes an

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 262-67.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>45</sup> One of the first scholars to talk about deification or divinization in Anabaptism may have

ecclesiology in which the church is understood sacramentally as the place where Christ is found, where Christ's presence is incarnated in the world.<sup>46</sup> For someone like Menno Simons, such a theology of being leads inexorably to a nonresistance posture.

When we turn to Mannhardt's writings in defense of military conscription, we see that this hermeneutic and theological ontology appears to be rejected. There we encounter a different theological lens—an altered hermeneutic and theological ontology—that inevitably leads to a different code of conduct allowing for participation in military service.

### **Inner Convictions**

Mannhardt begins his argument by relativizing the past and arguing for an ecclesiology grounded in a “democratic principle.” In historicist fashion, he notes that while dynamic religious communities adhere to at least one principle or “fundamental idea, on which it stands or falls,” there is nevertheless “a great difference between the fundamental idea itself and its historical development, the eventual form it takes in individual doctrinal statements and its application in church rituals and confessional documents.”<sup>47</sup> He observes that such forms and applications often do not truly reflect the original idea but are the effect and consequence of a particular context. This suggests they can be changed. Changes in religious expression are therefore possible without damaging fundamental principles. In some cases these expressions “*must* be set aside if it becomes evident that, because they rest upon erroneous assumptions, they constitute a hindrance to the relatively perfect realization of that fundamental idea.”<sup>48</sup>

Distinguishing between a fundamental principle and convictions and

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been Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> On the Anabaptist notion of the church as sacrament, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 351-64. Brian Hamilton argues convincingly that the notion of the church as the embodiment of the incarnation is also found in the theology of the Swiss Anabaptist Michael Sattler. See Brian Hamilton, “The Ground of Perfection: Michael Sattler on ‘The Body of Christ,’” in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010), 143-60.

<sup>47</sup> Mannhardt, “Concerning the Question of Military Service,” 299.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.



practices that are historically conditioned, Mannhardt challenges the claim that nonresistance is the fundamental principle on which Mennonitism stands or falls. What lies at the root of the tradition, in his view, is a particular kind of ecclesiology: a “freely self-determined, constantly renewing brotherhood of persons determined to become disciples of Christ dedicated to mutual admonition, assistance and encouragement to act ethically.”<sup>49</sup> This brotherhood is “based on practical honesty, love, patience, gentleness, and humility, without a systematic dogmatic structure and without the binding compulsion of unchangeable creeds and confessional documents.”<sup>50</sup> This concept of Christian community is the basis of all Mennonite teachings, including the practices of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Such a brotherhood is congregational in its polity; a “democratic principle” determines important matters pertaining to teaching and practice. Accordingly, any attempt to create a hierarchical order or consistorial constitution, or any effort by the state to interfere in a congregation’s self-determination, contradicts this foundational principle.<sup>51</sup> While Mannhardt recognizes that for many Mennonites non-participation in warfare is a fundamental principle, he believes they are mistaken. Although Simons argued for a nonresistant position, in Mannhardt’s view he did so ostensibly in relation to his critique of Münsterite fanaticism.<sup>52</sup> His views may have made sense in the 16th century, but changing circumstances in the modern world mean new ethical perspectives must be considered.

Mannhardt does not avoid the Bible to build his case, but he does not see the teaching of nonresistance mandated in Scripture. He believes not only that the God of the OT encouraged warfare, but that the NT upholds this teaching.<sup>53</sup> Neither John the Baptist nor Christ declared the use of arms to be out of bounds, nor did they require soldiers to rid themselves of their weapons. Rather, both responded positively toward soldiers, and condemned only arbitrary and illegal acts of violence. Further, Christ often used images of warfare in his teachings, and could “hardly have categorically forbidden

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 322-23.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 301, 313.

his disciples the use of weapons, especially for purposes of self-defense given the threats posed by robber bands.”<sup>54</sup> Rather than viewing the language of warfare metaphorically, as Simons was prone to do, Mannhardt concludes that its use in Scripture sanctions Christian participation in it.

At the same time, Mannhardt is quick to explain that the moral imperative to love the enemy cannot be ignored. He readily affirms NT writings forbidding revenge.<sup>55</sup> However, he insists that these texts are entirely concerned with inner motivations and attitudes. Thus killing and wounding is not, in and of itself, sin. It becomes a transgression against God only if one’s attitude is vengeful and if one is not willing to negotiate or honestly seek to find alternative solutions. Pure objectives and the internalization of the gospel are what matter most.<sup>56</sup> While Mannhardt does pay attention to Christ’s teachings, nowhere does he address imitation, discipleship, or the new birth; nor does his theological anthropology take into account the inextricable ontological linkage between Christ and Christian identity. The identity of a Christian seems to have become more world-oriented and less ontologically connected to its divine source.

As for the secular state, Mannhardt emphasizes its autonomy. He points to the story where Jesus admonishes his disciples to give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.<sup>57</sup> He interprets Jesus’ words to mean that religion and politics, church and state, are two distinct spheres, and thus the state enjoys a certain level of independence; for “aside from God, it has no one else above it to judge it.”<sup>58</sup> There may be limits to one’s obedience, but ultimately the government is responsible for determining what should be done in a given situation. Without question, soldiers should obey God above any other authorities, and under extreme circumstances of flagrant injustice, an army might act against the wishes of a commanding officer. On the whole, however, “the soldier must submit to the call of the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 301-302, 313.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 304-305, 310-11, 323. This is a line of reasoning similar to Augustine’s. See the discussion of intention and “readiness of mind” according to Augustine in Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), chapter 4.

<sup>57</sup> Mannhardt, “Concerning the Question of Military Service,” 303, 342.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 309.

fatherland even when he personally may not recognize the justness of the war, for not he, the individual citizen, but the government leaders have the right and the heavy responsibility to decide on the matter. . . .”<sup>59</sup> In situations where war appears to be unjust, the soldier has the responsibility to utilize by legal means all the influence that he has to stop officials from their errors. Should these efforts be in vain, one should assume that the government has the better understanding. In this way, Mannhardt reasons, the soldier on the basis of Romans 13:4 must in virtually every case obey the authorities. If they are in error, the soldier is “relieved of any personal responsibility”<sup>60</sup> because of the state’s presumed better understanding of things, even if this means the soldier contributes to an unjust situation.<sup>61</sup> In this respect the values of justice and duty become paramount. Government officials are duty bound to punish and even execute criminals, while ordinary soldiers are obligated to render services consonant with the wishes of the state.

This emphasis on duty is oriented toward the other, but it is also linked to self-preservation. At one point, Mannhardt even suggests this is an important value above all else:

Self-defense is allowed, indeed mandated because it is only when our life and existence is a given that we are enabled to complete our duty, our divine purpose, and show good will to our neighbors. It is permitted because in the division between the two ethical interests our duty lies on the side of the more immediate interest, that of self-preservation and higher justice. Therefore the other—the care for the life of our neighbor—must recede. On the other hand, there may be instances where consideration for oneself must give way before the safety of the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 311. For Augustine, “the soldier will be innocent in carrying out even an ‘unrighteous command’ of the king on whom he ought to rely for the determination of just or unjust cause” (Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, 72).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>61</sup> For an account of the state as ethically autonomous within Protestantism more generally, see John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Co-op Bookstore, 1983), 97-113; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 129-79.

family, the state, or another person.<sup>62</sup>

Thus the virtue of duty toward the other and toward the self are interrelated. Self-preservation makes possible service to the state and to society, based on the highest values of justice that come from God.

Mannhardt takes care to reiterate that he is not opposed to peace, but he insists that this is a future reality that will come about only gradually. Referring to Matthew 13:33, he notes that the kingdom of God is like leaven that gradually saturates bushels of flour, or like “a mustard seed that only gradually grows to become a mighty tree.”<sup>63</sup> This kingdom will first need to be realized within individuals before it will be “fully realized in the life of nations.”<sup>64</sup> And yet, from his 19th-century vantage point, Mannhardt is also optimistic that the kingdom is near. Already in the present context powerful nations are beginning to reconcile differences.<sup>65</sup> The kingdom of God, then, is not—as Simons would have it—associated only with believers or the church; it is also reflected in nations that pursue acts of reconciliation.

Accordingly, the traditional Mennonite position is untenable, because it assumes a present realization of the kingdom, a faulty realized eschatology that is too eager “to leap over the God-ordained stages of development.”<sup>66</sup> Mannhardt asserts that Mennonites in bygone years developed a great political theory, but their history of quarrels and lack of inner peacefulness reveal that they have embraced the letter of Scripture yet have utterly failed to understand the genuine spirit of their tradition.<sup>67</sup> Thanks to their misguided convictions, the various privileges that Mennonites have negotiated with monarchs over the years have given them an unfair advantage over other Christians. They have become co-conspirators in a profoundly unjust situation.<sup>68</sup> Their special privileges, negotiations, and exemptions have left them socially isolated, taking on the appearance of a hereditary caste. Accident of birth now determines membership, which

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<sup>62</sup> Mannhardt, “Concerning the Question of Military Service,” 307.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 317. See also 353.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

leads to unjust material advantages.<sup>69</sup> Such “caste-like cordoning off from the rest of the world” is manifestly injurious, in that some intermarriages between families have led to a large number of childless unions. In addition, social isolation has narrowed Mennonites’ cultural and intellectual horizons. The unwillingness of Prussian Mennonites to broaden their knowledge, and their limited education, has brought harm to the wider society, which is a moral transgression.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence, “the absence of any breeze of fresh air entering their ranks through the exchange of conflicting ideas [has] promoted a high degree of hardening and fossilization in their religious thought.”<sup>71</sup>

Much of the blame for this situation, in Mannhardt’s view, rests with the clergy. For many years elders have held absolute decision-making power, and conference resolutions have tied the hands of congregations, limiting their ability to make decisions on their own. The conference has even garnered judicial and penal power, leading to such clerical tyranny that church members have been intimidated and will no longer voice dissenting opinions.<sup>72</sup> The time has come for individuals to decide for themselves how to be responsible citizens. Mannhardt concludes that Mennonites should offer themselves as medics or stretcher-bearers in times of warfare. Moreover, there is no reason that they could not also become full participants on the battlefield. While noncombatant service might seem most appropriate, bearing arms should also be an option.<sup>73</sup>

In this summary, we can observe the hallmarks of modernity shaping Mannhardt’s reasoning as he explicitly champions the individual as the one who determines the direction of moral action. At the beginning of his work, despite linking the Mennonite fundamental principle with the discerning community (Mennonitism understood as a brotherhood of persons dedicated to mutual admonition, assistance, and ethical living),<sup>74</sup> Mannhardt ultimately leaves little room for collective exegesis or the wisdom of ecclesial discernment. When he does refer to the collective, he uses the language

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 348-49.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 355-58.

<sup>74</sup> See note 51.

of a “democratic principle,” sidestepping the authority of the clergy and Mennonite tradition. He may have good reason to be critical of the clerical hierarchy, but he does not put in place a sufficient alternative communal model of discernment with theological content. The “democratic principle” ultimately means that individual members are to look internally to decide how to fulfill their military obligations.

In shaping his political theology Mannhardt does not exclude theological reasoning. Like his forebears, he attends to Scripture, including the teachings of Christ that call for a peaceful attitude. But he no longer has any use for a Christocentric hermeneutic in which identification with Christ and his kingdom becomes the point of departure for how one should live in a world of conflict. He would apparently live in both spheres—in the kingdom of Christ and in the kingdom of the world—a view less aligned with the Anabaptist tradition and more in tune with the Protestant mainstream and Lutheran two-kingdom theology. While aware of his own tradition, Mannhardt cannot bring himself to accept the Anabaptist-Mennonite ontology of the new birth along with the related notions of discipleship, imitation, and the separated community. He seems to find greater resonance with the modern world where individualism and universal principles of duty and justice, based on a general notion of “God,” take center stage. He has become accustomed to being a citizen of the kingdom of the world, in which inner convictions and nation-state aspirations have become determinative. It is this theopolitical starting point that must now determine whether Mennonites will become involved in military service.

### **Coming to Terms with the Past**

In 1884, not long after Mannhardt’s essay in support of military service, Anna Brons (1810-1902), a dedicated member of the Emden Mennonite congregation, wrote a ground-breaking modern history of the Mennonites. She praised the early Anabaptists for their refusal to take up arms, and particularly applauded the nonresistant position of Menno Simons, contrasting his behavior with the vengeful and violent actions of the radical Thomas Müntzer. She went on to commend the Anabaptists for their pioneering peace witness. In light of the current state of affairs in northern Germany, however, she concluded that a new theopolitical imagination

was required. While Simons in his day had appropriately refused to bear arms, the present context required taking up arms. Pointing to Mennonite participation in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, she insisted that no one should have the insolent boldness to condemn.<sup>75</sup>

Just a few decades later, support of militarism seemed to be gaining traction. In the spring of 1915, as the First World War was raging, Hermann Gottlieb Mannhardt (1855-1927), Wilhelm Mannhardt's cousin, spoke to an audience in a hotel banquet hall in Danzig (now Gdansk) about the virtues of Germany's cause, drawing associations between the present war and Germany's history of struggles for freedom and nationhood. He reminded listeners of the long road from Hermann's defeat of the Romans in the Teutoburger Wald in 9 AD<sup>76</sup> to the defeat of the French in the Napoleonic and Franco-Prussian wars, and to the declaration of the new German Reich at Versailles in 1871.<sup>77</sup> He waxed eloquent about the sublime and lofty cultural wealth present in the German *Volk*, drawing on classic German poets while roundly condemning the stale sickness of all things foreign.<sup>78</sup> By this time, more than 200,000 German soldiers had died in battle, a detail Mannhardt used in his lead-up to a strident call for the audience to fight against the alien hordes seeking to destroy the German spirit. Calling to mind Germany's status as "the heart of the world," the speaker concluded with these words:

To you German men and German women, and to you, O German youth, belongs the future. Is the struggle of this charge, to bleed and die for it, to bring sacrifices for it, worth it? God grant us now, and in the days to come in war and in peace, what

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<sup>75</sup> Anna Brons, *Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten in kurzen Zügen übersichtlich dargestellt* (Norden [Ost Friesland]: n.p., 1884), 329.

<sup>76</sup> Hermann, a name given to Arminius, a Teutonic chieftain who led a coalition of armies defeating the Romans in 9 CE. The Hermannsdenkmal, a statue more than 50 meters high, was erected in 1875 near Detmold, Germany. It still stands menacingly, sword in hand, facing westward in the direction of France.

<sup>77</sup> Hermann Mannhardt, "Heroic Deeds and Heroes: An Address in Time of War," trans. Walter Klaassen, in Walter Klaassen, Harry Loewen, and James Urry, "German Nationalism and the First World War: Hermann G. Mannhardt's *Heroic Deeds and Heroes*," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 4 (October 2014): 529.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

is required for it: Heroic Deeds and Heroes!<sup>79</sup>

In little less than two decades, these sentiments of heroism would become widespread as a significant number of German Mennonites embraced National Socialism and officially renounced the principle of nonresistance.

As the Wilhelm Mannhardt story suggests, such sentiment did not arise overnight. Elements of German militarism were already in place by the latter half of the 19th century. At the time, he was perhaps one of the first Mennonites to develop a theological rationale that would adumbrate the convictions of, and give credence to, attitudes and actions which would become widespread decades later. As I intimated earlier, some of this sentiment may have been anticipated in other regions of Europe as early as the 1750s, when the Mennonite position on nonresistance started to unravel.

Much has changed over the years. In discovering the horrors and atrocities of unfettered nationalism and conflict, many Mennonites in Germany have now recommitted themselves to principles of nonresistance, even rediscovering an Anabaptist vision for peace and service. Some have expressed words of repentance, often followed by corporately initiated rituals of remorse and regret, such as the petition for forgiveness marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War's end in 1995.<sup>80</sup> European Mennonites have encouraged peace initiatives at the ecumenical level, such as the "Decade to Overcome Violence" sponsored by the World Council of Churches.<sup>81</sup> This initiative, among others, suggests not just a re-affirmation of traditional views but a development in thinking from a passive posture to an active, engaging one, including a transformation in language from "nonresistance" to "peacemaking." Indeed, a significant number of Mennonites and their institutions in Europe and North America have moved "from quietism to activism" and along the way have incorporated in their language concepts such as restorative justice, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and

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<sup>79</sup> Mannhardt, "Heroic Deeds and Heroes," 536.

<sup>80</sup> See Fehr and Lichdi, "Mennonites in Germany," 129-30.

<sup>81</sup> See the final submission to the WCC by the Union of German Mennonite Churches (Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden), titled "'Guide our Feet into the Way of Peace': Declaration on Just Peace," to the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2011: Churches Seeking Reconciliation, [www.mennofriedenszentrum.de/fileadmin/downloads/DeclarationonJustPeace.pdf](http://www.mennofriedenszentrum.de/fileadmin/downloads/DeclarationonJustPeace.pdf)



mediation.<sup>82</sup> Mennonites have also linked themes on peace to issues ranging from human rights to the environment. The legacy of nonresistance has not only been recovered; it has been transformed in imaginative and fruitful ways.

It may be tempting for so-called “Mennonite progressives” to remain fixated by this recent narrative, with its accompanying optimism and exemplary comportment. Surely it would be satisfying to put our confidence in this recent history, and simply disremember or dismiss expressions of belief and conduct that do not measure up to certain Anabaptist ideals. But in avoiding the uncomfortable narratives, we may miss an opportunity to learn from the past. Becoming cognizant of Mannhardt’s theological reasoning may help us comprehend more adequately the kind of reasoning that many German Mennonites came to adopt during the two World Wars. Such awareness is not about justifying past destructive attitudes but about placing them into historical context, and at least beginning to recognize the enormous power of the social, cultural, and political forces of that time. This sort of remembering should, moreover, provide a heightened awareness of the forces shaping today’s theological and ethical convictions and attitudes.

Examining Mannhardt’s theological reasoning may also help us probe our current theopolitical imaginations. A facile biblicism or proof-texting will not bear careful scrutiny since, as Mannhardt has shown, the Bible may be used to support a militaristic view just as well as a nonresistance view. Those reflecting on Mennonite peace theology would be wise to pay attention to hermeneutical assumptions and the role of communal discernment. That said, does a traditional Anabaptist hermeneutic—a Christocentric approach highlighting the axioms of imitation and discipleship, along with a theological anthropology of heavenly citizenship—still have purchase? Menno Simons’s world is not ours, but does his theological reasoning deserve our attention?

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<sup>82</sup> See Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994); Rachel Waltner Goossen, “North American Mennonite Peacemakers and Their History,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 91-100; Gayle Gerber Koontz, “Peace Theology in Transition: North American Mennonite Peace Studies and Theology, 1906-2006,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1 (January 2007): 77-96; Ervin Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908-2008* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011); *Peace*, ed. Ted Koontz, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2013), entire issue.

Can his proposal, along with others in the tradition, provide a theologically defensible and faithful way forward for a contemporary political theology?

Such queries require serious attention today, especially when convictions about peace in Mennonite circles may be weakening.<sup>83</sup> Examining Mannhardt's reasoning—and Menno's—can help us gain clarity regarding our own perspectives and presuppositions. An exploration of this kind, together with an investigation of the historical consequences of such reasoning, may also deepen our resolve to work for peace in the world.

*Karl Koop is Professor of History and Theology at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

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<sup>83</sup> For example, American Mennonite Brethren seem to be softening their peace position. See "USMB Delegates Approve Peace Article Revision," *Mennonite World Review*, August 18, 2014, [www.mennoworld.org/2014/08/18/news/usmb-delegates-approve-peace-article-revision](http://www.mennoworld.org/2014/08/18/news/usmb-delegates-approve-peace-article-revision), accessed January 4, 2016.

# Shalom Political Theology: A New Type of Mennonite Peace Theology for a New Era of Discipleship

Malinda Elizabeth Berry

## Introduction

In my office I have a small stack of photocopied booklets with black plastic comb binding and cream-colored card stock for the cover. On several occasions I have used this modest publication—*Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types*<sup>1</sup>—as a textbook, making sure to have a least one extra copy on hand because it is not easy to come by. What I have found so useful about this simple collection of essays is that it makes undergraduate students open their eyes wide in wonder. It raises a question they never thought to ask: Is there more than one way to be a Mennonite pacifist?

This booklet opened my eyes and heart, and this expository essay is both a homage to the *Panorama* and an offering of a new form of Mennonite peace theology—shalom political theology (hereafter SPT)—that has grown from my grounding in the traditions of Mennonite peace theologies, plural.<sup>2</sup> What follows affirms the importance of cultivating a variety of peace theology types, and builds on the original typology by offering SPT as a synergistic blend of some of the lesser-known types featured in the *Panorama* with the hope that Historic Peace Churches (hereafter HPCs) will continue to use their unique forms of theologizing to align with God's reconciling purposes and vision in the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> I have developed the initial form of shalom political theology (SPT) in Malinda Elizabeth Berry, "'This Mark of a Standing Human Figure Poised to Embrace': A Constructive Theology of Social Responsibility, Nonviolence and Nonconformity" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 2013). This essay both revises and adds to my original discussion, and significant portions of it are drawn directly from that longer work (available online at <https://ambs.academia.edu/MalindaElizabethBerry>).

<sup>3</sup> By "Historic Peace Churches" I refer to the Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, and the Society of Friends, a cluster of denominations that understand themselves to be pacifistic.

### The Case for a New Type and its Components

Why is there a need for a new form of peace theology? Aren't ten types sufficient? Well, no. In broad terms, lived theology, which Mennonite peace theology is, is constantly in dialogue with the world around it, requiring articulations of how a biblical vision of peace is central to Christian faith. My offering alone does not meet this requirement, because while our working typology has included voices influenced by experiences from around the world, as John A. Lapp notes in his preface to the *Panorama*, our typology has yet to include and be reliant on African, Asian, Australian, and Latin American voices.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, there are three reasons for expanding the ten types.

First, for understandable reasons Mennonite peace theology has been a discourse dominated by men's voices, perspectives, and personal narratives. The *Panorama* is a case in point. While women participated in the consultation that led to the booklet's publication, only two of the ten contributors were women, and even then, women were not identified as proponents of any of the types of peace theology under scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> This gender imbalance is a moral problem in light of the denominational *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. Article 6 articulates a theological anthropology that understands women and men as "equally and wonderfully made in the divine image," with Article 15 affirming that the Holy Spirit calls both women and men to be leaders in the church.<sup>6</sup> Because we have these convictions about women, it is important that women's voices, perspectives, and personal narratives actively shape our tradition. I am putting forward SPT as a feminist approach to Mennonite peace theology.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John A. Lapp, preface to *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types*.

<sup>5</sup> Three notable works that are part correctives to this trend include Elizabeth Yoder, ed., *Peace Theology and Violence against Women* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992); Rosalee Bender et al., *Piecework: A Women's Peace Theology* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 1997); and Carol Penner, "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices: Peace Theology and Violence against Women" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> "Article 6. Creation and Calling of Human Beings" and "Article 15. Ministry and Leadership," *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, <http://mennoniteusa.org/confession-of-faith/ministry-and-leadership/>, accessed February 1, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this essay, I use "feminist" as an umbrella term for critical woman-centered

Second, historical dimensions have had contextual sway in shaping Mennonite peace theology types. For example, the post-World War II project of making pacifism intellectually respectable was one that consumed HPC scholars. As a junior scholar, I observe that today we do not have a well-defined or obvious scholarly community that sees itself as charged with the task of keeping peace theology alive for subsequent generations in the same way as those featured in the *Panorama*. That is, having established Anabaptist-informed pacifism as an intellectually respectable Christian stance, it is appropriate to consider how moments like the end of the Cold War, the advent of the War on Terrorism, the global recognition of the Green Belt Movement, #BlackLivesMatter, and the long-overdue closures of Indian residential/boarding schools and Magdalene laundries become points of interest for HPCs in light of decades of political advocacy for alternatives to military service in wartime. Thus I put forward SPT as a member of Generation X, interested in how both church and society are faring as our social and institutional lives change dramatically and rapidly.

Third, the pacifism of the Messianic community (Type 5 in the *Panorama*) is arguably the most common form of peace theology among US Mennonites. One of its weaknesses is that it is insufficient for helping contemporary Anabaptist communities make theological sense of social problems that indict the church for its inability to stand with the oppressed.<sup>8</sup> While several other types in the *Panorama* work to address this weakness (i.e., social responsibility, radical pacifism, realist pacifism, and liberation pacifism), the prominence of scholarship in the tradition of John Howard Yoder translates into limited debate about methodological blind spots in the pacifism of the Messianic community. This provides another reason for my arguing for SPT: to disrupt the hegemonic qualities of our peace theological discourse.

This essay has three parts. Part I weaves together James Evans's work on social problems as theological problems and Dorothee Soelle's work with

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approaches to theological and ethical concerns that includes both global feminist perspectives and US movements of Asian American feminism, black feminism, womanism, Latina feminism, *mujerista*, native feminism, and white feminism.

<sup>8</sup> A few high-profile examples include clergy sexual abuse cases in the Roman Catholic Church, the HIV/AIDS crisis in the Black Church, Christians on either side of the marriage equality/sanctity of marriage debate, and climate change denials centered in Evangelical groups.

mystical political theology. This section gives the reader a way to anchor my use of political theology in the sea of books, essays, and articles that are also concerned with where, how, why, and to what effect our God-talk meets various forms of political concern. Part II develops the biblical warrant for SPT. My argument is that through the perspective of wisdom literature, biblical shalom is linked to the theological motifs of Creation, the prophetic oracles of the Peaceable Kingdom, and Jesus' proclamation of the *basileia tou Theou* (the kingdom of God). This continuity becomes the synergistic hermeneutic that focuses peace theology as form of theological wisdom.

Part III is a constructive proposal for SPT, along with examples of how SPT can interrogate and re-shape the theo-ethical life of faith communities in ways that peace theology has not historically done. I direct my proposal to communities of Christians persuaded that peace, justice, and nonviolence are central to faith, values, and ethics; those communities may be ecumenical or denominationally particular. SPT integrates the principles of theological anthropology, nonviolence, and nonconformity as I have come to articulate them through my encounters with Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Doris Janzen Longacre.<sup>9</sup>

I should make a methodological comment here. SPT is not “biblical theology” in the classic, disciplinary sense of the term. Nor is SPT primarily a systematics or a particular theological ethic. SPT is a constructive theological offering that integrates three dimensions of confessional discourse—biblical study, theological reflection, and ethical engagement—into a biblical theo-ethic of shalom manifesting as discipleship committed to nonviolence and nonconformity.

## **I: POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND PEACE THEOLOGY**

Because God loves the world, to love and serve God is to embrace and serve the

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. was unfaithful to his spouse Coretta Scott King. Scholars have documented this aspect of King's life, and I am grateful for their fact-finding and analysis. As a feminist Christian, I am uneasy about drawing on and using King as a source for my work, knowing that he used patriarchal privilege to dominate women. I hold this tension by naming his failings, reading him critically, and striving to direct readers' attention to him not as an exemplar but as one who contributed ideas to the public sphere of Christian theology and ethics that are worth learning from and adapting in light of his transgressions.

world God loves. Such a confession is political, calling us to account for how we believe God does or does not sanction our human politics and enactments of human power. Political theological confession involves looking outwardly and inwardly, and also involves dialogical communication and multivalent awareness that keeps outward and inward realities in conversation with each other. An inward glance that turns outward might raise the question, How is God present in my life, and what difference does God's love make in how I see the world? Peering outwardly to contemplate public policy dilemmas can shape internal conversations in faith communities and how they do or do not use power equitably. Such confession has led me to consider theologians James H. Evans, Jr. and Dorothee Soelle, both because their work expands what we typically think of as political theology and because it is shaped by their outward and inward seeing commensurate with social justice hermeneutics endemic to Mennonite peace theology. In many ways the term "political theology" is trendy, and therefore requires unpacking. However, I will limit my discussion to how Evans's and Soelle's uses of it shape how I employ political theology as the discursive framework for SPT.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Evans links social problems to practical theology and political theology through African American experience, both chastening political theology and calling for a hermeneutics of suspicion of ourselves, lest we think too highly of the state and too little of the church or vice versa. He helps SPT call Mennonite communities to account for the moments when power in the Messianic community goes unchecked, protecting members who act sinfully and thinking the state cannot be an agent of God's justice. Similarly, Soelle calls for a hermeneutics of suspicion in order to reclaim a form of Christian piety that recognizes how God-talk also functions as political speech. Her particular contribution to SPT comes from bringing her exploration of mysticism to bear on social problems and their relationship to the ego, possessions, and violence. She posits that we are all mystics, making "God desires fullness of life for all" the central theological basis for distinguishing between false and genuine mysticism.<sup>11</sup> I will now explicate

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<sup>10</sup> Readers interested in my detailed analysis and evaluation of political theology may want to consult my dissertation at <https://ambs.academia.edu/MalindaElizabethBerry>.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 52-55.

these two writers' perspectives and contributions to SPT in more detail.

As Evans describes how his book *We Shall All Be Changed: Social Problems and Theological Renewal* is a work of practical theology, he says that his interest is in offering a deeply theological response to persistent social problems, because how we expect Christian witness to interact with such problems is complicated and requires sustained theological analysis.<sup>12</sup> But he is not interested in simply analyzing social problems; he wants to address what he calls "two deeply felt needs": a public longing for spiritual renewal and a similar longing for common ground through social transformation.

As I survey the global landscape, I concur with Evans. From climate change and critiques of the industrial food system to hidden but persistent human trafficking and sexual violence, from gun violence at home and drone attacks far away to shrinking congregations and growing religiously motivated violence, it does not take long for social justice-oriented Christians to wonder exactly how God is making all things new in our time. Evans argues that these two desires, spiritual renewal and social transformation, are not only deeply felt but deeply connected.<sup>13</sup> As he makes his case for understanding what links social problems, spiritual renewal, and social transformation, he offers valuable commentary on how practical theology's discourse is related to other kinds of God-talk, notably political theology. Evans argues that by developing an awareness of social problems, however immediate or removed they are from our most direct experiences, we have new access to questions about ultimate reality. "Face to face with God, the theological dimensions of social problems are brought to light," he says, "and the social dimensions of theological problems become apparent."<sup>14</sup>

Evans laments the persistent majority of theologians who do not consider social problems and dilemmas to be their bailiwick. If and when those problems do enter theological conversations, he contends, they do so under the umbrella of ethics, to which he makes this objection: "Assigning

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<sup>12</sup> James H. Evans Jr., *We Shall All Be Changed: Social Problems and Theological Renewal* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), v.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. In making his case, Evans appropriates Gordon Kaufman's concept of mystery, which Evans describes as "the name we give to our ongoing attempts to find meaning in and solutions to those human problems that appear to be timeless, permanent, novel, contemporary, but always intractable" (11).



discussion of social problems in theological discourse solely to the field of ethics does justice to neither the field of ethics nor the influence of these problems on Christian witness in our times.”<sup>15</sup> At best, such a disconnect makes ethical action merely habitual and reflexive: Christians simply respond to their enemies with love without a second thought because that is what Christians are supposed to do. At worst, without offering a deeper spirituality or moral grounding beyond a basic biblicism, Christians’ actions may be ethical in an objective sense but not in a subjective sense, because their actions lack the basic theological reflection that goes hand-in-glove with ethics.

Theology in its broadest sense, Evans argues, is a combination of three different but closely related elements: fundamental or foundational theology, systematic theology, and practical theology.<sup>16</sup> From the German schools, Evans cites Friedrich Schleiermacher and Gerhard Ebeling. The former considered practical theology to be the aspects of theological education that give the organization and structure of the church’s life as a polity and a community. The latter argued that practical theology is the theory giving form and shape to church leadership, compared to other disciplines of theological education providing the content of that leadership. Evans contrasts this German perspective with those of John Macquarrie (United Kingdom) and David Tracy (United States), both of whom grant practical theology a wider definition: it is concerned with “the ecclesiastical life of the community.”<sup>17</sup>

Evans notes that both Macquarrie and Tracy define practical theology in a way that aligns it with political theology. Political theology is a theological discourse that explores Christian understanding of how God does or does not sanction human structuring of nation-states. Contemporary political theology also incorporates social analysis of human power dynamics as a vital part of its method. In this way, political theology is always going to reflect on institutions, and where political theologies part ways is in their

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> See John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1977), 127; and David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 6ff.

view of the state. What Evans brings into the discussion is his concern about political theologies' tendency to collapse state and church. On one hand, Schleiermacher and Ebeling seem to take such a high view of the church that it becomes a "divinely ordered political community." On the other, Macquarrie and Tracy both assume that the state is a "justly ordered polis." It is at this point that Evans levels his critique, arguing that in the US "where African Americans have been oppressed by despotic notions of the state and excluded by truncated notions of the church, theocracy or a narrow ecclesiasticism become suspect as points of departure for practical theology" and, I would add, for political theology.<sup>18</sup>

Dorothee Soelle's *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* is another example of the paradigm Evans establishes. Her approach to political/practical theology is activist in its orientation but also mystical. And like Evans, she laments the split between theology and ethics. She shares his hope that our human imagination will grow stronger, so that we can unite our experiences of the world with how we live in the world.<sup>19</sup>

Soelle's intention in *The Silent Cry* is to integrate her mystical spiritual experiences, borne of everyday living, with her life in the academy and in the institutional church. In particular, she wants to correct the impression that mystics received their most profound insights in isolation. "Was the demeanor of flight from the world, separation, and solitude adequate for mysticism?" she asks. "Were there not also other forms of expressing mystical consciousness to be found in the life of communities as well as individuals?" Soelle concludes that we base many of our assumptions on a false distinction between the mystical as internal and the political as external. With a desire to repair this breach, she writes, "everything that is within needs to be externalized so it doesn't spoil, like the manna in the desert that was hoarded for future consumption." And there are models of mysticism that remind us that "there is no experience of God that can be so privatized that it becomes and remains the property of one owner, the privilege of a person of leisure, the esoteric domain of the initiated." From Soelle's perspective, our times call for mysticism imbued with a spirit of resistance and a passion for

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<sup>18</sup> Evans, *We Shall All Be Changed*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, 5.

transformation—a declaration of No! in the face of injustice.<sup>20</sup>

By introducing mysticism into the discourse of political theology, Soelle hopes to contribute to personal healing and communal transformation.

To read texts of mysticism is to have renewed cognition of one's self, of a being that is buried under rubble. Thus, the discovery of the mystical tradition also sets free one's own forgotten experience. . . . If it is true that God is love, then the separation of religion and ethics—or, in the technical terminology of the academy, the separation of systematic theology and social ethics—is dangerous as well as detrimental to both sides. It is self-destructive for religion and ethics because it empties religion, reducing its basis for experiencing the world. It turns ethics into arbitrary arrangements of individual tribes and hordes.<sup>21</sup>

In identifying the importance of the existential aspects of religious experience and the meaning of Christian faith, she is talking about the search for shalom.

Together, Evans and Soelle reinforce the deeply Anabaptist impulse to keep theology and ethics knitted together with a biblical view of the world. Through their unique paradigms of political theology, they also bring something new to conversations about peace theology: the multivalent dialogue between what we see when we look both outwardly beyond ourselves and inwardly at ourselves (as individuated people, tight-woven faith communities, minority subcultures). Evans's integration of spiritual renewal and social transformation, and Soelle's belief in mysticism's power to be a catalyst for personal healing and communal transformation, offer Mennonite peace theological discourse a theological framework for communal self-examination as a spiritual necessity.

As Anabaptist Christians, we regard our original sin as not equated with our nature but with the self-conscious choice for evil rather than good. Baptism, according to Pilgram Marpeck, marks our choice to crucify sin and experience resurrection and new life in Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> God's grace is present

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>22</sup> Pilgram Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 108ff.

in our lives as a midwife, an agent of rebirth and regeneration. Psalm 34:14 comes to mind: “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” This is not a platitude but an invitation to seriously consider the theo-ethical challenges of shalom-oriented love and service united by the socially transformative and mystical pathway of God’s politics: making peace as we seek justice by keeping our eyes focused outwardly and inwardly.

## II: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL SHALOM

In Sunday school most of us learn that “shalom” is the Hebrew word for peace. What we tend not to learn is how holistic this peace is. “Peace” is an important term, but the cultural baggage it carries in Mennonite communities has led me to give “Peace” a break. In opting instead for “shalom” I am signaling that SPT is interested in holistic theo-ethical education and formation. Peace theology is something academics offer to the church, so that together we might innovate a way of being missional that is both socially responsible and nonviolent.

Shalom is the principle that links prophetic testimony of the Peaceable Kingdom oracles, found in Isaiah and Hosea, with Jesus’ prophetic proclamations about the *basileia tou Theou*, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>23</sup> In this part of the essay I seek to establish a theological definition of shalom that serves as the foundation for SPT and supports the holistic formation of disciples who know how to respond nonviolently to conflict within and beyond the church, and to offer a credible Christian witness that empowers others to make the same commitment.

### Four Dimensions of *Shalom*

In *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace*, Perry B. Yoder provides a four-part definition of the word that encapsulates God’s intention for wholeness. In one sense, shalom refers to material wellbeing and economic prosperity. When we ask after someone’s shalom—“How are you? How are your loved ones?”—we are asking after their health, financial situation,

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<sup>23</sup> Peaceable Kingdom references include passages like Isa. 2:2-4, 11:1-9, 65:17-25, and Hos. 2:15-20. A key theme is a cessation of violence between creatures who now have a predator/prey relationship. Weapons of violence and warfare are also laid aside or become tools for agricultural work.

or even physical safety and security.<sup>24</sup> In a second sense, shalom refers to social relationships and God's desire for justice to permeate the interactions between neighbors and nations. Moreover, the presence of shalom gives rise to a feeling of God working to end suffering and oppression. "Thus," Yoder writes, "in the arena of human relations, we see that shalom describes the way things ought to be . . . [involving] a much wider and more positive state of affairs than a narrow understanding of peace as antiwar or antimilitary activity."<sup>25</sup>

In a third sense, shalom refers to moral and ethical dimensions of our lives. Persons of shalom act with integrity and speak straightforwardly, and their conduct is in stark contrast with oppressors who deceive and speak falsely.<sup>26</sup> Yoder's discussion includes commentary on shalom's relationship to ancient Israel's law and the development of its political institutions, extending into the first century CE. As these institutions shifted from the time of the judges to the era of kingship with its accompanying structures, and ultimately to Roman imperialism, God's expectation of (political) leaders was constant: it is their duty "to implement substantive justice which leads to shalom."<sup>27</sup>

The word *eirene*, the Greek New Testament's counterpart to shalom, adds another layer of meaning that enlarges shalom's theological meaning. Yoder points out that in Paul's letters, the apostle refers to *eirene tou Theou*, the peace of God, which Paul uses to interpret the gospel. This new meaning builds on God's interest in justice within social relationships by bringing God's relationship with us into the dynamic. There can only be shalom between people and God, Yoder writes, "because things have been made right between them. The result of Christ's transforming death is not only a transformation of human-divine relationships, but it also transforms affairs between people."<sup>28</sup> Shalom is the site of social transformation where God renews communities.

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<sup>24</sup> Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1998), 11-13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

**A Realist Hermeneutical Move**

Howard John Loewen has made a study of HPC denominational statements on the theme of peace, in which he observes that their documents cite 98 references from 26 biblical books, with roughly two-thirds of these references coming from the NT.<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, the Gospels provide the Christian tradition with resources for developing a “peace theology” based on Jesus’ teachings and invitation to people in his time and in our day to become his disciples. However, our reliance on the Gospel accounts does not mean that we have turned our backs on the OT altogether. Most often those who have taken on the challenge of working with the Hebrew Bible have followed the scholars who diverge from Gerhard von Rad’s path and the “anti-kingship tradition” of biblical studies. Millard C. Lind’s work stands out here: *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*.<sup>30</sup>

However, there is another course we might follow in relation to peace theology and the Bible. Rather than look backwards from the NT to the OT, we can employ a hermeneutic that looks forward, highlighting how social justice concerns naturally figure in the biblical material. Instead of working within the traditional paradigms of OT biblical theology, we can use this discipline to establish signposts for making thematic and genre connections within the Bible’s diversity, and thereby build a bypass of sorts around the traditional “holy way thickets.” These signposts are the prophets,<sup>31</sup> wisdom literature,<sup>32</sup> and shalom (this last is the canonical biblical principle at the center of everything).<sup>33</sup>

This is a Christian realist move inspired by my readings of Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, Jr. Breaking with some streams of Mennonite scholarship, I am not interested in whether or not God is nonviolent. I am interested in arguing that biblical warfare is an example of human nature at

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<sup>29</sup> Howard John Loewen, “An Analysis of the Use of Scripture in the Churches’ Documents on Peace,” in *The Church’s Peace Witness*, ed. Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Nelson Gingerich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> See Matt. 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6a, and Luke 4:16-30.

<sup>32</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 67-68.

<sup>33</sup> Yoder, *Shalom*, 5.

work: self-interest, self-deception, anxiety, and hubris in all their glory. As such, I do not believe that God purposefully wills warfare, because it violates the moral foundation of the universe, which is God's Great Shalom. Violence is never redemptive, even if and when it is effective in confronting evil. The theological meaning we make of violence through our God-given reason, imagination, and memory is where God's redemptive power shines through. Thus, it is the renunciation of violence that is redemptive. I arrive at these conclusions by drawing on the Bible's wisdom literature.

### **Wisdom's *Shalom* Theology**

In *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, and David Petersen explain that "Old Testament theology" simply refers to interpretive moves that take seriously "the claim of the text that it is speaking about encounter and relationship with God."<sup>34</sup> Although the OT is a "collection of polyphonic voices," the authors argue that while this feature is a gift, it also signals the importance of locating the coherence and continuity of Israel's encounter with God as Israel becomes the ethos of the incarnation and the early church. The OT, then, is focused on God's character and activity within the framing context of Israel's story as God's people.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside the historical narratives and law, biblical literature includes the genre of wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Wisdom of Solomon), which Birch et al. acknowledge is a "broad and imprecise" category. Yet, they argue, there are five characteristics of these books that form what I would call interpretive principles that give wisdom literature its coherence.

First, wisdom literature concerns itself with everyday things like speech, money, friendship, work, sexuality, and land, rather than events such as the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt. Second, in bringing readers' attention to the stuff of life, wisdom literature gives voice to its writers' view that "these mundane matters [are] shot through with ethical significance and ethical outcomes," giving us cause to bring our own experience to theological

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, and David Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 30.

reflection. Third, “the wisdom teachers want to communicate to the young—those still to be inducted into the lore of the community—its distinctive sense of how life is to be lived well.” Fourth, wisdom writers have made careful and studied observations of the world around them that offer a form of systems analysis, to speak anachronistically.<sup>36</sup> Fifth, and most important for SPT, wisdom literature is theological literature (contrary to claims that this literature is insufficiently religious or confessional) by speaking of Yahweh’s creative work and intention for the world:

It is widely recognized that wisdom theology is a ‘theology of creation,’ that is, a reflection of faith upon the world intended by the creator. It is clear that the creator God intends that the world should be whole, safe, prosperous, peaceable, just, fruitful, and productive, that is, that the world should be marked in every part by shalom. To that end, the creator God has set limits and built into creation rewards and punishments that are evoked and set in motion by wise or foolish actions. But these limits are not self-evident. They must be discerned over a long period of time by the study of many “cases,” in order to notice what actions produce trouble. The premise of all such observations and generalizations is that the large matrix of life and well-being is the creation of God. The creator God has willed that all parts of creation are delicately related to one another, and therefore every decision, every act matters to the shape and well-being of the whole.<sup>37</sup>

The wisdom writers offer a global, cosmopolitan rhetoric of biblical faith. They urge us to read these scriptural texts as literature that moves us beyond “clichéd Christianity,” favoring an openness that affirms a basic fact: “life in God’s world is a way of faith to be celebrated.”<sup>38</sup> Their conclusion describes a hermeneutic that encourages us to weave wisdom’s insight together with the prophets’ oracles of hope and judgment. The wisdom-prophecy tapestry poses an important challenge to readings that advance

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 374-76.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 377.



chosenness-, nation-, and exceptionalist-centered interpretations of the OT.

H. H. Schmid offers further support for this unconventional approach to biblical theology.<sup>39</sup> In the 1970s, Schmid began advocating for reading the OT corpus with a focus on Creation—the beginning of the world and the nature of its order under God’s law—rather than a focus on Israel’s history as an ethnically defined nation. His approach calls for an emphasis on peace, running contrary to the trend developed and defended by Gerhard von Rad that views warfare, specifically holy warfare, as “a very central and positive element of the entire theology of the Old Testament.”<sup>40</sup>

Commentator James Barr argues that Schmid rejects the holy war paradigm of biblical theology because it is based on “a nationally limited understanding of God which is closely connected with the ancient understanding of the world.”<sup>41</sup> This means that an ethnocentric quality takes hold of biblical interpretation, leading to a view of the cosmos as composed of the chosen and the unchosen. When the world is centered on and ordered around such a particular ethnos, then “the enemies, the foreign peoples [to that ethnos], are basically seen as manifestations of chaos and have to be repelled in the interests of the cosmos.”<sup>42</sup> If we rely on this paradigm, then we neglect the witness of a fundamental character of Creation. Schmid writes, “die Bibel geht davon aus, daß der Frieden die eigentliche Bestimmung der Welt ist”<sup>43</sup> (“the Bible proceeds on this basis, that peace is the world’s real destiny”). To this Barr adds that understanding peace as the world’s destiny becomes a statement about “a basic need of humanity to live in a sound, ordered world.”<sup>44</sup> However, this peace is not the Pax Romana or a desperate repression of conflict. It is God’s shalom.

Together, the biblical perspectives of Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, Petersen, Yoder, and Schmid, and what I read as their theological implications, provide the hermeneutics I am advocating: a way of reading the Bible with

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<sup>39</sup> James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 327.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 326

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hans Heinrich Schmid, *Altorientalische Welt in der Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, 6 Aufsätze (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 116.

<sup>44</sup> Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 327.

a view of the world and human identity that extends beyond a narrow definition of “God’s chosen people,” one that reads the biblical witness as a sourcebook documenting human beings’ navigation of the interplay of violence and nonviolence. When we lay aside a rigid hermeneutics of chosenness—the idea that the Bible is simply the story of Israel—we are able to adopt an intercultural reading of the biblical text which puts cultural differences in relationship with each other, rather than elevating one set of cultural norms above others. Taking a “global” view of the world allows us to pay attention to the biblical message that everything is connected. It is from this organic sense of wholeness that I now turn to a brief outline of SPT’s theo-ethical components built on this biblical and theological foundation.

### **III: SHALOM POLITICAL THEOLOGY**

In aligning with Evans’s and Soelle’s approaches to political theology that draw attention to the pervasiveness of injustice, SPT can meet urgent demands for justice with an attitude of wisdom. However clear an act of injustice may be, it cannot simply be overcome by human willpower to defy sin, evil, and oppression. “If we just mobilize enough volunteers.” “If we can just get enough signatures on our petition.” “If we can just prove they are behind this outrage.” “What they’re doing is just wrong!” Self-righteous anger alone is not enough to solve our problems. Moreover, when we begin with an interest in shalom, we look at the world through the lenses of sin and grace. To seek God’s shalom for the world involves paying attention to how sin (unbelief, rebellion, inordinate self-love, self-deception) decimates relationships and how grace (repentance, humility, renewed trust, forgiveness) preserves them. Only when we can see both types of power at work in the world will we be ready to conceptualize what it means to welcome God’s shalom into our lives and into that world.

SPT integrates a cluster of theo-ethical principles that draw on three theo-ethicists: theological anthropology informed by Christian realist Reinhold Niebuhr, nonviolence informed by personalist Martin Luther King, Jr., and Doris Janzen Longacre’s feminist reconstruction of nonconformity. Because I am committed to interpreting and applying SPT in real, live communities, SPT includes three practices that make integrating the three principles possible: transparency in naming the influential members in

our communities, nonviolent communication, and the discipline of circle process.

### **Realistic Theological Anthropology**

One of Niebuhr's contributions to 20th-century Christian thought is an insistence that "sin" is a necessary, not dirty, word in our theological vocabulary. Through his pastoral work, activism, and academic work, Niebuhr came to the conclusion that American liberal theology had led Christians down the wrong path. By sentimentalizing Jesus' message "beyond all recognition," liberal Christianity was dismissing the biblical foundations of Christian faith, replacing them with middle-class idealism and moralizing. Niebuhr took an alternative path "theologically to the right and politically to the left of modern liberal Protestantism," and urged others to join him in taking an existentialist view of the Bible's ideas and insights about human beings.<sup>45</sup>

In the preface to a 1964 edition of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr explains his basic thesis that Western culture has emphasized two ideas—individuality and meaningful history—that are actually rooted in the Hebraic biblical tradition. In tracing "the growth, corruption, and purification of these two concepts," he hopes his two volumes might "create a better understanding between the historic roots and the several disciplines of our modern culture which were concerned with the human situation."<sup>46</sup> The biblical roots to which Niebuhr brought new attention involve the enduring paradox of human beings, the fact that we carry in us God's image while also being finite creatures. This paradox, held dialectically, is the foundation of Niebuhr's theological anthropology.

A second dialectic that grounds this anthropology and Niebuhr's theology overall is a vertical dialectic of transcendence and relatedness. Langdon Gilkey identifies a three-fold use of transcendence in Niebuhr's theology: transcendence as anchored in God beyond our immediate

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<sup>45</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Dr. Niebuhr's Position," *The Christian Century* 50 (1933): 91-92, quoted in Gary J. Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity: 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 451.

<sup>46</sup> Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), vii.

reality; as the ground of reality, meaning, judgment, and hope; and as self-transcendence, our capacity to rise above self-interest and relate to God. “Despite the fact that transcendence as Niebuhr sees it is not an aspect of the human psyche or of cultural history, this is a transcendence continually related to the world—related, that is, not only to individual persons, but even more to society, culture, and history.”<sup>47</sup>

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”: this prayer attributed to Niebuhr is a microcosm of his theological anthropology. There is an appeal to God, who transcends and judges human history and culture; there is hope that, through our relationship with God, we may discern how self-interest and self-deception distort the *imago Dei*, leading us to think we can change anything we think should be changed; and there is reassurance that our creaturely freedom can also be a source of inspiration to combat injustice.

### **Nonviolence and Beloved Community**

Martin Luther King, Jr. did not begin his career as an activist but as a Baptist preacher. Finding himself leading a movement for civil rights came as a surprise to the young King, who had become a sought-after orator and hoped to eventually occupy an academic chair. As the movement took off, he became aware that he needed to apply his theological education to tasks that involved more than sermon writing and pastoral care. As he applied religious belief to moral and political action, he was not simply drawing from the wells of his graduate school experience; he was also integrating theo-ethical lessons learned in childhood into what would become a full-scale system of theology. King scholar and personalist Rufus Burrow, Jr. has coined this system “Afrikan American Personalism,” linking King’s intellectual training with the Boston school of personalism and his “homespun” personalism that was integral to his view of God, human beings, love, and justice.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), 17, emphasis Gilkey’s.

<sup>48</sup> Burrow uses the Black Consciousness spelling of Afrika, which, he writes, is a prevalent and preferred spelling on the continent and in the diaspora. Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 2.

Burrow names five personalist ideas that animate King's theology and ethics, specifically his belief in nonviolence and his vision of the beloved community: reality is personal; reality is social; "persons" are of the highest intrinsic value; the universe is based on an objective moral order; and social injustice requires our protest as we establish a community of love.<sup>49</sup>

The goal of King's activism was the recognition of the human worth and dignity of all peoples and their inclusion in the "world house." Nonviolence was not merely a tactic for him; it indicated the kind of relationship he wanted black people to have with their neighbors, whether white, black, or brown. In 1966 King wrote about these dynamics in an essay on nonviolence, in the face of competing calls from other activists for violence and self-defense: "The American racial revolution has been a revolution to 'get in' rather than to overthrow. We want a share in the American economy, the housing market, the educational system, and the social opportunities. This goal itself indicates that a social change in America must be nonviolent."<sup>50</sup>

This conviction is directly connected to King's characterization of nonviolence as a way of life that does not seek to humiliate one's opponent but to bring both self and opponent to the same side, the side of God's justice; these are the politics of shalom. With his optimism, held in dialectical tension with Niebuhrian realism about the morality of groups within society, King argued that an outcome of nonviolence is the beloved community, a reality created cooperatively by God and human beings, a reality that appears in our midst here and in our speaking prophetic words of judgment, and in our daily decisions to suffer rather than retaliate, and to live as mystics who notice how God is at work in the world.<sup>51</sup>

### **Feminist Reconstruction of Nonconformity**

Reconstruction is an approach to theology's constructive task that identifies the need to take things apart (deconstruct) and then put them back together

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 58.

<sup>51</sup> See various sermons and addresses in *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. 4, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000). See Burrow, *God and Human Dignity*, 169.

in a process that may use different materials, design, and techniques. One model for such reconstruction has been generated by the Workgroup on Constructive Theology, a collective that has authored a number of theology texts, including *Reconstructing Christian Theology*.<sup>52</sup> Within theology's new discursive context, Workgroup members advocate for analyzing Christian doctrine with "the goal of shaping a revisioned Christian communal praxis," the word "communal" signaling the variety of communities now involved in the production of theology.<sup>53</sup>

One of the multiple junctures where reconstructive work happens is the place where we decide to reformulate what a doctrine symbolizes rather than rejecting it outright. This process involves naming the ways traditional doctrinal formulation has contributed to the current crisis, resulting in Christian theology's anemic response to pressing social issues and problems. A second juncture is reclaiming theologians' work of speaking directly to particular communities and society as a whole, sharing new insights that emerge from the reconstructive process. Rebecca Chopp and Mark Taylor note that "alternative modes of address, perhaps employing the poetic or mixing words and images in novel ways, may be extremely important today for reconstructing an engagement of theologians with artists and activists, who are especially needed for social and ecclesial transformation."<sup>54</sup>

In this vein, Doris Janzen Longacre, starting with a cookbook, has reconstructed the Anabaptist/Mennonite doctrine of nonconformity (based on Romans 12:2, 1 John 2:15-16, and 1 Peter 2:11). Describing Mennonites as good cooks who also care about the world's hungry in the preface to *More-with-Less*, Longacre deftly recasts this cultural heritage in spiritual terms: "We are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of our tradition but take their shape from living faith and the demands of our hungry world."<sup>55</sup> Part 1 of *Living More with Less* gives Longacre's biblical, theological, and ethical foundations for putting this new consciousness about the world into action. She outlines five principles or standards to guide

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<sup>52</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, eds., *Reconstructing Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Chopp and Taylor, "Introduction," in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *More-with-Less Cookbook* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 13.

theological reflection: (1) do justice, (2) learn from the world community, (3) cherish the natural order, (4) nurture people, (5) nonconform freely.<sup>56</sup> While these principles may seem obvious, the next question she addresses adds considerable complexity: How might these theological norms become concrete action?

With the fifth standard, Longacre freed a valuable biblical idea that had, by the 1950s and '60s, become ideologically and ethically entrenched as church leaders sought to keep "worldliness" out of their congregations and communities. From her vantage point, Longacre saw that the rigidity of not conforming to the world had lost both its prophetic edge and its possibility of symbolizing freedom, joy, and transformation. Seeking to recapture the apostle Paul's radical message, she proposed a new, reconstructed approach to nonconformity marked by individual and communal choices to free ourselves from patterns of overconsumption and the imperialist mentality that equates affluence with wisdom.

While Longacre never identified herself or her work as explicitly feminist, she was deeply committed to viewing the world as one gigantic ecosystem and did not shy away from naming the evils of imperial exploitation from her social location as a woman. This fits with a primary philosophical tenet of feminist theory and theology: patriarchy creates and maintains an ontological hierarchy to keep a small number of (male) people in control by using mechanisms of exploitation and oppression, particularly by dominating female bodies, symbols, and concepts, including the planet. Longacre's reconstruction of nonconformity as a practice of Christian freedom challenges North American hubris, raises awareness about the dehumanizing features of our cultures, and makes these issues theo-ethical problems. Following the path of her analysis in combination with Niebuhr and King, I see a way forward to a theologically rich understanding of Christian discipleship invested in all people's wellbeing.

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<sup>56</sup> Doris Janzen Longacre, *Living More with Less* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 21ff. While Longacre describes these "life standards" as her alternative way of speaking about "lifestyle," she notes that "standard is a word that fits a way of life governed by more than fleeting taste. It is permanent and firm without being as tight as 'rules'" (16).

### Three Practices of Shalom Political Theology

In *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City—An Anabaptist Theology of Culture*, Duane Friesen describes the importance of “focal practices,” the ontological commitments, lifestyle choices, and behaviors that express a community’s vision of the common good, for well-grounded moral formation.<sup>57</sup> Friesen’s discussion of rituals of moral formation, process practices, pastoral care, and practices of service has drawn my attention to how my own moral formation and primary socialization in Mennonite community taught me more about avoiding conflict under the guise of “peacemaking” than about pursuing shalom. What draws me to Niebuhr, King, and Longacre is how their ideas provide tools to develop a multivalent outward/inward awareness of my life as a Christian, the group dynamics of my congregation, the institutional and interpersonal challenges of my workplace, and an understanding of what those things have to do with the rest of the world. Thus, if SPT is to be a meaningful alternative to the pacifism of the Messianic community, I believe it must include formative shalom practices so that Mennonite communities are no longer easy prey to the criticism that we are more ready to help our global neighbors solve their conflicts than we are to face our own. I will now briefly summarize three ways I have been practicing SPT.<sup>58</sup>

First is naming the influential members of my faith community as such. As a corrective to the over-zealousness of bishops, Anabaptist interpretations of “the priesthood of all believers” can turn this principle into a false egalitarianism. Using the theo-ethics of SPT, I have seen how integrity takes root when groups come to terms with the fact that some people’s opinions count more than others. The Quaker tradition of recognizing “weighty Friends” as those who have spiritual maturity and theological insight that gives their opinions more authority in times of conflict or discernment is

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<sup>57</sup> Duane Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City—An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 139ff.

<sup>58</sup> I am at work on a book-length project that elaborates on these practices, relating their pragmatic wisdom to wisdom literature’s appropriations of social justice codes, providing a pattern for how to integrate and theologize practices that come to us without a particular confessional or religious orientation, which is true for two of these practices. These practices can be particularly useful in conflicts centered on sexual violence, a moral and social problem that some types of peace theology inexcusably exacerbate.



one that Mennonite peace theologies can learn from. Such naming creates a climate of honesty about how power dynamics shape our interactions with each other, making it possible to speak more truthfully about the internal politics of being church.

Second is nonviolent communication (NVC), a communication process developed by clinical psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg that cultivates empathy and compassion as requisites for personal and communal well-being.<sup>59</sup> By practicing NVC's pattern of observing without judgment, identifying emotions and needs in light of observation, and making requests (not demands) based on emotions and needs, I have realized how much my communal formation taught me to communicate passive-aggressively with inadequate vocabulary for communication that nurtures empathic connection and assertiveness. When we mistake peace theo-ethics for conflict avoidance, we sacrifice our well-being, pacifying ourselves with self-righteousness instead of enacting shalom. Jesus does not ask us to love our neighbors more or instead of ourselves, he urges us to love our neighbors and ourselves. NVC is one concrete way to explore how a commitment to nonviolence can manifest the double-love command (Matt. 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28).

Third is circle process, a practice of creating a social container for all voices to be heard and valued in what M. Scott Peck calls "real community."<sup>60</sup> This practice intersects with NVC, and together they are powerful tools for addressing painful topics and celebrating what is good in the world. There are many ways and reasons to form circles; diversity circles and restorative justice circles are well-known examples. My circle practice is based on a model called PeerSpirit Circling and the Circle Way.<sup>61</sup> Through this practice in the classroom, in congregational life, and even at the extended family dinner table, I have been astounded at what happens when we begin to

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<sup>59</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 12. M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 59.

<sup>61</sup> Along with Baldwin and Linnea, *The Circle Way*, websites for PeerSpirit (<http://peerspirit.com/>) and Calling the Circle (<http://callingthecircle.org/>) provide introductions to PeerSpirit Circling.

rely on everyone to carry and shape the conversation, instead of the usual suspects. Breaking with cultural norms that make interruption inevitable and silence uncomfortable, circle process has given me a way to explore SPT as a theo-ethic of nonconformity and spiritual renewal. I have seen shalom happen when people ask for what they need from the circle, and I have heard people bear witness to how sharing in another's vulnerability taught them something new about what it means to be a Christian.

### **Conclusion**

SPT grounds a commitment to peace, justice, nonviolence, and nonconformity in a theological anthropology that takes sin and power dynamics seriously. My hope is that SPT also grounds socially responsible political engagement, challenging our often employed but simplistic biblical hermeneutics that identify the Christian call to pacifism with Jesus' words commanding us to love our enemies. This approach all too often and all too easily fails to avoid ideological pitfalls with hubris masquerading as righteousness. Peace theology and ethics employing a realistic view of human nature lead to moral formation that curbs our tendencies toward making sharp binary distinctions. For example, the statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA that "war is contrary to the will of God" was not originally a pacifistic statement. However, some Christians read it pacifistically, leading to an interpretation that makes a pacifistic view of Christian faith theologically normative rather than allowing for a variety of faithful understandings. Once this kind of claim becomes normative, Christians begin to advocate for public policies to outlaw war. When this happens, we draw a divide between those who are moral and those who are immoral; in the cosmic barnyard, pacifists are the sheep and warmongers are the goats. This was one of Niebuhr's chief reasons for leaving the Christian pacifist position and developing a realistic view of theological anthropology, which SPT emphasizes.

When peace theology sheds the language of pacifism and takes up the language of nonviolence in the tradition of King, it also reorients itself to a metaphysics that envisions shalom. This turn underscores both the agency we have as free persons and the fragility of this freedom in a society with the power to structure our lives in ways that distort our dignity and confine our

choices.

Generations of contemporary Mennonites across subcultures learned that peacemaking meant avoiding conflict, objecting to war as a matter of conscience, and “loving our enemies,” but we need something more if we are going to proclaim a gospel that renounces violence. Looking back, we can see that if we reduce peace theology to avoiding conflict, then it will only ever be a theo-ethics of privilege. And if we reduce it to an orientation of personal obedience to communal norms, then it will only ever be a peculiar form of discipleship. If, however, we enact peace theology as a theo-ethics seeking shalom as a way of imagining God’s politics, then our witness becomes a form of social engagement with the world that hopes for personal and communal transformation. Shalom is a way of invoking the power of life’s goodness despite the suffering, exploitation, violence, and alienation that remind us that evil is as powerful as ever. Shalom is invested in the quality of our living and loving. Shalom paints vivid pictures of opposites embracing—unlikely allies laughing with abandon as they break bread together, wolves and lambs enjoying the shade of the same tree, an unshakeable sense that we belong.

*Malinda Elizabeth Berry is Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.*

# Reframing Mennonite Political Engagement as Christian Formation

*Paul C. Heidebrecht*

## Introduction

For several decades, official Mennonite political engagement in North America has been largely defined by the work of offices operated by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Washington, DC, in Ottawa, Ontario, and at the United Nations in New York City.<sup>1</sup> This work has at times been the source of controversy in the churches that support MCC, and one place to draw the fault line is between those who embrace and those who regret the shift from quietist to activist modes of peacemaking.<sup>2</sup> The apparently widespread assumption is that Mennonites are now entering the fray of political debates because of a fundamental shift in their understanding of the church's relationship to the world. Where Mennonites were once content to focus on their own business within the life and institutions of the church, and let governmental power do what it must in the world beyond the church's reach, it follows that breaching the boundaries between, or even collapsing, these kingdoms has resulted in a desire to extend the church's influence into the public square. The correlation between an outwardly directed peace theology and an outspoken politics seems clear.

This article draws on the work of MCC's Ottawa Office—a key strand of *Canadian* Mennonite political engagement—in order to argue that there are other reasons why Mennonites should embrace political engagement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 1968, 1975, and 1991 respectively. For a discussion of how MCC's supporting denominations have pursued political engagement on their own, and the varying degrees to which they are content to have MCC assume this responsibility on their behalf, see Ervin R. Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908-2008* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> This typology was laid out by sociologists Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill in *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on the intersection of Mennonite approaches to theology and politics in Canada rather than in the United States makes a difference, although space does not permit discussing

A close examination of how this work is actually carried out indicates that the pursuit of public policy influence does not necessarily rely on a Constantinian compulsion to change the world. Rather, political engagement can create space for the church to embody the gospel of peace. The article makes the case that grappling with public policy issues is one crucial way that Mennonites can understand what it means to be people of peace in their own time and place. More than reshaping the moral landscape of society, I will argue that MCC's political engagement has the potential to enliven the moral landscape of its constituent churches.

This article cannot provide a complete overview of the history of the Ottawa Office, much less MCC's political engagement more generally. Helpful reference points in this regard include MCC staff person and historian Esther Epp-Tiessen's book published on the occasion of MCC Canada's 50th anniversary,<sup>4</sup> the comprehensive evaluation of the Ottawa Office's first 25 years completed by political scientist Mark Charlton,<sup>5</sup> and the analysis that religion scholar Keith Graber Miller undertook of the Washington Office's first 25 years.<sup>6</sup> My goal is to describe how the Ottawa Office has functioned in order to make a prescriptive argument about how its work should properly be conceived. My analysis is intended to provoke both those who strongly support and those who quarrel with this dimension of MCC's work to think about it in a different way. This reframing also has implications for other church-related agencies engaged in similar work, as well as for contemporary political theologians and social ethicists in North America.

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key distinctions. If my thesis holds for MCC's work in Ottawa, it should be all the more true in Washington and at the United Nations.

<sup>4</sup> Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg, CMU Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Charlton, "Evaluation of the MCC (Canada) Ottawa Office" (Report to MCC [Canada] board, April 30, 2001). A similar evaluation after the office's initial three-year trial was conducted by political scientist John H. Redekop: "Evaluation of MCC (Canada) Ottawa Office" (Report to MCC (Canada) board, November 21, 1978). All internal MCC documents cited in this article can be found in the MCC Canada Collection in the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Graber Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1996).

### **Situating Political Engagement within the Realm of Advocacy**

Within MCC, the expression *political engagement* is often used synonymously with the term *advocacy*. Advocacy refers to efforts to address injustices caused by the systems or structures that rule our existence, of which the institutions of government are a significant part. However, advocacy can also involve engagement with systems and structures other than governments.<sup>7</sup> Advocacy also includes *public engagement*, sometimes referred to as indirect advocacy, in order to make supporters in constituent churches aware of—and move them to take action to address—the systemic causes of injustice. While political and public engagement often require different skills and resources, they cannot be neatly distinguished. A deep understanding of policy issues and political strategy is required to engage supporters constructively, and grassroots action is needed to reinforce the message shared with policy-makers in Ottawa and Washington. The key point is that the pursuit of public engagement means advocacy is the task not only of the MCC's advocacy offices but of the broad network of volunteers and supporters who make all of MCC's work possible. All are properly viewed as advocates.

In recent years, advocacy has been positioned as one of several tools or modes of implementation utilized by MCC in order to achieve larger program objectives, alongside things such as financial grants to partner organizations and material resources.<sup>8</sup> Advocacy has not been thought of as an end in itself but as the means to a greater end. MCC has not pursued a relationship with the Government of Canada just for the sake of that relationship; the expectation is that this relationship may have a real impact on the communities MCC works with in Canada and abroad. This connection between advocacy and larger program objectives is also evident when advocacy is described as “a

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<sup>7</sup> Other examples include economic, technological, and cultural systems, which are much less tangible than governmental systems, and educational, health care, and military systems, which are often subsumed under governmental structures. Systemic evils such as racism, sexism, and ageism have also been the focus of MCC advocacy.

<sup>8</sup> In many ways, all of MCC's relief, development, and peacemaking work is political. This broader understanding of the political is captured in Ronald J.R. Mathies, “Witness and Struggle or Politics and Power: MCC Engages the World,” *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 77-87. A narrower view is evident in John H. Redekop, “The Politics of the Mennonite Central Committee,” *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 63-76.

form of public witness and a tangible way of loving our neighbor.”<sup>9</sup> MCC is compelled to speak out because of relationships established not only with governments but with diverse partners and communities who lack the same access to power.<sup>10</sup> The priorities and policy stances pursued emerge out of on-the-ground experience, not on theoretical analysis alone, along with the theological commitments undergirding these programs.<sup>11</sup> This practical experience is often what gives MCC authority and credibility with policy-makers.<sup>12</sup>

What gives MCC’s advocacy efforts authority and credibility for many within its church constituencies is the ability to effect change. Why pay for an office in Washington, Ottawa, or New York if it makes no difference? As Keith Graber Miller notes, the Washington Office has often framed its response to this question in terms of the tension between being prophetic and being pragmatic, or between the call to be faithful and the call to be effective:

In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition . . . faithfulness has long taken priority over effectiveness. Faithfulness is near the

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<sup>9</sup> “Loving Our Neighbor through Witness to Government” (MCC Advocacy Offices brochure, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> For this way of framing MCC’s advocacy work, see J. Daryl Byler, “For such a time as this: The ministry of political advocacy,” *A Common Place* (June 1988): 8-9; Dalton Franz, “Advocacy: A Biblical Calling,” *MCC Peace Section Washington Memo* 25, no. 5 (September-October 1993): 1; and Martin Shupack, “Biblical Basis of Public Witness,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 33, no. 3 (July-September 2003): 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Although it is now common within (and beyond) MCC to say that advocacy grows out of, and is deeply informed by, programmatic expertise, the initial mandate of the Ottawa Office was much broader. See J.M. Klassen, “Statement Regarding and MCC (Canada) Office in Ottawa” (presented to the MCC [Canada] Annual Meeting, Edmonton, AB, January 11-12, 1974). The lengthy list of functions approved by the MCC Canada board in 1974 was updated slightly in 1988 and again in 2002.

<sup>12</sup> This has been confirmed by senior policy-makers over the years, not to mention politicians as prominent as former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau: “If you were merely a group of 160,000 or less . . . wanting to talk to me about [recognizing mainland] China or about the Canadian Pension Plan, I suppose I would have gotten around to meeting you sometime, but I don’t think I would have been as interested personally.... I am interested in the spiritual input that you are bringing into this society, as a group of people who have a certain faith and who are the leaven in the dough.” See Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1988), 322.

heart of Mennonite theological and ethical thinking, with the background hope that God has structured the world in a way that faithfulness also will be, eventually, effective.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, this has not meant that effectiveness in the short term has been completely ignored. Over the years staffers in all three MCC advocacy offices have been quick to share “success stories” in public presentations and writings.

In his annual reports to the MCC Canada board, William Janzen, the inaugural director of the Ottawa Office, would often conclude his summary of the year’s activity by responding to the question about impact. For example, in 1995 he wrote: “Constituents often ask: ‘Does your work actually change government policy?’ In some instances, the work of the Office has had an effect by itself. At other times our voice is merely added to other voices, but here too some effects can be noted.”<sup>14</sup> In 1990, he noted that “thanks to my assistant, my colleagues, and the grace of God, some worthwhile things have been done.”<sup>15</sup> Now *some effects can be noted and some worthwhile things have been done* perhaps puts things too modestly, but it points to a deeper understanding, namely that for Mennonites changing the world has never been a real temptation. Even at the best of times, incremental change was the most that has been hoped for. In 1987, Janzen wrote that he was “impressed anew by the value of speaking to the government. Clearly, we are not transforming the world, but sometimes we do have an effect. Some people’s lives are better because of MCC [Canada]’s governmental work.”<sup>16</sup> My discussion attempts to demonstrate that framing effectiveness as achieving short-term or incremental progress in the realm of public policy is too narrow, although not for the reasons that might be appealed to by activists or

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<sup>13</sup> Graber Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves*, 87. See also Shupack, “Biblical Basis of Public Witness,” 5.

<sup>14</sup> William Janzen, “Program Reports for Mennonite Central Committee Canada” (September 1, 1994 to August 31, 1995), 1.

<sup>15</sup> William Janzen, “Ottawa Office Annual Report for 1990,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> William Janzen, “Ottawa Office Annual Report for 1987,” 5. These reports do not gloss over the challenges faced during particularly challenging years; for example, in his annual report for 1977, Janzen wrote: “Sometimes it feels as if one is in between two high walls of concrete, looking for cracks to pry open.” See “Ottawa Office Report to the Mennonite Central Committee [Canada] Annual Meeting, Regina, Saskatchewan” (January 1978), 2.



that might cause quietists to worry. Such a framing lacks ambition because it fails to consider the impact that speaking to government has on the people who support and participate in this activity. The distinction often drawn between faithfulness and effectiveness is false.

### **Advocacy through Program Connections**

One of MCC's most significant impacts has not come through engaging in a power struggle but through creative program partnerships. MCC's ability to affect Canadian government policies has often been the result of grassroots initiatives just as much as strategic political calculation. The scope and scale of this impact is even more impressive when organizations birthed by MCC in Canada are taken into consideration; there have been numerous cases where MCC has spun off projects as they gained traction and required greater capacity to flourish.<sup>17</sup> There have also been many cases where MCC's programming has been supported financially by local, provincial, and federal governments, and this funding relationship has opened doors that MCC staff did not even know existed. Most notably, MCC's international relief, development, and peace work has been funded to some extent by the Government of Canada since 1968, several years before the Ottawa Office was established.

This financial support has not lacked controversy, especially since MCC refused to pursue similar funding from the US government at the height of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s.<sup>18</sup> The primary concern was that financing brings with it strings that enable governments to shape, even if subtly, MCC's agenda around the world. After all, the Canadian government frames its funding relationships with international development and humanitarian assistance organizations in the language of "partnership."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Well-known inter-Mennonite or ecumenical organizations that MCC has played an important role in establishing include Mennonite Disaster Service in 1954, Ten Thousand Villages (formerly Self Help Crafts) in the early 1970s, Canadian Foodgrains Bank in 1983, and Christian Peacemaker Teams in 1986. Dozens of other organizations have been birthed by provincial MCC programs working in refugee resettlement, restorative justice, social services, and job creation.

<sup>18</sup> See Judy Zimmerman Herr and Robert Herr, "MCC and the Public Purse: History, Theology and Context," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 25, no. 4 (October-December 1995): 1-6.

<sup>19</sup> In the past, MCC's funding was administered by the Canadian International Development

And, as anyone who has administered a government-funded project can attest, this comes with an expectation that partners will apply a standard set of tools for planning, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the work.<sup>20</sup>

However, Canadian government staff are quick to point to the many lessons they have learned from organizations such as MCC, whose collective expertise far outstrips their own. This learning goes beyond insights from particular contexts to include larger policy-level issues. Thus, for example, after many years of engagement by institutional development organizations, at the end of 2012 the Government of Canada completed a five-year process of untying development assistance. Material aid is now sourced solely from local markets, because it has proved to be more efficient and to contribute to better long-term outcomes in developing countries.<sup>21</sup> In recent years MCC has also participated in consultations with government officials on food security issues in East Africa, disaster response approaches in Haiti, and peacebuilding efforts in Syria.

MCC has partnered with other branches of the Canadian government beyond the realm of foreign affairs. While getting less attention, these connections are much more significant in terms of impact on both MCC finances and government policies.<sup>22</sup> For example, in 1979 MCC signed

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Agency's (CIDA) Partnerships Branch, renamed the "Partnerships with Canadians Branch" in 2010. Since 2013 this branch has been housed within the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (DFATD), which was itself renamed as Global Affairs Canada in the Fall of 2015. MCC's long-term funding partnership with CIDA ended abruptly on December 23, 2011, after which funding has been secured on a project-by-project basis, mainly through DFATD's International Humanitarian Assistance Program. MCC Canada clarified its terms for a relationship with CIDA in 1973 (updated in 1988 and 1994). See Ron Bietz, "MCC Canada Experience: A Case Study of Government Funding for Development," and "Statement of Values and Guiding Principles Governing MCC Canada's Relationship with CIDA and Use of CIDA Funds," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 25, no. 4 (October-December 1995): 6-9.

<sup>20</sup> Beyond this practical impact, there have been improvements in MCC programming as a result of Government of Canada requirements such as the inclusion of gender analysis and the assessment of environmental sustainability in project proposals, as well as the ability to scale up peacebuilding projects.

<sup>21</sup> "Canada Fully Unties its Development Aid," CIDA News Release (September 5, 2008), [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/acdi-cida.nsf/eng/NAT-9583229-GQC](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/acdi-cida.nsf/eng/NAT-9583229-GQC), accessed January 12, 2016. This agenda was pushed for many years by NGOs individually and collectively through the Canadian Council for International Cooperation.

<sup>22</sup> Canadian programs have typically relied on grants from federal, provincial, and local

a memorandum of understanding with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that enabled the private sponsorship of refugees.<sup>23</sup> Interest for this initiative grew out of MCC's deep roots in assisting Mennonite refugees displaced by revolutions and wars in Europe, and a desire to extend this assistance to vulnerable peoples beyond MCC's traditional constituencies. Since then, MCC's supporting churches have provided assistance for over eighty thousand refugees permitted to resettle in Canada. More significantly, hundreds of religious, ethnic, community, and service organizations have followed MCC's lead in signing formal sponsorship agreements with the government, enabling several thousand refugees to resettle in Canada every year.<sup>24</sup> Relationship-building efforts by the Ottawa Office helped shape an innovative approach to refugee resettlement in Canada that continues today.

A final partnership example is in restorative justice. Since MCC first started experimenting with victim-offender reconciliation initiatives in Ontario in the 1970s, numerous additional efforts have been undertaken to expand on and develop alternatives to a justice system based on retribution. Now a restorative justice movement in Canada, the US, and other countries goes far beyond MCC's work. Correctional Services Canada (CSC) has embraced this movement—at least to an extent. Thanks to the efforts of passionate prison chaplains and key administrators, since the mid-1990s CSC has sponsored a nation-wide “Restorative Justice Week” to raise awareness of the importance of utilizing restorative approaches, not only in the justice and correctional systems but in other governmental realms such as education and health care.<sup>25</sup> Beyond garnering general support for this movement, CSC has also funded a number of initiatives, as has its parent department, Public Safety Canada, which is responsible for implementing

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government sources to a much greater degree than have MCC's international programs.

<sup>23</sup> William Janzen, “The 1979 MCC Canada Master Agreement for the Sponsorship of Refugees in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 24 (2006): 211-22. See also Larry Kehler, “Making Room for ‘Strangers’: A Review of the Refugee Assistance Program of MCC (Canada) and the Provincial MCCs” (prepared for the MCC [Canada] Executive Committee, December 24, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> “Sponsorship Agreement Holders – Sponsoring refugees,” Citizenship and Immigration Canada, [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/sah.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/sah.asp), accessed January 12, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> “Restorative Justice – A Worthy Approach,” Correctional Services Canada, [www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/index-eng.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/index-eng.shtml), accessed January 12, 2016.

a National Crime Prevention Strategy.<sup>26</sup> For instance, a few years ago the government approached MCC, offering to fund a pilot project to study the impact of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), an initiative utilizing a core group of volunteers who meet regularly with high risk sexual offenders who have served their prison term and are seeking to re-integrate into communities. This is another case where political engagement, based mainly on relationships with bureaucrats, led to conversations with politicians that impacted policy decisions at a higher level.

These examples of how MCC's program work has shaped government policy and action demonstrate why the line between church and state can be crossed as a result of churches' efforts to address the needs of their neighbors near and far. Bridges are built, not because the church is trying to seize the reins of social control or because the state is trying to control the church. Rather than an inevitable power struggle, political engagement can take the form of creative, mutually beneficial partnerships. In each case cited, political engagement was not only the domain of staff in the Ottawa Office. It included key program staff from other parts of MCC, and relied heavily on the insights and passion of the many volunteers who make the programs function.

This selection of examples is made all the more striking by subsequent policy shifts in the Canadian government in recent years: the amalgamation of the Canadian International Development Agency and Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade appeared to place Canada's Official Development Assistance at the service of trade interests; revamping the refugee system has resulted in cuts to the number of refugees admitted and the support available to them; and a politically expedient "tough on crime" agenda has cut funds for restorative justice initiatives like CoSA. Indeed, MCC's experience in Ottawa makes the success stories even more dramatic, and suggests that the positive impact of government partnerships is always provisional.

Nonetheless, these kinds of connections are not rare exceptions proving the rule that the state is inevitably coercive and violent. Rather, they confirm that the government's role is often construed too narrowly by MCC's

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<sup>26</sup> "National Crime Prevention Strategy," Public Safety Canada, [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/strtg-eng.aspx](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/strtg-eng.aspx), accessed January 12, 2016.

church constituencies. Governments can do much more than restrain evil or maintain order, although this is pretty much the extent of their mandate as acknowledged in Mennonite confessions of faith<sup>27</sup> and in many MCC foundational documents.<sup>28</sup>

I am not the first to argue that this construal of government is too limiting. In 2003, William Janzen, the inaugural Ottawa Office Director, wrote:

This low view of the larger society and its institutions [that] has been articulated by our theologians and is evident in our confessions of faith . . . misses some things. [Politics] is about ordering the relations among people, [but also] about the

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<sup>27</sup> Article 6 of *The Schleithem Confession* (1527) states that “The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked and guards and protects the good.” Cf. Article 13 of *The Dordrecht Confession of Faith* (1632): “We believe and confess that God has ordained power and authority, and set them to punish the evil, and protect the good, to govern the world, and maintain countries and cities, with their subjects, in good order and regulation.” Article 23 of the *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective* (1995) states that “In contrast to the church, governing authorities of the world have been instituted by God for maintaining order in societies.” The only exception to this emphasis on a negative ordering function appears in Mennonite Brethren confessions: Article 14 of the *Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith* (1975) asserts that “We believe that God instituted the state to maintain law and order in civil life and to *promote* public welfare” (italics added). Article 12 of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches’ *Confession of Faith* (2001) states that “We believe that God instituted the state to promote the well-being of all people. Christians cooperate with others in society to defend the weak, care for the poor, and promote justice, righteousness, and truth.”

<sup>28</sup> “The Governmental Work of MCCC: A Framework” states that “MCCC believes the Bible teaches that governments are to maintain a just and peaceful social order and that Christians individually and churches corporately, have a responsibility to assist governments to be faithful in their calling.” “A Commitment to Christ’s Way of Peace” (1993) asserts that “We recognize that governing authorities have an ordering role in society.” Although “Peace Theology: A Visual Model with Narrative Explanation” (developed by the MCC Peace Theology Project) seeks to enrich understandings of the ordering function, this is where it starts and stops in discussing government: “Mennonites have usually viewed the ordering function of government as an institution of the fall. However, this is too limited a view. Even if we could imagine a world free of sin, we humans would still need to order our lives together. We would need rules/laws, structures of decision making, and assignments of differentiated roles.” See Duane K. Friesen and Gerald W. Schlabach, eds., *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 161.

proper distribution of resources, goods, and opportunities, about restraining the human tendency toward greed, about promoting justice and peace, and about supporting the good within an imperfect, 'fallen' community.<sup>29</sup>

This view has been echoed by several other Canadian Mennonites: theologian James Reimer,<sup>30</sup> political scientist John Redekop,<sup>31</sup> and peace and disarmament activist Ernie Regehr.<sup>32</sup> It has also been supported by US Mennonite thinkers such as Ted Koontz, who asserted in 1995 that "government cannot now be equated with the sword. Government does a lot of things beyond the sword-bearing function of maintaining order."<sup>33</sup>

However, many Christian ethicists are, like Mennonite confessions, too quick to leap past these many other things that governments do in order to home in on what they see as the essence of government.<sup>34</sup> Or, even worse, they are quick to disparage those many other things. Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh writes:

The urgent task of the church, then, is to demystify the nation-state and to treat it like the telephone company. At its best, the

<sup>29</sup> William Janzen, "The Mennonite Public Witness in Canada," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 33, no. 3 (July-September 2003), 1.

<sup>30</sup> A. James Reimer, "An Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology," *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 29-44.

<sup>31</sup> John H. Redekop, "Government, Theory and Theology of," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1990). See also John H. Redekop, *Politics Under God* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> "Talking to Ourselves," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 23, no. 5 (September-October 1993): 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Sidebar, *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 23, no. 5 (September-October 1993), 9. Numerous references in the work of John Howard Yoder could be invoked here. See, for example, John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Gedder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003): "The NT does not deal with the state in terms of its role in funding school systems, building roads, administering social programs, regulating postal services, and all the other things that we also think of today when referring to the 'state'" (19); "Participation by Christians in one aspect of the state does not obligate the Christian in any way to participate in another one" (43).

<sup>34</sup> For Todd David Whitmore, "many Christian ethicists practice 'veranda ethics': They write from a vast social remove from the issues they address, like poverty and war, as observers." See Todd David Whitmore, "Crossing the Road: The Case for Ethnographic Fieldwork in Christian Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2007): 273-94.

nation-state may provide goods and services that contribute to a certain limited order; mail delivery, for example, is a positive good. The state is not the keeper of the common good, however, and we need to adjust our expectations accordingly.<sup>35</sup>

Not to belittle routine mail delivery or telephone service, but what about universally accessible health care, education, welfare, or pensions? In Canada these four things alone consume well over half the federal budget; the amount is more than three-quarters at the provincial level. And this doesn't include a whole host of other things that the private sector and civil society organizations find difficult to handle, such as infrastructure for public transit and water treatment systems, affordable housing, product safety testing, skills development programs, and parks systems.<sup>36</sup>

We should not limit ourselves to discussions of essences, but grapple with actualities and particularities. Program connections with government exemplify the ad hoc nature of MCC's political engagement. It does require systemic thinking and analysis—the ability to maneuver within and alongside existing institutions, and even to have a hand in creating new ones—but it does not presume that MCC possesses systemic or comprehensive solutions.

My point is not that government is the be-all and end-all. I agree that Christians must be “realistic about what we can expect from the ‘principalities

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<sup>35</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 42. Although supportive of more active engagement with governments, Gerald Schlabach seems to share an essentialist view: see Gerald Schlabach, ed., *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 99. Ted Koontz has wondered about the danger of delegitimizing public institutions, noting that the only thing allowing them “to operate in anything except coercive, oppressive ways, is a consensus that they ought to be there and are doing the right things.” See Sidebar, *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 25, no. 4 (October–December 1995), 12.

<sup>36</sup> This view of government is informed not only by my exposure to MCC's work in Canada but in numerous contexts where governments are dysfunctional, damaged, or absent. These examples express the enormous complexity of nation-building exercises, and the tremendous folly of thinking a few Western experts can map out the best path for reforming, rebuilding, or creating governments in such contexts. The complexity of governing nation states and the particular challenges beyond security issues underline that governing is not a synonym for maintaining order or ruling by force. It includes a great diversity of functions.

and powers' of our own age"<sup>37</sup> and that "the expectations that people place on politics are unrealistic" for many problems that we face.<sup>38</sup> I also agree that states "constantly exercise power to position themselves as indispensable for social construction and the organization of political architecture."<sup>39</sup> Certainly MCC's experience makes the limitations of partnering with governments abundantly clear. Governments are complex, and dealing with bureaucracies can be time-consuming and frustrating. They also have tremendous inertia and therefore cannot react or change direction as quickly as circumstances may warrant. Or they move in the wrong direction; MCC's frame of reference means staff may conclude that the government's vision is fundamentally incompatible. But sometimes it requires shared work, not simply theoretical conversations, to recognize where the worldviews of church and state differ. Again, it is not that program connections with government are risk-free, but they are one way to shape the government agenda without assuming a position of power within government. The pursuit of advocacy does not depend upon a single view of how to navigate the boundary between church and state.

### **Advocacy through Legislation**

In addition to setting policies that guide government programs, elected officials—in the case of the Canadian federal government, Members of Parliament (MPs)—govern by establishing and amending laws. Beyond the criminal justice system, laws regulate businesses and professions, and provide a framework for delivering countless services. They define the parameters within which a society operates and thus epitomize the ordering function of government. Besides getting involved in policy discussions arising from program connections, MCC's Ottawa office has thus always paid close attention to legislation and to the legislative process by which new laws are created and old laws replaced or reformed.

Most bills that attract the attention of the Canadian media and the

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<sup>37</sup> Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: Irony, Tragedy, and the Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 185.

<sup>39</sup> Craig Hovey, *Bearing True Witness: Truthfulness in Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 106-107.



general public are introduced by MPs who serve as the government's cabinet ministers, and with good reason. The Canadian parliamentary system is set up to spend most of members' time giving consideration to these bills, which form the basis of the vast majority of new laws.<sup>40</sup> MCC staff have also followed the government's legislative agenda with interest, as evident in the many letters and coalition statements collected over the years in the Ottawa Office Government Communications Registry. In contrast to the kind of advocacy made possible by program partnerships, however, MCC has very often played a negative role. MCC has resisted change, rather than instigated it, when convinced the change posed a threat to peace or inhibited the potential for it.

A recent example was MCC's intervention in a bill to implement Canada's commitment to the International Convention on Cluster Munitions, legislation full of loopholes that would undermine the global effort to ban the production, stockpiling, and use of weapons proven to cause excessive harm to civilians during and long after attacks.<sup>41</sup> MCC staff prepared written submissions and testified before a Senate standing committee, urging the government to consider amendments to address the bill's shortcomings. The experience of MCC program partners in countries such as Laos and Lebanon meant MCC had an obligation to do what it could to lessen the harm of the bill. In the end, the government agreed to remove a single word from the legislation—a noteworthy change, but a case where a significant effort by MCC and other civil society organizations could only tweak things at the margins.

A less well-known way to establish a new law in Canada is for individual MPs to propose new legislation through a Private Members'

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<sup>40</sup> Given the dramatic increase in the size of government and the complexity of society, it is surprising that since World War II the Canadian government has created fewer new laws each year. John Diefenbaker's government averaged 59 new laws per year between 1957 and 1963; by Jean Chretien's time in the 1990s that number had dropped to 38. Stephen Harper's government averaged only 31 new laws per year since 2006. In the US, where much more business is conducted through legislation, Congress considers upwards of 5,000 bills per year, of which several hundred are signed into law by the President.

<sup>41</sup> Bill C-6, *An Act to Implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions*, 2013, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=6263567](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=6263567), accessed January 12, 2016.

Bill. Unlike bills introduced by government ministers, considered “public” because they affect the public in general, bills introduced by individual MPs are considered “private” because they are more limited in scope and concern only an individual or group of individuals. Private Members’ Bills cannot require the expenditure of funds but can confer a right on a person or group, or relieve them of a responsibility.

Despite receiving less attention in Parliament and the media, these bills are far more numerous than government bills, since any of the almost three hundred MPs not in the cabinet can introduce a bill at any time. Yet far fewer of these bills ever advance past the initial stage of first reading, and fewer still receive Royal Assent, the final step to becoming the law of the land.<sup>42</sup> Since the start of the 39th Parliament, 2,418 Private Members’ Bills were introduced. When the 41st Parliament was dissolved in the summer of 2015, only 68—less than three percent—had received Royal Assent. By contrast, over the same period 476 government bills were introduced, of which 312 became law.<sup>43</sup>

Given rather bleak prospects for success, why would Parliamentarians bother with Private Members’ Bills? While some MPs may be trying to raise their profile on the national stage by addressing a controversial issue or embarrassing the government, or on a local stage by championing an issue of interest to their constituents, a surprisingly common motivation is that MPs are passionate about something. They want to make a difference. The prevalence of this more noble motivation has been made clear to MCC as the Ottawa Office has tracked the progress of Private Members’ Bills that directly relate to MCC priorities or have the potential to impact program partners. MCC support has been predicated on the conviction that the pursuit of legislation can be a faithful, effective way to work for peace. This support consists, for example, of meeting with sympathetic Parliamentarians to encourage them to second a bill, and encouraging churches to sign petitions

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<sup>42</sup> Since this option first became available in 1910, 278 Private Members’ Bills have received Royal Assent. Even with reforms in 1986 and 2003, it is still a difficult journey and largely depends on the luck of the draw. For details, see *Private Members’ Business: Practical Guide*, 9th edition (Ottawa: Procedural Services of the House of Commons, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> The select list of 68 bills approved in the past decade includes more than a dozen establishing official days of recognition for specific people or events, and obscure matters such as recognizing the Canadian horse as Canada’s national horse.

or pursue meetings with their MP. By offering a concrete, focused answer to the challenge that pacifists have nothing to offer to debates over violence and injustice, these bills have become a rallying point and teaching tool.

One example of a legislative initiative long endorsed by MCC is Bill C-363: *An Act respecting conscientious objection to the use of taxes for military purposes*.<sup>44</sup> Based on ten previous Private Members' Bills introduced in seven different Parliaments, this bill sought to allow conscientious objectors to war to redirect the portion of their income taxes that would otherwise would fund the military.<sup>45</sup> The story behind these bills may actually go back to 1793, when British-controlled Canada first respected conscientious objection to military service on religious grounds. Precedents for recognizing conscientious objections to paying for the military can be traced to 1841, when conscientious objectors to the militia tax were allowed to redirect these taxes to public works. In the First and Second World Wars, conscientious objectors to war bonds were allowed to buy "peace bonds," whose proceeds were used only for the relief of suffering caused by the war.<sup>46</sup> The effort to pursue legislation along these lines followed the founding of an organization called Conscience Canada in the late 1970s. Starting in 1983, several Private Members' motions were introduced, calling for the right to redirect the military portion of income taxes to peaceful purposes, and the first Canadian Conference on Taxes for Peace was held in 1987.<sup>47</sup>

After the first bill died when an election was called in 1993, the Coalition of Conscientious Objectors to Military Taxation met with

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<sup>44</sup> 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2011, [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E-&Mode=1&billId=6253731](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E-&Mode=1&billId=6253731), accessed January 12, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> The first was *An Act to establish the Peace Tax Trust Fund* (Bill C-414) introduced by New Democratic Party MP Ray Funk in March 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Esther Epp-Tiessen and Elaine Bishop, "A Short History of Conscientious Objection in Canada" (MCC Canada, 1991 and 2006). See also the theme issue on "Conscientious Objection" compiled by Esther Epp-Tiessen and Titus Peachey in *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Canadians built on similar efforts in the United States that go back to the establishment of the National Council for a World Peace Tax Fund in 1971, and the introduction of the proposed World Peace Tax Fund Act (H.R. 14414) in the House of Representatives in 1972. For background on this history, see Marian Franz, with editors Tim Godshall, David R. Bassett, and Steve Retzlaff, *A Persistent Voice: Marian Franz and Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2009).

Canadian MPs and drafted the text for a new Private Members' Bill, the *Conscientious Objector Act*. Meetings were even held at that time with staff in the Finance Minister's office. The draft bill was subsequently revised and introduced in 1997, and has been reintroduced eight more times.<sup>48</sup> Despite the bill's long history, the core argument remains the same: "Today war is technologically driven and thus capital-intensive. Tax dollars, rather than citizens, are the focus of conscription." Thus our conscientious objector laws need to be updated.<sup>49</sup>

Other peace-related Private Members' Bills that MCC has supported merit equal discussion, including legislation seeking to establish a Department of Peace<sup>50</sup> and to assist conscientious objectors to wars not sanctioned by the UN who seek refuge in Canada.<sup>51</sup> MCC has also supported bills addressing a broader range of issues, such as regulating the international operations of Canadian mining companies.<sup>52</sup> The circumstances of all these bills indicate that the pursuit of "pacifist-friendly legislation"—the attempt to legislate peace—is not what it appears to be at first glance. These initiatives are not taken in the expectation that the laws will change anytime soon, or with a naïve trust that changing laws will automatically result in social change.

However, these initiatives are more than symbolic gestures. They are

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<sup>48</sup> Introduced by NDP MP Svend Robinson as *An Act Respecting Conscientious Objection to the Use of Taxes for Military Purposes* in 1997 (Bill C-404), this legislation was reintroduced in 1998 (Bill C-272), 1999 (Bill C-399), and 2001 (Bill C-232). It was reintroduced again by Robinson's successor, NDP MP Bill Siksay, in 2005 (Bill C-397), 2006 (Bill C-348), 2007 (Bill C-460), and 2009 (Bill C-390). NDP MP Alex Atamanenko has carried on the tradition with Bill C-363 following Siksay's retirement.

<sup>49</sup> Frequently Asked Questions, Conscience Canada website, [www.consciencecanada.ca/?page\\_id=128](http://www.consciencecanada.ca/?page_id=128).

<sup>50</sup> Bill C-373, *An Act to Establish the Department of Peace*, 2011, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament), [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=6253758](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=6253758), accessed January 12, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Bill C-440, *An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (war resisters)*, 2009, 3rd Session, 40th Parliament, [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=4328439](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=4328439), accessed January 12, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> One prominent example was Bill C-300, *An Act respecting Corporate Accountability for the Activities of Mining, Oil or Gas in Developing Countries*, 2009, 3rd Session, 40th Parliament, [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=4327824](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=4327824), accessed January 12, 2016. This bill garnered significant public, even global, attention, and almost made it through the House of Commons. It was narrowly defeated in 2010.

pursued because individuals and organizations have felt compelled—or in some cases have even been invited—to frame a moral argument using the language of legislation. For MCC they have provided an occasion to articulate deeply held moral convictions.<sup>53</sup> Not the only occasion, to be sure, and legislation is certainly not the first, or the most natural, language with which to speak. But it is not an occasion to be dismissed, because the hard work of bearing witness to one's convictions in this way is itself of tremendous value. It requires not only expertise but careful consultation and on-the-ground experience. It is an opportunity to express a peace church identity when others who embrace nonviolence or are actively working for peace seek input or support. Most important, not only does this effort contribute to public debate, it contributes to internal debate within MCC's supporting churches. It prompts Mennonites to ask themselves what being a follower of Christ in the Canadian context really means. What does it mean to be a conscientious objector to war? What does it mean to say we wish the government would pursue more creative approaches in working for peace and justice? What does it mean to say that we care about our brothers and sisters whose community has been hurt by a Canadian mining company? Without the language of legislation, how would Canadian Mennonites have answered these questions? Would they even ask them? In the words of Stephen Webb, "Christians do not know what they really believe until they publically witness to their faith."<sup>54</sup>

### **Evaluating Advocacy**

Beyond reshaping the moral landscape of society, partnering with the Canadian government in program initiatives and participating in the

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<sup>53</sup> After all, legislation presumes the possibility of making moral arguments in the House of Commons. The issues debated by Parliamentarians are not confined to the realm of political, economic, legal, and scientific calculation, but also include moral considerations. And however rare they may be, there are times when elected officials make decisions that are not focused solely on their own—or even their nation's—self-interest.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Craig Hovey in *Bearing True Witness*, 186. Hovey notes that Webb "follows Barth, who describes how bearing witness to the content of faith is the way that 'cognizance' becomes 'knowledge.'" This also resonates with Miroslav Volf's argument that the very act of sharing an authentic vision of human flourishing with the world can be a significant form of political engagement. See Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011).

legislative process can enliven the moral landscape of MCC's constituent churches. This kind of political engagement is properly viewed as creating space for these churches to embody what they believe—to bear witness to their moral vision through the process of wrestling with the impact of actual, not theoretical, systems and structures. Our attention is misplaced when we focus on effecting change in governments as the primary objective of Christian advocacy. Advocacy is appropriately understood as moral formation—but this formation occurs primarily in those doing the advocacy, not among the direct targets of the advocacy.

My discussion of program connections and legislation also gives a glimpse into another important dimension of MCC's advocacy: working with other churches, church agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. Indeed, MCC frequently does not speak out on policy issues alone, but alongside others—to learn from them and to amplify MCC's voice. Interestingly, while the rationale for this approach has been framed in terms of effectiveness, that is, because it can “enrich and strengthen” MCC's work and “advance MCC's mission,”<sup>55</sup> ecumenical collaboration through coalitions such as KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, the Church Council on Justice and Corrections, and Project Ploughshares has also profoundly shaped MCC's work and mission.<sup>56</sup>

This focus on the formative impact of advocacy for MCC is a perspective that Christian ethicists concerned primarily with building up the church through the formative power of Christian practices will be sympathetic to, although some may find it a stretch to recognize advocacy as a legitimate Christian practice.<sup>57</sup> Despite their interest in the church, Christian

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<sup>55</sup> “The Governmental Work of MCCC: A Framework.”

<sup>56</sup> Not only have there been substantive differences on particular issues to negotiate, but MCC has also found itself learning to speak the language of human rights. See Paul C. Heidebrecht, “Looking for the Right Words: Human Rights and MCC Canada's Advocacy Work,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 32 (2014): 165-78.

<sup>57</sup> Craig Hovey's distinction between witnesses and advocates may be a stumbling block to my argument, but it can be overcome. For Hovey, if the witness's words “do not ultimately belong to the witness but to the Holy Spirit, then the witness is not finally responsible for the outcome of those words. The witness is relieved of the functional and operative aspects of his task.... The witness faces the temptation to ... become an advocate. The advocate turns a witness's testimony into a compelling case by weaving together the testimonies of many witnesses and presenting them persuasively to the court.” See Hovey, *Bearing True Witness*, 130-31.

formation is not something that prominent Mennonite theologians ranging from John Howard Yoder to J. Lawrence Burkholder paid much attention to.<sup>58</sup> Yet hints of a similar sensibility to what I have articulated are found in occasional reflections on the work of MCC. For example, in summarizing his perspective on MCC's witness to government, former Executive Director John Lapp wrote:

These three offices have helped to shape twentieth-century Mennonites. They may be more beneficial in strengthening and refining the conscience of the church than in extending any particular witness themselves.<sup>59</sup>

My emphasis on the formative impact of advocacy on the church may also be a stretch for Christian ethicists concerned mostly about changing the world. I must therefore point out that broader discussions of the evaluation of advocacy confirm my overall methodological point, namely that a closer examination of *how* political engagement happens will enrich the theoretical assumptions of Christian ethicists. Not only churches and church agencies, but think tanks and lobbyists of all types have come to reexamine how they go about working for change today. They realize that trying to measure the effectiveness of advocacy demonstrates the limitations of typical measures

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Although advocacy requires more than dogmatics, it is not properly thought of as apologetics. Since it is more about formation, it makes no claims about replacing or competing with other forms of Christian witness, although it also can bear witness to the truth.

<sup>58</sup> My critique of Yoder draws on Michael Cartwright, "Sharing the House of God: Learning to Read Scripture with the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 4 (2000): 610; and Joseph Kotva Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1996), 158. J. Lawrence Burkholder, often turned to when Mennonites seek warrant for active cultural engagement, is seen as representing an opposite pole to Yoder and the "Bender school." This is a misreading of Yoder, although Burkholder does urge a very different kind of approach. See J. Lawrence Burkholder, "What shall we say to the state?" *Gospel Herald* (December 31, 1991): 6-7.

<sup>59</sup> John Lapp, "Reflecting on Our Public Witness as Anabaptists," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 33, no. 3 (July-September 2003): 9. The formative nature of the Ottawa Office's work is perhaps precisely what some feared when it was established: that interacting with the political realm would change Mennonites, but not for the better! Another example is former Executive Director Ron Mathies's description of the "political" nature of MCC's work as "speaking prophetically to ourselves and to our own power structures." See Ronald J.R. Mathies, "Witness and Struggle or Politics and Power," 79.

of effectiveness. This has led Steven Teles and Mark Schmitt to propose that organizations should move beyond attempting to evaluate advocacy initiatives to “focus on evaluating *advocates*.”<sup>60</sup> The proper focus is “the long-term adaptability, strategic capacity, and ultimately [the] influence of organizations themselves.” Thus evaluations must move beyond considering formal strategic plans or the wisdom of senior leadership to include an advocacy organization’s strategic capacity—the “overall ability to think and act collectively, and adapt to opportunities and challenges.”<sup>61</sup>

What this approach means for advocacy organizations and networks is that they must pay more attention to how they themselves are being shaped by their work, and less attention to their impact on policy-makers. Given the crucial roles that volunteers from supporting churches play in MCC’s advocacy efforts (as noted earlier, they too are advocates), they should be part of the assessments of MCC’s work in this area.

## **Conclusion**

Those pursuing political engagement should stop worrying so much about being effective at changing the world, and should concentrate more on the formation of advocates and advocacy networks. The overall thrust is to be less, not more, instrumental in approaching the political realm, and to be more circumspect about the areas in which they can exert control. This is simply another way of getting to the same place that my description of MCC’s approach to political engagement in Ottawa ended. Although not explicitly articulated this way in the past, the best measure of MCC’s advocacy work—of the pursuit of program connections and peculiar legislative initiatives—is *polity* influence, not policy influence. The most profound impact is ecclesial, not governmental or societal.

I recognize that this prescription will complicate the assumptions of

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<sup>60</sup> Steven Teles and Mark Schmitt, “The Elusive Craft of Evaluating Advocacy,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Summer 2011), 42. Support for their analysis is found in such sources as Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Univ. Press, 2009); Jennifer Chapman, “Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy,” *Participatory Learning and Action Notes* 43 (2002): 48-52; and Harry Jones, “A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence,” *ODI (Overseas Development Institute) Background Note* (February 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Teles and Schmitt, “The Elusive Craft of Evaluating Advocacy,” 42.



both quietists and activists, challenging conventional wisdom about what is needed to move Canadian and US Mennonites from non-involvement to involvement in the political affairs of their respective nations. Indeed, this reframing suggests that the work of MCC's advocacy offices is relevant for constituents who hold various views on the proper relationship between church and state. Perhaps viewing political engagement as ecclesial formation may even enable MCC to deepen its rootedness in its supporting churches.

*Paul C. Heidebrecht is Director of the MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.*

Anthony Paul Smith. *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

When thinking of the Abrahamic faiths and the covenant recorded in the book of Genesis, we rarely consider what is both unavoidable and seemingly beyond measure: the grit, the sand, that is found in all material contact and the present wonder of the stars that are seen but maddeningly out of reach. Accounting for God's covenant is related to an understanding of nature. Anthony Paul Smith's *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature* attempts to articulate an understanding of thought in light of these traditions (including the philosophy and science emerging from them), particularly with an awareness of how these forms can express violence and inflict suffering. Smith claims there is nothing magical in the differences between religious expressions or disciplines of thought.

One of the most important moves the author makes is trying to infect theology and philosophy with "an ecology of thought." He wants to dismantle theological and naturalistic understandings of Nature that posit some transcendent quality or ideal which can, in turn, determine particular states or expressions as being "unnatural." An ecology of thought sees thinking as also a natural process that occurs within an ecosystem and cannot claim a privileged or exterior position. As such, thought cannot be unnatural. In relation to thought, Nature is understood as perverse: "this is to say it outruns thought" (5).

To think in relation to this view of nature, Smith employs the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. For Laruelle nature is understood as the Real. The Real cannot be absolutely described because we cannot configure an exterior from which to describe it as a whole. Practically, this is meant to keep science, philosophy, and theology from claiming a privileged perspective, one that can pull rank on the other disciplines.

Having identified the principles that establish disparate hierarchies of thought, Smith unpacks what he calls "ecologies (of) thought." He makes the seemingly self-evident statement that "[f]or thought to do work it requires energy" (148). But from there he poses the less considered questions that follow from it: "But do thoughts decompose? Do they live and die, passing their energy to something else?" (148) Smith is clear that this is no metaphor

but a claim that thought indeed begins with energy, and that we can think apart from, or in resistance to, structures claiming authority over other disciplines of thought. Simply to pull rank on another mode of thinking is to expose a project as ideological, an arbitrary abuse of the energy or material that is given.

Smith also engages Thomas Aquinas, Benedict Spinoza, and Ya'qûb al-Sijistânî. While these three figures are often viewed as representative of the three traditions of the Abrahamic covenant, Smith shows that the “energy” of their thought can stimulate work well beyond traditionally imposed boundaries. These are difficult sections to work through, as the author covers a wide swath of intellectual terrain. It is important to remember that his project is more about the disciplines of thought than about current academic engagements with each thinker. This demonstration of Smith’s ecology of thought should free thinking “to be at play with creatural nature rather than overdetermining it” (222).

Smith’s project leads to an awareness of how “as a creature I experience nature in-person as my body” but it should also lead to what remains “separate from me, transcending in a relative sense, that I may also call nature” (223). This awareness leads to a struggle against destructive or violent hierarchies of thought and towards the possibility of freedom. This struggle is named as a type of fidelity. While I name this fidelity as coming from the Abrahamic covenant set forth in Hebrew scripture, Smith articulates it as it emerges in Ismaili Islam (and non-philosophy), where it is put in negative terms: “the act of *infidelity* is to cover up that upon which thought runs aground, it is to stop thinking at the limits of thought, even to simply accept the absolute or divinity” (224; emphasis mine).

Smith is passionately calling us to understand that there are dangers in the way we think, in the way our thoughts are structured. His book is an attempt to name these dangers. In order to name these hierarchical forms, he seeks to level all pretense of thought, situating it all ecologically as matter and energy. From this place of dust and stars, thought is able to be both humble and bold.

*David Driedger*, Associate Minister, First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Cornelis Bennema. *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*. Second Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Cornelis Bennema's considerable literary output includes three books and at least seventeen academic articles, most of which are focused on Johannine studies. The volume under review is a revised version of an original 2009 publication, and is paired with a more theoretical companion volume (*A Theory of Character in NT Narrative*), itself an expansion of a 2009 article. Bennema's aim in *Encountering Jesus* is to reinvigorate the study of the Fourth Gospel by focusing on its characters, and overturning a too common reading of many of them as "flat" characters or types. The second edition responds to criticisms by paying more attention to the relationship between character and plot, refining terminology, and adding a chapter on Jesus.

Chapter one lays out the groundwork. Previous works on character in John have lacked either a theory of character or comprehensiveness of treatment. Bennema embraces a "text-centred approach" (23), dependent on "historical narrative criticism" (41) in which authorial intention is (theoretically) recoverable. In other words, the interpreter pays attention to both literary cues within the text of the Fourth Gospel and extra-textual data that might clarify the meaning of the text (whether social-scientific, historical, or canonical—Bennema's implied reader of John will also know Mark's gospel).

The author then draws on a heuristic grid developed by Israeli literary critic Yosef Ewen, exploring the three dimensions of complexity, development, and inner life (27). This grid provides a basis for Bennema's analysis of characterization, ranging from agent (flattest), to type, personality, and individual (roundest). Chapter one also sketches an overview of John's story of Jesus, outlining the centrality of the Fourth Gospel's purpose statement (John 20:31) to the entire narrative. This is also central to Bennema's evaluation of each character: How does their faith-response compare to John's explicit goal of persuading readers to "believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God"?

The bulk of this volume is an investigation into each character by means of the above grid. Bennema begins with Jesus as protagonist, and follows with every character who interacts directly with Jesus. The author rightly includes corporate entities as Johannine characters: "the world," "the

Jews,” and so on. For some reason (expedience?) Andrew and Phillip are treated in a single chapter. Some readers might question the decision to omit God the Father—it isn’t clear whether this omission is for literary or theological reasons.

In general, Bennema’s exegesis is even, rather than innovative. Conclusions tend to be consonant with historic Christian readings of John (e.g., the Beloved Disciple is the writer of the gospel and is likely John son of Zebedee; there’s no attempt to “rehabilitate” a “misunderstood” Judas; but appropriate care is taken to nuance the identity of “the Jews” as a character within the gospel). Overall, the grid yields good exegetical results, whether that means agreement or occasional debate with Bennema’s insights.

The book’s conclusion synthesizes the study of character, and makes general remarks about a typology of faith responses to Jesus (as adequate or inadequate) and the role of the characters in the gospel’s plot. The author helpfully distinguishes the complexity and often ambiguity of the human characters, representing a view “from below,” from the absolute dualism of the view “from above,” showing the necessity of both within John’s narrative world.

Bennema then follows with “the contemporary representative value” of the characters—something that might be considered an effort to make them relevant to modern readers. Some readers might be glad for this “practical application” at the end of a long academic study; others (myself included) might see it as a kind of type-casting that weakens an otherwise helpful conclusion. It threatens to reduce the study’s impact, for it seems to want to keep readers tied to one or more faith responses located within the story. However, the narrative itself culminates in a beatitude for “those who believe but haven’t seen” (20:29)—something impossible for every character within the story, but a *sine qua non* for any real-life disciples who exist outside of, and subsequent to, it (cf. 17:20).

While not the final word on character in John, *Encountering Jesus* significantly advances the field of study. It will reward the serious reader in the academy or in the church with new perspectives on, and conversation starters about, this rich Gospel.

Randy Klassen, Restorative Justice Coordinator, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Sheila E. McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, Ahida Calderón Pilarski, eds. *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

What does the Bible say to communities of plenty about the starving families staring into the emptiness of food pantries because of climate change, warfare, empire, or indifference from the privileged few “unwilling to address this critical issue?” (52). While hundreds of millions of people remain food insecure today, people of faith are hungry for resources to understand and respond. Conceived in a 2009 address by Old Testament scholar Kathleen M. O’Conner, *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry* responds with a “hermeneutics of hunger” from a Catholic Feminist perspective.

Each of the eleven offerings in this volume stands with the hungry to interpret both the ancient context and the current social realities of readers. O’Conner observes that interpretation is “both illuminated and obscured by the interpreter’s cultural context” (19). Indeed, this is the core strength of interpretation, which is presented as both a fundamentally different and a more faithful way of reading texts than other ways.

Taken as a whole, this book is an excellent addition to a vibrant tradition of interpreting scripture through the eyes of marginal and minority groups. It belongs on the same shelf with other classic marginal hermeneutics, not only Anabaptist but Liberation, Mujerista, Indigenous, Black, Queer, and many other theologies as well.<sup>1</sup> Each chapter also stands on its own as a compelling exploration of the topic of hunger then and now. The various chapters take us from the imperial tower of Babylon to the Canadian prairie city of Saskatoon, from dangerous gaps in the Revised Common Lectionary to the gap between the world as it is and as it is meant to be.

Especially noteworthy chapters include Carol J. Dempsey’s reading of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha / In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004); Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010) and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

Jeremiah 14:1-9 connecting the social roots of hunger with the ecological crisis, calling the church to hunger for the common good with the same intensity as those who hunger for food. Laureess Wilkins's article unmasks the intentional use of famine to inflict war, critiquing how sanctions, bloated military budgets, and indiscriminate bombing alike target the most vulnerable among us. Susan M. Elliott's use of the Gospel of Thomas—itsself part of a suppressed tradition—draws us into the psychological impact of hunger in Jesus' parables and rural Zacatecas Mexico.

Sheila E. McGinn and Megan T. Wilson-Reitz examine misreadings of the Apostle Paul's work ethic from a western perspective that tend to "water down its countercultural message, treating it instead as an apostolic ratification" of a middle-class lifestyle and the empire that makes it possible. This pointedly addresses the book's intended audience by critiquing "white collar welfare" and "ancient yuppies . . . grasping at upward mobility" (189).

The audience for *By Bread Alone*—communities of plenty with resources to address worldwide and local hunger—will find the book helpful in attempting to understand and respond to the global food crisis today. Readers looking for an introduction to marginal hermeneutics will find the articles helpful and compelling. However, an effort to interpret texts *with* the hungry rather than *for* the hungry would have been welcome. We are left to wonder about our own blind spots, and what those who are hungry might see that we miss.

This is an excellent book with eleven sharp and compelling chapters. I strongly recommend it for pastors and scholars alike. It has the potential to turn you—and the world—right side up.

*Marty Troyer*, Pastor, Houston Mennonite: The Church of the Sermon on the Mount, Houston, Texas

A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*. Edited by Paul G. Doerksen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.

*Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* collects the working papers for a monograph that Mennonite theologian A. James Reimer was writing before his passing in 2010. Reimer entrusted these papers to Paul Doerksen with the intention that they be published together posthumously. In the foreword P. Travis Kroeker briefly describes the significance of Reimer's work and provides a synopsis of some major themes of Reimer's political theology. The introduction by Doerksen narrates the circumstances of Reimer's request and describes the non-invasive approach taken in editing the volume.

Reimer's theological project sought to re-emphasize the importance of the creeds and Trinitarian orthodoxy for Mennonite theology. His dissertation was focused on political theology, later published as *The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate*, and his wide-ranging writings on systematic theology, Anabaptist Mennonite theology, and inter-faith dialogue were published in the retrospective collection *Mennonites and Classical Theology*.

Other landmarks of Reimer's scholarly career include an edited collection, *The Influence of the Frankfurt School on Contemporary Theology*; a collection of catechism-like essays, *The Dogmatic Imagination*; and a festschrift, *Creed and Conscience*. In the final decade of his life Reimer published an essay collection, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature, Culture, and Politics*, and a textbook, *Christians and War*. However, preparatory materials for the political theology monograph remained unfinished, and were scattered throughout scholarly journals and edited collections.

*Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* is the fruit of Reimer's final scholarly project, arguing that all theology is political and must engage civil society, and that the basis for interfaith dialogue is dialogue and forbearance, especially given that modern pluralism is not neutral but comprises value systems steeped in tradition. Like John Howard Yoder, Reimer understands the gospels to be fundamentally political, but unlike Yoder, he does not draw hard lines between church and society, preferring instead to remind readers that they are already involved with the culture surrounding them.

The chapters, in order, are as follows. "An Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology: Theological Presuppositions," describes the main



contours of Reimer's political theology, proceeding from the conviction that readers are already involved in the political life of the state. Pure separation from the state is not an option for Reimer, and engagement with civil institutions is thus unavoidable. Reimer grounds both his argumentation and his hermeneutic in the doctrine of the Trinity. His political realism and his commitment to Christian doctrine come together in his claim that "*Logos* (Word, grace, love) is the basis and reason for *Nomos* (Law, form, structure)" (7).

"I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it: A Positive Theology of Law and Civil Institutions," begins with a detailed critique of Mennonite theologians including John Howard Yoder, John W. Miller, and Waldemar Janzen, and then examines the work of Richard B. Hays and Robert C. Tannehill on Jesus' fulfillment of the law. This chapter strengthens the link between *logos* and *nomos* by detailing how Christ comes to fulfill both civil law and the law of the Torah.

"Trinitarian Foundations for Law and Public Order," highlights Menno Simons's commitment to Christian discipleship, and furthers the ontological connection between *logos* and *nomos* by drawing on Karl Barth's account of creation. Through Barth, Reimer contrasts the fixity of order and structure with the ongoing work of "the ordering and structuring of the world (*Nomos*) in the face of chaos . . ." (54). "Constantine: From Religious Pluralism to Christian Hegemony" questions polarized interpretations of the Constantinian legacy through an examination of Lactantius, the third-century Christian apologist.

The fifth chapter, "Revelation, Law, and Individual Conscience," suggests that the strong critique of the Western liberal tradition is common to both Mennonites and Shi'ite Muslims, furthering Reimer's effort to dialogue with other faith traditions. "Law, Freedom of Conscience, and Civil Responsibility: Marpeck, Mennonites, and Contemporary Social Ethics," seeks to ground Reimer's political theology in Pilgram Marpeck, particularly Marpeck's negotiation between the religious and political spheres.

"An Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology, Part II: Historical Manifestations and Observations," the seventh chapter, continues Reimer's engagement with the Constantinian legacy through a further examination of Yoder and a description of the relationship between eternal, natural, human,

and divine law. It concludes with the role of the Christian conscience in developing civil law in the context of religious pluralism. “Public Orthodoxy and Civic Forbearance: The Challenges of Modern Law for Religious Minority Groups,” extends Reimer’s examination of this concern by grounding forbearance (patient tolerance) in *orthodoxy* rather than *neutrality* (169).

The final chapter, “Anabaptist-Mennonite Political Theology: Conceptualizing Universal Ethics in Post-Christendom” offers a summary and a demonstration of the grounding of forbearance in orthodoxy. Exploring the work of Max Stackhouse and Jeffrey Stout, and critically appropriating Yoder’s concept of “middle axioms,” Reimer conceives of a universal religious ethic that would not diminish the quality of dialogue between religious groups.

The essays in *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology* have a striking underlying unity in their collective focus on the intertwining of the Word (*Logos*), the Law (*Nomos*), and the importance of both political and interfaith engagement. This book will contribute to ongoing conversations about the nature and possibility of an Anabaptist-Mennonite informed political theology.

*Maxwell Kennel*, pulpit supply pastor, Rainham Mennonite Church, Selkirk, Ontario

Paul Born. *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2014.

In *Deepening Community: Finding Joy Together in Chaotic Times*, Paul Born lays out a basic framework that helps readers understand the movement from lack of community, shallow or fear-based community to deep community. Insight for his fourth book comes from his own innovative approaches in community development that have received honors from organizations including the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Born promotes deeper community, using the example of Canadian Mennonites

who were able to demonstrate resilience in recovering from the oppression of the former Soviet Union.

A study of 500 individuals' responses to Born's questions about community form the basis of the author's four-step framework towards deeper community. This framework includes: sharing your story in order to develop connections; letting yourself enjoy the relationships with these same people; allowing trust and mutual care be experienced in community; and using the networks and strengths of collective wisdom as a community will promote a better world for everyone.

I find Born to be optimistic in stating that the best of our times includes many communities that have already "dismantled racism" (7). Naming the limitations of the 500-person study and some critical analysis of the Russian Mennonite experience would have strengthened the argument. He uses the Russian Mennonite experience as a healthy example of community, without acknowledging the dark side of traumatization including mental illness and addiction when "people remain too long in a place of victimization."<sup>1</sup> I too am concerned about the Mennonite social norms that are held without critique, as they can be exclusionary, and I wonder how we can promote open versus closed systems.

Born references the Exodus story to encourage caring for the strangers in the land, as we too were once strangers (38). This scripture inspired his career in community development. Using the Exodus story reminds me of the work of theologian Walter Brueggemann, whose understanding of the story also provides a nuanced paradigm for understanding community. Brueggemann contrasts Pharaoh's community of scarcity to Yahweh's community of abundance.<sup>2</sup> This paradigm provides a greater understanding of our communities operating under the basis of fear, and calls for moving towards community that is life-giving.

Reflecting on Born's initial storytelling phase, I notice that it does not include the importance of deep listening for understanding, what it takes

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Enns, "Pilgrimage to the Ukraine: Revisioning History through Restorative Justice," [www.bcm-net.org/pilgrimage-to-the-ukraine-revisioning-history-through-restorative-justice-elaine-enns](http://www.bcm-net.org/pilgrimage-to-the-ukraine-revisioning-history-through-restorative-justice-elaine-enns), accessed August 31, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," *Christian Century* March 24-31, 1999, 342-47.

to move from conflict into reconciliation, or how we might seek to include people on the margins of society. I was confused when Born suggests that we enjoy relationships with the same people over time (65), and I contrast this view with the need to find community solutions by working across sectors of experience—not necessarily with people that we know or like. Craig Rennebohm, founder of a mental health chaplaincy on the downtown streets of Seattle, describes the model of companionship and accompaniment as a way to walk alongside people experiencing homelessness.<sup>3</sup> As part of a neighborhood group in Seattle, my colleagues and I have taken this work to heart and accompanied many folks into permanent housing. This effort brings a diverse group of people to work together for a similar purpose.

Born includes impressive examples of groups working together to better our world, including Habitat for Humanity, worldwide efforts in Tsunami recovery, Mennonites raising funds for Muslim refugees, and neighborhood watch groups. These examples are part of what he describes as a “collective altruism” that utilizes the power of working together. At the same time, I wanted to know more about the work of collaboration across sectors of society in the reduction of poverty (136). I also wondered what “community potentialization” is, as listed in Born’s biography (160).

Resources on the website named [deepeningcommunity.org](http://deepeningcommunity.org) encourage engagement through the formation of learning communities. I too want to encourage the transformation of systems that create abundance rather than scarcity as we work together to change the world.

*Melanie Neufeld*, Pastor of Community Ministry, Seattle Mennonite Church, Seattle, Washington

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Rennebohm, *Souls in the Tender Hands of God: Stories of the Search for Home and Healing on the Streets* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).

Bernard V. Brady. *Be Good and Do Good: Thinking Through Moral Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014.

Bernard Brady, a faculty member at St. Thomas University and a veteran classroom professor of moral theology, offers a fine introduction to the field in this compact, informative, and formative volume. As he makes clear in the introduction, he seeks to aid conscientious consideration of moral issues, providing a conceptual map for moral discernment.

The organization of the book around the key conceptual hooks of freedom, relationality and love, actions and persons, and conscience, held in conversation with a framework for identifying types of ethical discourse, leads the reader step by step through a very cogent, synthetic account of moral theology. Brady carefully lays out his understanding of the structure of the field in terms of theology, anthropology, morality, and appropriation, encouraging readers to discern and claim their own moral identity, much in the style of Richard Gula's *Reason Informed by Faith*, one of Brady's conversation partners. Like any effective teaching tool, the text embodies and demonstrates the method that it describes, taking readers through a process of moral discernment as part of ongoing formation of conscience.

Other interlocutors include Thomas Aquinas, Vatican II texts, Martin Luther King, Jr., Maya Angelou, William Cavanaugh, Jean Porter, James Keenan, Cathleen Kaveny, Bryan Massingale, John XXIII, John Paul II, and Pope Francis. To a field marked by significant ideological divisions in the last half-century around methodological (and ultimately ecclesiological) issues such as consequentialist reasoning, Brady's volume brings a nuanced and balanced tone.

In his treatment of intrinsically evil acts (123 ff.), for example, Brady explains the concept in an evenhanded manner, without losing those new to the field in the jargon of *materia circa quam*. Undergraduates might not emerge from studying this text with mastery of the Latin lingo of moral theology, but they will be able to articulate what is at stake in defining what is included in the description of the object of an act, one of the central points of debate about intrinsically evil acts. Brady also takes care to note social manifestations of the concept, thereby extending the traditional discourse in a manner intelligible in the contemporary context.

One would be hard pressed to locate Brady's approach to this topic, or other contested topics in moral theology, in any one camp. His broad vision of the field and its relationship to other areas of theology in fact offers ground for hope that the guild can move past its more neuralgic debates and remember its pastoral roots.

An important contribution of this volume is that it offers a pastoral account of moral theology attuned to the significance of cultural context and social location. In one instance, Brady explores Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as a beautiful masterpiece of ethical reasoning. He carefully explicates the different ethical arguments deployed there and notes the variety of audiences to whom King was appealing (24-26). Brady is teaching the material as he goes, to good effect. One can hear the rich classroom discussion that might ensue after reading this chapter, including the possibility of addressing contemporary challenges of racial justice in particular societal and ecclesial contexts.

Indeed, the practice of careful listening to the positions of others as part of personal and communal formation in moral identity emerges as a central insight of this text. Whether one prefers narrative, prophetic language, reasoned ethical argumentation, or a pragmatic policy approach, the goal in deploying each kind of moral discourse is the same: to love what and how God loves (171).

Brady builds the argument of the book gradually, tracing the significance of culture from the person socially situated in Chapter 1 (32, 37) to the institutional and communal aspects of the moral life in later chapters (e.g., 63, 69, 129). In the process, he refers to many relevant examples that often surface in classroom discussions, e.g., the Catholic Church's sexual abuse crisis.

*Be Good and Do Good: Thinking through Moral Theology* is clearly written in an accessible style, and strikes a graceful balance between pastoral and academic concerns. Thoughtful discussion questions at the end of each chapter enhance the text's value for the undergraduate classroom setting as well as for ecclesial formation groups.

*Margaret R. Pfeil*, Associate Professional Specialist, Moral Theology/  
Christian Ethics, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana

# Call for Proposals

## **CROSSING THE LINE: WOMEN OF ANABAPTIST TRADITIONS ENCOUNTER BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES**

**June 22-25, 2017**

**Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA**

More than twenty years have passed since the watershed conference *The Quiet in the Land? Women of Anabaptist Traditions in Historical Perspective* took place in 1995. New topics, approaches, and viewpoints invite further examination of the constructions of gendered experience within groups in the Anabaptist tradition. Crossing boundaries and borders can and should encompass a wide range of disciplines, approaches and topics, and we seek submissions from scholars, students, activists, and literary, performing and visual artists. Conference participants are encouraged to think creatively about how Anabaptists, Mennonites, Amish and related groups have crossed and continue to cross lines, borders and boundaries. Crossing might entail traversing the lines between:

- public and private spaces
- church/community and “the world”
- quietism and activism
- expected decorum/silence and speaking out
- gender constructions
- sexualities and gender self-identities
- race, ethnicity and class
- religious and theological belief systems
- nation states in the making of transnationalism
- disciplinary expression.

Please submit a one-page CV and a 250-word abstract for a paper, a creative performance or presentation, or a complete panel/workshop session (with presenters indicated).

**DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: SEPTEMBER 1, 2016**

**Submit proposals to: [awcrossingtheline@gmail.com](mailto:awcrossingtheline@gmail.com).**

The program committee will announce acceptance by January 1, 2017.

Program Committee: Rachel Epp Buller, Bethel College; Marlene Epp, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo; Kerry Fast, Independent Scholar; Luann Good Gingrich, York University; Rachel Waltner Goossen, Washburn University; Julia Spicher Kasdorf, Pennsylvania State University; Kimberly Schmidt, Eastern Mennonite University; Jan Bender Shetler, Goshen College; Mary Sprunger, Eastern Mennonite University.

# **Call for Proposals**

## **MENNONITES, SERVICE, AND THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE: MCC AT 100**

**October 23-24, 2020  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

In 1920 Mennonites from different ethnic and church backgrounds formed Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to respond collaboratively to the famine ravaging Mennonite communities in the Soviet Union (Ukraine). Since then MCC has grown to embrace disaster relief, development, and peacebuilding in more than 60 countries. One of the most influential Mennonite organizations of the 20th and 21st centuries, MCC has facilitated cooperation among various Mennonite groups, constructing a broad inter-Mennonite, Anabaptist identity, and bringing Mennonites into global ecumenical and interfaith partnerships.

This centennial conference invites proposals for papers examining MCC's past, present, and future, and reflecting on Mennonite response to the biblical call to love one's neighbor through practical acts of service. Proposals are welcome from various academic perspectives, including but not limited to anthropology, conflict transformation and peacebuilding, cultural studies, development studies, economics, history, political science, sociology, and theology.

The conference will be hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, in collaboration with Canadian Mennonite University.

### **DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: DECEMBER 1, 2019**

Send proposals or questions to Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies,  
University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2E9, Canada.  
E-mail: [r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca).

Limited research grants are available to help defray costs related to research in MCC's archives in Akron, Pennsylvania or at other MCC sites. Queries, with a brief two-paragraph description of the proposed research, should be sent to Alain Epp Weaver: [aew@mcc.org](mailto:aew@mcc.org). Requests for research grants will be assessed on an ongoing, rolling basis.



*The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR) is a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry devoted to advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives. It is published three times a year. We welcome submissions of articles, reflections, and responses. Accepted papers are subject to Chicago style and copy editing, and are submitted to authors for approval before publication.

### **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. 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.

### **Responses**

Responses are replies to articles either recently published in CGR or appearing in the same issue by arrangement. Length is negotiable.

## **SUBMISSION PROCEDURE**

Send your submission electronically as a WORD attachment to: **Stephen Jones, Managing Editor, [cghedit@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cghedit@uwaterloo.ca)**. Include your full name, brief biographical information, and institutional affiliation in the covering e-mail. CGR will acknowledge receipt immediately, and will keep you informed throughout the assessment process.

For CGR's Style Guide, Citation Format Guide, and other useful information, please consult the submissions page on our website.

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# Contents

## REVISITING MENNONITE PEACE THEOLOGY

A Jesus-Centered Peace Theology, or, Why and How Theology and Ethics are Two Sides of One Profession of Faith

*J. Denny Weaver*

A Complication for the Mennonite Peace Tradition: Wilhelm Mannhardt's Defense of Military Service

*Karl Koop*

Shalom Political Theology: A New Type of Mennonite Peace Theology

*Malinda Elizabeth Berry*

Reframing Mennonite Political Engagement as Christian Formation

*Paul C. Heidebrecht*