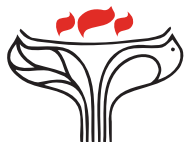


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Introduction

Paul Martens

Mennonite. Systematic. Theology. Each of these terms is contested in manifold ways. Linked together, however, the possibility of disagreement is raised exponentially. The purpose of this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR) is to provide a forum for significant voices in an important discussion; the specific occasion for it is the response generated by David Cramer's "Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect," which appeared in CGR's Fall 2013 issue. In sketching the characteristics that should guide future Mennonite systematic theologies, Cramer outlined what appears to be an idiosyncratic appropriation of the Wesleyan quadrilateral: a theology rooted in scripture and the broader Christian tradition that also utilizes reasoned non-foundationalist arguments, as well as personal and communal experience.¹

Four exemplary approaches to Mennonite systematic theology appear in the pages that follow. Quite surprisingly, each of the four central characteristics named by Cramer finds a sympathetic affirmation here: (1) J. Denny Weaver's "From Narrative Comes Theology" emphatically endorses "the New Testament narrative of Jesus" as the beginning of Mennonite systematic theology; (2) Darrin Snyder Belousek's "God, Evil, and (Non) Violence: Creation Theology, Creative Theology, and Christian Ethics" not so vaguely suggests that "traditional creation theology" (by this the author means ecumenical and historically orthodox theology) may best provide "a stable ground for a nonviolent stance"; (3) Nathanael Inglis's "The Importance of Gordon Kaufman's Constructive Theological Method for Contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology" singles out Kaufman's philosophical commitments to historicism and pragmatism as the two key methodological commitments necessary for the future of Anabaptist-Mennonite systematic theology; and (4) Justin Heinzekehr's "Getting to Silence: The Role of System in Mennonite Theology" leans heavily on experiences as events not only requiring abstraction for representation and communication but also

¹ See David Cramer, "Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 263.

The Conrad Grebel Review 34, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 113-116.

illuminating the fragility of the requisite theological systems that emerge through this abstraction.

Of course, to characterize the respective contributions in this manner is to oversimplify both the arguments themselves and the dialogical nature of this issue. Beginning with Weaver's argument, therefore, I want to try to shed some light on a few of the debates, themes, and questions that lie behind and within these essays, and that are invariably playing a part in shaping Mennonite systematic theology today.

Weaver's essay contends that "systematic theology for Mennonites begins with the narrative of Jesus," a methodological move loosely related to, but not dependent upon, Cramer's recognition of the historical particularity of all forms of reasoning.² Weaver then draws out seventeen implications from this initial assumption, some of which have figured prominently in his other writings, such as "theology is a derived statement" (implication 1), "Jesus rejected violence" (implication 3), and classic or standard Christological statements are relativized or decentered (implication 4).

There is some truth to Weaver's claim about the centrality of the narrative of Jesus for Mennonite theology (and his theology self-consciously follows John Howard Yoder in important ways in this respect), but the sweeping simplicity of his assertion that all theology is therefore a derived statement belies the vigorous, nuanced debate among Mennonite theologians about the relationship between biblical texts and theology that has been going on for decades. To illustrate: already in 1991, Gordon Kaufman argued that "Scripture itself must be 'construed' . . . as some particular sort of literature that we use for certain purposes; and such a construal always involves an imaginative act of the theologian."³ What this means is that, even in using the term "New Testament" and prioritizing the story of Jesus Christ, Weaver has made theological decisions that cannot claim to be merely derivative of the narrative itself. Of course, his initial theological decisions about the text itself may be justified, but he cannot claim they do not exist.

Following Kaufman's lead, Inglis's paper boldly steps in to provide something like the appropriate justification for the selection of the New

² Ibid., 272.

³ Gordon D. Kaufman, "Critical Theology and the Bible: A Response to A. James Reimer," in *So Wide a Sea: Essays on Biblical and Systematic Theology*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1991), 60.

Testament narrative of Jesus—what Inglis refers to as “christomorphism” in various forms—that is absent in Weaver’s argument. What Inglis is seeking to articulate is a way of doing theology in what he calls a “detraditionalized society,” the conditions Mennonites find themselves in once they are no longer defined by the rural communities that once organically provided regulative and orientational determinations of their identity. To that end, he suggests that Kaufman’s historicism and pragmatism enriches, and appropriately strengthens, the noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis already present in the broad Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.

That said, what Inglis does not seem to notice—but what Kaufman does notice in acknowledging debts to the Enlightenment and modern democratic experience—is that the society that Mennonites find themselves in is not really detraditionalized so much as it is defined by different traditions than those of early 20th-century rural Mennonite communities. Yet Inglis is optimistic that Kaufman provides solid resources for Christian communities as they reconstruct traditions as a basis for maintaining identity in the face of societal changes.

Darrin Snyder Belousek, however, is much less optimistic that Kaufman’s theology leads Mennonites to the christomorphic humanization expected by Inglis. Reflecting on a theology of creation, and affirming the specter of A. James Reimer (who has been directly and indirectly been in the crosshairs of the previous two essays), Belousek energetically attempts to demonstrate that Kaufman’s historicism is, in important respects, the antithesis of traditional creation theology. Kaufman might agree with this assessment. The controversial aspect of Belousek’s argument surfaces when it follows the logic of Kaufman’s position to the point of suggesting that Kaufman’s God is the origin of violence and the “violence-trajectories of human development are not moral deviations . . . but emerge serendipitously from ongoing cosmic creativity.” Because this is the case, Belousek concludes, only a return to the separation of God and history as articulated in “traditional creation theology” can suffice to ground and motivate nonviolence.

The careful reader will see, however, that Belousek’s appeal to traditional doctrinal theology is also in service of a pragmatic end, namely “a sustainable commitment to nonviolent discipleship.” Whether this way of reasoning accurately reflects traditional doctrinal theology is probably still

up for grabs; what is clear is that even if Belousek is entirely correct here, the ghost of Kaufman has not been entirely banished from Mennonite theology.

Looping back and casting Weaver's argument in a new light, Justin Heinzekehr's essay finds theological precursors not in the likes of Yoder, Kaufman, and Reimer but among those who have frequently found themselves at the margins of Mennonite thought—Elaine Enns, Gayle Gerber Koontz, and Carol Penner, for example—and whose voices also seem to say that systematic theology does not have much to offer, if this CGR issue is any indication. While Heinzekehr initially appears to affirm narrative as the foundational mode for Mennonite theology when he claims that it “allows us to synthesize the particularity and universality of Jesus' life,” what he ends up revealing is that narrative “may actually disguise a greater level of violence than more ‘systematic’ genres” because the elements that enable it to translate the meaning of particular events (for instance, plot, protagonists, antagonists, and theories about the purpose and meaning of existence) are the same ones that function as universals in a manner that is both hidden and unexamined within the worldview of the narrative itself. Therefore, Heinzekehr argues that Mennonites ought to construct systems rather than naively depend upon narratives, but the systems must respond adequately to various types of experience, not claim “finality,” and can expect to be shattered at some point in the future.

Whether one agrees with Heinzekehr or not, I think he is right to cast systematic theology as a “deliberative genre” in which specific arguments and refutations are made with the intention of persuading one's opponent. The dissent and diversity in this genre genuinely seek to hear the other, because that is a prerequisite for arguing with the other. It is my hope that this CGR issue illuminates the fragility inherent in the ways of systematizing Mennonite theology we have inherited. I also hope it invigorates us to ask new questions, especially of our own narratives and theological shibboleths. Mennonite systematic theology is dead, long live Mennonite systematic theology.

Paul Martens is Associate Professor of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

From Narrative Comes Theology

J. Denny Weaver

Introduction

What “Mennonite systematic theology” is or should be has sparked lively debate. In the context of that debate and the multiple varieties offered, I agree with David Cramer’s suggestion for such a theology: “Rather than beginning with foundational, universal first principles, Mennonite theologians will recognize the historical particularity of all forms of reasoning and will be unembarrassed by our inability to persuade others with different starting points than ours.”¹ Thus I will neither engage in lengthy discussion about the definition of terms such as “Mennonite” or “systematic” or even “theology,” nor defend my preferred designation of the project as “systematic theology for Mennonites” rather than Mennonite systematic theology. Instead I will jump into the fray from my particular perspective. I will posit my beginning point and explain my approach for using it. And from that explanation eventually there will appear answers to the questions of definition, methodology, sources, and audience.

A crucial question concerns the beginning point of a systematic theology for Mennonites. My assumption is that such a theology should begin with the New Testament narrative of Jesus. “Beginning point” in this assumption does not mean a fixed foundation. As will be clarified in what follows, this beginning point is itself subject to revision and new interpretation. Beginning point just means the first item that will be stated at the start of theologizing. I am assuming that Christian theology—and Mennonites are Christians—should begin with the story of Jesus Christ. Many implications follow from the claim that a systematic theology for Mennonites begins with the narrative of Jesus.²

¹ David C. Cramer, “Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 272.

² This essay is an attempt to be specific about the methodology that stands behind two publications, J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) and J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). Interested readers can use the tables of contents and the indexes in these volumes to *The Conrad Grebel Review* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 117-130.

Beginning Point: Implications

(1) Beginning theology with the narrative of Jesus means that theology is a derived statement. It consists of insights and concepts that are extracted from or derived from, or that go beyond, what the narrative says. As a minimal NT example of this beginning point, note that in Acts the Apostles asserted their authority and identified Jesus by telling his story. These narrative statements occur in Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41. Common to all the accounts was that people in Jerusalem killed Jesus and that God raised him. Also occurring in most instances were statements of fulfilled scripture or a plan of God, which indicate that the event of Jesus was part of the ongoing story of God and God's people. Also present in most instances were statements of the witnesses to the events, and statements of how the hearers responded or the impact of the events.

This narrative outline appears in 1 Corinthians 15. This text provides one early example of developing theology from the narrative of Jesus. In verses 3b-8, Paul repeats the outline used in the Acts recitations. It is clearly a recitation of a previously known outline—he stresses that he is only passing on and referring to material passed to him. Paul repeated this handed-down narrative outline because he wanted to use it to make a point not included in the original outline from Acts. Based on the narrative, Paul argues that accepting that story of Jesus requires accepting the idea of a general resurrection of all the dead, and that to deny a general resurrection is to deny the resurrection of Jesus. For this argument to make sense, there must be an assumption of solidarity between Jesus and all humanity, so that what happens to one happens to all. My contention is that Paul brings the assumption of solidarity to the story that he was given, and then uses it to argue a point not included in the original story, belief in a general resurrection. This process of extracting and applying meaning from the narrative exemplifies how theology begins with the narrative of Jesus.

find more extensive discussions as well as sources used for the applications in this essay. A short version of the theology in interaction with some challengers is J. Denny Weaver, "A Jesus-Centered Peace Theology, or, Why and How Theology and Ethics are Two Sides of One Profession of Faith," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 5-27.

(2) When I asked a well-known womanist theologian whether there was any theology that could not be corrected, she replied, “God never wrote any theology.” In other words, all theology, and that includes theology derived from the narrative of Jesus, is written by people. Such theology will be incomplete and imperfect because that is the nature of human beings. Other factors also contribute to the incomplete character of theology. Contexts evolve. Changing contexts provoke a looping back or a return to the narrative with new questions that require new thinking and application. Further, the narrative itself has no fixed form. It exists in four versions in the Gospels, as well as the outline in Acts, in 1 Corinthians 15, and elsewhere. These multiple forms make the narrative itself also subject to interpretation, along with the fact that the Gospel narratives themselves are already interpretations. Thus theology derived from the narrative is always incomplete or open-ended and subject to further discussion.

This open-ended character means that theology derived from the narrative of Jesus falls clearly within the postmodern conviction that there is no universally recognized and accessible norm of truth that coerces a hearer to believe against his or her will. There is no final form of theology to which all future theology must conform. There is, however, a postmodern way to testify to the truth of the theology one professes. To witness to the truth of claims about Jesus, a postmodern follower will live according to the story of Jesus, even when it is costly or dangerous.

(3) Although the narrative of Jesus exists in several versions, it is nonetheless widely acknowledged to make clear that Jesus rejected the sword as a means of advancing his mission or advancing the coming of God’s reign. That Jesus rejected the sword can be generalized to say that he rejected violence. Stated positively, when we are talking about his rejection of the sword and his activist way of confronting injustice without mirroring evil, Jesus can be described as “nonviolent.”³ Deriving theology from the

³ The term “nonviolence” is not used here as an abstract and transcendent idea that exists apart from the narrative of Jesus. Jesus rejected the sword. With the directions in the Sermon on the Mount to turn the other cheek, give cloak with coat, and go the second mile, he was showing ways to respond to violence or abuse without mirroring it. Furthermore, he engaged in activities, such as healing on the Sabbath and traveling through Samaria, that challenged existing purity regulations and demonstrated true justice. These actions are ways to confront

narrative of Jesus makes his rejection of violence an integral feature of theology derived from the story. That starting point also makes other social and ethical issues integral to theology. Jesus talked about the use and abuse of money, and expressed concern and caring for outcasts and the marginalized, including lepers and the poor. His treatment of Samaritans is akin to confronting racism today, while his treatment of women locates him with today's feminists. Thus, beginning theology with his story draws these and other social issues into the center of the theological enterprise.

Showing that these social issues, including the rejection of violence, are integral to the story of Jesus is not a reduction of theology to ethics or to nonviolence, as has sometimes been charged. It is rather a recognition that Jesus' work and mission cannot be discussed without reference to his actions. And when his actions are integral to who Jesus is, it points to the inseparable relationship of Christian theology and ethics. To identify Jesus is to tell his story, as the Apostles did in Acts, and to ask how a follower of Jesus should live requires telling his story. To say that theology begins with the narrative of Jesus thus shows that theology is the words that express the meaning of that story, while Christian ethics—the way Jesus' followers live—is a lived expression of that same narrative. Ethics and theology are inseparable.

(4) Theology derived from the narrative of Jesus relativizes or decenters the classic or standard Christological statements of Nicea, Chalcedon, and the Cappadocian Fathers' terminology for the Trinity, which emerged in the 4th and 5th centuries. The classic Christological language answers questions left open by the NT, but it does so with terminology different from the NT and assuming a philosophical system not fully present there, and situated in a worldview quite different from our own in the 21st century. These classic statements are efforts to derive theology from the NT's narrative of Jesus, and they are true within the framework and philosophical system they presume. However, with recognition of their particular context, it becomes apparent that in other contexts and epochs new ways to derive meaning from the narrative of Jesus in discussion of Christology are appropriate and

injustice without resorting to violence. With this picture of Jesus in view, "nonviolence" is a descriptive term that covers both the refusal to use the sword and resort to violence and the active ways to confront injustice without mirroring evil.

to be expected. These new formulations will reach back to the narrative of Jesus, while being in conversation with, but not necessarily beholden to, the classic time-honored images.

(5) To state the previous point differently: when theology is derived from the narrative, the classic language of Christology and Trinity is no longer posited as an unquestioned given. Rather, it is recognized as one kind of derivation of theology from the NT narrative. Removing these creedal statements from the category of unquestioned given, by pointing to their context, has profound implications for doing theology. Christology shifts from being an explanation of the 4th- and 5th-century statements as givens, and instead becomes a never finished process of deriving meaning from the narrative of Jesus. Put another way, the discussion of Christology begins with the NT narrative rather than as an explanation of classic statements accepted as givens from past centuries.

(6) A particular application of the shift of theology from explanation to derivation occurs with use of the language of Trinity. This language was developed as a way to affirm that God was in Jesus and also in the Holy Spirit, and to affirm their equality while maintaining their distinctness. Within the worldview and underlying philosophical assumptions of the time, this language offered good answers. However, there are other ways to affirm the equality of God and Jesus, or to confess that Jesus' story is God's story. Elsewhere I have asserted that God's resurrection of Jesus shows that Jesus' story was fully God's story. In Revelation 5, when the lamb with marks of slaughter is the only being in heaven or earth that can open the sealed scroll in God's hand and the heavenly host breaks into a loud song, culminating with "to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever," these are resplendent affirmations of the equality of Jesus with God. That there are other ways to assert the relationship of God to Jesus means that the idea of three-ness or three-in-oneness in and of itself as a given is not an inherent characteristic of the God revealed in Jesus. I suggest that we should not claim that "Trinity" or three-ness is what is unique about the Christian view of God, and refrain from routinely referring to the God revealed in Jesus as the "Triune God."

(7) Rejection of violence shines a bright light on the silence about violence (and its accommodation) in the classic Christological imagery. As writers of several persuasions have shown, this silence accommodates the sword of the emperors and the willingness of ecclesiastical authorities to appeal for and accept imperial support when emperors sided with them. This social location constitutes an additional aspect of the particular context of the classic conciliar statements of Christology and Trinity. It is thus appropriate that theology derived from the narrative of Jesus supports alternatives. These alternatives will make visible his rejection of the sword, while being in conversation with, but not beholden to, the classic statements.

(8) Beginning theology with the narrative of Jesus changes markedly the understanding of, or approach to, atonement theology, and exposes the feudal context in which “satisfaction” atonement originated. One or another version of satisfaction atonement has been the predominant approach to the work of Christ for close to eight centuries. Anselm of Canterbury gave the first full articulation of satisfaction atonement imagery in his book *Cur Deus Homo*, published in 1098. Anselm wrote that he would prove the necessity of the God-man by “reason alone.” Sin had disturbed the order of creation, he said, and for order to be restored God’s honor had to be satisfied. Since humans had sinned, the one to offer the sacrifice to satisfy God had to be human. In order to cover the sins of all who would be saved, the effect of the sacrifice had to be infinite. As the God-man sent by God, Jesus satisfied those conditions.

To understand this image, one should know that Anselm assumed the Norman feudal system as a given. In the feudal order, when an underling offended the ruling lord, maintaining order in the realm depended on the lord’s power either to punish the offender or to exact satisfaction. It should be more than obvious that Anselm pictured God as the ultimate feudal lord, and the “reason” to which he appealed was the assumptions of the feudal system. The 16th-century reformers introduced a modification of satisfaction, arguing that instead of satisfying God’s honor, the death of Jesus satisfied God’s law. This change did not alter the basic idea of satisfying God; it only shifted the divine target toward which Jesus’ death was aimed.

The feudal system has long since disappeared, but the idea of Jesus’

death as a sacrifice to satisfy God or divine law remains widespread. A form of this atonement idea is also retained in the retribution-based criminal justice systems of many nations, with the state replacing God as the offended party.

Beginning with the narrative of Jesus to develop atonement imagery exposes a number of omissions and problems with the idea of satisfaction. The satisfaction images focus on Jesus' death, while the narrative culminates with resurrection. The narrative of Jesus displays no notion that God sent him for the purpose of dying to satisfy either God's offended honor or the death penalty demanded by divine law. The narrative makes clear that the violence which killed Jesus came from the side of human beings—the religious leadership who wanted Jesus removed and the Romans who did the actual killing. In contrast, for Jesus' death to be offered to God in satisfaction, God had to send him to die as that sacrifice, making God the agent behind his death, and the people who killed Jesus appear as both opposing God's reign and assisting God to receive the needed sacrifice. Not surprisingly, feminist and womanist writers have said that these atonement images picture God as a divine child abuser. Further, the role of Jesus poses an unhealthy, even dangerous, model for women in an abusive relationship and people in any situation of abuse or oppression—it is a model of passive submission to abuse by an authority figure.

Recently, some theologians have attempted to rescue a version of satisfaction atonement by claiming that Jesus' death was not about satisfying either the penalty of law or God's honor but about a more wholesome sounding concept, such as restoring true worship or obedience, or perhaps an exchange in which God takes Jesus' place to satisfy God's demand. Such rescue efforts may camouflage, but not alter, the underlying assumptions of any version of satisfaction atonement, namely that the death is still offered to God, God is the one who set Jesus up to make the satisfying sacrifice, and, for the death to be offered to God, the people who kill Jesus are both cooperating with God and opposing God's reign. The image of God as abusive and Jesus as a model of passive submission to abuse remains. In my estimation, beginning theology with the resurrection of Jesus calls for abandoning the received images of atonement and any version of satisfaction atonement, however it may be redefined.

(9) Perhaps the most striking theological implication of this discussion of atonement concerns the character of God. The critique of satisfaction atonement (and other inherited images as well) highlights the role of God in those images as that of a God who depends on and sanctions violence as the basis of salvation. In contrast, the God revealed in the narrative of Jesus is a God who responds to violence by restoring life. The God who responds to the killing of Jesus by restoring life is a nonviolent God. Since God is revealed in Jesus, as Christian faith professes, the God revealed in him should be conceptualized as nonviolent. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son represents this image, a God who waits with loving arms for sinners to return. It is not the image of a God who first expects satisfaction or punishment before offering forgiveness.⁴

(10) Accepting that theology is derived from the narrative of Jesus and recognizing the particular context of classic, so-called orthodox theology changes one's perspective on "contextual" theologies. Theologies such as feminist or black or womanist should not be viewed as special pleading for a certain cause, in contrast to classic, so-called orthodox theology that is given the mantle of universality as though it applied to everyone. As already noted, the classic statements also reflect and emerge from a particular context. Stated rather crassly, it is just as legitimate for Jesus to be called *black* as to be called *homoousios*, although such designations should start with the fact that Jesus' ethnicity was Jewish.

(11) Recognizing that theology derived from the Jesus narrative both reflects and speaks to a context, and is always unfinished, does away with the idea of producing a theology-in-general, that is, a theology that speaks for all people in all times and places. Each theology expresses the meaning of the narrative of Jesus within a particular context. Theologies from different contexts can interact and stimulate and enrich each other. But there should

⁴ Deriving theology from the narrative of Jesus focuses on the particular or material or earthly dimension of theology. However, to say that God is revealed in Jesus points toward a universal, metaphysical dimension to this particular theology as well. For development of the metaphysical dimension of this earthly-focused theology, see Justin Heinzekehr, "The Absent Christ and the Inundated Community: Constructing a Process-Anabaptist Micrometaphysics" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 2015).

be no urgency to synthesize all theologies into one. A Palestinian liberation theology, for example, may have affinity with theology developed by First Nations peoples in North America, while both may have significantly different emphases from a systematic theology for North American Mennonites.⁵ And Mennonite theology in the United States should find affinity with black theology. As outsiders to the mainstream (white) culture, black theology has developed as a challenge to the (presumed white) standard theology. Also, with a history of suffering and as outsiders in a different way to that same culture, Mennonite theologians ought to find significant opportunities for mutual enrichment with black theologians.⁶

(12) An illustration close to home for North American Mennonites illustrates the impact of differing contexts on theological expression. Canada and the United States have quite different social contexts. The US features a monolithic civil religion that deifies violence as the foundation for freedom, and a melting pot society in which varying ethnicities are to be downplayed and subsumed under the higher, more important category of “American.” The term “melting pot” has fallen out of usage, but homogenization into the American whole is still alive. This Americanization can erode Mennonite identity. In contrast, Canada features a cultural mosaic without a monolithic civil religion. Within that mosaic, ethnic groups are accepted officially and maintain their identity with government support. Mennonites in Canada can thus be Canadian without weakening their identity as Mennonites.

The same theology may appear quite different when looked at from these two contexts. From my perspective in the United States, a theology for Mennonites must pose a comprehensive, multifaceted ecclesiological and

⁵ Declaring that these several theologies stand alone is a correction to David Cramer’s statement that my use of feminist, black, and womanist theologies was akin to Tom Finger’s methodology. Finger does take pieces from various theologies and insert them into a mosaic, which he believes is one theology that suits all views. In contrast, I allow each theology to stand alone and to speak for its constituency even as I can learn from them, and hope they may also learn from my theological articulations. See Cramer, “Mennonite Systematic Theology,” 267-69.

⁶ For an important suggestion about such conversation, see Andrew G.I. Hart, “Salvaging the Way: A Critical, Comparative, and Constructive Black and Anabaptist Theological Ethic for Subverting Western Christendom and White Supremacy” (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 2016).

nonviolent alternative to the monolithic civil religious society that claims the ultimate loyalty of all Americans. It is important that Mennonites have an identity distinct from American identity with its intrinsic violence, and that this identity pose a nonviolent witness to the surrounding, violence-prone society. But if this theology is transported into Canada and advocated for Mennonites without explanation, Canadians may hear it quite differently from my explanation on the American side of the border. Without a monolithic civil religion that must be opposed, Canadians may sense that American Mennonites are unnecessarily hostile to government; and the idea that a theology for Mennonites will pose an alternative to the social order may seem to imply that one member of the cultural mosaic is rising up to lord it over the others. In contrast, a theology for Mennonites that reflects the Canadian context might stress the need for them to engage cooperatively with other members of the mosaic. Because Canada has no monolithic violence-prone, civil religion, a theology for Mennonites in Canada lacks the requirement that they must have a particular identity over against Canadian society. Mennonites can be happily Canadian without feeling that their national identity conflicts with their pacifist orientation.

Such a theology may serve Canadian Mennonites well. But looked at from across the border, it can appear to be unaware of the dangers of nationalism, to lack a sense of clear Mennonite identity, and to be prone to assimilation into general Christianity and into Canadian society. In 1990-91, I spent a year in Winnipeg, where I learned something of the difference in the social milieu between Canada and the US and the challenge it poses to a theology for Mennonites that would transcend borders. Since then I have thought much about the way the same theology may be heard differently in the two countries, and I still cannot fathom completely one theology that can pass equally well on each side of the border without a significant amount of explanation. To me it is a lesson in recognizing the contextual nature of all theology, recognizing that theology is always in process, and being willing to abandon the notion that 4th- and 5th-century creedal formulas have settled for all times and places how we should talk about Jesus and about the God revealed in him.

(13) Deriving theology from the narrative of Jesus reminds us that this story is the continuation of a story that began in the Old Testament. Thus, by

extension, theology is also derived from the story of Israel. Statements about the God of that story should be compatible with or find their continuation in the God revealed in Jesus, who is a continuation of Israel's story. Two implications follow. Since the OT contains a narrative that unrolled over many centuries, it ought not surprise us that we discover different images of God and violence, and that the biblical authors differed in how they understood God and God's working with Israel. Thus we find both images of a God who exercises or sanctions great violence, and images of a God who acts without violence and sanctions nonviolent conflict management. Acknowledging the narrative source of these differences means accepting that OT writers differed in their understandings and that a modern reader is not obligated to harmonize all these images. Rather, reading with the nonviolence of Jesus in view points to the nonviolent images of God in the OT as the interpretation of God revealed in Jesus. At the same time, it is clear that the entire OT is necessary—picturing the violent images of God over against the nonviolent strands shows the significance of Jesus' continuation of the story. The same approach would apply to texts of slavery versus freedom, or polygamy versus "husband of one wife."

(14) I have not yet said anything specific on the question of systematic theology for Mennonites. As a first point on that agenda, I will state the obvious, namely that Mennonites are Christians. Thus theology that begins by developing meaning from the narrative of Jesus is Christian theology. That makes theology developed from this narrative theology for Mennonites. Theology that starts with this narrative could also be called an Anabaptist theology. My interpretation of Anabaptism is that it is one particular manifestation of a movement whose impulse is to point back to Jesus as the basis of truth.⁷ The 16th-century Anabaptist movement is by no means the only such movement or impulse in church history, but it is the one from which Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren find their historical origins. Thus theology identified by the name of that historical movement is an appropriate name for theology for Mennonites and Brethren.

⁷ For this interpretation of Anabaptism, see 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).

In point (3) above, I said that starting with the narrative made nonviolence, as well as other issues of social ethics, integral to theology. Mennonites (along with Brethren and Quakers) are identified as “historic peace churches.” Given the prevalence of and proclivity to violence in the American national ethos, a theology featuring nonviolence is of great importance to Mennonites in the United States. The ongoing presence of racism in American society underscores the need for that theological challenge. The same is true for issues related to equality of women, and for issues contributing to poverty and increasing the wealth gap between rich and poor. For these reasons, I would hope that the historic peace churches would welcome as their own theology that has rejection of violence and other issues of social justice as intrinsic characteristics. At the same time, since this theology begins with the narrative of Jesus Christ, it is theology that engages every Christian.

(15) My previous point placed theology for Mennonites in the context of the United States. An earlier point described differences in ethos between the US and Canada. These differences call for conversation when theology crosses the border.

But there are other contexts as well. In 2009 I spent a month in the Congo (Kinshasa), giving lectures on nonviolent atonement theology. In these presentations I emphasized that Jesus made God’s reign visible by confronting injustices. The response was not what I had anticipated. In one setting, students wanted to know what I thought Jesus’ confrontation of injustice had to say to their situation. Feeling a bit of embarrassment, I said I didn’t know their political context well enough to comment, and they would have to figure that out for themselves. Professing not to know turned out to be the right answer for that context, as I learned from the dean of the religion faculty, who seconded my answer with an enthusiastic “amen.” The Congo is still recovering from decades of colonial rule in which few Congolese were allowed to go to school after sixth grade, and all answers and all administrative work came from the foreign colonial rulers. Thus without any wise intention on my part, telling the Congolese that they could find their own answers to their problems was the right response.

There was a church dimension as well. I was told that some

missionaries had said “blessed are the poor,” which made poverty sound like a blessing and undercut incentives to combat it. And some missionaries also attempted to do everything—teach, supply money, hand out clothing, lead congregations. Thus the people learned to wait passively for gifts and expected God to provide them. Again, in an unanticipated way, the message about an activist Jesus who confronted problems was welcomed by church leaders, who told me they were now teaching their people to be active in working for God’s blessing.⁸ The description of the context of Congo could be expanded greatly beyond what I could learn in three-and-a-half weeks. But this brief description is enough to show that a theology that speaks to Mennonites in the Congo will sound different from theology for Mennonites in Canada or the United States.

(16) I have referred to three distinct contexts for systematic theology for Mennonites—Canada, the United States, the Congo. Each calls for a theology with different nuances and emphases. The same theology cannot be transplanted from one context to the other without any changes or explanation. The number of contexts could be expanded greatly.⁹ Further, we must recognize that the American milieu has produced more than one theology that challenges the dominant culture. To name only two, one is the Anabaptist/peace church theology that I advocate, and another is black theology. Although Anabaptists and the black church have obviously different histories, each has a history of suffering that gives them an outsider stance vis-à-vis the dominant culture. Even though theology should derive from the narrative of Jesus, how it is derived and the emphases it has, and how it addresses the particular context will vary greatly. For this reason I speak of “systematic theology for Mennonites,” which allows for many versions, rather than of Mennonite systematic theology, which can perhaps imply a search for one such theology. Theology will vary from one context to another and there can be multiple systematic theologies for Mennonites.

⁸ For a longer discussion of this experience in the Congo, see J. Denny Weaver, “Atonement in the Congo,” *Mission Focus: Annual Review* 17 (2009): 175-82.

⁹ For examples of theology using indigenous African imagery, see Anton Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

Each of these must truly represent its context of origin, even as they may find many significant points in common.¹⁰ Thus my language is systematic theology for Mennonites.

(17) This essay has argued that theology for Mennonites is or should be derived from the narrative of Jesus. I am not saying this is a quasi-magical methodology that solves all questions. On the contrary. Quite obviously, bad theology can be derived from the narrative, and bad applications. Deriving theology and ethics from the narrative of Jesus does not guarantee truthfulness or suitability. I suggest that the way to truthfulness has at least two aspects. One is the recognition that as a human product, theology is always incomplete or in process and therefore always subject to correction and revision. The second is to recognize that theology needs daylight. Theology is written for the church, and thus there should always be open, widespread discussion about the meaning of the narrative, and the theology and ethics derived from it.

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

¹⁰ A suggestion for such harmony with distinction is Hart, "Salvaging the Way."

The Importance of Gordon Kaufman's Constructive Theological Method for Contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology

Nathanael L. Inglis

Early in his career, Gordon Kaufman suggested that “the objective of systematic theology is not simply to repeat traditional views but rather to grasp and think through the central claims of the Christian faith afresh, and one should expect this to produce novel or even offensive interpretations.”¹ Although Kaufman shifted from identifying as a systematic theologian to identifying as a constructive theologian, at heart his understanding that theology should be novel, creative, and suggestive never changed. One of the most important contributions that he offers contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite theology is his particular way of using the Christian tradition as a non-authoritative source for theology. Although this has been the root of many critiques of his work, I will argue that his understanding of tradition is helpful for reconstructing two theological dispositions which have had continued influence in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology—noncreedalism and the priority of christomorphic praxis.² Kaufman's constructive method offers a promising direction for theologians who want to interpret faith claims on a comprehensive scale while also engaging cultural developments

¹ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), xi.

² For a range of critiques of Kaufman's use of tradition, see William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989): 159-60; Victor H. Froese, “Gordon D. Kaufman's Theology ‘Within the Limits of Reason Alone’: A Review,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 1-26; Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992); Gavin D'Costa, review of *In Face of Mystery* by Gordon D. Kaufman, *Pro Ecclesia* 5, no. 2 (1996): 225-27; Janet Martin Soskice, “The Gift of the Name: Moses and the Burning Bush,” in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. Denys Turner and Oliver Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 61-75; Delwin Brown, *The Boundaries of our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994); and Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2000).

like pluralism, individualism, and contextualism, which tend to have a corrosive effect on theological systems of all kinds.

Kaufman's Constructive Theological Method

Whether creative theological work is identified as 'systematic' or 'constructive,' Kaufman's contribution is instructive for considering the possibilities of Anabaptist-Mennonite theological method because he spent his entire career wrestling with the question of how theology should be done.³ In his best-known work, *In Face of Mystery*, Kaufman identifies theology's task as primarily constructive. He uses scripture and the Christian tradition as sources for his theology, but he approaches them non-authoritatively.⁴ The starting point for his theology is that the reality of God is ultimately a mystery, and that all of our concepts of God are constructs of the human imagination. This methodology is based on two key philosophical commitments: historicism and pragmatism.

Given his historicism—his first philosophical commitment—Kaufman is convinced that there are no absolute or universal truths: all theological beliefs and practices are shaped by the time and place of their construction, and as such should be critically reconsidered in light of new developments. This insight—that God-talk has always been historically conditioned and thus relative to its social context—was groundbreaking for Kaufman's thinking, reframing his understanding of the task of theology

³ See Kaufman, *Systematic Theology*, for his earliest attempt to write a systematic theology using a method that was historicist and correlational. The limits of this method, particularly its reliance on traditional authority, ultimately compelled Kaufman to rethink how theology should be done. While he abandoned his systematic theology as unsuccessful—primarily due to its uncritical acceptance of a neo-orthodox doctrine of God—his early work is still an important resource because it introduces many of the basic concerns and questions that he returned to over his career. Both this correlational method and his later constructive method are united by a search for a credible way to talk about God that can orient human life in light of historicism. See Gordon D. Kaufman, "My Life and My Theological Reflection: Two Central Themes," *Dialog* 40, no. 1 (2001): 43-60; idem, "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," in *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*, ed. Harry Loewen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1988), 134; and idem, "Some Reflections on a Theological Pilgrimage," *Religious Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (1994): 178-79 on Kaufman's own sense of continuity and change in his work.

⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 133.

from systematics to construction, and shifting in his mind where Christian theologians ought to place their loyalty.

Whereas in his earlier systematic theological method, loyalty to the Christian tradition as 'unique' and 'essential' was precisely what it meant to be a Christian theologian, in his later constructive method Kaufman argues that "it is a serious mistake to invoke the *authority* of the major symbols of the tradition as the principal basis for theological work."⁵ While loyalty is still considered a marker of what it means to be a theologian, he shifts the focus of this loyalty from the Christian tradition to ultimate mystery, which Christians call God.

As historicist, Kaufman's theology is therefore a fundamentally creative activity, a process of imaginative construction. However, the presupposition that every theological claim is provisional and historically contextual is not meant to dissuade people from doing theology. Instead, the recognition that all theology is imaginative construction is intended to liberate Christians to courageously and creatively engage the Christian tradition in light of their own situational experiences.⁶

Pragmatism, Kaufman's second philosophical commitment, inclines him to judge theological claims not simply by how well they either correspond to Christian scripture and tradition or correlate the tradition to the current situation. It is equally important to judge these claims according to their fruits: do they encourage ethically responsible ways of life or not? Kaufman's constructive theology, which attempts to make claims about God that are not justified by reference to traditions as normative or authoritative, sharply contrasts with any type of hermeneutical or correlational theological method that interprets the current social context in light of some definitive text or tradition.

Thus, when evaluating the adequacy of a theological claim, the most important question for Kaufman is not how it came to be known but

⁵ Kaufman, *Systematic Theology*, 64; Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 48.

⁶ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 32. See also Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 263-79; and idem, "Theology as Imaginative Construction," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 1 (1982): 73-79; Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Human Historicity, Cosmic Creativity, and the Theological Imagination: Reflections on the Work of Gordon D. Kaufman," *Religious Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (1994): 171.

whether it empowers people to act more humanely in the world. As he says in *The Theological Imagination*, “all claims to truth made simply on the grounds of religious authority are in question: theological truth-claims are to be assessed strictly in terms of our present needs and our present moral insight (educated as much as possible, of course, by past experience and by tradition).”⁷ By rejecting the notion that the origin of a belief has any priority in determining its truth, Kaufman assesses tradition from a characteristically pragmatic perspective.⁸

The importance of results as the criterion for successful theology is made clear in *In Face of Mystery*, when Kaufman explains that “the reconception of the Christian faith and Christian ideas which I have worked out here is not intended as a mere academic exercise. . . . If it cannot (or does not) succeed in doing that [i.e., helping men and women find their way in life in the world today], it must be reckoned a failure.”⁹ His theology is thus clearly intended to be practical, not theoretical: “[W]e must remember that our exploration here is not to be grounded primarily in a speculative interest in the question of what is ultimately real but rather in the practical interest of finding orientation for life in face of the problems and evils of modernity—and in the hope that the central Christian symbols may provide us with such orientation.”¹⁰

While many readers take Kaufman’s historicism and pragmatism at face value as philosophical commitments guiding his theology (and seemingly idiosyncratic ones at that), I suggest that these commitments can be read in line with theological dispositions from the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.¹¹

Two Theological Dispositions in Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition

Before turning to the ways that Kaufman’s historicism and pragmatism can

⁷ Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 192.

⁸ William Dean, “The Persistence of Experience: A Commentary on Gordon Kaufman’s Theology,” *New Essays in Religious Naturalism*, ed. Creighton Peden and Larry E. Axel (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1993), 71-73.

⁹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 430.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹¹ For an in-depth study of the philosophical background to Kaufman’s historicism and pragmatism, see Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism*.

inform Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, I will briefly consider the meaning of noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis in the broader Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.¹²

Noncreedalism is a distinctive methodological presupposition in Anabaptist-Mennonite theological reflection that involves more than creeds. It is a hermeneutic of suspicion seeking to distinguish between human and divine authority that can be applied to creeds, to confessions of faith, traditions, and customs, and even to the scriptures themselves. For instance, while Anabaptist-Mennonites have had a consistent tradition of confessionalism, unlike creedalism, their confessions did not usually function as independent authorities and have been constantly open to revision.¹³ As Thomas Finger explains, most Mennonites have rejected three characteristic functions of creeds in other Christian traditions. They do not attribute any special significance to early Christian creeds, such as the Nicene. Likewise, they do not typically use faith statements as a basis for defining the boundaries of church membership, nor do they understand their confessions to be universal or without error.¹⁴ Thus, while Anabaptists produced a wide variety of confessions of faith, starting with the Swiss Anabaptist Schleitheim Confession in 1527, these confessions have focused more on practice than on doctrine, in contrast to the Nicene Creed and other creeds that were primarily doctrinal.¹⁵

¹² While the scope of this essay cannot do justice to the historical diversity and the development of these two themes, or include other important dispositions within the Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition, I focus on these specifically because they most closely relate to the emphases in Kaufman's theological method.

¹³ For varying perspectives on the use and meaning of creeds in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, see Thomas Finger, "The Way to Nicea: Some Reflections From A Mennonite Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24, no. 2 (1987): 212-31; Ben C. Ollenburger, "Mennonite Theology: A Conversation Around the Creeds," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 1 (1992): 57-89; Andrew P. Klager, "St. Gregory of Nyssa, Anabaptism, and the Creeds," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 42-71; Andy Alexis-Baker, "Anabaptist Use of Patristic Literature and Creeds," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 3 (2011): 477-504.

¹⁴ Thomas Finger, "Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76, no. 3 (2002): 277-78, 296-97.

¹⁵ Karl Koop, "Introduction," in *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition: 1527-1660*, ed. Karl Koop (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 1. See also Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004); Thomas Finger, "The Way to Nicea," 214.

Unlike creeds and confessions in the Catholic and Protestant churches that were used to exert ecclesiastical and political authority, confessions among early Anabaptists usually had little external authority over congregations or individuals, and the authority that they did have was derivative. It was dependent on the degree to which a confession accurately reflected the scripture and the extent to which congregations chose to assent to it.¹⁶ As Karl Koop explains, “although the essential commitments of the Anabaptist-Mennonite communities, from the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, remained constant,” the social contexts in which confessions were used were constantly changing and the confessions were revised accordingly. Koop observes that “the confessions represent not a fixed, but rather a dynamic and developing theological tradition.”¹⁷

The resistance to recognizing independent authority in creeds or confessions is indicative of a more fundamental delineation of divine and human authority that influenced some Anabaptists’ interpretation of scripture as well. In his study of early Anabaptist biblical hermeneutics, Ben Ollenburger emphasizes two “pre-understandings” that directed the way many 16th-century Anabaptists read the scripture. One was the drawing of some sort of distinction between the Old and New Testaments, and the other was some version of the principle that a person had to have a prior commitment to Jesus in order to interpret the scriptures correctly.¹⁸

¹⁶ Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith*, 75-76. Especially in the case of the Waterlanders, Koop notes that their confessions had “representative, rather than constitutive authority” (75-76).

¹⁷ Koop, “Introduction,” 10, 14. In *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith*, 79-80, Koop explains that “in most instances confessions of faith were not considered ‘first-order’ commitments of the Christian community” like scripture, worship, or prayer. Instead they functioned as ‘second-order’ documents, “as heuristic constructions, assisting the process of articulating the content and implications of the faith.” In “Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition,” Finger surveys the recurrent use of confessions from the 16th to the 20th century.

¹⁸ Ben C. Ollenburger, “The Hermeneutics of Obedience: A Study of Anabaptist Hermeneutics,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 49. Ollenburger identifies versions of these two “pre-understandings” in the writings of Menno Simons, Thomas Münster, Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Caspar Schwenckfeld, Melchior Hofmann, Michael Sattler, and Pilgram Marpeck.

For instance, although Menno Simons considered the whole Bible to be authoritative, he used the life and teaching of Jesus and the apostles as the interpretive key for understanding the whole.¹⁹ For him, “Any teaching, interpretation, or even Word of Scripture which is contrary to ‘the intention of Jesus Christ’ is false.”²⁰ The southern German Anabaptist Hans Denck would not even call the Bible the ‘Word of God,’ since God’s word was only truly Christ himself.²¹ In his “Recantation” Denck explains that “The Holy Scriptures I hold above all treasures, but it is not as high as the Word of God.”²² Thus, for some early Anabaptists even the scriptures themselves had to be tested using the interpretive criterion of faithfulness to the words and practices of Jesus, who was the sole and final authority for Christian life and action.²³

By relegating all human authority under the absolute authority of God in Jesus Christ, noncreedalism is closely related to a second important Anabaptist-Mennonite theological disposition: the priority of discipleship, or christomorphic praxis. Unlike a christocentric faith that focuses on correct doctrines, ideologies, or creeds, a christomorphic faith focuses on the ethical responsibility that Christians have toward others, through practices that conform one’s life to the model of Jesus.²⁴

¹⁹ Henry Poettcker, “Menno Simons’ View of the Bible as Authority,” in *A Legacy of Faith*, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1962), 35, 39.

²⁰ Ollenburger, “Hermeneutics of Obedience,” 51.

²¹ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1973), 19, and Jan J. Kiwiet, “The Theology of Hans Denck,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 32 (1958): 3-27. Kiwiet explains that for Denck, Christ is the Word of God, both as the historical person Jesus whom Christians can imitate, and as an inner experience of God that empowers Christians and makes the imitation of Christ possible. For Denck, “Christ is identical with the Word of God and is the only power by which we can fulfill obedience to God” (18).

²² Quoted from Wilhelm Wiswedel, “The Inner and the Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Doctrine of Scripture,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 26 (1952): 183. See also “Hans Denck’s Recantation” in *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523-1533): A Source Book*, ed. William Roscoe Estep (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1976), 131-37.

²³ For perspectives on noncreedalism in today’s context, see Nadine Pence Frantz, “Biblical Interpretation in a ‘Non-Sense’ World: Text, Revelation, and Interpretive Community” *Brethren Life and Thought* 39, no. 3 (1994): 157, 160; and Ollenburger, “Mennonite Theology,” 84-85.

²⁴ David Tracy explains that “there is no serious form of *Christian* theology that is not christomorphic. This is a more accurate designation of the christological issue, I believe,

J. Denny Weaver suggests a way of thinking about Anabaptist discipleship that gives more shape to this idea of christomorphic praxis. Interpreting the views of Sattler, Grebel, Denck, and Balthasar Hubmaier, he argues that the Anabaptist practice of discipleship is best expressed as “solidarity in Christ.” He explains that these figures each understood discipleship to be the imitation of Christ, in which disciples continued to participate in the work of Christ as Christ also continued to empower their activities. As Weaver defines this kind of solidarity, the Jesus of the gospels is the head of Christ, and the church functions as the body of Christ.²⁵

When christomorphic praxis is prioritized, the Anabaptist interpretation of scripture becomes even more distinctive. This is because, in addition to judging the Bible in light of Jesus’ life and teachings, there is a concurrent belief that the gospels themselves cannot be properly understood except as one attempts to follow him. As Ollenburger explains, key figures in the early Anabaptist movements generally agreed that “knowledge of Christ comes in walking *with* Him, and only then can one understand what is written *about* Him.”²⁶ In practice this meant that many early Anabaptists would not turn to religious or scholarly authorities to understand the scriptures. Instead, as Walter Klaassen describes it, the scriptures could only be properly interpreted in the “gathered disciple-community.”²⁷

This ideal of the church as a hermeneutical community continues to serve as a model for many today who think that Anabaptist-Mennonite biblical interpretation should be deeply entwined with a commitment to living as the body of Christ.²⁸ In this way the community of disciples forms

than the more familiar but confusing word ‘christocentric.’ For theology is not christocentric but theocentric, although it is so only by means of its christomorphism.” See David Tracy, “Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity,” *Theology Today* 51, no. 1 (1994): 111.

²⁵ J. Denny Weaver, “Discipleship Redefined: Four Sixteenth Century Anabaptists,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54 (1980): 256. On recent views of Anabaptist discipleship, see also Thomas Finger’s interpretation of discipleship as christomorphic divinization in *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 564-66; and Gerald J. Biesecker-Mast’s postmodern interpretation of Anabaptist discipleship as “concrete Christianity” in “Spiritual Knowledge, Carnal Obedience, and Anabaptist Discipleship,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997): 201-26.

²⁶ Ollenburger, “Hermeneutics of Obedience,” 58.

²⁷ Klaassen, *Anabaptism*, 79-80.

²⁸ See, for instance, Millard Lind, “Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics,” in Swartley, *Essays on*

a locus of authority that, at least in ideal terms, can “avoid authoritarian interpretation on the one hand, and uninformed individualistic imagination on the other.”²⁹

Of course, communities of faith are rarely if ever ‘ideal.’ John D. Roth suggests that there was great diversity in the actual practice of early Anabaptist biblical interpretation, and that the hermeneutical community may never have been more than an ideal.³⁰ Besides the diversity of practice, Lydia Neufeld Harder argues that it is important to account for the ways that power relationships and authority structures within the hermeneutical community can privilege the contributions of some members more than others.³¹ Yet, even if it has not always been realized, this ideal of the Anabaptist church as hermeneutical community envisions christomorphic praxis as the

Biblical Interpretation, 151-64: “viewing the congregation as a hermeneutical community is an important contribution” to contemporary biblical hermeneutics because “the hermeneutical question is shifted from ‘What does the text mean to me?’ to the more basic question, ‘What does the text mean to us?’” (153). Nadine Pence Frantz, in “Biblical Interpretation in a ‘Non-Sense’ World,” 153-66, recommends a “Believers’ Church hermeneutic” as an alternative to “hermeneutics in the modern period, which separated the processes of understanding, interpretation, and application and spoke of practice as the application of an insight or principle.... Integral to the Believers’ Church hermeneutic is the role of the local congregation as the interpretive community, which means that the confessional community of faith is actively involved in discerning the meaning of the text” (159-60). For a range of perspectives on Anabaptist-Mennonite hermeneutics, see the other essays in Swartley, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*.

²⁹ Klaassen, *Anabaptism*, 80.

³⁰ John D. Roth, “Community as Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 35-47.

³¹ Lydia Neufeld Harder, “Postmodern Suspicion and Imagination: Therapy for Mennonite Hermeneutic Communities,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71, no. 2 (1997): 268. This question of the dynamic between authority and suspicion in communal biblical interpretation is central to feminist biblical hermeneutics. See Lydia Harder, “Biblical Interpretation: A Praxis of Discipleship?,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 17-32; Gayle Gerber Koontz, “The Trajectory of Scripture and Feminist Conviction,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 201-20; Nadine Pence Frantz, “The (Inter)Textuality of Our Lives: An Anabaptist Feminist Hermeneutic,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 131-44; and Katie Funk Wiebe, “Reflections on the conference ‘In a Mennonite Voice: Women Doing Theology,’” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 209-14. See also Finger’s summary of this debate in *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 80-82.

condition for the possibility of understanding the Bible.

To summarize, at the heart of this interpretation of Anabaptist views of creeds, confessions, and scriptures is a fundamental concern never to confuse human authority with the absolute authority of God. This is what I would identify as a noncreedal disposition in at least some forms of Anabaptist theological reflection. According to this interpretation, there is also a tendency in some strands of Anabaptist-Mennonite thought to judge faith and the Bible according to their fruits or the degree to which they conform to the life of Jesus. This practical view of the Christian life is what I would call a christomorphic disposition in theological reflection. In analogous ways, Kaufman's theology also starts with these two dispositions, but by doing theology in conversation with historicism and pragmatism, his work offers creative possibilities for Anabaptist-Mennonite theology.

Kaufman's Method as a Distinctive Form of Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology

Kaufman's early theological identity and career was significantly shaped by the Mennonite tradition.³² Yet even though his later theology is less explicitly Mennonite, the historicist and pragmatic principles guiding his constructive theology function in analogous ways to the Anabaptist-Mennonite theological dispositions toward noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis. Although some contemporary Mennonites do not recognize Kaufman as a part of their theological tradition—thinking of him more as a liberal protestant or even a post-Christian theologian—he never rejected his Mennonite roots as a source of theological inspiration and was a lifelong ordained minister in the Mennonite Church.³³ The common misunderstandings of his theological location seem to be based in part on the assumption, which he never held,

³² Kaufman's explicitly Anabaptist-Mennonite works include Gordon D. Kaufman, "Some Theological Emphases of the Early Swiss Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25 (1951): 75-99; his 1959 Menno Simons lectures collected in Kaufman, *The Context of Decision: A Theological Analysis* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961); various essays collected in Kaufman, *Nonresistance and Responsibility and other Mennonite Essays* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979); "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," 126-38; and Kaufman, "The Mennonite Roots of My Theological Perspective," in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1996), 1-19.

³³ E.g., Kaufman, "My Life," 49; "Apologia Pro Vita Sua," 127.

that one cannot be both an Anabaptist and a liberal theologian.³⁴

For instance, John Howard Yoder concluded that even Kaufman's early work had parted ways with Anabaptist theology, especially in its willingness to accept and respect the contradictory convictions held by other Christian denominations. Yoder laments that Kaufman acquiesces to a "peculiar equiprobabilism of American denominational etiquette," a faux-respect that does not take differences of opinion seriously enough, when they are in fact contradictory understandings of God's commands.³⁵ Kaufman, objecting to this characterization, responds that what he is really doing is rejecting religious authoritarianism: "Yoder [argues] that I have rejected the all-too-great authority of the church in the Anabaptist tradition in the name of the mass-church tradition; it would be more correct to say I am rejecting the common authoritarianism of both these lines in the name of 'liberal' traditions rooted in the Enlightenment and modern democratic experience."³⁶ Kaufman clearly sees no contradiction in his theology being informed by both theological liberalism and Anabaptist thought.

Although Kaufman felt little need to justify the congruence between his theology and his Mennonite faith, as a liberal Mennonite theologian he weaves together Enlightenment and Anabaptist traditions in innovative ways. A. James Reimer, although skeptical of Kaufman's historicism, suggests that his work does stand in continuity with the prophetic and ethical dimensions of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.³⁷ Reimer says:

In short, it seems to me that, while Kaufman's 'historicism' is much more explicit and radical than the 'historicity' of Bender, Friedmann, and Yoder, there is still a continuity among the four which harks back to the left wing of the Reformation with its voluntarism, protest against all forms of human heteronomy,

³⁴ For an assessment of Kaufman as an American liberal theologian, see Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity: 1950-2005* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 307-24.

³⁵ John Howard Yoder, review of *The Context of Decision: A Theological Analysis*, by Gordon D. Kaufman, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 37 (1963): 138.

³⁶ Kaufman, *Nonresistance and Responsibility*, 115, n8.

³⁷ A. James Reimer, "Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 52. See also *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity*, in which various Mennonite theologians engage Kaufman's work.

and its emphasis on an historical, ethical, and eschatological kingdom of God.³⁸

While Kaufman's constructive method is not the only way or even a common way of doing Mennonite theology, it offers a promising direction for a culturally engaged theological method that should not be hastily dismissed.³⁹

For instance, like the noncreedal disposition in Anabaptism, Kaufman also begins his theology with a suspicion of human authority. He is especially concerned with what he calls 'idolatry'—the confusing of human beliefs about God with the reality of God.⁴⁰ For him, the symbol God, properly understood, is that which "unmasks the idols," by disclosing the relativity of everything that is not God. In *In Face of Mystery*, for instance, Kaufman argues that "theologians [should] understand themselves to be responsible first and foremost to God (and Christ), not to the churches that are the historical bearers of this symbolism, nor to the traditions in and through which this symbolism has been handed on to us today."⁴¹ A true understanding of the function and "meaning of the symbol 'God'" as the ultimate point of reference, whereby *all* human viewpoints are shown to be relative, "demands such a stance."⁴²

Like Hans Denck, but from a distinctively historicist perspective,

³⁸ Reimer, "Nature and Possibility," 46.

³⁹ James C. Juhnke, "The Mennonite Tradition of Cultural Engagement" in *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity*, 23-36, argues that Kaufman's work rightly belongs to a Mennonite tradition of 'culturally engaged pacifism.' However, this tradition was marginalized after the Second World War as Mennonite theologians such as Guy F. Hersherberger reinterpreted Mennonite social responsibility in terms of "biblical nonresistance," an insular and disengaged pacifism critical of methods of nonviolent resistance implemented by Mohandas Gandhi and others.

⁴⁰ See Kaufman, *Theological Imagination*, 275-76; Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 9-11. Kaufman's historicist noncreedalism is also influenced by the work of H. Richard Niebuhr. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1943), 21, 33-34. In this understanding, being faithful to the continuing development of the tradition requires only giving one's ultimate loyalty to that which is truly absolute, i.e., God. Uncritically devoting oneself to anything less amounts to idolatry.

⁴¹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 440.

⁴² Ibid.

Kaufman distinguishes between the reality of God and human words about God.⁴³ For this reason he thinks that uncritical interpretations of the Bible are theologically irresponsible. By merely accepting the world-pictures of the past, theologians fail to seriously engage the questions of how God is best understood in our world today and what a Christian's responsibility should be.⁴⁴ While Kaufman does not reject the Bible as a source for theology, he believes it should not be regarded as an inherently authoritative source. If the Bible is understood in historicist terms, as the contextual reflection of human communities on their experiences of God, then Kaufman's historicist interpretation of the scriptures and tradition can be read as a constructive adaptation of the historic Anabaptist suspicion of the human authority that can usurp divine authority in creeds and in the scriptures. To make the Bible absolutely authoritative is to confuse human words about God with the reality of God—a mystery that cannot be circumscribed by the human imagination.

Like the christomorphic disposition in Anabaptism, Kaufman also judges all theological claims according to the fruits they bear. He is concerned that in christocentric theologies even "the image of Christ is reified to the point of idolatry."⁴⁵ As an alternative, his own theology is strongly theocentric, and his christomorphism emphasizes a radically inclusive way of life—that how one lives is far more significant than what one believes.⁴⁶ Kaufman identifies christomorphism with practices like the love of enemies, nonresistance, and kenosis, which are "paradigmatic for understanding what it means to regard God as 'love' (1 John 4) and for defining the radical stance that is (should be) normative for Christian life and action."⁴⁷ As Scott Holland points out, an advantage of prioritizing christomorphism is that it enables Christians

⁴³ See, for instance, Wiswedel, "The Inner and the Outer Word," 184, who paraphrases Denck's view that "he who is not in a right relationship with God, who is not permeated by His Spirit nor filled with His love, cannot understand the Scriptures, but 'makes of it an idol.'"

⁴⁴ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 223.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 390. See Kenneth Nordgren, "God as Problem and Possibility: A Critical Study of Gordon Kaufman's Thought toward a Spacious Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Uppsala University, 2003), 248.

⁴⁶ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 390-91.

⁴⁷ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning ... Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 133, n. 12; see also Gordon D. Kaufman, "On Thinking of God as Serendipitous Creativity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2001): 417.

“to form coalitions and even ‘community’” with people from other walks of life who share the same goals, and to be open to genuine friendship with and appreciation of those who inhabit other religious or non-religious worlds.⁴⁸

In both these ways Kaufman’s constructive method not only offers new insights on these dispositions in Anabaptist thought, It is also a timely contribution to theological method. This is because, as I will explain below, societies governed by the authority of traditions are being steadily transformed by pluralism, individualism, and an increasing awareness of the perspectival nature of truth claims. Underlying these changes is a larger process of detraditionalization, whereby social authority is shifting from traditions to the subjective judgment of individuals. In light of this process, the insights that Kaufman’s theology brings to noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis are important for understanding how to do theology in detraditionalized society.

Shifting Role of Tradition in Society

In countries like the United States and Canada, the ways that people relate to traditions are changing considerably. There has been a steady shift of authority from external traditions to the subjective determination of individuals, a process that Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and other social theorists describe as detraditionalization.⁴⁹ To understand the significance of detraditionalization for contemporary theological method and the reasons that Kaufman’s constructive theology is effective in this context, I will take the example of a group of Mennonites, studied by the sociologist Joseph Smucker, who left their rural communities for the city because they found the commitments to traditional community life too restrictive.⁵⁰ But first, I must briefly examine how traditions function in societies, in order to show how people’s relationship to tradition is changing, and how it is not.

⁴⁸ Scott Holland, “*Einbildungskraft*: 1. Imagination 2. The Power to Form into One,” in *Mennonite Theology In Face of Modernity*, 252.

⁴⁹ For a range of perspectives on detraditionalization, see Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, and Paul Morris, eds., *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

⁵⁰ Joseph Smucker, “Religious Community and Individualism: Conceptual Adaptation by One Group of Mennonites,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25, no. 3 (1986): 273-91.

Traditions function in society in two major ways: they regulate life and they orient life.⁵¹ Traditions function *regulatively* when serving as norms that justify the status quo, legitimate the authority of community leaders, or secure hierarchical boundaries. In an exclusive sphere of influence, traditions can be elevated as authoritative, indisputable guides for the present and future. Traditions function *orientationally* by providing symbolic material that people draw upon to understand who they are and how they relate to one another. In this way, traditions are the building blocks of individual and collective identities.⁵²

Traditional societies, where much of one's identity is given at birth, have often been characterized by both regulative and orientational forms of tradition. For instance, Joseph Smucker explains how in traditional Mennonite societies, the ideal is that "religious life can be practiced only within a community where self-will is submerged."⁵³ This vision of community is not compatible with individualism. According to Anthony Giddens, traditional societies are by nature exclusive: insiders participate in the rituals and accept the truths of a given tradition, outsiders do not. These kinds of distinctions create a strong sense of communal identity and destiny. Tradition in this sense serves as a "medium of identity" providing adherents with a feeling of ontological security. This shared tradition serves as the basis for the trust necessary for community life.⁵⁴

However, the process of detraditionalization has significantly altered the conditions under which individuals and groups create and maintain their identities. In contrast to the traditional, rural communities that they came from, when the Mennonites in Smucker's study moved to the city their religious identities were no longer a given. The regulative authority of their

⁵¹ My categorization of tradition as regulative and orientational adapts social theorist John Thompson's useful schema for differentiating four distinctive but interrelated parts of a comprehensive understanding of how tradition functions in society. Thompson calls these parts the *normative*, *legitimizing*, *hermeneutic* and *identity* aspects of tradition. See John B. Thompson, "Tradition and Self in a Mediated World," in *Detraditionalization*, eds. Heelas et al., 92-93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵³ Smucker, "Religious Community and Individualism," 274.

⁵⁴ Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, ed. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), 79-81.

tradition ceased to function in their new, detraditionalized social context. If they were to still identify as Mennonite, the meaning of that identity was now largely a matter of choice and personal preference. As these Mennonites found when they moved to the city, in detraditionalized societies people are increasingly required to actively create their identities and to succeed or fail as individuals.⁵⁵ As Ulrich Beck explains:

Decisions on education, profession, job, place of residence, spouse, number of children and so forth, with all the secondary decisions implied, no longer can be, they must be made. Even where the word 'decisions' is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to 'pay for' the consequences of decisions not taken. . . . In the individualized society the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the center of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on.⁵⁶

The open-endedness of possibilities and the complexity of modern bureaucracy make nearly every aspect of life a matter of individual discernment and personal initiative.

However, increasing individualization does not come at the expense of tradition as a whole. Unlike traditional societies, where the regulative and orientational functions of tradition work in unison, in detraditionalized societies the regulative function is in steep decline but the orientational function still plays an essential role. For instance, when the urban Mennonites formed a church, they had to decide for themselves what community meant in their new social context. By combining a familiar ethic of service to others with a new unbounded concept of community, and by redefining church as a support group for their vision, they drew on traditions orientationally, but not regulatively, to construct a new Mennonite identity compatible with the secular, technological, and individualistic values that drew them to the city

⁵⁵ Ulrich Beck, "Self-Dissolution and Self-Endangerment of Industrial Society: What Does This Mean?," in Beck, Giddens, and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, 177.

⁵⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 135.

in the first place.⁵⁷

Although they may not have thought of it this way, these Mennonites were, out of necessity, engaging in a collaborative form of constructive theology. They were able to reconstruct their place and purpose in a new social environment while creating a new and distinctive urban Mennonite identity.⁵⁸ This group is just one example of how some Anabaptist-Mennonite communities are already transforming themselves in response to the larger social process of detraditionalization.⁵⁹

The biggest change for theology in detraditionalized societies is that traditions can no longer be assumed to have regulative authority, even among those who identify with a religious tradition. To do theology effectively in this context, it is especially important that one's theological method reflects Christians' experiences in a significant way. As I will explain below, Kaufman's constructive theology offers a way for Christian communities to participate in a collaborative form of constructive theology, by adopting noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis as criteria for judging traditions and theological claims. Moreover, it does not presuppose a view of tradition as regulatively authoritative, a view that no longer holds true for many Christians in detraditionalized societies.

Importance of Kaufman's Method for Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology Today

If theologians want to address the social context in which many Christians live today, they must develop new ways of doing theology that do not rest on a belief in the inherent authority of tradition. Yet prominent contemporary

⁵⁷ Smucker, "Religious Community and Individualism," 277.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 284, 286-87.

⁵⁹ Detraditionalization is not limited to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition; it has significant consequences for religious traditions of all kinds. See, for instance, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant*, June 2008, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>. It illustrates how the United States is an example of a society that is largely detraditionalized, but many people still see themselves as religious and even more continue to hold some belief in God. Yet these beliefs do not necessarily offer adequate orientation for their lives. The biggest influence for them is practical experience and common sense (5, 8, 23, 60-62).

theological methods are remarkably similar to those employed in the past.⁶⁰ Theologians continue to do hermeneutical forms of theology, interpreting their current social context in light of some definitive text or tradition, with tradition serving as the authoritative foundation for theological claims. While disputes have always erupted over what should be counted as a legitimate authority (canons) or how the authorities should be properly interpreted (councils), the inherent authority of tradition itself has largely remained an unquestioned assumption.⁶¹ However, in detraditionalized societies, this hermeneutical form of theological method is decreasingly adequate to the task of theology, since fewer Christians actually experience traditions as external authorities to which they should conform their lives.

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's classification of theological methods is a helpful way to understand how Kaufman's constructive theology offers an alternative to other typical ways of doing theology. Fiorenza distinguishes between theological methods that involve a 'hermeneutics of authority' or a 'hermeneutics of experience' in contrast to 'reconstructive theologies.' He notes that for most of Christian history up through the modern period, theological methods have been primarily hermeneutical in character. However, hermeneutics alone is no longer a sufficient basis for a theological method informed by historicism. He explains that historical-critical methodology demonstrates how traditional theological authority is deeply conditioned by the social and political assumptions from which it arose. Moreover, it is not just traditional authority that is historically dependent. It is also increasingly implausible to posit an 'unencumbered self' free from social, cultural, and religious conditioning: "just as one can no longer appeal to classical authorities without at the same time asking the interpretive question, so too one cannot simply appeal to personal experience to confirm interpretation. Personal experiences are themselves interpretive and have

⁶⁰ See Kaufman's discussions of major types of theological methods in Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, 3rd ed. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 45-47, and Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 18-31.

⁶¹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 48, 65; see also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Hermeneutics and Christian Theology," in *Theology at the End of Modernity: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Kaufman*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 118-20.

themselves influenced the interpretation.”⁶² Far from being universal, human experience is contextually conditioned, diverse, and perspectival. Thus, if the background theories (such as detraditionalization) underpinning contemporary life are very different from those that informed a tradition, then interpretation of the tradition is not enough; it must be reconstructed in light of current theories in order to remain meaningful.⁶³

The theology of David Tracy is an important example of hermeneutical theology. In *The Analogical Imagination*, for example, he argues that the task of systematic theology is to interpret the “Christian classic,” which he defines as the “event and person of Jesus Christ” as it has been received through text, symbol, and doctrine.⁶⁴ Although Tracy recognizes that systematic theological work can no longer be unself-critical in a pluralistic world, for him theology is still basically a hermeneutic task of correlating the authoritative classics of a tradition with the contemporary situation.

Kaufman and Tracy each propose a version of ‘public’ theology, but by compartmentalizing systematic theology as specialized to speak only to the public of the ‘church,’ Tracy ends up shielding the sources in his theology from full critical scrutiny. Kaufman observes that “systematic theology is here held to be almost exclusively hermeneutical in character: its task is interpretation of the Christian tradition; in particular, of the ‘classics’ of that tradition. These are taken as a kind of theological given which is simply to be accepted, never decisively criticized or revised, certainly not in major features to be rejected.”⁶⁵ He is concerned that Tracy’s strict separation

⁶² Fiorenza, “Crisis of Hermeneutics,” 125.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 133-34.

⁶⁴ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 233, 248-87.

⁶⁵ Gordon D. Kaufman, “Conceptualizing Diversity Theologically, Review of *The Analogical Imagination*, by David Tracy,” *Journal of Religion* 62, no. 4: 297. Making a similar critique, Linell Cady is not convinced that Tracy presents a truly ‘public’ theology. While he “concentrates upon defending the public character of theology against those who construe it as merely a parochial form of apologetics,” he “assumes at the outset that the texts and symbols of a tradition are truthful, [thus closing] off the possibility of radical critique and reconstruction of a tradition.” Rather than defending the conclusion that Christian texts and traditions are truthful “through sustained substantive argumentation,” Tracy’s hermeneutical theology prematurely closes off public discourse. Cady notes that “The difference is crucial: it determines whether a theology rooted in a tradition is indeed a circular, parochial form of reflection or an

between fundamental and systematic theology creates an artificial wall behind which the theologian can simply engage in renewed interpretation of the tradition, without questioning whether certain beliefs or practices might actually need “radical surgery or reconstruction.”⁶⁶

Another hermeneutical theological method based on the authority of tradition is the postliberal method of George Lindbeck. In *The Nature of Doctrine*, he suggests a return to a hermeneutic of authority, but with a twist. Rather than interpreting religious doctrines as propositional truth-claims that must be interpreted, he sees them as grammatical rules to be followed. While the theologian’s job is to interpret how and when these rules apply, she cannot question the authority of the rules themselves.⁶⁷ From this perspective, theology’s primary focus becomes the intratextual hermeneutics of the Bible and the Christian tradition, and its task is to redescribe reality from the biblical perspective rather than interpreting the Bible through extra-biblical categories.⁶⁸ As Linell Cady explains, although Lindbeck “appropriates a postmodern framework,” it is “not to serve as a device to interpret and critique [the Christian] tradition” but to defend it from criticism or reinterpretation.⁶⁹ Thus, Lindbeck’s ‘cultural-linguistic method’ does not so much move beyond modernism as it tends to invert the modern turn to the subject.⁷⁰

In quite different ways, Tracy and Lindbeck each continue to grant the Christian tradition authoritative status in their theological methods. The problem is that while they discuss the contemporary situation, they make claims based on a presumed authority of the Christian tradition that is not necessarily shared by their audience. If theology is to connect with the lived experience of Christians in detraditionalized societies, it must do more than interpret the current situation in light of traditional authority. Theology

open-ended public form.” See Linell E. Cady, “Theology and Public Discourse,” *Encounter* 49 (1988): 285-96. Quotations at 285 and 288.

⁶⁶ Kaufman, “Conceptualizing Diversity Theologically,” 298.

⁶⁷ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 107.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁹ Linell E. Cady, “Resisting the Postmodern Turn: Theology and Contextualization,” in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, 90.

⁷⁰ Fiorenza, “Crisis of Hermeneutics,” 121.

needs to be written and argued in a way that connects with the de facto constructive theology that many Christians are already engaged in within their personal lives and local congregations.

While Kaufman never used the term “detraditionalization” in his work, he understood the changing social tides, and intuitively provided a model for a distinctively Anabaptist-Mennonite way of doing theology in a detraditionalized context. He offers an alternative possibility for theological method: to fundamentally transform the relationship of theology to tradition. This option is important as it strives to make sense of peoples’ lived experience from a Christian perspective as they face emerging ethical challenges. As Christian communities embark on constructive theologies of their own, Kaufman’s work is a model that individuals, congregations, and denominations can use to make informed judgments about their own theological reflection. For Christian communities, like Smucker’s urban Mennonite church, Kaufman offers a valuable resource—a way to do theology that is neither authoritarian nor individualistic. Instead, by reconstructing Anabaptist theological dispositions, his method contributes two important criteria that Anabaptist-Mennonite communities can put into practice in a collaborative method of theological construction.

Kaufman’s first contribution is historicist-noncreedalism. By starting with the assumption that no human word or tradition is absolute, historicist-noncreedalism is a way to continue to use scripture and tradition in theology orientationally but not regulatively. In his *In Face of Mystery* he neatly sums up a historicist-noncreedalist use of tradition:

So we must move forward, becoming as aware as possible of the traditions which have shaped us and of their limitations and strengths, adopting from them whatever we can and adapting them to the new circumstances in which we find ourselves, as we seek to reshape them—imaginatively to reconstruct them—so they can better provide orientation for the new world into which we are moving.⁷¹

Like some early Anabaptists who even tested the scriptures against the words and actions of Jesus, he also maintains that “it is impermissible for

⁷¹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 133.

theologians to take any religious tradition's authoritarian claims about God as an unquestioned foundation of theological work: all such claims must themselves be critically examined to see whether and in what respects they may be idolatrous."⁷²

Kaufman's second contribution is pragmatic christomorphism, which provides a nonauthoritarian alternative for making truth-claims about traditions. Rather than asking whether a belief or practice has precedent in an authoritative source like scripture or tradition, a criterion of pragmatic christomorphism asks instead whether a tradition is humanizing or not. For Christians, this humanization takes on its most paradigmatic form in the symbol Christ, which "represents both what is genuinely human and that which ultimately grounds our humanization, God."⁷³ Thus, despite his rejection of traditional authority, Kaufman still seeks to establish norms transcending the whims and preferences of individual choice. By resisting the hyper-individualistic temptation to discard norms altogether, his theology offers an alternative to both traditionalism and individualism: the possibility of orientation for human life without the authoritarian structure.

These two criteria can serve as norms for Christian communities as they seek to reconstruct traditions as a basis for maintaining identity in changing social contexts. Like the urban Mennonites, Kaufman too seeks to expand the notion of community, arguing that the church's primary concern should be to "enter into community with those with whom we are speaking, and where estrangement or separation exist to seek reconciliation with them. It will be, in short, not to make claims for ourselves or our truth against our neighbors, but to love and accept our neighbors as ourselves."⁷⁴ Far from compromising the essentials of the Christian faith, the deemphasizing of obscure and divisive theological issues for the sake of building a more humane world is "directly expressive of those essentials."⁷⁵

In line with Kaufman's more expansive and inclusive notion of Christian community, George Rupp proposes the paradigm of 'communities

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ Gordon D. Kaufman, *God—Mystery—Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 94.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

of collaboration.' He argues that while traditional forms of community have often been built on exclusive identity markers like blood-ties, geography, or ideology, in a globalized society it is not only possible but desirable to construct communities that are not exclusive in these ways. Inclusive identity can be built among a group of people when they share responsibilities and commitments in the completion of common tasks.⁷⁶ These communities of collaboration are formed around commitments to one another in the achievement of shared goals, rather than in commitments based on a shared history.

Kaufman's constructive method is important because it presents a model for how theology can be done collaboratively by theologians and in communities of faith. Collaboration offers a historicist and noncreedal basis for Christian community that is consistent with the changes ushered in by detraditionalization, since communal identity is not formed on the basis of exclusive categories like the authority of a particular tradition. It is also consistent with pragmatism and christomorphism, since it is practical, inclusive, and focuses on Christians' ethical responsibilities toward others. The identities of collaborative communities are defined by their practice and their shared experience. Kaufman's constructive method is clearly not the only way that Anabaptist-Mennonite theology can be done in detraditionalized societies. For those Christians who choose to live according to the regulative authority of tradition, his theology may make little sense. Yet, for communities and theologians who seek to do Mennonite theology in detraditionalized society, a method like Kaufman's is an essential contribution.

Conclusion

By carefully considering Gordon Kaufman's use of tradition in his theological method, I have argued that, on the one hand, if theology is to continue to use traditions as a source in detraditionalized society, then these traditions should be assessed using the criteria of historicism and pragmatism. On the other hand, I have argued that Kaufman's theological commitment to historicism and pragmatism can bring new insights to bear on two Anabaptist-

⁷⁶ George Rupp, "Communities of Collaboration: Shared Commitments/Common Tasks," in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, 216.

Mennonite theological dispositions: noncreedalism and christomorphic praxis. It opens up the possibility of a collaborative, communal theological method that resists both authoritarianism and individualism.

Although traditions may need to be reinterpreted, reconstructed, or even rejected in light of the changing social context of Christian life today, wrestling with these central pieces of the shared theological heritage will continue to be an essential task of Mennonite theology. In this respect, Kaufman's constructive theological method has much to offer the current discussion, since Kaufman models how a Mennonite theologian can engage the Christian tradition in a distinctively Anabaptist way while also engaging the larger world in which Mennonites live.

Nathanael L. Inglis is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana.

God, Evil, and (Non)Violence: Creation Theology, Creativity Theology, and Christian Ethics

Darrin W. Snyder Belousek

Introduction: Doctrinal Tradition and Anabaptist Ethics

Creation theology in the doctrinal tradition of scriptural witness and ecumenical creed entails the ontological discontinuity of Creator and creation and, correspondingly, the ontological dependence of creation upon Creator. This discontinuity and dependence is implicit in the first article of the Nicene Creed: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” James Reimer contended that contemporary theology needs to reclaim the ontological dimension of doctrinal tradition in order to make sense of the special claims of Christian ethics. When constructed within the modern paradigm of historicist reasoning, Reimer argued, contemporary theology lacks the conceptual capacity to believe in a God whose eternal reality provides a transcendent ground for ethical imperatives.¹ This deficit in contemporary theology, he warned, bodes ill for the peace church: “The Anabaptist-Mennonite emphasis on an ethic of nonresistant love formulated simply in terms of a historicist view of time and reality is just not adequate to meet the present crisis.”² Reimer thus proposed a renewed appropriation of doctrinal tradition for the sake of sustaining that “distinctive trait” of Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, “the normative claim of Jesus’ ethic of nonviolent love.”³

¹ A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), esp. 30-35.

² *Ibid.*, 198.

³ *Ibid.*, 202, 207-208. Ben Ollenburger critiqued Reimer for inadequately distinguishing between the ontological entailments of Christian confession and the metaphysical theories of Greek philosophy, which gave the impression that Christian confession should be grounded in Greek metaphysics: see Ben C. Ollenburger, “Mennonite Theology: A Conversation around the Creeds,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 1 (1992): 57-89. While Ollenburger’s critique warrants taking due caution with Reimer’s rhetoric, whether Reimer actually believed that

The upshot from Reimer for our present concern is that the practical content of ethical norms cannot make sense within just any systematic articulation of theological doctrine. We might conjecture that only a doctrinal structure framed by the confessional commitments of doctrinal tradition and buttressed by the ontological entailments of those commitments can adequately sustain the ethical norms of Christian discipleship.⁴ This prompts a question: Must the gospel norm of nonviolent discipleship be grounded in the confessional commitments and ontological entailments of doctrinal tradition, or could a pragmatic appeal to historical reality suffice to motivate nonviolence?

The theological project of Gordon Kaufman presents a test case for our conjecture.⁵ Kaufman's historicism replaces the ontological discontinuity of God and world with the ontological inseparability of God and world—and in this respect is the antithesis of traditional creation doctrine. Rather than conceiving God as originator and sustainer of the cosmos, Kaufman proposed that we conceive God as the “ongoing creativity” of the cosmic evolutionary process. Kaufman thus paraphrased John 1:1 as “In the beginning was creativity . . . and the creativity was God.”⁶ At the same time, he argued for an ethical commitment to nonviolence motivated by seeing the “Jesus-trajectory” of human history as a “significant expression” of God-as-creativity.⁷

metaphysics is prior to confession is doubtful, I think (see *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 355-71). In any case, I am concerned here with the ontological entailments of Christian confession.

⁴ On Scripture and creed, see Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, “God and Nonviolence: Creedal Theology and Christian Ethics,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 2 (2014): 233-69; D.H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 167-71.

⁵ My focus here is Kaufman's theology in three sources from his final decade: Gordon D. Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 18-24; *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); and *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006). On Kaufman's late work as the last stage of his theological project, see *In the Beginning*, 107-27. For a critical comparison of Reimer and Kaufman, see Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 70-72, 73-75.

⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, ix, 71, 106.

⁷ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 54.

Whereas Reimer was concerned primarily with “the trinitarian and christological affirmations of the early church,” I want to shift the focus to the creation doctrine of Christian tradition. Previously I have outlined how the *mandate* of nonviolence is grounded in the canonical narrative of the “divine economy” and buttressed by the ontological entailments of Christological confession;⁸ here I will outline how the *motivation* for nonviolence is framed by the canonical narrative of creation-fall-redemption and buttressed by the ontological entailments of creation doctrine. I will compare and contrast creation theology with creativity theology, and then critically consider their respective implications for our motivation for nonviolence in the face of evil. I will argue that doctrinal tradition’s account of “the beginning” and “the end” provides a much more stable motivation than can Kaufman’s historicism for a sustainable commitment to nonviolence.

God: Creation, Creativity, and Cosmos

God the Creator: Traditional Creation Theology

God’s work as Creator encompasses both originating creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) and continuing creation (*creatio continua*).⁹ The world’s existence derives not from any pre-existing matter or form, but entirely from God’s

⁸ See my “God and Nonviolence.”

⁹ This presentation of traditional creation theology is informed by a number of sources that I cite here only once: Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010); William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005); Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created...: Biblical Theologies of Creation*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2000); Ben C. Ollenburger, “Isaiah’s Creation Theology,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 54-71; “Peace and God’s Action against Chaos in the Old Testament,” *The Church’s Peace Witness*, ed. Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Gingerich Nelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 70-88; “Creation and Peace: Creator and Creature in Genesis 1-11,” *The Old Testament in the Life of God’s People: Essays in Honor of Elmer A. Martens*, ed. Jon Isaak (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); “Creation and Violence,” *Struggles for Shalom: Peace and Violence across the Testaments*, ed. Laura L. Brennenman and Brad D. Schantz (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 26-36.

originating word;¹⁰ the world's continuance is due, finally, not to any inherent principle or cause but solely to God's sustaining will. Whereas originating creation witnesses to God's eternal being and all-possible power, continuing creation witnesses to God's constant character and gratuitous goodness.

To elaborate "originating creation": God only is without beginning or end ("infinite").¹¹ God only is uncreated; God exists independently of any other reality—if nothing else existed, or if all else ceased existing, God *is*.¹² All else that exists has a beginning and an end in God ("finite"). All else that exists is created and contingent; the world is entirely derived from and dependent upon God—had God not commanded, the world would not exist. God's originating creation thus entails an ontological discontinuity between God and world, a fundamental differentiation of uncreated-infinite-independent reality (God) and created-finite-dependent reality (world).¹³

To elaborate "continuing creation": God created freely, neither under necessity nor from eternity. God began the world in freedom and thus the world continues, neither by its own necessity nor by God's need for it, but by God's constancy and fidelity to it. And because the world began and continues by God's action and for God's purpose, it remains open to God's continuing work of creation. God's fidelity to the world and the world's openness to God make possible a God-world relation that is interactional but asymmetrical—the world is ever dependent on God.

The originating/continuing distinction is not absolute but approximate, and thus not categorical. God's originating work of creation included not only commanding creation to exist but also establishing it so that it might continue existing, and decreeing an order to sustain its continuance.¹⁴ Likewise, God's continuing work of creation includes not only sustaining what already exists but also initiating a "new thing,"¹⁵ including the Incarnation.

¹⁰ Jonathan R. Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 72.

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45.3-4, in *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 164.

¹² Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 30.18, in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 108.

¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 29.4, in *On God and Christ*, 72.

¹⁴ Ps. 148:5-6.

¹⁵ Isa. 42:5-9; 43:14-21; 48:6-7.

The traditional creation doctrine was affirmed as early as the second century in several sources.¹⁶ *Shepherd of Hermas* expressed this doctrine as the first article of Christian faith.¹⁷ Theophilus, in an apologetic treatise, stated it as integral to God's attributes.¹⁸ And Irenaeus, defending Christianity against Gnosticism, stated it as the chief affirmation of Christian faith.¹⁹ This doctrine, a constant element of the "rule of faith,"²⁰ was understood within the early church as a faithful development from and a correct reading of the overall witness of Scripture as well as a logically necessary corollary to a truly Christian confession of God.²¹ That all the Greek schools affirmed matter's eternity, because they repudiated an absolute origin of the material cosmos "from nothing" as contrary to reason, indicates that early Christians affirmed the creation doctrine as a confession of faith and not a concession to metaphysics.

Traditional creation doctrine, then, while it must be corroborated and elaborated by scriptural exposition, is not equivalent to exegesis of Genesis;²² nor does it compete with scientific theories of cosmic origins or natural history.²³ It entails a dual affirmation about God and world: God is ultimately

¹⁶ On the early development of creation doctrine, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 2000), 83-87; Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 104-15; Ernan McMullin, "Creation *ex nihilo*: Early History" and Janet M. Soskice, "Creatio *ex nihilo*: Its Jewish and Christian Foundations," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 11-23 and 24-39, respectively.

¹⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 1.1, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 29.

¹⁸ *Theophilus to Autolytus*, I.4 (cf. II.10), in Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2*, 137.

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.1.1 (cf. 1.22.1 and 3.11.1), in Philip Schaff, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 592.

²⁰ Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 1-46.

²¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 65-102; Tatha Wiley, *Creationism and the Conflict over Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 33-54.

²² Traditional creation doctrine thus allows diverse readings of the Genesis narrative. See Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

²³ Johnson, *Creed*, 96-97, and Wiley, *Creationism*.

unlimited by the world (there is no reality preceding God that conditions God's being or power surpassing God that obstructs God's action),²⁴ and the world is deeply dependent on God (the world's origin is contingent on God's choice and its continuance is subject to God's consent).

God-as-Creativity: Kaufman's Creativity Theology

Kaufman's creativity theology is in important respects the antithesis of traditional creation doctrine. While Kaufman retained the idea of God as "the ultimate reference point of reality," he proposed conceiving God in natural-historical terms in reference to cosmic-evolutionary process:

It is this mystery of ongoing creativity, I suggest, that today can quite properly be considered as the ultimate point of reference in terms of which all else is to be understood, that in terms of which human life should therefore be basically oriented, that which today we should regard as God.²⁵

Just as traditional creation theology is founded upon the confessional affirmation of a creating God as ultimate reality, Kaufman's creativity theology is likewise founded upon a confessional affirmation about ultimate reality: God—"the ultimate point of reference in terms of which all else is to be understood"—is the "ongoing creativity" of cosmic-evolutionary process. And Kaufman's confessional affirmation—that cosmic creativity is ultimate reality—carries ontological implications that sharply distinguish creativity theology from creation theology.

First, and fundamentally, God is not Creator of the cosmos but cosmic creativity that manifests itself through evolutionary trajectories in natural history and developmental directions in cultural history. The cosmos in turn is "constituted by . . . ongoing cosmic serendipitous creativity. . . ."²⁶ The ultimate reference point of all reality—God—is thus ontologically inseparable from the world-order brought about by the cosmic-creative

²⁴ William R. Stoeger, S.J., "The Big Bang, Quantum Cosmology, and *creatio ex nihilo*," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, 152-75, esp. 173.

²⁵ Kaufman, "Is God Nonviolent?" 22.

²⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 45; see also x, xii, 42, 45-47, 59. On how he intended "serendipitous" to be understood, see Gordon D. Kaufman, "Response to Critics," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2008): 76-117.

process.²⁷ Kaufman's theology eliminates at once both the ontological discontinuity of God and world and the ontological independence of God from world. Further, God is not eternally existent: because God-as-creativity is ontologically inseparable from the cosmic order, God-as-creativity exists only insofar as the cosmos in which creativity is manifest exists; God-as-creativity is ontologically actualized along with the cosmic order and thus is existentially co-extensive with natural history. Finally, God has no personal reality: God-as-creativity is a natural-historical process not a personal-intentional agent.²⁸

Why exchange creation theology for creativity theology? Kaufman offered two main reasons. First, he averred that we need a contemporary alternative to the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric theology of our ancestors, which he thought is the source of both religious violence and ecological crisis.²⁹ Second, he contended that the traditional idea of God-the-Creator is no longer credible in our modern era of scientific sensibility and thus no longer meaningful to many folks whose world understanding is conceived in scientific terms.³⁰ I will discuss these in turn.

Kaufman claimed that religious violence and the ecological crisis trace to the incoherent theology rooted in the biblical portrayal of God that conceives God as a personal being like creatures and as "utterly incompatible" with creation.³¹ Whether Kaufman's etiology is correct or not, I agree that absolute transcendence generates intellectual difficulties and that crude anthropomorphism is unworthy of faith. It does not follow, however, that the only, or best, alternative is to conceive God in natural-historical terms. Doctrinal tradition in fact offers neither an abstract theology of absolute transcendence nor a naïve theology of crude anthropomorphism.

According to Genesis, God creates both "from outside" creation ("Let there be light . . .") and "from inside" creation ("Let the earth put forth . . .").

²⁷ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 69. Kaufman emphasized a conceptual distinction (not an ontological discontinuity) between creativity and creatures in order to define "idolatry" and thus preserve a parallel with doctrinal tradition (see *In the Beginning*, 50, 69, 103; *Jesus and Creativity*, 8).

²⁸ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, x, 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-41, 53-55, 105-106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-52; *Jesus and Creativity*, 14-16.

³¹ Kaufman, "Is God Nonviolent?" 19-20; see *In the Beginning*, 4-7.

According to Isaiah, God-the-Creator beside whom “there is no other” is also God-the-Savior who has “called [us] by name” and has promised “I will be with you.” According to John, the Word who “was in the beginning” and through whom “all things came into being” is the same Word who “was in the world” and “became flesh and lived among us.” In biblical tradition, therefore, God is both “beyond” creation and “among” creation: both “before” creation as Creator and “present to” it as Spirit; both “above” creation as Judge and “with” it as Redeemer. In creedal tradition, moreover, God comprises both transcendence and history, both eternal being and dynamic becoming, both immanent Trinity and economic Trinity.³² The doctrines of incarnation and redemption explicitly emphasize and mutually reinforce this sensibility. Jesus is both “fully God” and “fully human,” yet the union of divinity and humanity in no way “confuses” the two natures. Jesus qua human is “of the same substance” as humans; yet Jesus qua God remains always “other” than human (Definition of Chalcedon). Likewise, God’s redemption of humanity through the “economy” of incarnation aims at restoring humanity to its divine destiny of life with God. Yet the destiny of humanity is to become the likeness of God-in-Christ but not to become God—God is always other than humans.³³ Doctrinal tradition neither absolutely distances God from creation nor simply collapses the difference between God and creation.

This traditional sensibility about God and creation is reflected in the doctrine of analogy regarding God and language. In some ways of speaking, we can conceive God only in terms that negate limits on God and thus are incommensurate with the finitude of creatures (e.g., God is uncreated, eternal, almighty, etc.). Such terms, which cannot be predicated properly of creatures, signify the ontological discontinuity between God and creatures.³⁴ In other ways of speaking, we can use terms that refer to both God and creatures even while falling short of God’s perfection (e.g.,

³² Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 153.

³³ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, “On the Beginning and End of Rational Creatures,” in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 45-74.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 28, in *On God and Christ*, 37-67, and Oration 38.7-8, in *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 65-66, and Basil the Great, “Homily on Faith,” in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 234-39.

God is wise, patient, just, etc.). Such terms predicated of both God and creatures are meant neither univocally (same sense) nor equivocally (diverse senses), but analogously (senses that vary proportionally in reference to God or creatures). Analogy avoids anthropomorphism because such terms, predicated properly, compare creatures to God and not God to creatures. By analogy, which imperfectly expresses the divine perfection, we may conceive God as being neither entirely different from nor essentially identical to creatures.³⁵

Kaufman acknowledged analogy but argued that it collapses into negation: due to the limits of language, every analogy entails a negation (analogy denies univocity); therefore, all God-talk is really only “not”-talk.³⁶ Although the premise is true, the inference to the conclusion begs the question by assuming a dichotomy: we must conceive God either as utterly incommensurate, or as entirely commensurate, with the world. Whereas Kaufman embraced the latter, tradition rejects the dichotomy.

Instead of a God-idea that he saw as anthropomorphic and other-worldly, Kaufman proposed a naturalized, this-worldly reconstruction. A God who creates the cosmos “at the beginning” and “from the outside,” he thought, cannot be accommodated within the conceptual framework of contemporary science:

The traditional idea of God as the Creator of the world (as is well known) stands in sharp tension with the understanding of the origins of the universe and of life widely accepted in scientific (as well as many other) circles today . . . the notion of a person-like creator-God *at the beginning of things* really cannot be thought in connection with modern evolutionary theory.³⁷

God-as-creativity is a suitable replacement for God-the-Creator, because (1) it preserves a parallel to the mystery of a transcendent Creator in doctrinal tradition and (2) it fits well with the modern evolutionary

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.29-34, in *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991); *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 13, A. 5, in *Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 138ff.

³⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 22-23.

³⁷ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 21, emphasis in original; see *In the Beginning*, 53-54.

understanding of the cosmos in which novelty is natural.³⁸

Why, though, should we conceive God “in connection with modern evolutionary theory”? Now, I do not suggest that Kaufman’s theology is suspect because it takes evolutionary science seriously. There need not be—and, one might well argue, should not be—any inherent incompatibility between evolutionary science and either scriptural exegesis or doctrinal tradition.³⁹ Rather, I argue that Kaufman’s scientifically oriented reconstruction of the God-idea generates difficulties of its own.

First, although Kaufman presented creativity theology as a scientifically credible alternative to traditional creation theology, his reconstruction risks the very error that he admonished us to avoid:

[I]n our *theological reflection*, when we are seeking to think carefully and precisely about what we mean when we use the word “God,” we must move with great care in our employment of such metaphors or we will end up with a conception of God largely constructed in our own human image.⁴⁰

Kaufman, of course, recast God in the mold of evolution. His theological reconstruction, while prefaced by historical deconstruction of the God-idea,⁴¹ effectively took the evolution-idea as an epistemological given. He utilized the latter idea as a scientifically legitimated concept ready-to-hand for theological construction.⁴² Kaufman’s historicism, ironically, ignored the human history of the evolution-idea.⁴³ Recast in the mold of a human-historical idea, God-as-creativity is still “largely constructed in our own human image.”⁴⁴

Second, having recast God in the mold of evolution, Kaufman characterized evolutionary creativity as not only “ongoing creativity” but also as originating creation:

³⁸ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, x, 42, 53-55, 57-58. On Kaufman’s desire to preserve parallels with doctrinal tradition, see 68-70, 72-74, 100-106.

³⁹ See Wiley, *Creationism*.

⁴⁰ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 19, emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 1-32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xii, 42-43.

⁴³ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 146.

Creativity, in this modern evolutionary sense, remains profoundly mysterious; and the coming into being of the truly new and novel—the totally unexpected, the unforeseeable—suggests a movement *beyond* all specifiable causes and conditions (a movement that really cannot be accounted for); it seems to involve, thus, a kind of coming into being “from nothing,” *creatio ex nihilo* (as the ancient phrase has it).⁴⁵

Kaufman distinguished three “modalities” of God-as-creativity: creativity manifest in the cosmic origin (creativity₁); creativity manifest in evolutionary process (creativity₂); and creativity manifest in human culture (creativity₃).⁴⁶ He recognized that neither creativity₂ nor creativity₃ involves “something from nothing,” strictly speaking; each emerges from and operates on the prior creativity.⁴⁷ Yet, seeking a conceptual parallel with doctrinal tradition, Kaufman did associate creativity₁ with *creatio ex nihilo*.⁴⁸ While acknowledging that cosmological theory and empirical evidence cannot determine an absolute beginning to the physical cosmos—“We are in no position to say that the Big Bang is a preeminent example of ‘something coming from nothing’ . . . ”⁴⁹—he spoke of the cosmic origin as “the naked and unadorned mystery of something coming into being (from nothing).”⁵⁰ To speak of “from nothing” is necessarily to stretch words beyond the limits of space, time, and experience—and thus lacks rational warrant from a historicist perspective. The association of creativity₁ with *creatio ex nihilo*, therefore, is an epistemological overreach that undermines conceptual coherence.

Third, Kaufman’s scientifically credible God-idea seems progressive but is potentially reactionary. A historical lesson is useful here. The Galileo affair was not actually a conflict between theology and science but between contrasting views of the proper relation between science and theology—and

⁴⁵ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 22, emphasis in original; see *In the Beginning*, 55–56, 71.

⁴⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 76. Kaufman seemed to retain a kind of naturalized modalistic trinitarianism at the same time as he tried to salvage a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76, 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76, 77, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80. See Stoeger, “The Big Bang, Quantum Cosmology, and *creatio ex nihilo*.”

⁵⁰ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 100.

especially the interpretation of Scripture in relation to an understanding of nature. Medieval scholasticism had not rejected science as contrary to faith but had integrated faith and reason—the “Book of Scripture” and the “Book of Nature”—into a single system over which theology ruled as “Queen of the sciences.”⁵¹ The Council of Trent confirmed this integration but, in reaction to the Reformation, vested the Magisterium with the authority to judge the true sense of Scripture and thus the prerogative to judge the truth of science in relation to Scripture. Galileo, harking back to an older tradition (e.g., Augustine), advocated a degree of separation between science and theology. Because physical cosmology was both beside the point of Scripture and beyond the competence of theologians, Galileo argued, the church should allow figurative readings of Scripture where necessary to accommodate advancing knowledge of nature.⁵² Cardinal Bellarmine, true to Trent, saw science as subordinate to theology, with truth in science to be measured by the letter of Scripture as interpreted within the church’s tradition. Thus, he maintained, because the church Fathers unanimously supported the plain (“literal”) sense of Scripture concerning the sun’s motion, unless there is conclusive demonstration of the earth’s motion, the plain sense of Scripture must overrule the heliocentric theory of Copernicus.⁵³

Kaufman in effect inverted the counter-Reformation view established by Trent and upheld by Bellarmine. By vesting evolutionary theory with the authority to judge the plausibility of God-ideas, he effectively crowned it the “Queen of the sciences.”⁵⁴ Suppose, however, that the Queen were dethroned by a new theory of natural history, just as Ptolemaic cosmology and Aristotelian physics were supplanted by Copernican cosmology and Newtonian physics. What, then, for God-as-creativity? Facing a scientific revolution, Kaufman would have to defend the outmoded science or give his God-idea a scientific makeover. Kaufman the historicist would opt for the latter, we might expect. Yet, aware that science is fallible and changeable, he warned against “getting too quickly on the bandwagon” of a newly-formed

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.3-8.

⁵² Galileo, “Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina,” in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 175-216.

⁵³ See the several essays in Ernan McMullin, ed., *The Church and Galileo* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 42, 54.

scientific consensus and counseled a “thoroughly critical stance” toward even established scientific theories.⁵⁵ We could thus imagine him reinforcing his God-idea even as the scientific reference for theological reflection shifted. Subordinating theology to science, which seems progressive, might generate an incentive to resist scientific change in order to retain existing theology—and so risks repeating the reactionary choices of the Council and the Cardinal.

Evil and (Non)Violence: Cosmology, Eschatology, and Ethics

The divergences between traditional creation theology and Kaufman’s creativity theology can be readily seen in light of the problem of evil.⁵⁶ The evident existence and stubborn persistence of evil-doing in the world prompts three questions: What is the origin of evil (cosmology)? Will evil ever end (eschatology)? How to deal with evil in the meantime (ethics)? I will now compare and contrast these theologies, directing the discussion toward this question: What motivates nonviolence in the face of evil?

Evil and (Non)Violence: Traditional Creation Theology

The ontological discontinuity entailed by creation doctrine is not a dualism of good and evil but a differentiation of Creator from creation. God is good, all that God creates is good, and there is nothing other than God and what God has created. As does creation’s existence, so does creation’s goodness derive from and depend on God.

In Genesis, creation’s goodness is teleological. God creates by forming a world (“heavens and earth”) that is *unordered* because undifferentiated (“formless void”) into a world ordered by differentiation (light/dark, day/night, sky/earth, waters/waters, sea/land, plant/animal/human, male/female). What God creates is good because it is ordered toward God’s purpose (ongoing proliferation of living creatures under human administration). The order that evidences creation’s goodness is just the order that God ordains “in the beginning.” God, deeming each formation “good” and the whole

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83; see *Jesus and Creativity*, 87-88.

⁵⁶ The focus here is “moral evil.” On creation theology and “natural evil,” see Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

formation “very good,” judges that the creation in each part and in its whole is properly ordered toward functioning in fulfillment of God’s purpose.⁵⁷

Patristic theologians sharply distinguished the ontological discontinuity entailed by creation doctrine from cosmic dualisms positing an original opposition between good and evil—spirit versus body (Gnosticism) or light versus darkness (Manichaeism)—and identify evil with matter. Over against these dualisms, orthodox Christianity both affirmed the created goodness of matter and denied the primitive reality of evil.⁵⁸ Whence, then, evil? And what is it? Evil is neither an independent power, existing apart from the cosmos, nor the direct effect of God’s power, an original creation in the cosmos. Rather, evil is parasitic on the God-ordained capacities of the created order; it is a corruption of creation. Creatures have improperly used their God-given capacity of choice to pervert what God created; they have *reordered* creation contrary to God’s purpose.⁵⁹ As the goodness of creation is teleological, so evil in creation is *dysteleological*: evil is *disordered* creation.⁶⁰ Creation doctrine, therefore, entails two distinctions—between uncreated Creator (independent reality) and created creation (dependent reality), and between Creator-ordered creation (good) and creature-disordered creation (evil)—that operate in tandem. The reality of evil is thus neither primitive (only God *is*) nor derivative (as is creation) but negative (corrupted creation).

As diagnosed by Paul, the disorder of evil in the order of creation stems from the rebellion of creatures by refusing to honor the Creator as God.⁶¹ Although the Creator alone is worthy to be worshipped, human

⁵⁷ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 51, 149-50.

⁵⁸ Against Gnosticism, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; against Manichaeism, see Augustine, *City of God*.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 40.45, in *Festal Orations*, 140; Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin 2004), XII.1-3, 471ff.; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), chapters 3-5; and Basil the Great, “Homily Explaining that God is Not the Cause of Evil,” in *On the Human Condition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 65-80.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine*, 77.

⁶¹ Rom. 1:18-32. On “sin” in Paul, see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 3 (2004): 229-40; and Simon J. Gathercole, “Sin in God’s Economy: Agencies

beings have worshipped creation instead, thereby inverting created order: by refusing to honor God, even though God's power and glory are manifest in the creation, they elevate themselves above and thereby dishonor God; then, by worshipping human-made images of animals over whom humans were ordained to rule, they elevate animals and artifacts above and thereby dishonor both themselves and God.⁶² This inversion of order symbolizes the displacement of life by death: a lifeless object replaces the living creature which it represents, the living human who made it, and the living God who gives life; idolaters thus become like their lifeless idols.⁶³ Whereas God had ordered creation to bring forth life, the idolatrous inversion of created order begets a cascading sequence of escalating evildoing that ends in death. The "exchange" of Creator for creature (inversion) leads to the "exchange" of truth for lie and good for evil (perversion), resulting in the "exchange" of life for death (corruption).

The traditional doctrine that evil is not a subsistent thing should not be mistaken for the neo-Platonic view that evil is mere non-being. Evil, as disordered creation, has power to distort and destroy creatures. Disobedience subjects humans to a "dominion of sin" that brings about "the end of death" to us who are "slaves to sin."⁶⁴ Moreover, the sin-laden legacy of humans is correlated with "the whole creation" being "subjected to futility" and "groaning" in "bondage to decay."⁶⁵ Even so, the existence of evil is tertiary—a corrupting of the creation created by the Creator, a disordering of the order ordained by God—such that the persistence of evil is temporary.

God's righteous rule over creation, premised on God's originating act of creating, is rooted in God's fidelity to the good order that God created and is manifest through God's continuing work to preserve, repair, and renew it for its prolific purpose. Violence *deforms* that which God has formed and to which God remains faithful;⁶⁶ and violence unbounded (war) makes a

in Romans 1 and 7," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 158-72.

⁶² See Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 39.6-7, in *Festal Orations*, 83-84.

⁶³ See Ps. 115; 135; Isa. 44:9-11; Wisd. of Sol. 13:10-15:17.

⁶⁴ Rom. 5:12-6:23.

⁶⁵ Rom. 8:18-23.

⁶⁶ God's original action and final intention in creation is thus the ontological presupposition of defining (non)violence.

wasteland, threatening to return the earth to its *uncreated* state of “formless void.”⁶⁷ The prophetic vision of messianic peace to be established by God’s faithfulness and righteousness thus correlates ceased violence with both righted relationship and renewed creation.⁶⁸ Accordingly, the psalmist imagines creation rejoicing at the coming judgment of the Creator God.⁶⁹

As a function of God’s rule over creation, God’s judgment against evildoing expresses God’s faithfulness to defend creation by acting righteously to counteract violence against the created order.⁷⁰ God’s judgment of evil in defense of creation is thus manifest as resistance to evildoing, which evildoers experience negatively as God’s “wrath.”⁷¹ “God’s wrath against all impiety and injustice” is manifest universally by God’s “giving up” idolatrous humanity to darkened minds and debased desires so that they commit degrading acts and thereby receive “the due penalty for their error.”⁷² God’s judgment may be manifest in the reversal of evildoing, violence turned back on its perpetrators so that it effects its own punishment.⁷³ This judgment may also be manifest in one nation’s violence effecting retribution against another nation’s evildoing.⁷⁴

We should not infer, however, that God’s wrath generates violence. Human violence ruptures God’s creation and frustrates its purpose, thus provoking God’s judgment.⁷⁵ God’s wrath is God’s righteous reaction against human violence in faithful defense of created order and its prolific purpose. It is a mistake to attribute violence to God on account of God’s counteraction

⁶⁷ Jer. 4:11-31.

⁶⁸ Isa. 11:1-10; 32:15-20.

⁶⁹ Ps. 96:10-13; 98:4-9.

⁷⁰ Wisd. of Sol. 5:17-23; Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45.8-9, in *Festal Orations*, 167-68.

⁷¹ Ps. 75. On God’s “wrath,” see Terence E. Fretheim, “Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no. 2 (2002): 1-26; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 279-98.

⁷² Rom. 1:18-32.

⁷³ Ps. 7:11-16; 9:15-17; 35:1-9; 37:12-15; Wisd. of Sol. 11:15-16; 12:23, 27; Sirach 27:26-27; see Matt. 26:52.

⁷⁴ Isa. 10; 45; Jer. 25; 50-51; cf. Luke 19:41-44. See W. Derek Suderman, “Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 44-66.

⁷⁵ Gen. 4:8-16; 6:1-13; 9:1-7; Hos. 4:1-3.

of humanity's violence in order to restore creation's peace.⁷⁶ Nor should we suppose that God's wrath licenses human violence. Judgment belongs to God as Creator, and thus wrath and retribution are off limits to humans.⁷⁷ Indeed, God's vengeance opposes human vengeance.⁷⁸ The ontological discontinuity between Creator and creation entails a moral asymmetry between God and humans: divine prerogative is not mirrored by human permission.⁷⁹

God's historical judgment anticipates the final end of evil. As Paul observed, that the cosmos is subject to evil is not metaphysical necessity but historical contingency, neither describing cosmic origins nor determining cosmic destiny. The beginning of the end of evil has begun through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, by which God has judged the disorder of sin and conquered the dominion of death that enslave humanity and frustrate creation.⁸⁰ The incarnate-crucified-risen-ascended Christ is the proleptic embodiment and promissory note of a renewed creation purged of sin and freed from death, which is even now being realized in the church through the enlivening and sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ All created realities—"all things in heaven and on earth ...visible and invisible"—are to be reconciled to God through Christ by whom and for whom all things were created.⁸² This reconciliation includes the subjection under Christ of all created-but-fallen powers presently hostile to God.⁸³ The "all things" also includes our bodies, which are to be raised from mortality to the immortality for which we were created.⁸⁴ "Then comes the end," when the "last enemy" of creation—death—is "to be destroyed" by Christ "so that God may be all in all." God's righteous rule will be manifest in all creation and God's prolific purpose for creation will be completed.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ See Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 393-97; Terence E. Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word & World* 24, no. 1 (2004): 18-28.

⁷⁷ Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:34-43; Prov. 20:22; Sirach 27:30-28:7; Rom. 12:17-19; Heb. 10:30.

⁷⁸ Gen. 4:15; Sirach 28:1.

⁷⁹ See Snyder Belousek, "God and Nonviolence: Creedal Theology and Christian Ethics."

⁸⁰ Rom. 5:12-21; 8:1-3, 31-39.

⁸¹ Rom. 8:4-17.

⁸² Col. 1:15-20.

⁸³ 1 Cor. 15:27-28; Eph. 6:10-13; Col. 2:8-15.

⁸⁴ Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 15:35-53; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Phil. 3:20-21.

⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 54-57.

Paul's phrase "all in all" implies that God's righteous-ruling, creation-renewing work in Christ will ultimately encompass the *whole* of creation.⁸⁶ God, having created all things good from nothing in the beginning and having purposed to be "all in all" in the end, will thus render evil into nothing by the renewal of all things.⁸⁷ In God's final judgment, which consummates the divine economy and completes God's kingdom, evil is nullified and creation is vivified.⁸⁸ No matter how inured we are to the violence in ourselves or how overwhelming seems the violence in our world, this remains true: because evil is not what we or the world *were* in the beginning (all was created good by God), it is not fundamentally what we or the world *are* now (all is fallen from God) and, therefore, it is not finally what we and the world *will be* in the end (all will be restored to God).

This traditional cosmology and eschatology carries ethical implications. Evil is neither normal nor necessary in creation. Because evil is originally not God's creation but creaturely choice, evil doing can be vanquished and innocents vindicated, sinners can be judged for and released from sin; for God remains sovereign over and faithful to creation despite evil doing. God's promise that evil will be undone and outdone grounds redemption hope that the all-possible God will act climactically to reverse the violence of evil doers, rescue humanity from its violent ways, and reorder creation toward its prolific purpose.⁸⁹ Indeed, God's promise has already begun to be actualized in the order of creation through the economy of the Incarnation and dispensation of the Spirit even as God's final purpose has not yet been fully realized but awaits "[God's] kingdom come on earth as in heaven." God's "kingdom come" is neither the inevitable culmination of human progress nor the collective result of Christian activism. God's kingdom in a renewed creation will be fully and finally realized not by humanity's perpetuation of history but by God's disruption of history, not by earth becoming heaven but

⁸⁶ Rom. 8:19-22.

⁸⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), chapters 6-7.

⁸⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7, in Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, 745.

⁸⁹ Restoration of creation's prolific capacity is emphasized in "new creation" texts (Isa. 65:17-20; Rev. 21:1-4). Human access to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16), revoked at expulsion from the garden (Gen. 3:24), is restored in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 2:7; 22:2).

by heaven coming to earth.⁹⁰

While human effort cannot suffice to bring forth a “new creation,” at the same time the gospel summons us to action that aligns with God’s coming kingdom. Because God has conquered evil through Christ, Paul exhorts us to actively resist evil by means of our mortal bodies in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not to resubmit to sin as its slaves but rather, exercising freedom from the dominion of sin received by grace through baptism “into Christ,” we are to become “slaves of righteousness” in service to God.⁹¹ Because this is *possible* by God’s power that raised Jesus from the dead, it is thus *sensible* to stand against and struggle against powers of evil with the armor of God and the gospel of peace, and thereby seek to overcome evil with good.⁹² Because of God’s victory through Christ, “the present evil world-age” is waning and “the age to come” has begun “in Christ,” such that we can *imaginatively anticipate* a new order in which sin and death are no more and so even now *actively participate* in Christ’s cruciform conquest of evil.⁹³ The protology, cosmology, and eschatology of creation doctrine and canonical narrative thus motivate a nonviolent discipleship: human living patterned after Christ’s life, enabled by the Spirit’s power and aligned with God’s plan to renew creation by undergoing and overcoming sin and death through cross and resurrection.

The doctrinal tradition does prompt troubling questions: Why would God allow creatures to despoil creation? Why would God allow evildoing to the point of innocent suffering? Such questions are poignantly voiced in lament psalms by the righteous sufferer urgently pleading for God’s vindication: “How long, O Lord?” “O Lord, make haste to help me!” “Rise up, O Lord!”⁹⁴ Rather than offer a divine justification for innocent suffering (theodicy), biblical wisdom answers these pleas with an exhortation to fidelity and patience: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Revelation 21:1-4.

⁹¹ Rom. 6:1-23.

⁹² Rom. 12:14-21; Eph. 6:10-17.

⁹³ Rom. 12:1-21; 1 Cor. 7:31; 15:51-58; 2 Cor. 5:16-17; Gal. 1:4; 6:14-16; 1 John 2:17.

⁹⁴ Ps. 9, 10, 13, 17, 35, 40, 70, and 94; Rev. 6:9-10.

⁹⁵ Ps. 37; Prov. 20:22; Sirach 2.

Why love enemies and leave judgment to God?⁹⁶ Why not return violence for violence to vanquish evildoers and vindicate oneself? To take up the sword and save oneself is to refuse to take up the cross and follow Jesus.⁹⁷ But why forsake sword and follow Jesus in the face of evil—and possibly lose oneself? The rationale to “Depart from evil and do good” is rooted in faith that the Creator is also the Judge who will act to put all to rights.⁹⁸ Because “we hope for what we do not see”—God’s kingdom coming with judgment to deliver us from evil—“we wait for it with patience” while persevering in prayer and “entrust[ing] [our]selves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.”⁹⁹ The true pattern for patient trust in God’s judgment is the truly human one, Jesus, who did not return violence for violence but “entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” and whom God faithfully vindicated.¹⁰⁰

Evil and (Non)Violence: Kaufman’s Creativity Theology

Kaufman replaced the “traditional idea of God’s purposive activity in the world” (no longer plausible within an evolutionary worldview) with “a more modest conception . . . *trajectories* or *directional movements* that emerge spontaneously in the course of evolutionary and historical developments.”¹⁰¹ Cosmic creativity, he recognized, serendipitously generates evolutionary trajectories of both productive nonviolent creativity and destructive violent creativity in human history.¹⁰² Thus, because God just is “ongoing serendipitous cosmic creativity,” and cosmic creativity generates violence-trajectories of human evolution, God is the origin of violence. Now, as Kaufman emphasized, because God-as-creativity is not a personal-intentional agent, these trajectories are not to be understood as “the deliberate expression of a self-conscious violent will.” Nonetheless, “this violence . . . is deeply connected with the creativity manifest in the world” and thus is linked intimately to ultimate reality, God.¹⁰³ Trading creation theology for creativity

⁹⁶ Matt. 5:38-48; 13:24-30, 36-43.

⁹⁷ Matt. 16:24-26; 26:47-56.

⁹⁸ Ps. 33:14; Ps. 34 and 94; 1 Pet. 3:8-22.

⁹⁹ Rom. 8:24-30; 1 Pet. 4:1-19.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Pet. 2:21-23.

¹⁰¹ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 42, emphasis in original.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 61-62, 99; Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 18, 21.

¹⁰³ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 23. See Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 46.

theology, therefore, readily explains evil but radicalizes rather than resolves the problem: eliminating the separation of God and world eliminates any gap between God and evil.

Because serendipitous creativity generates violence-trajectories of human evolution, evil is a “native species” in the cosmic order and finds a “natural niche” in human culture. Even so, Kaufman took hope in the fact that this creativity has also generated nonviolence-trajectories (e.g., Jesus and the Jesus-community), which have opened human-historical possibilities for creative development:

The creativity at work in our universe—in the course of bringing us *humans* into being—has brought us to a point where we can entertain the possibility of living in a moral order that is nonviolent, can deliberately choose to work at bringing about such an order, and can train ourselves and our children to live and act in nonviolent ways (however unlikely the realization of such a dream may be). . . . This development, quite unlike what occurred in the interrelations of creativity (God) with many other spheres of the cosmic order, is—at least in the judgment of those who count ourselves as Christian pacifists—of great significance.¹⁰⁴

As Kaufman’s parenthetical hedge (“however unlikely”) suggests, the serendipitous emergence of nonviolence-trajectories is likely inconsequential for human evolution. Because (a) creativity serendipitously generates both violence-trajectories and nonviolence-trajectories, but (b) creativity’s serendipity is effectively indifferent between violence and nonviolence, such that (c) creativity cannot provide an Archimedean leverage point in evolutionary history by which nonviolence-trajectories can counteract and overcome violence-trajectories, therefore (d) creativity will generate violence-trajectories as long as human evolution continues. We thus cannot expect a historical end to violence apart from the evolutionary end of humanity.

That conclusion in turn destabilizes a historical-human rationale for

¹⁰⁴ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 23, emphasis in original; see Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 105, and Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 1-26.

nonviolence. From the historicist angle, with no transcendent ground for ethical norms, the only criteria for action are those derivable from history; but history can warrant at most an ethic based on the goal that a certain human-historical trajectory should continue. A historicist ethic is in effect a pragmatic ethic in which the criterion of right is success in prolonging a humanly-preferred present into the future.¹⁰⁵ In Kaufman's theology, because cosmic creativity is the "ultimate reference point" for understanding all else, it is the standard for evaluating human conduct. Yet, because creativity serendipitously generates trajectories of varying value, "Creativity unqualified . . . does not provide an adequate model of how we humans should live and what we should be trying to do."¹⁰⁶ Kaufman thus defined the ethical criterion in terms of productive creativity: "whatever creatively facilitates the forward movement of the evolutionary/historical trajectory of which we are part—and is in relative harmony with the wider ecological order on Earth—is to be considered good, right, fitting."¹⁰⁷ We might then argue on historicist grounds that the nonviolence-trajectory of human development, which emerged serendipitously from human evolution and was modeled creatively by the human Jesus, is right because it is necessary: nonviolence is the only way we can preserve the trajectory of evolutionary history against destructive threats (e.g., nuclear war and ecological ruin).¹⁰⁸

At the same time, from the evolutionary angle, the violence-trajectories of human development are not moral deviations off a normative nonviolence-trajectory but emerge serendipitously from ongoing cosmic creativity—they are "creations," not "corruptions." We can expect that nonviolence-trajectories will always be swimming up the evolutionary stream against an unending current of violence-trajectories. The pragmatic success of nonviolence in human history—humanity overcoming its violent ways—is evolutionarily unlikely.¹⁰⁹ Nonviolence thus seems historically futile because it appears fated to evolutionary failure.

Kaufman's theology, therefore, cannot provide a stable rationale for

¹⁰⁵ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 66; cf. *Jesus and Creativity*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, *In the Beginning*, 37-38, 45, 47-48, 62, 66, 104-6; Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 23-26, 89-114.

¹⁰⁹ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 46.

nonviolence because it is incapable of eschatology. Because God-as-creativity serendipitously generates violence-trajectories in human evolution, we cannot expect an historical end to violence apart from an evolutionary end to humanity. Although the Jesus-trajectory of creative nonviolence did emerge serendipitously from human evolution,¹¹⁰ such that we can “follow Jesus” by continuing his trajectory with the hope of preserving a human future,¹¹¹ even this trajectory cannot deliver a historical guarantee of humanity overcoming its violent ways.¹¹²

Kaufman’s theology is incapable of eschatology because it offers no possibility of a fundamentally new order breaking forth within evolutionary history. Overcoming violence-generating cosmic creativity requires transcending evolutionary history. But, because there is no world-transcending reality (no ‘God’ of doctrinal tradition), transcending evolutionary history is impossible.¹¹³ That is, *unless* cosmic creativity were serendipitously to overcome itself and generate a “new beginning” of evolutionary history. Any historicist hope for overcoming violence would thus require appealing to a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*, by which cosmic creativity serendipitously generates something new from nothing that has come before. However, such an appeal would be rationally unwarranted within Kaufman’s theology. Because violence-generating cosmic creativity is ultimate reality, there is no cosmos-transcending possibility of a permanently violence-free order that might be actualized historically, not even serendipitously.

Where, then, does this leave the righteous sufferer? Because there is no historical expectation that serendipitous creativity will ever generate an evolutionary reversal saving humanity from a violent end,¹¹⁴ Kaufman’s theology could answer the plea “How long, O Lord?” with the counsel “Wait for the Lord” only in the sense of “Wait for the unexpected.” Facing violence, with humanity’s salvation uncertain and personal survival the nearest hope, choosing nonviolence would be a risky gamble—the likely loss of one’s own future for the unlikely gain of humanity’s future. Choosing

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 91-95.

¹¹¹ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 49-52, 105, and *Jesus and Creativity*, 52-54, 109-14.

¹¹² Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 57-59, 97, 101.

¹¹³ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 189.

¹¹⁴ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 46, 48, 70, 106; *Jesus and Creativity*, 58, 98-100, 103.

nonviolence would thus require “a spirit of self-sacrifice for the well-being of all of humanity . . . a spirit that can subdue the instincts for self-preservation and self-defense. . . .”¹¹⁵ Given that God-as-creativity cannot guarantee vindication for the nonviolent, what human-historical rationale could compel such a sacrificial-spiritual commitment to nonviolence?

One could look to Jesus, who, forsaking sword for cross, exhibited self-sacrificial nonviolence as a human-historical possibility.¹¹⁶ Why, though, entrust one’s future to the Jesus-trajectory of human evolution?

. . . commitment to Jesus and *agape*-love . . . is a matter of the weightiness of a long sequence of historical human decisions and consents and the deep conviction that this trajectory is a significant expression of the serendipitous creativity we call *God*.¹¹⁷

This, however, seems insufficiently compelling. Because *every* human evolutionary trajectory—violent and nonviolent—is an “expression of the serendipitous creativity we call God,” there is no human-historical reason why, when one’s life is threatened, one should believe in the special “significance” of *any* evolutionary trajectory other than a trajectory including one’s personal future, even if that trajectory is preserved by violence. In fact, on that account, taking up the sword to save oneself could make much more sense than taking up the cross to follow Jesus, for, after all, nonviolence did not save him.

Conclusion: Back to the Tradition for the Future

Must the gospel norm of nonviolent discipleship be grounded in the confessional commitments and ontological entailments of doctrinal tradition, or could a pragmatic appeal to historical reality suffice to motivate nonviolence? Although the foregoing arguments cannot deliver a definitive conclusion (Kaufman’s is only one variety of historicism), I think a critical assessment of Kaufman’s project indirectly confirms our original conjecture. Traditional creation theology, far better than Kaufman’s creativity theology,

¹¹⁵ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 35; see 113-14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54, emphasis in original.

provides a doctrinal framework within which we may establish a stable ground for a nonviolent stance. For the sake of motivating a sustainable commitment to nonviolent discipleship, the serendipitous movements of God-as-creativity in evolutionary history are a poor substitute for the overarching purpose and ongoing activity of God-the-Creator in the created order. This conclusion bolsters Reimer's contention that Anabaptist-Mennonite theology would be well served by a renewed appropriation of doctrinal tradition, with a renewed appreciation of the ontological entailments of confessional commitments, for the sake of safeguarding discipleship ethics.¹¹⁸

Darrin W. Snyder Belousek teaches philosophy and religion at Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio.

¹¹⁸ See also Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*.

Getting to Silence: The Role of System in Mennonite Theology

Justin Heinzekehr

In his outline of the history and future of Mennonite systematic theology, David Cramer identifies four characteristics of a “third wave” that seems to be getting ready to break, if it hasn’t done so already. Earlier Mennonite theologies, the nonsectarian and the dialogical, have been perhaps overly concerned with their relationship to the broader Christian tradition. The first group attempts to appeal to a Christian audience rather than a Mennonite one. The authors downplay their particular identity, although “their indebtedness to their Mennonite heritage remains visible in the questions they raise and their approaches to answering them.”¹ The second group has the opposite problem: the authors are explicit about their Mennonite roots, but end up defining their theology primarily in terms of some other tradition.

Cramer rightly argues that ecumenism and sectarianism are best seen as two sides of the same coin; to be able to contribute to the broader Christian conversation, Mennonites need to develop theologies from an unapologetically Mennonite perspective. He identifies four characteristics that might help to define the shape of integral Mennonite systematic theologies (hereafter, MST): they will be rooted in Scripture, rooted in the broader Christian tradition, make use of reasoned argument without becoming rationalistic or foundational, and emphasize personal and communal experience as a theological source.

I agree with the direction that Cramer identifies—the possibility and desirability of Mennonite systematic theologies in general and the specific characteristics listed above. But significant questions remain about how or if Mennonite identity can be articulated in a system. After all, most Mennonite thinkers, especially before the 1980s, assumed that Mennonite theology was

¹ David Cramer, “Mennonite Systematic Theology in Retrospect and Prospect,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 263.

biblical rather than systematic,² and contemporary Mennonite theologians, with few exceptions, have stressed that their work can be called systematic only if one gives up the idea of foundational first principles.³ If systematic theology is defined by coherence and comprehensiveness, to what extent should Mennonites be involved in developing such systems? Is there such a thing as a nonviolent system, even if it is based in the theology of a peace church?

In this paper, I will explore some interesting peculiarities that appear when we examine each of Cramer's four characteristics, and define further what the role of systematic thought might be for Mennonite theology. I argue that if we are to combine these characteristics with integrity, system is both necessary and disposable. As Mennonites develop theologies, we must use systematic reasoning as a tool for selectively demolishing systems and encouraging new ones that draw on voices beyond the borders of our current systems.

From Event to Narrative: Grounded in Scripture and Tradition

Mennonite theology, like Christian theology in general, has its foundation in the events of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection. But more than some other Christian theologians, Mennonites have always emphasized the particularity of this foundation, the fact that these events occur in a specific time and place, within a specific historical trajectory, and to a specific community.

This insistence on particularity already opens up a potential problem for Mennonite theology: how to reconcile the particularity of the event with the universality (or at least potential universality) of its meaning. If

² This is true of the 16th-century Anabaptists as well as 20th-century Mennonite theologians. I make a full case for this statement in Justin Heinzekehr, "The Absent Christ and the Inundated Community: Constructing a Process-Anabaptist Micrometaphysics" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, 2015).

³ The one main exception is A. James Reimer, who says, "Only an ethic that is grounded beyond itself in the very structure of reality (what I variously call theological ontology or theological metaphysics) can give human action stability and durability in the face of temporary setbacks. . . . I have used the term *foundation* in my title to distinguish the position here put forward from the anti-foundationalism . . . that reigns in much contemporary theology." A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 15.

we emphasize the particularity of Jesus' ministry—that it happened in *this* context, within *this* history, to *these* people—we are emphasizing the unrepeatability of the event. The same event could not happen in 7th-century Arabia or 6th-century China, nor could it have happened in the same location even a generation before or after it did. Jesus' ministry is constituted by its concrete features: conversations with particular people, relationships to local politics and the Roman Empire, development from particular post-exilic Jewish theologies and ethics, and so on.

The concreteness of the Christian tradition is a strength, because it points toward an experience that can never be fully captured. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said,

It is difficult to develop Buddhism, because Buddhism starts with a clear metaphysical notion and with the doctrines which flow from it. Christianity has retained the easy power of development. It starts with a tremendous notion about the world. But this notion is not derived from a metaphysical doctrine, but from our comprehension of the sayings and actions of certain supreme lives. It is the genius of the religion to point at the facts and ask for their systematic interpretation.⁴

At the same time, the inability to fully capture an event means that any description of it will be necessarily incomplete or even misleading. When we attempt to describe an event, we inevitably flatten it out so that it can be expressed and understood. In doing so, we lose the vibrancy of the original occurrence and select certain features to emphasize or ignore. John Caputo distinguishes between events and the names that we use to describe them: "Because the name is never the equal of the event that stirs within it, the name can never be taken with literal force, as if it held the event tightly within its grip, as if it circumscribed it and literally named it, as if a concept (*Begriff*) were anything more than a temporary stop and imperfect hold on an event."⁵ Paradoxically, this means that the more Mennonite theologians

⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1996), 50-51. Taken out of context, this makes Whitehead seem more critical of Buddhism than he actually is; in fact he has a deep appreciation for the role that both religions have played in human history.

⁵ John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana

emphasize the particularity of Jesus' historical context (i.e., define it as an event rather than a concept), the less access we give ourselves to the original experiences that gave rise to Christianity.

However, the transition from event to interpretation is inevitable and swift. Before we can articulate an experience to others, even before we can make sense of it for ourselves, we must fit it into some kind of categorical framework. We need to find some thread of coherence that allows us to link an event with our interpretation of previous events. Unconsciously, we develop narratives that highlight elements running through strings of events, allowing us to find meaning in otherwise isolated experiences.⁶ The act of interpretation fixes the event in some way (and therefore kills it), but interpretation is necessary in order to register it as something distinguishable from any other event. It is impossible to keep fragmented events from congealing into coherent wholes, especially within the genre of narrative, but also in the genres of art or poetry.⁷ Even the most fragmentary of representations has to situate itself in a linguistic and cultural world that requires certain systems of thought.

Univ. Press, 2006), 3.

⁶ "[O]ur moral lives are not simply made up of the addition of our separate responses to particular situations. Rather, we exhibit an orientation that gives our life a theme through which the variety of what we do and do not do can be scored. To be agents at all requires a directionality that involves the development of character and virtue. Our character is the result of our sustained attention to the world that gives coherence to our intentionality. Such attention is formed and given content by the stories through which we have learned to form the story our lives. To be moral persons is to allow stories to be told through us so that our manifold activities gain a coherence that allows us to claim them for our own. Stories and character are interdependent in the sense that the moral life, if it is to be coherent, always has beginnings and endings."—Stanley Hauerwas, "Vision, Stories, and Character (1973, 2001)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), 168-69.

⁷ The same necessity of abstraction applies to theopoetics or aesthetics as well as to narrative. Some postmodern philosophers, such as Jean-François Lyotard, have sought an escape from abstraction through art. Similarly, Scott Holland proposes theopoetics instead of systematic theology as a route toward a more embodied way of thinking. See Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), 89-107 and Scott Holland, "Theology Is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 317-31. However, aesthetics and poetics also abstract from the basic experiences of the artists, only in different forms.

The attractive thing about narrative, from a Mennonite perspective, is that this genre maintains at least some of the particularity of the original events, and can also be communicated and translated across time and culture. Of course we can never reconstruct the exact experiences of the first-century disciples, but we inherit the stories of those experiences. At the intersection of particularity and interpretation that the gospel narratives provide, communication of Christian meaning is now possible. Narrative allows us to synthesize the particularity and universality of Jesus' life. "For our world it will be in [Jesus'] ordinariness as villager, as rabbi, as king on a donkey, and as liberator on the cross," says John Howard Yoder, "that we shall be able to express the claims which the apostolic proclaimers to Hellenism expressed in the language of preexistence and condescension."⁸ Yoder's "low road to general validity" is an attempt to find the most concrete level of generalization that can be made from the events themselves.

The communicability of narrative does not exempt it from the more chaotic realm of the event. Every time a narrative makes its way into a new context, even into a new moment of time, it becomes a part of the event occurring in the life of the community that hears it. The parable of the workers in the vineyard, to take an example, sounds different when read in a base community in Latin America than in a wealthy Episcopalian church in the United States.⁹ This is true, in more or less obvious ways, whenever a narrative is heard by a community; the context shapes the meaning that the narrative is able to convey, and changes the way that the listener experiences that moment of hearing.

For Mennonite theology, this is important because it suggests that our

⁸ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 62.

⁹ "The analysis of the parable of the workers in the vineyard offered by the theology of liberation includes not only comments about the socio-political structure of first-century Palestine but also comments about that of twentieth-century Britain.... In the modern economy, as in the ancient, many work from day to day without security of employment. In a society which is increasingly recognizing that low-paid, part-time work is as much of a problem as unemployment, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard provides a tradition that can readily be appropriated by those who most need to organize today and yet are often least able to do so."—Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 25-26.

grounding in scripture cannot mean either grounding in the revelational events of Christianity itself, or grounding in a fixed narrative that would hold across any community. First, the narratives in the Bible are already interpretations of events, not the events themselves, as should be clear from the existence of four different gospels. Secondly, every community that reads the Bible makes its own interpretation of the narrative that might differ from the interpretations of other communities.¹⁰ When we talk about the foundation of scripture, we are at the same time talking about the Christian tradition, which includes all individual and communal theological interpretations over the course of Christian history. All interpretation occurs in a context shaped by various theological traditions, whether or not the community refers explicitly to them. I agree with Cramer that “Mennonites have always done theology in conversation with other traditions.”¹¹ I am less certain that we could “assume neither commonality nor tension with particular pre- or non-Mennonite theologies from the outset”¹² in any meaningful sense.

In any case, the transition from event to interpretation involves abstraction from the immediacy of the original event. In forming a narrative (or even a piece of art, a poem, or a literary fragment), we trade some of the spirit of the experience for the ability to articulate that experience and to apply its meaning beyond the immediate context.

From Narrative to System: Reason without Rationalism

How can we represent these foundational experiences in a way that resists the totalization inherent in the movement toward abstraction and universalization? Can we, for instance, avoid constructing the kind of comprehensive frameworks that go into traditional systematic theologies? This concern relates to Cramer’s third criterion for integral MST: that it uses reasoned argumentation without resorting to natural theology or

¹⁰ “The Christian scriptures are written records of the normative interpretations of various Christian communities. The Gospel writer (or Letter writer) speaks for and to a community, and in so doing, he himself interprets further the community interpretation. Our scriptures are not the primordial revelational event. They are a witness to the event.”—Bernard J. Lee, *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus: Retrieving the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 42.

¹¹ Cramer, “Mennonite Systematic Theology,” 271.

¹² *Ibid.*, 270.

foundational knowledge claims. Mennonite suspicion of foundational epistemologies is deeply connected to the Mennonite emphasis on nonviolence. Chris Huebner, commenting on Yoder's work, says:

The fragmentary and occasionalist style of Yoder's work is often recognized. What tends to be underappreciated is that this way of proceeding is firmly rooted in his understanding of Christian pacifism. Both the temptation to start from scratch and the rhetoric of finality can be seen as forms of epistemological violence in the sense that they constitute a retreat from vulnerability.¹³

The obvious conclusion is that Mennonite theologians should stop short of the goals of comprehensiveness and coherence that drive other systematic theologians. We should rather experiment with "weaker" forms of theological reflection such as narrative, "ad hoc" writing, and theopoetics.

However, just as the emphasis on particularity requires a foray into the abstract, so these weaker theological genres may actually disguise a greater level of violence than more "systematic" genres. Narrative, for instance, always comes with a certain structure that defines a plot, protagonists, antagonists, culture and linguistic settings, and even theories about the purpose and meaning of existence. These are precisely the elements that give narrative the useful ability to translate the meaning of events beyond their immediate occurrence. But these abstractions function in the same way that universals do in other systems. For example, martyr narratives have functioned not only as a vehicle for Mennonite cultural identity, but also for the theology and metaphysics of the 16th-century Anabaptists. The stories make clear-cut distinctions between the Anabaptists and their oppressors—the former sure of their faith, ready to sacrifice their lives, joyful, guiltless, and ready to forgive; the latter confused, illogical, and unable to convince others except through the use of violence. When we identify with the Anabaptist martyrs, we implicitly accept the two-kingdom theology that separates the perfect Christian community from the worldly order. In fact, these narratives communicate an entire worldview that includes all the

¹³ Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), 102.

ideas usually found in a systematic theology: reflection on God and Trinity, ecclesiology, anthropology, eschatology, and so forth.

This ought to make us uncomfortable with the idea that narrative provides an escape from system, and therefore from violence. Jean-François Lyotard gives the following description of the genre of mythic narrative (I substitute “Mennonite” for “Aryan” in the original, a change which, unsettlingly, alters the meaning of the passage very little):

I, a Mennonite, tell you, a Mennonite, the narrative of our Mennonite ancestors’ acts. The single name *Mennonite* occupies the three instances in the universes of the narrative phrase. The sense of this phrase is always, directly or indirectly, that of the “beautiful death.” We tell ourselves that we have died well. It is an epic of exception. The *s/he*’s, the *you*’s, and the *I*’s are substitutable under a single name, thanks to the *we*. The closed narrative cell operates prescriptively. The imperative is hypothetical: if you are Mennonite, tell, hear, and carry out the Mennonite “beautiful death.” But it is not the sense (the beautiful death) that contains the founding potency, it is the mode of linking. If you hear, tell or do. If you tell, hear or do. If you do, hear or tell. The implications are reciprocal. You don’t therefore enter into the narrative cycle, you are always already there, or you are never there. Such is the genre of mythic narrative.¹⁴

The problem that Lyotard identifies is that narrative creates a closed system that must disregard anything which cannot be incorporated into it. This is true of any system, but narrative can hide these inconsistencies better than other genres by the way it uses particular events and characters, rather than explicit argument, to pull the listener into the logic of the system.

Elaine Enns has documented the way that Mennonite narratives of victimhood affected relationships between Mennonites and the Nogai in the Ukraine, and between Mennonites and Cree tribes in Canada. In both cases, the narratives Mennonites used to construct their identity blinded them to the fact that in some respect, they were not simply victims but were actually

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988), 105.

complicit in violence against native peoples.¹⁵ The truth is complicated: Mennonites were driven out of their own lands by governments that refused to excuse them from participation in state violence, but they ended up settling on land that other governments had forcibly taken from its prior inhabitants. Yet because of the way that Mennonites narrated their own history, only their own suffering could be expressed as meaningful. (This dynamic still haunts Mennonites now.)

The gospel narratives are no exception to this rule. They create structures defining the way that Christians can think about their own identity and their relationships to other groups. Perhaps most harmful is how the gospels (particularly John) portray the difference between Jesus and the “Jews” or Pharisees. John narrates Jesus’ ministry through the lens of Platonic metaphysics and messianic dualism, by which he fuses a separation of material and spiritual onto a separation of “this age” and “the age to come.” Judaism is identified as the older, more carnal faith and Christianity as the new, spiritual one. “By mythologizing the theological division between ‘man-in-God’ and ‘man-alienated-from-God’ into a division between two postures of faith, John gives the ultimate theological form to that diabolizing of ‘the Jews’ which is the root of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition.”¹⁶ Although these metaphysical structures have remained hidden from most Christians who read the book of John, they still have had a great effect on Christian attitudes toward and treatment of their Jewish neighbors.

One of the strengths of a narrative is its ability to coexist with other narratives. A story does not invite refutation. It may invite other stories to be told, even alternative histories, but it tends to rest content in a multiplicity of interpretations. This is perhaps a type of peace, but it is only possible because of the way that a story (if well-made) conceals its universals in the particularities of its plot and characters. So the majority of us function with multiple overlapping narratives that constitute our identity, but whose underlying worldviews may not be consistent with each other. Only when the

¹⁵ Elaine Enns, “Pilgrimage to the Ukraine: Revisioning History through Restorative Justice,” *Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries*, www.bcm-net.org/pilgrimage-to-the-ukraine-revisioning-history-through-restorative-justice-elaine-enns, accessed January 10, 2015.

¹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 95.

inconsistencies become extreme do we bring the abstractions of a narrative into the open to examine them.

Just as every event collapses into interpretation, every narrative contains within itself the seeds of a system. The question for Mennonites is not how to avoid systematic thinking, but rather how to construct systems, in whatever form, that can respond adequately to various types of experience. If narrative is “perhaps the genre of discourse within which the heterogeneity of phrase regimens . . . have the easiest time passing unnoticed,”¹⁷ then one function of systematic theology is to make the basic theological assumptions of religious narratives explicit so they can become vulnerable to criticism and revision.

From System to Silence: The Priority of Experience

It is in the nature of a victim not to be able to prove that one has been done a wrong. A plaintiff is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it. One becomes a victim if one loses these means. One loses them, for example, if the author of the damages turns out directly or indirectly to be one's judge. The latter has the authority to reject one's testimony as false or the ability to impede its publication. But this is only a particular case. In general, the plaintiff becomes the victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered.¹⁸

In itself, the systematization of the theological concepts implicit in our narratives does not alleviate the potential for violence. It is in the nature of systems to try to comprehend all of experience under a particular set of categories, and in the process to neglect certain experiences that cannot be incorporated into this framework. When a system gains power in a community or society, there are always voices silenced in and through that system. The worst thing about this, as Lyotard points out, is that the injustice cannot even be expressed within the system, since no concepts are available to cover the kind of experience being silenced. For example, a native tribe

¹⁷ Lyotard, *The Differend*, 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

sues the national government for rights to their land, but these rights (and even the concept of land rights), depend on Western law for their authority. Since the tribe cannot produce any evidence of land ownership that would be accepted by the court, it cannot prove its right to the land.¹⁹

Every theological system has lacunae such as this. The goal of Mennonite systematic theology, then, cannot be to construct a foolproof system. Whereas narrative disguises violence through its particularity, systematic theology is always in danger of disguising violence behind a pretense of finality. Where does this leave us, if it is impossible to avoid abstracting from experience, to keep our interpretations from developing systemic concepts, or to construct an explicit theological system without silencing certain people or experiences? I suggest that we can identify, and take advantage of, the fissures in our theologies by developing systems to the point that they can no longer sustain their own inconsistencies, with the expectation that a break will occur at some point. Such breaks are windows into the silences that the system has been fostering; they provide a starting point for new reflection. Systematic theology is the motor that drives a process through event, interpretation, systematization, and (previously invisible) event.

The goal of Mennonite systematic theology, then, is not convergence on any one system. This is a good thing because, despite the best efforts of theologians to persuade each other, I know of no systematic theologies that are identical. The plurality of theologies is not a matter of theological posturing, but a symptom of genre. Systematic theology opens into what Lyotard calls the “deliberative genre,” the realm of the political. In this mode, speakers make specific refutations of one another with the goal of persuading the other. Counterintuitively, the act of argumentation presupposes an unanswered question (“What should we be?”), and therefore fosters greater dissent and diversity, whereas narratives usually imply a presupposition about the identity of a community²⁰ (“we are martyrs” or “we are pacifists”). Mennonite systematic theology could proceed, I hope, without the vitriol of national politics, but the expectation of critique and defense does raise

¹⁹ Example taken from Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 88.

²⁰ Lyotard, *The Differend*, 149-50.

questions of consistency that might otherwise go unnoticed.

There are thus two reasons why systematic theology is so important in the process of discovering these silences. First, as mentioned, systematic theology is potentially a more “fragile” genre than narrative, especially if it is done with attention to the feeling of uneasiness that may signal a gap in the system. Secondly, because systems, implicit or explicit, work precisely by making it impossible to express injustices, we cannot simply look around and identify such injustices, at least not until someone finds a way to articulate them. Abandoning the effort of systematic thinking would mean abandoning any chance of recognizing injustices that weren’t already presentable under our current way of thinking.²¹

Instead of finding truth in consensus, systematic theology should pursue the truth lying outside the borders of consensus. But since this truth may be invisible to us, the only way to discover it is to attempt to map, as well as we can, the boundaries of consensus. When we fail at some point in the process, which is inevitable, we know there is something more worth exploring in that area. We attempt the impossible in order to discover the invisible.

One example of a break in a Mennonite theological system is the recognition of John Howard Yoder’s sexual abuse. This is probably the clearest example of a theological system that silenced an entire set of voices, especially through concepts like redemptive suffering, which tends to minimize women’s agency in the face of violence, and the Mennonite ideal of personal reconciliation in the church, which required women to confront their abuser directly. Incidentally, it was through a conference on peace theology and violence against women that several of Yoder’s victims began to organize themselves to ask for intervention from church leaders,²² and this conference had the stated goal of calling for “integration and consistency of

²¹ Enrique Dussel says something similar: “In order to discover new categories, which make it possible for us to think about ourselves, it is necessary to talk like Europeans and, from there, to find their limitations, deconstructing European thought to create space for the new.” *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 5th ed. (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1995), 138, my translation. Dussel uses this strategy to inform his entire project of liberation philosophy.

²² Linda Gehman Peachey, “Naming the Pain, Seeking the Light: The Mennonite Church’s Response to Sexual Abuse,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (2015): 111-28.

theology and practice.”²³ Here, the attempt to articulate a more coherent and comprehensive (systematic) version of Mennonite pacifism provided some language to articulate the inconsistencies of current systems, and sparked new theological reflection based on the experiences of those previously unheard.²⁴

Doing systematic theology towards silence is one way of being, as Cramer says, “keenly sensitive to the place of experience for theology.”²⁵ Here again, application of this principle is not as straightforward as it might seem, since experience is not simply given, waiting for theologians to come along and recognize it. Experiences are events requiring abstractions for their representation and communication. The systems of thought available to us limit (but do not determine) the way experiences can be told and remembered. Therefore, to be fully sensitive to experience is not only to attend to what is articulated in an interpretation of an event, but to make space for the breakthrough of a new articulation of experience. In this sense, systematic theology is the last step toward the lost event, which, if given the space to do so, overflows rational thought and renews the cycle of interpretation. Ideally, systematic theology produces a spiraling, rather than simply a cyclical, movement that continues to open up more and more uncharted areas of experience, though we may not be able to measure that progress except as an increased level of discomfort or anxiety. Lyotard’s diagnosis of the human situation might very well apply to the state of Mennonite theology:

If humanity were progressing toward the better, it would not be because ‘things are getting better’ and because the reality of this betterment could be attested through procedures for establishing reality, but because humans would have become so cultivated and would have developed an ear so attuned to the Idea (which

²³ Gayle Gerber Koontz, “Introduction,” in *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992), 4. The conference was held in October 1991 at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

²⁴ Especially relevant is Carol Penner, “Content to Suffer: An Exploration of Mennonite Theology from the Context of Violence against Women,” *Peace Theology and Violence against Women*, Elizabeth G. Yoder, ed., 99-111.

²⁵ Cramer, “Mennonite Systematic Theology,” 272.

is nonetheless unpresentable) that they would feel its tension on the occasion of the most apparently impertinent, with regard to it, facts and that they would supply the very proof of progress by the sole fact of their susceptibility. This progress could therefore be compatible with the general feeling that 'things are getting worse.' In its aggravation, the gap between Ideas and observable historical-political reality would bear witness not only against that reality but also in favor of those Ideas.²⁶

Justin Heinzekehr is Director of Institutional Research and Assessment and Assistant Professor of Bible and Religion at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana.

²⁶ Lyotard, *The Differend*, 180.

Matthew J. Distefano. *All Set Free: How God is Revealed in Jesus and Why That is Really Good News*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2015.

The seeming violence of traditional atonement theology has often presented a problem for Christians who want to hold to a Trinitarian faith and also want to take seriously the peacemaking teachings of Jesus. In this time of religiously affiliated violence, it is particularly pertinent to reconsider what the consequences of our beliefs might be. In this informed yet accessible study, Matthew J. Distefano grapples with an inherited understanding of God that seems disjointed. He calls upon René Girard's anthropological insights on mimetic theory as the basis for his project, and proposes that God, through Jesus' death, provides an alternative and nonviolent way of being for humanity.

The first move made by Distefano is to establish ground rules for discussing a complex and challenging set of questions. Here we sense the tone of this project, which is neither antagonistic nor dogmatic in its proposals but conversational and humbly hopeful. First, theological presuppositions must be critically engaged. Specifically, we need to critically engage our image of God. Second, we must actively recall the historical traditions of Christianity—from the formation of the creeds through to Augustine, Luther, and today—in order to give license to the work of critically engaging our understandings of God. Distefano stresses that this work has deep roots. Third, two specific theological frameworks, Calvinism and Arminianism, are contrasted and critiqued in order to provide a contextual model for this engagement.

Central to the author's project is the mimetic theory as developed by Girard. This theory understands social cohesion to be the result of spontaneous violence that unites groups, who would otherwise be rivals, against a common enemy. This 'victory' is then remembered in ritual in order to maintain social cohesion, or peace, even long after the initial violence took place (51). Adopting a Girardian lens, Distefano takes the passion narrative of Jesus to reveal the futility of this violent cycle, and to be salvific in proposing a new model—the forgiveness shown by Jesus—on which to base our behavior. This view of the atonement, and further, of the very nature of God, is in stark contrast to punitive, retributive, or otherwise

violent Christian theologies.

It is on this point, when contrasting his proposals with other dominant perspectives, that Distefano is at his weakest. While I would not go so far as to say that he gives traditions such as Calvinism unfair treatment, holding them up as a straw men in order to make his own points seem obviously superior, he does often turn to alternate perspectives in order to provide grounds for his arguments. This methodology is a cause for concern, in that it holds the potential for polarizing conversations or establishing camps of “us” and “them”.

However, this risk can be mitigated if the reader takes into account the book’s preface, where the author clearly states that this work is, more than anything else, a reconstruction of his own journey to answer the question, “If there is a God, is he/she violent?” (xii). Here the reader is given permission to enter into a sincere conversation with a fellow believer, struggling together to work at one of life’s most challenging questions, rather than being expected to defend one perspective or another.

Distefano claims that his intended audience is “Christians who have inevitably questioned the Western doctrine of hell, the faith in a violent and retributive god, and the politics of the church in the West,” adding that he is “also writing to non-Christians who avoid Jesus for these very same reasons” (xvi). I would add that his book represents a healthy blend of popular style and researched study. While *All Set Free: How God is Revealed in Jesus and Why That is Really Good News* would not make sense as a definitive resource on René Girard, nonviolent atonement, or its other varied interests, it never claims to be such a resource. What it does offer is a helpful, accessible introduction to these conversations with enough research to be reliable and enough honest personal reflection to be very engaging.

Elijah Fremont Tracy, Master of Theological Studies student, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario

Mary Ann Loewen, ed. *Sons and Mothers: Stories from Mennonite Men*. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2015.

Ably edited and critically introduced by Mary Ann Loewen, *Sons and Mothers: Stories from Mennonite Men* is a welcome entry into the burgeoning fields of Mennonite memoir and life writing, as well as a compelling case study in the adage that all writing is ultimately autobiography. *Sons and Mothers* includes a dozen contributions of prose and poetry from Mennonite Canadian men of Swiss or Russian descent.

Loewen uses her introduction to ground the collection in recent Mennonite life writing, as well as the broader critical conversations that inform the project. Noting that the idea for the book came from a question raised at the launch for Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast's *Mothering Mennonite* (Demeter Press, 2013), Loewen positions this collection as an important supplement to the earlier book, even as she anticipates a challenge to its differently gendered frame. "[I]t is not only *politically correct* to allow men to tell stories about women; it is imperative that both genders tell their life stories for only when men and women work together is the gender divide likely to dissolve," she writes. "[W]hat makes these particular narratives legitimate," she continues, "is that they are written from the sons' perspectives."

One could question the decision to frame these debates with a language of "political correctness" or a singular "gender divide," but the collection as a whole justifies Loewen's larger arguments: that the particular form of truth being sought and found in the collection is explicitly personal; that the story-telling process is central to both the construction and comprehension of self and community; and that the mother-son relationship is a key and underexplored component of the emerging conversation about motherhood and Mennonites.

The collection is notable for its intimate and often beautiful writing, as well as the mosaic-like portraits of Mennonite mothers that it constructs through historical detailing, personal anecdotes, and community narratives. A number of contributors aim to trace the full arc of their mothers' lives, or, as in Lloyd Ratzlaff's strong piece, focus on their mothers' final days. Others explore the complicated legacies that their mothers have left behind, as in Andrew C. Martin's open and challenging essay. Several pieces, including those by Paul Tiessen and John Rempel, are deeply affecting, offering

contemplative and careful accounts of complex women. Others are more playful, including Lukas Thiessen's interview with Mennonite mothers about dating and sexuality, and Bryon Rempel's episodic romp, "Fifteen Ways to a More Beautiful You."

Numerous threads link the essays, including religion (most commonly presented as a barrier to overcome), and food, which plays exactly as consistent a role as one would imagine in a book written by Mennonite men about their mothers. What may be most clear across the collection, however, is the men's deep respect for their mothers, which is evident even where the relationship is strained, and which in a number of pieces verges on veneration. Only one author goes so far as to suggest "Maybe the world doesn't need God so much as everyone needs my mom," but several are happy to concede that they effectively worshipped their mothers in their youth. It is a theme that should be a reminder of the very personal lens through which these stories are presented, as well as of the heavy demands these authors place upon their subjects.

Loewen deserves credit for shining a light on a perhaps surprisingly neglected relationship in the patriarchal structure of Mennonite life, and for bringing together this collection of essays. Its audience will include not only the broader reading public and the smaller Mennonite community, but also a deeply invested group of friends and family members with their own memories of the sons and mothers in question. Indeed, watching the authors negotiate these multiple audiences makes for fascinating reading, and there is a gentle irony in the fact that the strongest pieces are about women who have already passed away.

Perhaps it was inevitable that *Sons and Mothers* would tell us more about its contributors than it does their Mennonite mothers, but Loewen, well aware of the project's complexities, gracefully prepares us for this discovery and encourages us to appreciate its full meaning. "Surely *the act of remembering* deepens the original experience," she writes, adding that "the story gradually unfolds itself as it becomes part of a life's (indeed, a son's) greater narrative."

Robert Zacharias, Assistant Professor of English, York University, Toronto, Ontario

Lisa Sowle Cahill. *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

In *Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics*, Catholic feminist moral theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill constructs a biblical and theological argument for social justice-making. The book is Cahill's second contribution to the New Studies in Christian Ethics Series, following *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (1996) and is written for a diverse audience of scholars and students from a variety of theo-ethical perspectives.

Beginning with the relationship between theology and ethics, Cahill argues that in the experience of salvation the life of the believer is reoriented toward God, which has implications for the believer's action in relation to self and others. This action is necessarily personal, ecclesial, and political (1). With this established, Cahill aims "[t]o give biblical and theological reasons for Christian commitments to justice, to show why just action is necessarily a criterion of authentic Christian theology, and to give grounds for Christian hope that change in violent structures is really possible" (1).

The author accomplishes these aims by engaging biblical texts in conjunction with feminist and liberation theologies within a revised natural law tradition rooted in Aquinas. In particular, she claims that a theology of justice is promoted within the biblical creation accounts and theologies of evil; the politics of the Kingdom of God; Word and Spirit Christologies; and a liberative theology of the cross. All reveal a particular politics of salvation that calls Christians to participate in the work of justice making. Cahill concludes with a vision of peacebuilding as "a strategy to reduce conflict and its causes and as a Christian expression of the politics of salvation" (290).

Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics translates across theo-ethical differences. This is due largely to Cahill's willingness to name her context and a demonstrated openness to dialogue. She situates herself as a "white, feminist, Catholic, theologian, living in the United States" (28) and is honest about her decision to privilege certain discourses over others. At the same time she views her social location as a place from which to engage perspectives different from her own. Her transparency in this respect frames potential tensions and disagreements as opportunities for conversation. Anabaptist-Mennonites may find her appeal to universal norms, moral

realism, and a close relationship between church and politics challenging, but not detrimental, to engaging her work.

The book also makes three key contributions to peace theology and ethics. First, Cahill locates peace and justice-making within an active Christian response to the politics of salvation revealed throughout the biblical witness. Not only is peacemaking a response to the Gospel but also, she argues, a necessary response to the much larger narrative of God's presence in history. In this way she develops an even stronger argument for a peacemaking than one that relies solely on Jesus' nonviolent example. Second, Cahill highlights the danger of a community of faith forming "around selective memories and hope for a future that decisively validates one group over another" (27). As a result she promotes mutuality as well as solidarity with all groups suffering violence as criteria for peacebuilding (302). She, like Mennonite feminist theologians,¹ raises awareness of all forms of violence, including violence internal to the community of faith (e.g., violence against women), as a priority for Christian peacemaking.

Third, Cahill asserts that a commitment to peace and justice emerges from a liberatory view of the cross as Christ's decision to suffer with, rather than for, creation (228). Drawing on womanist theologians Jacquelyn Grant and Katie Geneva Cannon, for example, she names the power of the cross as active resistance to evil (235-36). Her work in this regard, which includes a reorientation of atonement as reconciliation (227), informs a peace ethic that is itself nonviolent. For these three reasons in particular, this volume is an important contribution to addressing violence in the 21st century from a Christian perspective.

Kimberly L. Penner, Ph.D. Candidate, Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, Toronto, Ontario

¹ See for example Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion, and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1998); Malinda E. 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); and Carol Jean Penner, "Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices: Peace Theology and Violence Against Women," (Ph.D. diss., St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1999).

Mirjam van Veen, Piet Visser, and Gary K. Waite, eds. *Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women, ca. 1525 to 1900*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women, ca. 1525 to 1900 is a collection of papers initially presented at a 2007 conference on the same topic at the Free University (VU) of Amsterdam. The essays in the volume are well worth the wait. Together, they form a useful complement to previous scholarship on women in Radical Reformation traditions, which has often focused on biographies of individual women (see, for instance, C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht's 1996 ground-breaking edited volume, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*). The essays in *Sisters*, by contrast, deliberately focus less on individual Anabaptist women and seek instead to examine various images and ideas of these women, including those created by the women themselves, by their male co-religionists, or by their Catholic and Magisterial Protestant opponents.

The collection spans a wide range, both geographically and chronologically. About half the essays cover Netherlandish topics, while the other half examine Mennonite and other Anabaptist communities in the Tirol, modern-day Germany, Switzerland, Russia, and the Polish Vistula Delta. The essays also cover a broad range of themes related to gender: Marion Kobelt-Groch, Mirjam van Veen, Mark Jantzen, and John Staples's contributions discuss views and realities of Anabaptist marriage, while Marjan Blok's essay on the testament of Soetken van den Houte deals with Anabaptist motherhood.

Linda A. Huebert Hecht, Mary Sprunger, and Marcel Kremer examine aspects of the socioeconomic realities of Anabaptist women in Tirol, Amsterdam, and Groningen in the 16th to 18th centuries, while Anna Voolstra's essay deals specifically with the intersections between Doopsgezind history, gender history, and the history of aging in her chapter on the Amsterdam *Oude Vrouwenhuis* (elderly women's home). Lucinda Martin's chapter highlights the porous nature of confessional boundaries and examines the role of gender in the official response to Bern's pietists, whose focus on inner, private spirituality led them to display a religious affinity for

Bern's Anabaptist congregations even as they refused to identify fully with them. Michael Driedger's essay notes some of the gendered ways in which the rise of the Enlightenment affected Doopsgezind and Mennonite groups, such as increasing acceptance of confessionally mixed marriages.

Many of the chapters also deal with representations of Anabaptist women in contemporary writings and images, both by Anabaptists and by their religious opponents. Martina Bick examines the gendered aspects of Anabaptist hymns, and Nicole Grochowina details the ways in which the Dutch martyrology, *Het Offer des Herren* (*The Sacrifice Unto the Lord*) reinforced the established gender hierarchy. Piet Visser's chapter relates how a Dutch printer and translator reimagined a French work aimed at upper-class Roman Catholic women for a Dutch Doopsgezind audience. Mirjam den Baar's chapter looks at how a 17th-century poem gave the term "Menniste Zusje" (Mennonite sister) an unfavorable sexual connotation, and Gary Waite's chapter on iconography of Anabaptist women and witches highlights the various images of Anabaptist women in 16th-century polemics as sexually licentious on the one hand and pious but simple and easily misled on the other.

This volume is a great addition to the bookshelves of historians of early modern gender history and of the Radical Reformation alike. The Anabaptist women whose lives were notable enough to merit biographical treatments were *ipso facto* extraordinary women in some ways, and the essays in this volume help to illuminate new aspects of the lives of ordinary Anabaptist women, the environments in which they lived, and the challenges they faced both within and outside their religious communities. Lecturers on early modern gender and Anabaptist history will also appreciate the wealth of images and anecdotes throughout the book, which may prove useful in a classroom setting. The essays in *Sisters* are a welcome addition to the field of Anabaptist gender history, and I hope this volume will continue to spur further research on the topic.

Christina Moss, Ph.D. student, Department of History, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario

Harry Loewen. *Luther and His Opponents: Ink Against the Devil*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015.

The late Harry Loewen was much respected in the field of Anabaptist-Mennonite and Reformation studies. His latest book, *Luther and His Opponents: Ink Against the Devil*, was completed a few months before his untimely passing. At approximately double the size of the original edition, entitled *Luther and the Radicals: Another Look at Some Aspects of the Struggle Between Luther and the Radical Reformers* (1974), the new edition offers expanded scope and vastly more information. Given this impressive new scholarship and enlarged material, *Luther and His Opponents* deserves to be reviewed on its own terms.

While the book is geared toward graduate or upper-level undergraduate students and the informed layperson with its jargon-free style, professional historians will nevertheless appreciate the vigorous, erudite research that underpins its insightful evaluation and application of Luther's polemical writings.

In addition to the Radical Reformers, Loewen examines Luther's new targets. After providing historical background to Luther's theological legacy, the author examines the smoldering ink that Luther spilled against his many infernal enemies, and provides a brief overview of the different types of radicals of this period and their reasons for opposing Luther. The volume is then logically organized according to the groups he opposed: Wittenberg radicals from Karlstadt to the Zwickau Prophets, peasant revolutionaries including Thomas Müntzer and his ilk, Erasmus and the Humanists, the Swiss Brethren, deranged Münsterites, Spiritualists, Rationalists including the Antitrinitarians, supporters of religious tolerance, European Jews, Muslim Turks, and the papal church.

However, the most meaningful contribution of this volume is its incisive, refreshing attention to apposite contemporary issues—or rather, how Loewen believes the book will and should be received in today's context. Although the historical stream coursing through its pages is the ink Luther spilled to malign his opponents, this volume is a personal plea for more ecumenism and religious tolerance. As modern-day wisdom literature from a seasoned sage, *Luther and His Opponents* is primarily concerned about

the negative effects—subconscious or deliberate—of past prejudices on the present.

Loewen decries the old vitriol that has inspired more recent hateful acts, the Holocaust as a primary tragic example. Happily, he also notes that stumbling blocks between Protestants, Catholics, and Anabaptists that fostered animosities in the 16th century exist to a lesser extent today, citing the increase in scholarship on these themes that has led to formal apologies and greater interfaith cooperation. In this sense, *Luther and His Opponents* has a distinct purpose: to encourage greater ecumenicity and unity in the church, and to avoid the in-fighting that characterized Luther's vicious attacks on others.

Rather than scapegoating Luther, however, the author asks whether such a characterization is unfair, given Luther's context as a man of his time who acted like most of his contemporaries. Or was he unique in his vulgarity? Despite the inhospitable reception by Mennonites to this book's first edition because it refused to attack the Magisterial Reformation with more force, Loewen says he felt "that as scholars we needed to be fair in understanding the positions of both Luther and those who dissented from him" (xiii–xiv).

Yet, given the contemporary context animating the sentiments behind the new volume, it would appear that Loewen modified his stance, hardening his opposition toward Luther—or else understanding the differences between Luther and his opponents as points of substance rather than mere emphasis. Interestingly, when Loewen delves into the reasons for Luther's attacks, foremost among them is the principle of *sola scriptura* that, according to Luther, did not open the eyes of all humanity despite increasing accessibility of the "clear" Scriptures—the Jews bearing the brunt of his attacks in this respect.

Luther and His Opponents is carefully researched, and written in readable, lively language. It is a pure pleasure to read. Loewen uses parenthetical notes sparingly but enough to urge the reader to explore his insights and evaluations further without becoming a distraction. Often overlooked but nevertheless important to bibliophiles, this volume is a well-designed, high quality publication from beginning to end. It is an essential work for scholars who explore historical precedents of interfaith dialogue and sectarian hostilities in order to inform and guide interreligious

peacebuilding and relationship-building, to undermine mutual suspicion, and to encourage humanization of the Other today.

Andrew P. Klager, Adjunct Professor of History and Research Associate, Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia

Catherine Keller. *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Catherine Keller is a pre-eminent voice in negative theology and process thought. Her reputation has been solidified by popular works such as *Face of the Deep* (2002) and *On the Mystery* (2008). In *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, she unites various voices in a transdisciplinary conversation that highlights how theology is always political, ecological, and diverse. Keller aims to stage a series of encounters between the relational and the apophatic, rooted in her understanding of both theological and nontheistic texts. Through bringing these voices together, she creates an account of humanity's interpersonal entanglement in light of a God who is impossible to identify.

Part I, *Complications*, begins in the Old Testament, with Keller looking at how history has portrayed a God who appears in scripture as a "dense cloud" (Exodus 19:9). She accounts for patristic elucidations of this theme from theologians such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa, who helped show that a negation in speech can portray characteristics of the Divine.

For the author, this understanding of "apophasis" acts as literary groundwork, seen most clearly in the final chapter of Part I. Here she brings together Nicholas of Cusa and the defining voice of process philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead, to track how knowing and unknowing contribute to both the relational and that which supersedes relation. Acknowledging

that although human beings have the capacity to be in relation with each other and with God, the nature of both humanity and God consists of aspects beyond our ability to comprehend. Negative theology can function as a relational cosmology, in which the absence of understanding works to unite humanity (120).

Part II, Explications, further investigates ontological entanglement through scientific, philosophical, and poetic perspectives. Keller looks at quantum mechanics to show the important roles that mystery and indeterminacy play in what Einstein referred to as “spooky action at a distance.” Although science is often portrayed as a discipline of objective truths, it remains reliant on the same strands of apophysis as theology.

The author then turns to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who also deployed the work of Whitehead into his mixture of post-structuralist philosophy and psychoanalysis. In Deleuze, Keller draws Whitehead into a language of apophatic entanglement to describe a “learned unknowing” that is not a reduction in knowledge but a gateway to new knowledge. She uses Deleuze to show how apophatic entanglement emerges from both physical and literary bodies. These bodies, although different, are folded together in order to show that accepted unknowing creates space for unlimited possibility. This acknowledgement is pushed further by traversing through the canon of Walt Whitman, for whom a body exists both as a part of a community and as a singular entity. Such depictions of the body reveal how apophysis highlights and conceals multiple meanings for objects.

In Part III, Implications, Keller engages theopolitics and how our political system and globalized economy impact our ability to be interconnected. She considers the current ecological predicament and proposes a turn to an apophatic theology rooted in Cusa’s consideration of God as *posse ipsum*, or possibility itself, suggesting that God exists as the source of infinite possibilities both seen and unseen. For the author, this functions as an appropriate definition of love. Her ultimate theological proposal does not require process or relationality in order to achieve its aims. Instead, it is rooted in love, which exists as possibility itself. Keller reminds the reader that God does not need relationships with creation, or humanity’s full comprehension, in order to exist. Human unknowing of the Divine is beautiful, and indicative of God’s love for humanity, which exists

infinitely and without limits.

Cloud of the Impossible is dense, and while at times Keller's theology is challenging, it is never inaccessible. The author has a knack not only for eloquently explaining multifaceted concepts from theology and continental philosophy but for rooting them in illustrations from popular literature, her travels, or intellectuals outside theology. The book's difficulty is one of its greatest assets, as the reader feels a sense of reward in tying together its complex themes. This feeling is compounded by the way voices such as those of Cusa, Whitehead, and Deleuze, as well as those of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Judith Butler, and John Cobb, frequently appear within the text. This volume offers a detailed account of human entanglement within negative theology, and flawlessly exemplifies how the study of theology can extend into other academic disciplines.

J. Tyler Campbell, Ph.D. student in Theology, University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio

August den Hollander, Alex Noord, Mirjam van Veen, and Anna Voolstra, eds. *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic: Studies Presented to Piet Visser on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014.

This volume of sixteen essays gives primary attention to the religiously and culturally diverse landscape of the early Dutch Republic, focusing on identity formation and cultural hybridity among religious minorities, especially the Mennonites. Contributors to this volume employ multi-disciplinary approaches, highlighting not only religious but also social, political, and economic realities with a view of better understanding how Anabaptists/Mennonites and other dissenting groups established their identity, how they interacted with one another, and how they intermingled with the "outside world."

The book is a tribute to Piet Visser and marks his 65th birthday.

Since 2002, Visser has been a professor at the Doopsgezind Seminarium (Mennonite Seminary) located at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Over the years his work in historical literature, book history, and theology has opened up new avenues of thinking about how Mennonites evolved from being a persecuted minority to becoming respectable burghers of the Dutch Republic. The volume builds on Visser's scholarly agenda, taking into account his interest in the long-term view, addressing developments in Anabaptism from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

Several of the essays take note of the Dutch Republic's highly competitive religious market. Through considering various theological writings, the production of martyrologies, and the cultivation of rituals, the authors note how religious groups sought to reinforce internal cohesion and legitimize their place within Dutch society. In an age of confessionalization, one might expect a reification of religious attitudes, a thickening of boundaries between competing communities without the possibility of mutual exchange. However, as a number of essays demonstrate, the boundaries between religious communities were often porous. Mainstream groups and dissenting minorities frequently exchanged ideas, images, and rituals. Commonalities that surfaced often superseded denominational and group distinctions, reflecting a high degree of religious and social hybridity.

A major contribution of *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic* is its attention to the way in which Mennonites interacted with the world of the Enlightenment. Broadly speaking, paying attention to the theme of Mennonites and modernity is not new. More than a century ago, Ernst Troeltsch assumed that Anabaptists, with their emphasis on voluntarism, equality, and toleration, anticipated the values of the modern age. Because of persecution, however, they eventually missed the opportunity to shape modern history in any profound way. American Mennonite historians agreed with Troeltsch, but added that the Anabaptists lost their relevance either because they surrendered their essential identity to the inward-oriented focus of pietism, or because they capitulated to the diluting forces of assimilation.

The essays collected here challenge these interpretive frameworks. The authors shun essentialist thinking and withhold judgment about pietistic (or "spiritualist") affinities and assimilating propensities. Instead of portraying

Mennonites as being negatively influenced by the Enlightenment, many of the contributors, in a non-judgmental fashion, suggest ways in which Mennonites were actually participants and shapers of that era. Rather than telling a story of a movement in decline, they fashion an account that highlights Mennonite engagement and constructive participation in the modern project.

The contributors to this volume clearly want to tell the Mennonite story without expressing confessional biases or offering judgments. In the introduction, the editors insist that the historian's task properly understood is about describing and explaining; it is not about making normative judgements. I am sympathetic to the concern for greater historical objectivity, but I have difficulty believing that it is possible to engage in the historical field in a disinterested fashion without offering some kind of evaluation or appraisal. In the telling of any story, aren't normative judgments in some sense unavoidable?

That said, there is much to celebrate about this rich collection of essays. The attention paid to the long-term view is especially fruitful, in that it provides a complex and nuanced imaging of Mennonite life. Instead of a static depiction of Mennonites quietly minding their own business—a common representation of Mennonites in North American historiographies of the past—this volume portrays them as evolving, dynamic, and refreshingly “worldly.” Indeed, the book has complicated the Mennonite story, which is why it should be required reading for any serious student of Mennonite history.

Karl Koop, Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba

William T. Cavanaugh. *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.

In *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*, DePaul University professor William Cavanaugh offers a precis of his work-to-date while providing a window into his wider ecclesiological project. Mennonite readers may recognize his name from *Constantine Revisited*, a 2013 volume of essays responding to Peter Leithart's positive evaluation of the 'Constantinian shift'. In an essay originally published in *Constantine Revisited* and reproduced in this new volume, Cavanaugh describes himself as "a Catholic who has been attracted to the thought of John Howard Yoder" (158). This influence is felt keenly throughout the thirteen essays, as Cavanaugh explores the church's relationship to economics, politics, and violence, providing fresh Catholic perspectives on topics frequently explored in Anabaptist scholarship.

The book's title is a reference to Pope Francis's description of the church in a 2013 *America* magazine interview. When asked what kind of church he dreams of, Francis replied, "I see the church as a field hospital after battle" (1). Cavanaugh builds on this metaphor as a basis for developing and demonstrating a third way between sectarianism and assimilation. He writes, "A field hospital is unconcerned about defending its own prerogatives, and instead goes outside of itself to respond to an emergency. . . . It neither withdraws from the world, sect-like, nor resigns itself to the world as it is" (3). This position entails that the church be creating "new mobile and improvised spaces where different kinds of politics or economic practices can take root" (4).

This approach is defended and demonstrated in the book's three major sections, which respectively deal with economic theory, political theology, and religious violence. In each section the author deconstructs the boundary separating the sacred from the so-called secular, thereby unveiling the hidden 'religious' motivations, sacrifices, and "worship of false gods" (194) at work therein. In defiant contrast to the secular cultus, Cavanaugh envisions the church's own distinct rite—the sacrifice of Jesus' broken body and blood in the Eucharist—as a hopeful and creative protest with wide-ranging contemporary socio-political implications.

Cavanaugh's overall vision of the church evokes the pop-up performances and flash-mobs of Internet fame. Like a flash-mob, the church in this conception is not always easy to discern from the crowd within which it is situated: the public is its stage, and the crowd is a part of its performance. The church becomes visible when it springs to action, transforming the public square and the tragedy of its violence, apathy, and materialism into a place of unexpected unity and joy. In Cavanaugh's view, the church is involved in an unpredictable dance in which it must adapt and respond to its context as it seeks to transform the world's tragedies into comedies (155). Like the Spirit, who comes and goes like the wind, the church appears unexpectedly and spontaneously—like a field hospital—to perform its healing work, a vocation that is predicated, sustained, and equipped through the incorporating act of Eucharistic participation, “which serves to bind the members together . . . by an act of bodily consumption” (18).

Given this highly sacramental focus, this volume notably lacks any extended reflection on the meaning of baptism as a politically constitutive act. This is surprising, given Vatican II's many emphatic statements about baptism as the means of initiation into the church. *Lumen Gentium*, one of Vatican II's principal documents, states that the faithful are “incorporated in the Church through baptism” and that “through baptism as through a door men enter the Church.” Moreover, non-Catholic Christians “are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ.” Such statements would appear to have far-reaching implications for Cavanaugh's ecclesiology, yet the sacramental vision in *Field Hospital* remains disappointingly limited to the Eucharist.

Setting aside this critique, *Field Hospital* presents a highly commendable collection of essays that will widen the political and sacramental imagination of Anabaptist readers. By exploring the church's relationship to violence, economics, and political power in practical detail, Cavanaugh successfully articulates a vision of the church that is truly in the world but not of it, a church that offers a vision of God's Kingdom in surprising and redemptive ways as a testimony to the authority of Jesus Christ. *Field Hospital* offers a strong summary of Cavanaugh's work that introduces his basic arguments while extending a compelling invitation to read further.

Timothy Colegrove, Church Planter, Conservative Mennonite Conference, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

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.

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 Papers

ANABAPTIST THEOLOGY: METHODS AND PRACTICES

June 7 - 9, 2017

Trinity Western University, Langley, BC

The Humanitas Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre for Faith and Learning at Trinity Western University invites submissions of paper proposals for a conference that seeks to encourage scholarship and engaged conversation on theological method. Proposals are invited that address theological method in general and Anabaptist-Mennonite theological method in particular.

Preference will be given to papers taking up these questions and related themes:

- What makes a particular theology Anabaptist, Mennonite, or a combination of the two? Is a distinct method or set of methods, convictions, or practices necessary for doing Anabaptist-Mennonite theology?
- In what sense is theology an academic discipline, and as such how is it to be done?
- What is theology's subject? Are there clear ways of expressing from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective what theology is about?
- What is theology's task? Are there clear ways of expressing from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective what theology is for?
- Are there Anabaptist-Mennonite ways to appropriate scripture as a sacred text, reason (the best reflective learning across disciplines), tradition (Anabaptist-Mennonite traditions, the wider Christian tradition, possibly other faith traditions), as well as lived experience? Are there Anabaptist-Mennonite ways of relating these sources?
- How does Anabaptist-Mennonite theology connect to biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and philosophical theology?

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: JANUARY 15, 2017

www.twu.ca/research/call-for-papers

Submit your proposal as a single document (Word or PDF attachment) that includes a 250-word max. abstract, with your name, current academic affiliation if applicable, and e-mail address to: humanitas2017@gmail.com.

Notice of acceptance will be sent by February 1, 2017.

Program committee: Jeremy Bergen (Conrad Grebel University College), Karl Koop (Canadian Mennonite University), Paul Martens (Baylor University), Myron A. Penner (Trinity Western University), and Laura Schmidt Roberts (Fresno Pacific 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.

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. 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**. 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.

Note: CGR also publishes Refractions, Book Reviews, and Book Review Essays. Refractions are solicited by the CGR Literary Editor (position currently vacant). Book Reviews and Book Review Essays are managed by CGR Book Review Editor Troy Osborne: troy.osborne@uwaterloo.ca.

CGR is indexed in Religious & Theological Abstracts, EBSCOhost databases, and in the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database. It is also included in the full-text ATLASerials (ATLAS) collection.

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