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Literary Refractions

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Editorial

The photograph on the cover of this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* was taken by a Mennonite visiting conflict-ridden Vietnam in 1966. At the time, this depiction of an American relief worker planting a watermelon seedling with a Vietnamese woman was likely viewed as a triumph of peacemaking in the midst of war. Thirty years later, a postcolonial mindset may cause us to see other layers of meaning–a paternalism of west over east, even impressions of sexism and racism in the relationship between the helper and the helped.

Seen through this dichotomous lens, the image is a suitable accompaniment to Perry Bush's revisionist look at Mennonite involvement in the Vietnam war. Initially prepared as the C. Henry Smith Peace Lecture for 1998, Bush's article demonstrates how "the call to service and the imperatives of peacemaking clashed unmistakably" as Mennonite efforts to aid victims of the war indirectly supported the continuance of the bombing that necessitated aid in the first place. His perceptive account demonstrates that the burden of Mennonite history is not just the heavy mantle of nonconformist pacifism, but also the weight of complicity in militarism.

Bush addresses, by way of historical case study, an ongoing locus of Mennonite theology and self-understanding, that is the peace position. For many contemporary Mennonites, a pacifist stance is the essence of adherence to an Anabaptist tradition. Yet there is ongoing debate about what is "essential"–what is at the core of–Anabaptist theology. This question is explored in different ways in three provocative articles by J. Denny Weaver, Thomas Finger, and P. Travis Kroeker.

Both Weaver and Finger examine twentieth-century Mennonite theology by proposing elements that are unique to the Anabaptist tradition and exploring "outside" accretions to that core. By means of a useful chronological outline of ten Mennonite writers and church leaders, Weaver observes that Mennonite theologizing has had a foundation in theology-in-general– including fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal-progressive, creedal orthodox models–to which various Anabaptist emphases, including rejection of the sword, were added. He argues that this approach is inadequate so long as no consensus exists amongst the generalist traditions regarding Jesus' teachings

on peace. Instead, Weaver asserts that its core identity as a peace church should be the starting point for a Mennonite theology.

Thomas Finger takes a more ecumenical approach, suggesting that a distinctive Anabaptist theology inevitably, and positively, appropriates other traditions in its evolution. He draws on two twentieth-century non-Anabaptist theologies–that of Hendrikus Berkhof and his idea of God as "the defenceless superior power" and Rosemary Ruether's emphasis on Jesus as liberator of the lowly and marginalized–as elements that could be incorporated to enrich an Anabaptist perspective.

While each of these two essays seem to desire, in varying degrees, a unity of thought and program in Anabaptist/Mennonite theologizing, one wonders to what extent the politics of identity(ies) that shapes so much of thought and behaviour at the end of this century needs to be applied to summations of Anabaptist theology. Travis Kroeker points most directly to the particularity of theology, one that arises from existence and experience, that is shaped by an individual's own tradition and community, or "memories and motions," yet in the end is part of the "all in all" of God's cosmic order. Through an analysis of three novels, Kroeker demonstrates that theology is less an academic exercise than a penitential ascetism depicted especially by Menno Simons and in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, where suffering and celebration culminate together out of God's self-giving love.

In addition to these thought-provoking essays, literary editor Hildi Froese Tiessen introduces some prose by British Columbia writer Andreas Schroeder. An assortment of book reviews rounds out this issue.

Marlene Epp, *Editor*

Cover photo: Chris Kimmel, a relief worker with Vietnam Christian Service, and an unnamed Vietnamese woman, planting a watermelon seedling, 1966. Used by permission of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

Vietnam and the Burden of Mennonite History

Perry Bush

On the level of public perceptions at least, this is a good time to be a Mennonite. We have come to hold a public image today that is quite flattering: we are known as a people devoted to service and peace. These characteristics go well together; they complement each other; they garner Mennonites a level of quiet public acceptance and even affection.

Yet at times in our common history in North America these characteristics have not always gone together so neatly. Sometimes, both in the public mind and in Mennonite practice, the twin callings to engage in peace and in service have clashed. One of the most agonizing recent arenas where this occurred was the Mennonite experience in Vietnam. In the dilemma we faced there lies a fundamental dilemma for those of us committed to both peace and service today.

Because these images have carried so much weight in modern Mennonite history, it is worth reviewing them briefly. When our armies rest quietly in their camps, as they do at present, the public tends to forget about Mennonite peace commitments. But when our nations go to war, as they have done repeatedly in this century, those commitments have unleashed upon us a stream of public scorn. The epithets still echo: "slacker," "yellow," "coward." To US army officers in World War I, Mennonites were a "bovine" people, "intellectually inferior" and unworthy of assuming the responsibilities of full citizenship. "They remain a curious and alien survival of an old-world people, an anachronism," wrote one army colonel.[1] Later, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr was more sophisticated but more condescending in his put-downs. Mennonites had a real service to perform, he declared, in preserving an ethic of absolute love at times when nobody else did. Yet in doing so, he warned, Mennonites were socially irresponsible and irrelevant to the struggle for justice. Worse, in their willingness to accept the benefits of society but to do nothing to "maintain

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government and . . . relative social justice," Mennonites were parasites on the social order.[2] On the mass level, such scorn has been physically translated into embarrassing acts of public rejection: Mennonite homes and businesses have been daubed with yellow paint, Mennonite churches burned, individual Mennonites publicly taunted and ridiculed. For an acculturating people who have yearned for full acceptance into Canadian and American societies, this public rejection has hurt.

On the other hand, in times when Mennonites weren't aggravating the public with stiff-necked fidelity to their peace position, the public could look upon us with some favor, even admiration. By and large, we have been very good citizens: we go to church faithfully; we keep our houses trim and our lawns mowed; we raise good crops of corn and children; we live simple, productive lives. When disaster strikes, Mennonites appear shortly afterwards to help clean up the physical and human wreckage. It would be erroneous to suggest that the Mennonite compulsion to engage in human service stemmed only from this desire for pubic acceptance. I will readily admit, even celebrate, the fact that for many Mennonites the overarching push towards service has come from their desire to be faithful to the commands of the Gospel. But the other compulsion has been operative as well. Partly to overcome the scorn we receive in wartime, we have created a host of service ventures–Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Voluntary Service, Mennonite Mental Health Services–and we support them faithfully with our money and our time.[3] Indeed, emanating out of this desire to create a "moral equivalent of war," Mennonites have so intertwined service commitments into their church life and theology that these commitments have joined peacemaking as the twin pillars of modern Mennonite identity.[4]

And the public has noticed. For example: In 1989, *Harper's Magazine* enlisted writers to describe the scenario that might ensue if Jesus came back and appeared on the popular TV comedy show "Saturday Night Live." In his monologue, comedy writer Al Franken has Jesus express his personal preference for a chosen religious group. This Christ tells the audience that while he doesn't want to offend anyone, "I don't really care that much for the fundamentalists. If anyone's interested, I think the folks that come closest to getting the whole thing right are the Mennonites. And they're not even watching."[5] Repeatedly, the movers and shakers of popular culture have noticed

faithful Mennonite service and have commented favorably.[6] The Mennonites who materialize in the wake of tornadoes to clean up the mess do not appear as "yellow" or "bovine" at all. For an acculturating people who have yearned for full acceptance into their societies, this public approval has been more than welcome.

Nonetheless, the contrasting images have led to a fundamental problem in modern Mennonite life. Mennonites like receiving the good images, but the burden of their history requires them to periodically engage in behavior that invites the bad ones. In the days of their Anabaptist ancestors, this meant a refusal to swear oaths or baptize babies. In more recent times, the salient issue courting public distaste has been the prophetic Mennonite articulation of the peace position. When Mennonites have expressed their dissent from the warmaking of the state, it has increased their marginalization in a way that not even all their good service work could erase. In 1971, a Mennonite pastor told a young member of a Mennonite "peace team" that "these people have worked hard to be accepted as good community citizens. They don't want to hear about the peace issues you are raising, even if it is part of the faith they claim. It makes them different . . . ."[7] More to the point, consider the objections that one Mennonite raised in 1969 to the decision of his church body to affirm draft noncooperation as a legitimate Christian witness. Such a resolution, he cried, "may be harmful to our public image."[8]

There has been no era in recent Mennonite history in which these conflicting images were more potent, and in which Mennonites felt the burden of their history greater, than during the American war in Vietnam. Mennonite service workers in Vietnam confronted the dilemma head-on: How could they engage in sacrificial service to the suffering people all around them while somehow remaining faithful to the prophetic Mennonite calling to speak to issues of peace? Conditions in Vietnam accentuated this dilemma. There, Mennonites discovered that engaging in service to the victims of war contributed in an unintended but tangible way to the war aims of the forces producing these victims. The call to service and the imperatives of peacemaking clashed unmistakably, and a brief history of this conflict sheds light on the relative Mennonite commitments to peace and service today.

In Vietnam, as in so many other areas, Mennonite service work would proceed under the direction of the Mennonite Central Committee, which had begun at the end of World War I to direct efforts by North American Mennonites to help with famines in Mennonite areas of the Ukraine. By the end of World War II, MCC had developed into the church's major relief and service agency.[9] The leadership began exploring the possibility of service work in Indochina as early as 1950, but not until the termination of the French war in Vietnam in 1954 did the effort begin in earnest.[10] Accords reached in Geneva which ended that war set up two ostensibly temporary governments in Vietnam: a communist power in the north, headed by Ho Chi Minh, and a separate state in the south which would shortly hold a plebiscite to decide whether it would join with the northern state. Because the communist government of the north was perceived as anti-Catholic, within weeks after the Geneva agreement was signed in July 1954, peasant refugees from the north, mostly Catholic, began streaming into South Vietnam. Ultimately, they would number nearly a million.[11] That summer, MCC executive secretary Orie Miller was visiting MCC projects in Asia and stopped in Saigon. He sat at the airport and watched a torrent of refugees from the north arrive, at the rate of one plane every six minutes.[12] Their needs, Miller cabled MCC headquarters, were "desperate and accumulating."[13]

Having already received encouragement from US officials that voluntary agencies would be needed in Vietnam, MCC suddenly found the door flung wide open.[14] Vietnamese embassy officials quickly produced a visa for a 23-year-old MCC worker from California named Delbert Wiens; three other MCC workers were shifted over from Korea.[15] The team was charged to "develop a consistently MCC pattern of service."[16] They initially threw themselves into distributing food staple items furnished by the US government in an effort that officials, with an eye to the Christmas season, grandly named "Operation Reindeer."[17] As the initial crisis ebbed, MCC workers shifted their attention to the central highlands, in a location called Banmethuot; by November 1957, seven workers were assigned to a leprosarium there, including an MCC doctor, Willard Krabill.[18] The focus for their longer term work would soon build from these initial commitments and would be set at least through 1965. Throughout their first decade in Vietnam, MCC workers labored at: (1) distributing food and clothing to orphanages, and schools, and victims of

natural disasters; and (2) working in medical programs in the central highlands and later at Nha Trang on the coast.[19] By the early to mid-1960s the reasons propelling Mennonite relief in Vietnam closely resembled causes driving MCC efforts elsewhere. As a logical outgrowth of their growing identity as a people of Christian service, Mennonites moved to fill a huge human need. Jesus had called his disciples to provide a "cup of cold water" to the needy (Matt 10:42), a metaphor that became foundational in Mennonite service efforts. In Vietnam as elsewhere, Mennonites would provide that "cup of cold water" in the name of Christ. Admittedly, the president of South Vietnam, Ngo Diem, was initially suspicious of Mennonite pacifism. According to his secretary, Diem said, "I don't know whether we should approve this project or not. They are in some kind of trouble with the army at home. They refuse to join their army." In spite of this attitude, the mission workers generally received welcome and cooperation from Vietnamese government officials, who were eager to facilitate western aid to their country.[20]

From the very beginning of their work in Vietnam, however, Mennonites began to discover efforts being made to put a political spin on their simple acts of Christian service. Wiens pointed out to MCC administrators that refugees were helped very little by the caloric value of the "Operation Reindeer" packages, which consisted mostly of dairy items which the Vietnamese didn't eat (they tried to use the cheese as laundry soap).[21] Instead, the point of these packages seemed to be for propaganda.[22] Should MCC help with that task? Orie Miller replied that the agency faced this problem in nearly every country where it worked and had always come to the "right conclusions" about how to proceed.[23] Yet MCC would find it harder to arrive at these "right conclusions" in Vietnam. For, as MCC worker Eve Harshbarger wrote home in 1954, "this country is on the thin edge of war."[24]

The war, of course, came. With the blessing of US officials, President Diem never held the plebiscite stipulated in the Geneva Accords because if he had, the CIA reported, Ho Chi Minh probably would have won the election and South Vietnam would have joined the north as one united, communist country.[25] Neither did Diem allow free elections in his own country; in 1960, eighteen national Vietnamese officials called for such elections and Diem threw them all into jail. As a result, a full scale revolt began in South Vietnam, as armed guerrillas began organizing in the countryside to overthrow Diem's

government. Eager to obtain further US aid, Diem responded by labeling all his opponents communists or "Viet Cong" regardless of their political orientation. The strategy worked: US military aid, along with advisors, poured into Vietnam; by November 1963, 15,000 US military advisors were working with the South Vietnamese army.[26] The guerrillas sometimes began to identify all Americans working in Vietnam as their enemies.

      MCC painfully learned this reality in 1962. MCC worker Daniel Gerber had been assigned to maintenance tasks at the Banmethuot leprosarium. On May 30, as he and other staff prepared for their weekly prayer meeting, a group of about twelve armed guerrillas suddenly appeared at the hospital. They ransacked the offices for medicinal supplies, seized Gerber and two other missionaries, bound them up tightly, and led them away.[27] In spite of a half-dozen unconfirmed reports of their sighting, none of the three were ever returned.[28] In the same year, MCC lost ten tons of goods when guerrillas sabotaged a train.[29]

      Episodes such as these pushed voluntary agencies, MCC included, into an ever-closer relationship with US military forces. MCC workers arranged to have the forces deliver supplies to isolated areas and sometimes even caught rides themselves. Doug Hostetter discovered the risks of this in 1965. Waiting at the airport in Khe Sanh for a flight to the coast, he accepted a lift from a friendly US military helicopter crew, who casually mentioned they had to run a short "cover mission" on the way. Hostetter had no idea what a "cover mission" entailed until he climbed aboard, seated himself on boxes of .30-caliber machine gun ammunition, and took off. The Huey helicopter was guarding another larger craft assigned to deliver military supplies to a jungle outpost. Quickly it came under fire, and door gunners on either side of Hostetter, in a deafening staccato of fire, poured bullets down at enemy soldiers below. Though hit, the helicopter arrived at the coast with no injuries, and the shaken young pacifist mission worker disembarked, unhurt but with plenty of food for thought about what it meant to do relief work in the midst of a war zone.[30] Because of the further breakdown of the Vietnamese transportation and communication infrastructure in the face of guerilla attacks, MCC began using the US army postal service, and staffers purchased food and supplies at the US military commissary.[31] When the war drew close, at times MCC staff bunked down overnight at US military bases.[32] For their part, army doctors

began volunteering their off hours at the MCC medical clinic in Nha Trang.[33]

Even the ability to conduct relief efforts simply in the name of Christ met unprecedented challenges. When severe floods hit Vietnam in November 1964, MCC plunged into the effort to help distribute emergency supplies to isolated villagers. They were forced to rely on US military helicopters–and learned that the pilots were forbidden to deliver supplies to areas under Viet Cong control. In those localities, people simply starved. Worse, the South Vietnam government would drop bags of sand labelled as relief supplies into these areas. When guerrillas appeared in the open to get the bags, they were shelled.[34]

By the mid-1960s, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Mennonites in Vietnam to hold to their largely apolitical stance and simply assist the suffering in the name of Christ.[35] For the "cup of cold water" was increasingly imprinted with military symbols and fit neatly into military purposes that, in Mennonite minds, ran counter to the essence of the Gospel.

"Simply being an American and present in this war makes maintaining our integrity very difficult," MCC recognized in 1965,[36] and events of the coming years would intensify this problem. For, beginning about then, the war itself was Americanized. Realizing that the South Vietnamese could not stave off the communist insurgency by themselves, in 1964-5 Lyndon Johnson decided that Americans would have to win their independence for them. Within three years he had sent half-a-million US combat troops into a confused and brutal jungle warfare in which the enemy rarely appeared in the open and was often, tragically, confused with the peasant population. As a result, victory would be measured not by land taken but by body counts, a number that would escalate dramatically along with the war. Johnson also proceeded to launch the most devastating bombing campaign in human history. American bombers dropped horrible new anti-personnel weapons such as napalm that incinerated entire villages; they let loose massive pounds of chemical defoliants that rendered the lush countryside of Vietnam as lifeless and barren as a lunar landscape.[37]

Along with the escalation of the war came a matching one in non-military aid, and in 1965 the planners of war assiduously courted the assistance of US voluntary agencies.[38] In October, Willard Krabill represented MCC as part of delegation of voluntary agency and government representatives on a

tour of Vietnam. The purpose of the tour, funded by US officials, was clearly to demonstrate the human need and to solicit the help of the voluntary agencies.[39] The help soon arrived. By 1969 fifty foreign relief agencies were working there, maintaining over 700 expatriate and 1,200 paid Vietnamese staff, and with total operating budgets of about $43 million.[40] MCC joined with Lutheran World Relief and Church World Service in a coalition called "Vietnam Christian Service" (VNCS); MCC administered this joint program until it left in 1972. The program launched initiatives in various areas: efforts to expand refugee relief were intensified greatly; medical services were made available at a half-dozen new sites; new ventures were set up to provide social services and community development. By October 1967, VNCS had seventy overseas personnel at work and was planning to send more. Ultimately, they would total over a hundred.[41]

Even in the beginning of the escalation, these workers realized it was not simple altruism that led government officials to so eagerly solicit their help. As he toured Vietnam at the behest of the government, Willard Krabill repeatedly heard from US officials that "You Voluntary Agency people can do a lot to help us show the refugees that the US wants to help them . . . and that they should be on our side."[42] MCC administrator Paul Longacre recognized the fundamental issue at the same time. "Since the US is fighting a guerilla war," he wrote home in 1965, "the strategy is quite a bit more involved than simply the positioning and the firing of bullets. The US knows that the war, if it is to be won, must be won primarily on the psychological level. The minds of the people must be won over to the non-communist side. To do this a massive program of aid and assistance has been undertaken."[43] Newly arrived MCC worker Earl Martin heard the same point more bluntly from an army colonel, after he described the humanitarian mission of MCC's work and explained workers would be serving out of a sense of Christian love. The colonel replied, "You've told me what you do. Now let me tell you what I do. My job, to put it starkly, is to kill the enemy. The more Viet Cong we kill, the better. We are also here to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. And that is where you come in, with your work in the camps. We are glad you are part of the team."[44]

As MCC intensified its efforts in Vietnam in the later 1960s, the tensions and moral struggle that many workers felt would only intensify. The

fundamental question was inescapable: How, with a war raging all around them, would they express the twin Mennonite compulsions to offer Christian service and speak to the issues of peace? Let's now examine Mennonite service and peacemaking in the heart of the war in Vietnam.

On the one hand, the call to Christian service grew ever louder and more compelling. Workers labored to serve the needy in the very midst of a terribly cruel war, and the pall of suffering seemed omnipresent at times. Scenes they witnessed still cry out from the pages of thirty-year-old documents: the faces of refugees who had just lost everything when their village was destroyed; the mother whose children had just perished when errant bombs hit a refugee camp; the peasants who lost limbs to mines in rice paddies; the seemingly endless funeral processions.[45] One example might suffice. In 1973 VNCS worker Maynard Shirk described conditions at a huge refugee camp near Kontum, in the region of Plieku. To prevent the Viet Cong from gaining recruits and assistance from the peasants, the South Vietnamese army was in the process of forcibly relocating them, most of them Montagnard tribes people, to this barren camp. By April, 17,000 people had been sent there without adequate tents or sanitation, and with nothing to do. Babies had begun to die of malnutrition. Worse, Viet Cong guerillas had recently appeared at the site, ordering the peasants to return to their village or be killed. The villagers made preparations to do so but then were forbidden by the South Vietnamese government, which warned them they would be punished if they left. Meanwhile, reported Shirk, "the morgue at the military hosp(ital) appears quite a busy place. They have now set up a tent beside the main building to help handle the heavy traffic in coffins."[46]

On the other hand, while MCC ably ministered to the immediate crises of the war's victims, as long as the war raged it was difficult to try to solve their longer term needs. The war produced plenty of such victims; the nation was awash with refugees. But MCC workers repeatedly noticed that, through the efforts of outsiders–those of the many voluntary agencies were considerably overshadowed by the larger energies of the US Agency for International Development (AID) and military "civic action" teams–the short term necessities of food, clothing, and shelter were readily supplied to most people who needed them.[47] While in some places people starved, in other locales so

much material aid was available that it seemed to foster dependency among the Vietnamese. A chieftain of a newly relocated village openly admitted that "I can get as much as I ask for." To the shocked MCC workers, such people were "professional refugees."[48] MCC's goods were of such high quality that, in at least one instance, staffers discovered US officials were distributing them as rewards for hamlet chiefs who obeyed political/military directives.[49]

As the war intensified, MCC's efforts to dispense these goods increasingly relied on military transport. Such efforts facilitated the tendency by many Vietnamese to identify VNCS personnel with the US military effort. With so many Americans, military and civilian, working at relief, many Vietnamese simply disbelieved the explanations by VNCS workers that their service arose only out of a sense of obedience to religious principles. After six years of working and living in Quang Ngai, for instance, Earl Martin was stunned to learn from his Vietnamese friends that only after he elected to stay with them after the US withdrawal did they finally believe he was not a CIA agent.[50] Other VNCS workers began to suspect that the very presence of North Americans in their midst endangered the lives of their Vietnamese friends and co-workers.[51]

Admittedly, MCC's work in Vietnam ranged far beyond material aid and refugee relief. By 1970 the annual report on the projects pointed to strong efforts in medical services at three different sites, five community social service centers in Saigon, initiatives in home reconstruction, literacy classes, agricultural extension, handicraft production, and school lunch programs.[52] Dozens of Vietnam Christian Service workers provided a remarkable, admirable record of costly and sacrificial service, rendered at some risk of their lives. Nevertheless, by the late 1960s even as sensitive and astute an administrator as Paul Longacre, who had headed MCC's efforts in Vietnam for three years in the early 1960s and then did the same from Akron, Pennsylvania through the rest of the decade, recognized the limitations facing the agency's service. "Every worker who has worked in Vietnam and who has exercised some sensitivity to the Vietnamese people and problems there has come home frustrated," Longacre conceded in 1972. "Most have said they would not be willing to go back unless the situation saw some changes. Because of the war, the Vietnamese people are not willing to become deeply involved in community development projects," he explained. "They can only give

marginal commitment to any project."[53] If sincere outsiders really wanted to help the Vietnamese and to minister to them in any but the most immediate way, perhaps they would need to stop the war.

MCC certainly included speaking to the ways of peace as an integral part of its purpose in Vietnam. The statement of the objectives and philosophy of VNCS included a call "to witness to the cross of Christ and to the reconciling power of love in the midst of violence, fear, hate and despair." Periodically, as in 1966, MCC chiefs expressed their "concern for the peace witness of the relief program," and noted the MCC mandate to unequivocally express "a moral witness regarding the wrongness of this war."[54] Throughout their service, MCC workers moved numerous times to separate themselves from military identification and agendas, and to express their peace concerns. In 1967, for example, MCC turned down an offer from US AID for a large-scale refugee feeding program (the government would furnish the goods for MCC distribution). This program would, MCC felt, overly compromise the integrity and identity of its witness.[55] For a similar reason, though the decision displeased US officials, in the early 1960s MCC refused to display the handclasp symbol of US AID on goods it distributed.[56]

On several crucial occasions, MCC's leadership in Vietnam likewise stood up to US military and diplomatic officials who had begun in 1967 to pressure voluntary agencies into a role more supportive of US policy.[57] For MCC, the pressure was most noticeably directed against the activities of VNCS worker Doug Hostetter, who had been assigned to community development and education in the up-country town of Tam Ky. Hostetter had arrived in 1966, fresh from completing his bachelor's degree at Eastern Mennonite College and determined to express a Mennonite peace concern. He threw himself into language study and soon became fluent in Vietnamese. He befriended a number of Vietnamese, associated almost exclusively with them rather than with US AID or military officials, and refused to rely on US authorities for security. When Viet Cong bombs hit Tam Ky, he did not take refuge in the US military compound.[58] That is, in line with VNCS objectives, he tried to remain politically neutral in regards to the war and to avoid too close identification with US officials. Quietly he aided four US army deserters trying to leave the war;[59] publicly he assumed a vocal antiwar posture to his Vietnamese friends, to US military officials, and ultimately to the US press.[60]

When a new colonel named Bryerton assumed command of US military forces in the area in the spring of 1967, trouble quickly ensued. Hostetter introduced himself to the colonel upon his arrival to explain VNCS's work. When Bryerton demanded whether he supported US military policies and Hostetter replied he did not, Bryerton declared that no Americans should be working in Vietnam unless they did; within the next several months, he and Hostetter had several public, angry confrontations. In August 1967, the colonel asked VNCS to transfer Hostetter out of Tam Ky, and the US ambassador in Danang declared Hostetter "persona non grata" in the area.[61]

MCC's in-country leadership in Saigon was forced to act. They temporarily removed Hostetter from Tam Ky but reassigned him there several months later, where he served out the remainder of his service term. They also informed US officials that VNCS officials, not the government, would determine where they would place their personnel. In September 1967, along with representatives of four other voluntary agencies, MCC leader Paul Leatherman met with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to protest the increasing pressure all the agencies were feeling to get on the American "team." Leatherman admitted to Bunker that, in line with MCC's desire to offer impartial service to the needy, workers did not always know the political positions of those they helped. Bunker informed him that "if you're helping VC, that is treason. You know the penalty for treason." Leatherman replied that "there is no treason in the church."[62]

On many occasions in the late 1960s and early '70s, MCC engaged in activities that were what people like Bunker would label treason: they attempted to reach both the Viet Cong and the government of North Vietnam with a message of peace and reconciliation, and also with monies for medical relief. At four separate times MCC representatives Atlee Beechy and Doug Hostetter contacted officials from these governments; Beechy and Hostetter both visited North Vietnam, bringing over a hundred thousand dollars for the medical relief of people that their own government branded as "enemies."[63]

Meanwhile, MCC's desire to more freely engage in reconciling peace work was one of the rationales compelling its withdrawal from the cooperative arrangement of Vietnam Christian Service in 1972.[64] Once this change was effected and as the war slowly drew to its painful and bloody conclusion, MCC could take up more of this kind of explicit reconciling work: intervention

on behalf of political prisoners, demolitions removal, and the like.[65] By the late 1960s, many VNCS workers were sending antiwar protest letters and petitions home for publication in church and national newspapers.[66] Indeed, the Mennonite presence in Vietnam became crucially important in the antiwar movement beginning to take on form and power in Mennonite churches back home. Partly due to reports received from workers, MCC's Peace Section began in 1965 to articulate a public dissent against the war.[67] MCC workers sent a flood of firsthand reporting about the evils of the war back to the denominational press,[68] while returning VNCS veterans such as Doug Hostetter, Earl and Pat Hostetter-Martin, and Jonathan Lind assumed important roles in the burgeoning peace movement on Mennonite college campuses.[69] Within a year after returning from Vietnam in 1967, Atlee Beechy estimated that he had spoken against the war to 150 churches, clubs, and other groups.[70]

Yet in the face of the terrible carnage of the war, and in light of the contributions by the voluntary agencies to the forces bringing that destruction, these voices on behalf of peace appear as somewhat muted, inadequate. MCC's ready and continued use of US military facilities, transportation, commissary privileges, and post office until late in its period in Vietnam certainly contributed to the peasants' inability to distinguish between Mennonites and the US military; so did the distribution of governmental surplus goods which carried political restrictions banning their allocation in communist nations. Not until 1970 did MCC decide to discontinue passing out such goods.[71] Volunteers were free to express their opposition to the war–but only as long as they directed their dissent back home and not to South Vietnamese government officials with whom MCC had to contract its work.[72] While this might have demonstrated a prophetic willingness to minister impartially to both sides in the conflict, not until late in the war did MCC explicitly move to extend aid to those the US government defined as the "enemy." MCC moved on the diplomatic level to contact the Viet Cong but prohibited its volunteers in the field from doing so.[73] As he surveyed refugee needs with US officials in 1965, Willard Krabill saw that sending relief into Viet Cong areas "would not be tolerated."[74] More surprisingly, MCC neglected to support the few Vietnamese Christians it encountered who faced prison terms for their conscientious objection.[75]

To be sure, MCC faced a number of constraints on its ability to offer a prophetic witness against the war as part of its activity. In 1967, William Keeney toured VNCS work at the behest of MCC's Peace Section, and his report encapsulated these constraints perfectly. First, a prophetic witness against the war would cause great tensions in relationships MCC valued with the evangelical, pro-war Tin Lanh church, the indigenous protestant church founded by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Second, such a witness would also undermine the VNCS coalition's cooperative efforts. Many VNCS workers were not Mennonites and not pacifists, and would be uncomfortable with more explicit Mennonite peacemaking efforts. But perhaps most telling of all, Keeney noted that "too direct an attack on American policy would jeopardize the program of service."[76] More than anything else, the compulsion to keep serving the suffering was what kept Mennonites from going further with their peace witness.[77]

As an example of the road MCC chose not to take, consider two different approaches to ministering to South Vietnamese political prisoners. In 1966, MCC sent a Swiss doctor, Alfred Stoffel, to work at Con Son Island, one of South Vietnam's major facilities for holding those judged guilty of political offenses. The Island held an inmate population of 3,600 yet had not a single doctor. Here was a great chance, MCC administrators urged, to minister to those in need without reference to their political orientation.[78] Stoffel had worked in Africa and had aided the sick under tough conditions, and he tore into the work with great enthusiasm. Yet within six months, he was reporting back furtive and guarded references to "many things I see and hear which are extremely grim" which "I am not free to talk about," but which made him "often depressed when I leave these places of concentrated suffering." Patients lay on the floor and he had to crawl around to examine them; "work is difficult there because of lack of drugs, equipment, facilities, nursing and also because sometimes the prison wardens are reluctant to let me do my duty. It is inevitable of course that I see things which would better be hidden." He knew he fought "a rather helpless war against negligence and corruption . . . ."[79] In November 1967, fearing for his personal safety, Stoffel abruptly fled the prison and left Vietnam.[80]

In accordance with his wishes, MCC said nothing about Stoffel or the conditions at Con Son Island. It remained for longtime Vietnam voluntary

agency leader Don Luce to accomplish what MCC pointedly refused to do. In 1970, Luce led two US congressmen and an aide to the island, where he showed them the horrific conditions in which the prisoners were kept; the aide snapped some photographs. The result? Any immediate aid to inmates by outsiders ceased, and the South Vietnamese government expelled Luce from the country.[81] But at about the same time as exposing Vietnam's infamous "tiger cages," Luce aroused the indignation and horror of the world. The issue became a cause célèbre in the peace movement, which not long afterwards succeeded in ending US involvement in the war.

In fairness, the muting of MCC's prophetic voice against the war occurred for pragmatic reasons: as frustrating and limited as their service was, MCC administrators would not engage in political dissent that would endanger its continuance. Luce's old agency, International Voluntary Services (IVS), provided a compelling example of what could happen to an outfit which spoke out too strongly. Throughout the later 1960s, IVS had been assuming an increasingly radical antiwar stance, which it did not hide from South Vietnamese officials. In 1971 they refused to renew its contract and expelled it from the country. Whatever assistance that agency could offer to the Vietnamese came to an abrupt end.[82] Even so, in retrospect, there might have been more room for MCC to raise its prophetic voice against the war than it realized or acted upon. Other groups managed to speak out more directly, but unlike IVS were not ultimately expelled from the country. Upon the close of her service assignment in 1970, Grace Kleinbach complained of "an *oversensitivity* (almost phobia)" [emphasis hers] "of VNCS regarding words or actions by members which might result in a reprimand by the [government of Vietnam] or the US Military." While the official excuse of VNCS leaders was "fear of extradition," she noted that other organizations such as the Quakers had been "far more outspoken" and had not "forfeited privileges for their stands of courage."[83]

MCC administrators instead insisted it was important to continue to offer a cup of cold water to those who suffered even when the cup itself contributed, indirectly, to the continuation of their suffering. The decision came accompanied by a sense of moral anguish that haunted scores of mission workers in Vietnam. As he decided to leave his work, VNCS staffer Tom Spicher voiced it well. He asked simply, "Can one both be opposed to the

bombing and help to feed the refugees it creates?"[84] MCC made its choice. Even while stressing the need for a prophetic voice against the war, Atlee Beechy argued that "Christians have been commissioned, commanded to be the compassionate community . . . to stand beside the dislocated, the disinherited, disrupted and despairing . . . we must be in Vietnam even if no one responds to the message in any formal or direct way, even if we are not gratefully received, or even if we are misunderstood and hated!" To leave Vietnam in the face of this massive human suffering, he said, would invite "spiritual death."[85]

Given the contours of Mennonite history and theology, MCC's decision to prefer service work to peacemaking in Vietnam was perfectly understandable. After decades of rapid acculturation, by the 1960s Mennonites were just beginning to articulate political concerns on behalf of other people who no longer lived beyond the boundaries of isolated Mennonite communities. Moreover, the Mennonites' ability to articulate much of a prophetic voice was substantially hampered by profound conservatism in their ranks, which saw such political advocacy as violating a traditional two-kingdom theology that stressed church-state separation.[86]

Thirty years later, we do not face the same constraints on our activism. One of the major reasons is, of course, *because of* the Mennonite witness in Vietnam that for a decade or more pushed the cutting edge of the Mennonite witness to the state.[87] In conclusion, however, it may be enough to suggest that the agony of Mennonites to express a message of peace in the midst of war offers a pointed lesson for a later generation. Mennonites have fashioned a new identity as a people of service and of peace. In Vietnam, though, those two characterizations diverged, even ran counter to each other. This struggle is not so far removed from us today. We appreciate the legitimation and public status that our service activities provide for us. Yet peace issues still cut against that appreciation; the prophetic calling still detracts from it; the call for peace and justice coming down to us from our history still promises to remove this basis for acceptance. To some extent, Mennonite history is a burden, one we are still reluctant to fully take up.

For example, we are quite happy to designate the Washington Office or the Peace Section to articulate our dissent against genocide in the Balkans

or Iraq. Those agencies even receive a small chunk of our church budgets to witness on our behalf. We rejoice in the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams. Yet is that enough? Over the past five years, half a million children have died in Iraq as a direct result of the policies of the governments of the US and Canada. There has been some proper Christian protest against this killing expressed recently in Mennonite college towns, but very little of it has risen up from the churches.[88]

In the very least, reviewing the Mennonite experience in Vietnam ought to spark some newer reflections about the kind of burdens that a prophetic Mennonite past might ask us to carry today. Maybe this burden means not always being nice. Maybe it means getting in the way. Maybe remaining faithful to the burden of Mennonite history means leaving our paralysis induced by our recognition of the ambiguities of power, and confronting those who make war or perpetuate injustice.

Many years ago as their respective nations entered World War II, North American Mennonites worried about what this turn would mean for them. To avoid any kind of conflict between their peace commitments and their nations' efforts at total war, they worked hard to make an arrangement with the state. As it turned out, the deal worked out nicely for both sides. Mennonites entered isolated camps to dig fire trails and fight fires, and did admirable service with the mentally ill. They even paid for the privilege. For their part, the respective governments of Canada and the US did not draft young Mennonite men into the army or whip up mob action against Mennonite communities. The state was happy to have this body of potential dissenters safely tucked away and quiet. Indeed, Reinhold Niebuhr even celebrated Mennonites as a gentle people who would preserve an ethic of absolute love at a time when everyone else cast it aside. They did not need to worry about their safety or survival. All a people of peace had to do was stay in their place.

But would they? Will they? More than half a century later, these questions still linger.

Notes

[1] These quotes are taken from Gerlof Homan, *American Mennonites in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 136, 101; and James Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989), 238.

[2] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Japan and the Christian Conscience," *Christian Century* LIV (November 10, 1937): 1391.

[3] On the construction of such service ventures as an expression of Mennonite aspirations to full citizenship, see James Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Revitalization in the Wake of World War I," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LX (January 1986): 15-30; Juhnke, "Mennonite Benevolence and Civic Identity: the Post-War Compromise," *Mennonite Life* 25 (January 1970): 34-7. On this arrangement in the mid-century decades and later, see chapter six of Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[4] Beulah Stauffer Hostetler has noted that as Mennonites dropped forms of cultural separation, they came up with new forms of commonality which expressed key values. "Separation from the world," she declared, "was being expressed through peace and service programs rather than in prescribed nonconformity . . . ." See Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 293.

[5] Al Franken, "'Saturday Night Live' Monologue," *Harper's Magazine* 278 (April 1989): 50.

[6] For other examples, see the laudatory comments of Dorothy Thompson, "Queer People," in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1952, reprinted in the *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* L (July 1989): 4-5; and Martin Marty, "On 'Being Prophetic'," *Christian Century* 97 (May 14, 1980): 559.

[7] "Peace Section–1971," Report of the Peace Section in the *1971 MCC Workbook*, p. B-4, IX-5-2, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen College, Goshen, IN (hereafter abbreviated as AMC).

[8] Ralph Kauffman, Letter to the Editor, *The Mennonite* 84 (November 18, 1969): 699.

[9] For histories of MCC, see John Unruh, *In the Name of Christ: A History of Mennonite Central Committee and its Service, 1920-1951* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1952); Robert Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, A Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988).

[10] On early efforts, see MCC Executive Committee Minutes, October 6, 1950, p. 3 and December 2, 1950, p. 8, both in MCC Executive Committee Minutes and Reports, IX-5-1, Box 2, AMC.

[11] George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975,* 2nd. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 46; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (NY: Viking Press, 1983), 222.

[12] Orie O. Miller trip diary, June 2 - September 10, 1954, p. 14, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Miller, Orie O., Commissioner trip, 1954," AMC.

[13] Miller to Akron, August 17, 1954, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Miller, Orie O., Commissioner trip, 1954," AMC.

[14] William T. Snyder to Orie O. Miller, June 23, 1954 and July 21, 1954, both in MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Miller, Orie O., Commissioner Trip, 1954," AMC. See Luke S. Martin, "An Evaluation of a Generation of Mennonite Mission, Service and Peacemaking in Vietnam, 1954-1976," n.p., MCC/EMBMC, July 1977, 6-7.

[15] Wiens to Byler, November 11, 1954, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Wiens, Delbert,"

AMC; MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, "The 1955 Assignment and Planning," December 29-30, 1954, MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 3, AMC.

[16] MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, "Memo of Understanding: Vietnam Unit," August 16, 1954, with Executive Committee minutes of September 23, 1954, MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 3, AMC.

[17] J.N. Byler to Delbert Wiens, September 24, 1954; Wiens to Byler, October 7, 1954; both in MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Wiens, Delbert," AMC.

[18] L. Martin, 8. MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, August 29, 1956, p. 5, MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 3, AMC.

[19] "Analysis and Proposals for Expanded Program in Vietnam," Exhibit 7 to MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, May 22, 1965, MCC Executive Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 3, AMC; Martin, 17.

[20] William T. Snyder to Orie O. Miller, August 6, 1954, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, Miller, Orie O., Commissioner Trip, 1954," AMC. Despite personal assurances about Mennonite good will he received from Wiens, Diem was suspicious of Mennonite pacifism and for a while held up official approval for the first MCC medical project in 1956. See Wiens to Miller, August 25, 1956, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Indochina Office, Dec-Aug, 1956," AMC. Diem's wariness was exacerbated by the growing opposition from pacifist Buddhist sects at home.

[21] Wiens to Byler, October 13, 1954, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Wiens, Delbert,"; Wiens to Byler, November 25 and December 28, 1954, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Indo-China Office, 1955," AMC.

[22] Wiens to Byler, February 5, 1955, and Wiens to Miller, Snyder and Byler, March 30, 1955, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Indo-China Office, 1955," AMC.

[23] Miller to Wiens, April 11, 1955, MCC Correspondence, IX6-3, "Indo-China Office, 1955," AMC.

[24] Eve Harshbarger, "November, 1954 Activity Report," MCC Correspondence, IX 6-3, "Wiens, Delbert," AMC.

[25] Herring, *America's Longest War*, 55.

[26] Stephen Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938,* 4th ed. (New York: Penguin, 1985), 147, 203-204, 208.

[27] T. G. Mangham to R.M. Chrisman, June 2, 1962, MCC Correspondence, "Vietnam Office, 1962," AMC.

[28] For a summary of these reports, see Jack Foley, "A Family's Tortuous Search to Find Father," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 17, 1985.

[29] L. Martin, 19.

[30] "Portrait: Doug Hostetter," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* (September/October, 1992): 2; Doug Hostetter diary entry September 27, 1966, Hist. Mss I-719, Douglas Hostetter papers, Box 1, File 7, AMC.

[31] On use of the APO, see Martin, 25. On the use of–and strong MCC efforts to retain–commissary privileges, see Paul Longacre to Robert Miller, December 29, 1965, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1966," AMC; and Peace Section report to MCC Executive Committee meeting, December 16-17, 1966, MCC Executive Committee Meeting

Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC. Miller pointed out that in most cases, the closest association that MCC workers had was with US AID officials more than military forces. Certainly on some levels MCC objected to these close ties. Even if we just told our workers not to use the commissary, Paul Longacre realized, it would be "difficult to keep our people from using it anyway without approval." See Longacre to Robert Miller, December 29, 1965, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1966," AMC. Nonetheless, MCC tried to curtail commissary use. In "Vietnam Christian Service Guidelines" issued in 1968, administrators in Akron tried to prohibit over-dependence by the workers on the US military commissary, transportation and the like; guidelines discouraged fraternization with US military forces and urged workers to live and associate with the Vietnamese. See Longacre, "Vietnam Christian Service Guidelines," Exhibit 5 to MCC Executive Committee meeting, May 23, 1968, MCC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC. These guidelines were prescriptive rather than descriptive. They were hotly rejected, as meddling by distant administrators, by VNCS workers in country. See: "Unit Meeting, Pleiku, VNCS," July 30, 1968; "Minutes of the Meeting to Discuss VNCS Guidelines," August 4, 1968; Bill Rose to Paul Leatherman, June 30, 1968; Doug Hostetter to Paul (Leatherman), August 6, 1968; Jeanne Armstrong, "Response to VNCS Guidelines," August 6, 1968; all in MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, April, 1968," AMC.

[32] L. Martin, 20.

[33] Rudolph Lichti, "Report from Vietnam on MCC and US military Cooperation in Nha Trang Hospital Program," September 19, 1962, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1962," AMC.

[34] Paul Longacre to Wilbert Shenk, November 23 and December 1, 1964, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1964" and "Vietnam Office, 1965," AMC.

[35] See L. Martin, 91.

[36] "Analysis and Proposals for Expanded Program in Vietnam," Exhibit 7 to MCC Executive Committee meeting, May 22, 1965, MCC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC.

[37] On the Americanization of the war and the increased bombing, see Herring, *The Longest War*, 108-139, 150-52; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 395-426.

[38] For examples of this solicitation, see Paul Longacre to Robert Miller and John Hostetler, August 9, 1965, and Miller to Longacre, August 19, 1965, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1965," AMC. Also David Leaman, "Politicized Service and Teamwork Tensions: Mennonite Central Committee in Vietnam, 1966-1969," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXXI (October 1997): 548.

[39] "Report on Vietnamese Refugees and Displaced Persons by a Delegation From The American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service," included with MCC Executive Meeting minutes of December 10-11, 1965, with MCC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC.

[40] Robert W. Miller, "The Role and Contribution of Foreign Voluntary Agencies in South Vietnam, 1966-1971," M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1972, 6.

[41] On the birth of VNCS, see Midge Austin Meinertz, ed., *Vietnam Christian Service: Witness in Anguish* (New York: Church World Service, 1976), 17-28. On the program expansion, see

MCC Executive Committee Minutes, December 10-11, 1965, pp.8-10, MCC Executive Committee Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC; and Douglas R. Beane, "Vietnam Christian Service: a Partial Historical Survey," in Meinertz, ed., *Witness in Anguish*, 31. For totals, see Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1994), 127.

[42] Willard Krabill, "Report of MCC Representative on the Vietnam Voluntary Agency Relief Team, October 16-28, 1965: Summary Observations," p. 2, included with MCC Executive Meeting minutes of December 10-11, 1965, with MCC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC.

[43] Paul Longacre, "Occasional Bulletin, No. 3, Clarification of Issue: US Government–MCC Relationships," March, 1965, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1965," AMC. Longacre understood how the work of voluntary agencies contributed to this objective. Johnson realized it was important to "rally the people at home, the rear guard . . . . So by MCC-CWS rallying the Protestant ranks for the welfare needs in Vietnam they will be rallying supporters to the government's cause here." See Longacre to Robert Miller, October 6, 1965, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1965," AMC.

[44] Quoted in Leaman, "Politicized Service . . . . ", 544.

[45] Instances of this are legion in MCC's Vietnam documents. For some specific examples from either end of MCC's service in Vietnam, see Delbert Wiens, "Monthly Report, September 3, 1954," MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Wiens, Delbert," AMC; Kevin Byrne to Mother and Father, July 27, 1970, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1970" AMC; and Kurt Sawatsky, "Monthly Unit Report, Ban-Me-Thuot," May, 1972, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Activity Reports, 1972."

[46] Maynard Shirk, "Occasional Report," April 4, 1973, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, Vietnam Activity Reports, 1973," AMC.

[47] For examples see: Wiens to Byler and Snyder, December 28, 1954 and Wiens to Miller, Snyder and Byler, March 30, 1955, Willard Krabill to Byler, November 12, 1955; all three in MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Indochina Office, 1955," AMC; "Overseas Services Report to MCC Executive Committee," September 18, 1985, MCC Executive Committee Minutes, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC; Gayle Preheim, "PAX Service Report: The Refugee of the Vietnam War," May 14, 1967, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Activity Reports, May, 1967," AMC.

[48] Preheim, "PAX Service Report: The Refugee of the Vietnam War," 2.

[49] Longacre, "Clarification of Issues, US Government–MCC Relationships," 2.

[50] Earl Martin, *Reaching the Other Side* (NY: Crown Publishers, 1978), 13.

[51] Gayle Preheim, "VNCS Withdrawal from Quang Tri Province," February 25, 1968, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1968," AMC.

[52] Robert Miller, "Vietnam," 1970 MCC Workbook, pp.A-13–A-17, "MCC Annual Reports, 1968-74," IX-5-2, Box 2, AMC.

[53] Longacre to Snyder, "Vietnam Planning," August 11, 1972, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1972," AMC.

[54] "Vietnam Christian Service Objectives and Philosophy," and Action VIII in minutes of Peace Section Executive Committee, both in MCC Executive Committee Minutes April 12-

13, 1966, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC.

[55] L. Martin, 26, 101.

[56] *Ibid.*, 101.

[57] For evidence of this pressure, see Paul Leatherman to Paul Longacre, October 18, 1967, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Leatherman, Paul, August, 1967," AMC.

[58] Douglas Hostetter, "Confidential Report," August 14, 1967, Hist. Mss. I-719, Douglas Hostetter Papers, Box 1, File 31, AMC; Hostetter Journal, entries January 17, February 17, 1967, Hostetter Papers, Box 1, File 7; Gerald Aakers, "Field Trip to Quang Ngai and Tam Ky," August 2-4, 1967, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office June, 1968," AMC.

[59] Doug Hostetter to "Folks," September 9, 1968, Hist Mss I-719, Hostetter Papers, Box 1, File 32, AMC.

[60] On Hostetter's adept usage of press contacts, see Paul Longacre to Doug Hostetter, September 12, 1967, and Hostetter to "Dear Folks," September 3, 1967, both in Hist Mss I-719, Hostetter Papers, Box 1, File 31, AMC.

[61] Hostetter, "Confidential report"; Aaker, "Field trip to Quang Ngai and Tam Ky,"; L. Martin, 102. Also, see Leaman, "Politicized Service . . . ," 555-57.

[62] L. Martin, 102. Leaman reads this confrontation quite differently; see "Politicized Service . . . ," 558.

[63] *Ibid.*, 110-111.

[64] William T. Snyder to Boyd Lowry, April 29, 1971, Exhibit 6 to MCC Executive Committee Meeting May 18-19, 1971, IX-5-1, Box 6, AMC.

[65] L. Martin, 91-3.

[66] For examples, see "Letter from Vietnam to American Christians," *Gospel Herald* 61 (January 16, 1968): 65-6; John Howard et al. to Richard Nixon, with Robert Miller to Boyd Lowry, May 18, 1970, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Miller, Robert W," AMC; Wilf Allen et al. to "Dear Friends," September, 1969, Ronald Partridge et al. to "Mr. President," October 15, 1969, both in MCC Correspondence, "Vietnam Office, 1969," AMC.

[67] Minutes of the Peace Section Executive Committee meeting, May 8, 1964, Peace Section Minutes and Reports, IX-7-8, Box 3, AMC. In July 1966, MCC sent a delegation to the White House to protest the war. Their letter described the nature and extent of Mennonite relief efforts in Vietnam and then outlined the contradictions that MCC had come to realize enveloped its work in Vietnam. "The time has come," the letter read, "when we can no longer maintain faith with the homeless, the hungry, the orphaned and the wounded to whom we minister unless we speak out as clearly as we can against this savage war in which our country is engaged"; see C.N. Hostetter and William T. Snyder to The President, July 11, 1966, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Hostetter, C.N.," AMC.

[68] For examples, see: Sam Hope, "Personal Reflections on our Presence in Vietnam," *Gospel Herald* 62 (April 8, 1969): 320-22; Kevin Byrne, "Significantly Involved," *Gospel Herald* 64 (January 12, 1971): 32; Earl and Pat Martin, "Who are You Kidding, Brother?" *Gospel Herald* 62 (October 28, 1969): 938; Max Ediger, "Handles for Lending a Hand," *The Mennonite* 88 (July 10, 1973): 440; Earl Martin, "Bombs Wait for Viet Farmers," *Gospel Herald* 66 (July 31, 1973): 589; Margaret Fast, "A Doctor in Vietnam," *Mennonite Mirror* 3 (November 1973): 9-10.

[69] On this Mennonite movement against the war, see Perry Bush, "Drawing the Line: Mennonites, the State and Social Change, 1935-1973," Ph.D. Diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 1990, 243-54, 262-71.

[70] L. Martin, 90.

[71] "Report on VNCS Material Aid," March 27, 1970, MCC Data Files, IX-12, #5, "Vietnam Christian Service, 1970," AMC; Martin, 101.

[72] Leaman, "Politicized Service . . . ," 566.

[73] For example, see Paul Leatherman to Doug Hostetter, January 12, 1968, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Leatherman, Paul, 1968," AMC.

[74] Krabill, "Report on Vietnamese Refugees and Displaced Persons . . . Summary Observations," 2.

[75] L. Martin, 97.

[76] William Keeney, "Report to the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section: Trip to Vietnam, May 1-16, 1967," Exhibit 6 with MCC Executive Committee Minutes, May 26, 1967, IX-5-1, Box 5, AMC. Likewise, Atlee Beechy signaled his own enthusiasm for more aggressive Mennonite peacemaking, but doubted whether the present environment would permit it. See Atlee Beechy to Edgar Metzler, May 10, 1966, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Beechy, Atlee, 1966," AMC.

[77] See Leaman, "Politicized Service . . . ," 566-67.

[78] Luke Martin, "Con Son Island Trip Report," October 8-11, 1966; Leatherman to Miller, January 4, 1967; both in MCC Correspondence, "Leatherman, Paul, 1967," AMC.

[79] Alfred Stoffel to "Director Vietnam Christian Service," Monthly Reports, April, May, and October 1967, all in MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Activity Reports, 1967," AMC.

[80] Leatherman to Longacre, November 9, 1967, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Leatherman, Paul, August, 1967," AMC.

[81] Gloria Emerson, "U.S. Writer Told to Leave Vietnam," *New York Times*, April 28, 1971; "Don Luce's Last Letter from Vietnam," April 27, 1971, Hostetter papers, I-719, Box 5, File 33, AMC. The aide was future US Senator Tom Harkin.

[82] On the expulsion of IVS from Vietnam see Miller, "The Role and Contribution . . ." 48-54; Jim Linn, "An Analysis of the Termination of IVS in Viet Nam," *IVS Reporter*, December 1971, 2-4.

[83] Grace Kleinbach, termination report, July 20, 1970, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1970," AMC.

[84] Tom Spicher to Bob Miller, May 1, 1972, MCC Correspondence, IX-6-3, "Vietnam Office, 1972," AMC.

[85] Atlee Beechy, "Our Vietnam Witness," *Gospel Herald* 60 (February 21, 1967): 145; "spiritual death" in Leaman, "Politicized Service . . . ," 567.

[86] See chapters 6-8 of my book *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[87] I am indebted to Earl Martin for this point.

[88] Rich Preheim, "Mobilization against Iraqi war slow in coming," *The Mennonite* 1 (February 24, 1998): 4.

The General versus the Particular: Exploring Assumptions in 20th-Century Mennonite Theologizing

J. Denny Weaver[1]

Introduction

At least since the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Mennonites have been talking seriously about theology. But they did not always call it theology–a lot of theologizing for Mennonite churches went on under the guise of expounding Bible doctrines or describing what sixteenth-century Anabaptists believed. Perhaps only in the last two decades have we started to become comfortable talking about theology as theology. And it is a quite recent development to say we are searching for a theology that will serve specifically the modern Mennonite churches or the modern peace church.

This essay is a part of that quest. The argument proceeds on the basis of four assertions about Mennonite theologizing in this century. As a response to these assertions, I make a specific suggestion for refocusing and restructuring the quest for a systematic theology that will serve the modern peace church. While the historical subjects come from the Mennonite tradition, the conclusion that I draw applies to the Brethren as a peace church equally as much as to Mennonites.

Two assertions

Assertion I: *For most of their theologizing in the twentieth century, Mennonites have assumed that their theology was built on a larger or broader theological entity located outside the Mennonite tradition.*

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This larger theological entity contained formulations of the classic foundational doctrines of Christian theology, including but not limited to formulations of the Trinity, Christology, and atonement. As such, they comprised a standard program, a theology-in-general or Christianity-as-such, that existed independent of particular historical contexts and denominations. These doctrines were assumed to be suited for and accepted by all right-thinking Christians. This assumption was paralleled in other denominations. A given writer's relationship to the standard program was a matter of the difference between truth or orthodoxy and heresy. To deviate from or to be outside the standard theology-in-general was to be unorthodox or even heretical, whether Arius in the fourth century, those in the sixteenth century who refused to acknowledge the Lutheran and Reformed creeds, or early twentieth-century modernists who claimed the right to reject classic doctrines which no longer made sense.

It was simply assumed that Mennonites borrowed this theology-in-general and built their own upon it. In fact, for them not to build on that theology-in-general would seem audacious as well as unorthodox. It would seem unthinkable that such a small Johnny-come-lately in the nearly two millennia of Christian history would dare to say anything unique about doctrines professed for so long. If the much larger traditions of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, which also began in the sixteenth century, affirmed the centuries-old creeds and confessions of Christendom, it would be brash for Mennonites to assert they had anything original to say about classic theological questions.

> Assertion II: *What was distinct about Mennonite theology came in what Mennonites added to the standard program of theology-in-general.*

Assertions I and II are virtually self-evident. For the most part, the writers specifically organized their theology in categories, such as general Christian teaching and distinct Mennonite teachings. The primary focus in the discussion to follow falls on the relationship between the two lists envisioned by these writers. Both the two lists and the interaction between them come in assorted packages.

Fundamentalist and evangelical packages

John Horsch

John Horsch's assumed standard theological core came from Fundamentalism. In *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, the foundation included these doctrines: the word of God equated with the Bible; Jesus as unique son of God; the super-natural birth of Jesus; the expiatory death of Jesus; special creation; innate human sinfulness; justification by faith in the atoning blood; and the need for supernatural regeneration.[2]

In his later *Mennonites in Europe*, Horsch wrote that Anabaptists and early Mennonites agreed with the major reformers on the fundamentals relating to original sin, justification by faith, salvation through the atoning blood of Christ, the full deity of Jesus, and the Trinity of the Godhead.[3] Differences came at the point of practices–Anabaptists believed that justification by faith should of necessity result in Christian living, which included nonresistance.[4] Other incorrect practices of the reformers included "infant baptism, the union of church and state, the persecution of dissenters, and war."[5]

Horsch also tied the fundamentals–his standard theological core–to the classic creeds of the church, which he located in the New Testament. Playing off a remark from J. E. Hartzler that the transition from the Sermon on the Mount to the Nicene creed was a "philosophical acrobatic stunt,"[6] Horsch virtually equated the Nicene Creed with the fundamentals of the faith as well as linking it to the Sermon on the Mount.

> As if the Nicene Creed, that is to say, the confession of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, were not in perfect agreement with the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, a number of the fundamentals are either expressed or implied in the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest of the fundamentals are taught in other parts of the Scriptures. That they are not all mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount does not detract from their authoritative value.[7]

Such comments indicate that Horsch operated with two lists–Christian doctrines and Mennonite practices. They also imply the priority of the first list over the second. Horsch eventually makes that implication explicit. An

individual who rejected the deity of Christ, his supernatural birth, and his resurrection would not be a Christian, he said, "even if he believed in the principle of nonresistance." Although some Christian supporters of World War I–what he called the "last war"–were "unenlightened or disobedient," they were still Christians. As Horsch said,

> Placing first things first we have the fundamentals of the faith and then the principles and commandments that have reference to practical life and conduct. If you deny Christ, these principles lose their importance.[8]

In Horsch's view, there is more difference between Mennonites and a modernist who believed in nonresistance than between Mennonites and a Fundamentalist who rejected nonresistance. For Horsch, the list of Mennonite distinctives defers to the list of fundamentals.

Daniel Kauffman

Like John Horsch, Daniel Kauffman organized theology into those doctrines that Mennonites shared with others and those that were distinctive. While a careful comparison of Kauffman's lists would reveal their increasingly Fundamentalist-like language and conceptualization, that development is secondary to the present description of Mennonite theologizing in terms of general and specific doctrines.

Kauffman's list in *Gospel Herald* (1910), for example, offered nine points (with some subpoints) on which "all Christian people" should be able to agree.[9] A list in 1916 presented a different version of the same "Christian Doctrine" in nineteen points.[10] This one included some explicitly Mennonite-oriented items. For instance, no.12 stated that Christians are a "separate people from the world" and thus cannot have part in the world's "fashions, carnal strife, oaths, secret societies, or unscriptural insurance."[11]

Kauffman offered another list (1920) to counter a proposed set of unifying doctrines from the church federationists. He did not consider the items on the liberal list to be inherently false. It was rather that they promised a self-help approach to human betterment without being born again. If they would emphasize the items in his list, he said, then "we might have a different

first list to be general theology, to which any and all right-thinking Christians should adhere.

If there were items on which all Christians should agree, it is equally true there were beliefs on which all Mennonites should agree. Note for example the chapter on "Mennonite Doctrine" in Kauffman's *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues*. After yet another list of nineteen points (identified as "Evangelical Faith") that Mennonites believe "in common with all other adherents of the evangelical faith," a second list followed, called "Distinctive Doctrines." It gave fifteen items that Mennonites believe "in common with some churches and unlike other churches." This slate covered the range of practices commonly attributed to the conservative Mennonite agenda: belief in obedience to all the commandments of Christ, adult baptism, prayer veiling, feetwashing, the holy kiss, separation of church and state, no participation in war or in lawsuits, nonswearing of oaths, nonmembership in secret societies, and more.[13] Of greatest import here is the relationship Kauffman saw between this second list and the first. He called items in the second one "Mennonite doctrine." But he considered them more than that. "In reality," Kauffman said, "it is *Bible Doctrine*, for they are all taught in the Word of God."[14] That is, since they are all Bible doctrines, it is really one list with subgroups.

A similar understanding appeared in two of Kauffman's editorials separated by a ten-year interval. In a comment on "Unfundamental Fundamentalists," he chastised militaristic fundamentalists who attempt to discredit pacifist organizations. His chief criticism is that "they do not go far enough" on the issue of peace and war, "they do not endorse the nonresistant doctrine in its entirety." The philosophy that compels fundamentalists to accept the doctrines of immediate creation, absolute reliability of scripture, and the deity and the virgin birth of Christ also "requires that we accept the nonresistant teachings of the Gospel of Christ."[15] Ten years later, Kauffman classed Mennonites as fundamentalists, although on the doctrine of nonresistance they were "more nearly like the liberalists." Frequently liberals "assume the role of pacifists" and "on this point they are more Scripturally fundamental than are the so-called fundamentalists who at times advocate war."[16]

Whereas Horsch gave a kind of priority to the first list, Kauffman virtually equated the two lists or made them segments of one list. The problem with the fundamentalists was not that their roster of general doctrines was

wrong; rather, it was too short. Mennonites had the complete set of biblical doctrines, in contrast to fundamentalists who possessed an admirable but incomplete set.[17]

Harold S. Bender

Harold Bender's description of what Anabaptists, Mennonites, and magisterial Protestantism believed also displays two lists. In "The Anabaptist Vision" he wrote that Anabaptism was a "consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles."[18] That identity with mainline Protestantism included an embrace of the core of Protestant theology. Some years before "The Anabaptist Vision," Bender described this core: "All the American Mennonite groups without exception stand upon a platform of conservative evangelicalism in theology, being thoroughly orthodox in the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith such as the unity of the Godhead, the true deity of Christ, the atonement by the shedding of blood, the plenary inspiration and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God."[19] Later he wrote that Anabaptists did not differ from the major Reformers "on such doctrines as the sole authority of the Scriptures, grace, and justification by faith, or in the classic Christian loci of doctrine."[20]

 Such comments show several things. First, Bender thought in terms of a core of doctrines–a theology-in-general located outside the Mennonite tradition. Second, he assumed that the validity and truth of Mennonite views on these classic doctrines was vouchsafed because Mennonites had learned them or borrowed them from that outside source. Third, the distinct Anabaptist and Mennonite identity came from additions to the central core. But fourth, much like Daniel Kauffman, Bender considered the items on the second list not mere add-ons but integral parts of full-orbed Christian faith. Without these Anabaptist emphases, Christian faith is incomplete. Some of Bender's well-known formulations in "The Anabaptist Vision" display that integration, as when he wrote that "the essence of Christianity [is] discipleship," and when he called Anabaptists "a consistent evangelical Protestantism" and "the culmination of the Reformation."[21]

John C. Wenger

In a similar fashion, the writings of John C. Wenger, Bender's longtime colleague, friend, and supporter, portray theology for Mennonites in terms of a general core with particular Mennonite additions. Wenger followed Bender in calling Anabaptism "the logical outcome of the Protestant reformation." Wenger then divided the theology of these more consistent Protestants into two primary categories, "Major Doctrines" and "Mennonite Emphases." On the fundamental doctrines Anabaptists agreed with Lutherans and Reformed, he said, "since Anabaptism was simply a radical form of Protestantism."[22] Included in his list of major doctrines were evangelical or conservative-oriented statements on God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, regeneration, holiness of life, divine grace, the church, eschatology, and inspiration of the Bible.[23]

Wenger listed Mennonite emphases under three major headings: "The Bible," "The Church," and "The Christian Life." The biblical emphases included "Bible, not theology," "Biblicism," which included ordinances and restrictions, and "New Testament finality." The church section dealt with discipleship and church discipline, while the section on the Christian life emphasized the importance of a lived-out faith and a church obedient to the will of God.[24]

As was true for Kauffman and Bender, while the items on the second list were not the theology-in-general of Protestantism, neither were they merely add-ons. For Wenger, they were necessary for a complete, full-bodied biblical faith.[25]

Ronald Sider

Some years ago, in an address directed primarily to a Mennonite audience, Evangelical Mennonite theologian Ronald Sider depicted a theology for Evangelicals and for Mennonites in terms of the two categories–doctrines claimed by all right-thinking Christians, and "emphases" associated with Anabaptism.[26] His slate of central doctrines included "the Trinity, the full humanity and full Deity of Jesus Christ, the atonement, the bodily resurrection." Two further items adhered to by both Evangelicals and Anabaptists were "concern for evangelism" and a commitment "to the full authority of the

Scriptures as the norm for faith and practice."[27] On the Anabaptist side, Sider offered four beliefs related to practice: "costly discipleship, on living the Christian life, on the church as a new society living the ethics of the kingdom (and therefore living a set of values radically different from the world), on the way of the cross as the Christian approach to violence."[28]

While Sider posed two lists, he really considered them one. In the article cited, he argued that: (1) if Evangelicals who care deeply about the first list are truly as biblical as they claim, they will also embrace the Anabaptist list; and (2) commitment to the Anabaptist list is ultimately invalid without adherence to the first list. "Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are equally important."[29] When addressing Mennonites, Sider stressed that the two lists–or the pair of orthodoxy and orthopraxy–are really one, that either emphasis without the other is a truncated or rootless gospel or Christian faith.

Writing recently for a wider, generally evangelical audience, Sider offered a somewhat different understanding of the relationship of the two slates,[30] but the core remained basically unchanged from his statement to a Mennonite audience.[31]

Beyond the agreement Sider assumes among Christians on the basic core, he noted that Christians differ on both important and insignificant issues. An example of an insignificant difference might be the use of candles in spiritual devotion. Significant differences are those which form the basis of denominational traditions. These might include disagreement about predestination between Presbyterians and Wesleyans, or disagreement between Mennonites and "Just War" Christians on whether there are exceptions to Jesus' teaching about killing. On these differences, Sider asserts, denominations and local congregations need to insist that membership means acceptance of the item in question as something the denomination believes is taught in scripture. However, these denominational differences ought not to obscure the underlying unity which all Christians have in "the same triune God," the confession of "the deity and humanity of Christ," and their "trust in salvation through Christ alone."[32] The implication is that these constitute the sine qua non of theology-in-general, whereas Mennonite belief in Jesus' rejection of the sword is outside the heart of the gospel.

Sider's description of the relationship of the two lists for a wide Christian audience appears to make the connection less tight than in his earlier discussion.

In this second instance, the peace church focus on rejection of violence is in the category of things to agree to disagree on; it is not intrinsically part of the gospel. In addressing evangelicals at large, Sider chose to focus on the core and allow the second list to appear optional. Earlier, he appeared to say that the two lists were in essence one–that evangelicals without the Anabaptist emphases were not fully biblical, while Mennonites without the general theological core lacked a valid foundation for nonviolence. The first Sider recalls Kauffman, Bender, and Wenger, while the second Sider resembles Horsch.

Our discussion so far reveals significant tension or even ambiguity about the relationship between general core theology and Mennonite distinctives. Rodney Sawatsky has used "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy" to distinguish the content of the two lists.[33] The tension between the two is real, as the account of Sider vividly illustrates. It results from the Mennonite writers' assumption that they must necessarily stand on a general Christian core, located outside of their tradition and prior to it, coupled with the realization that this general core lacked at least one item crucial to their Christian identity. That item is variously Jesus' teaching and example on nonresistance, rejection of the sword, or love of enemies. The (primarily) ethical items in the second list are clearly specific to Mennonites and do not belong to the theology-in-general claimed both by them and by those located outside their tradition. But the second lists did comprise what these Mennonites all considered clear, biblical commands that must be obeyed, since obedience was the essence of being Christian. From this standpoint, the Mennonite emphases were not mere add-ons but a part of the full gospel.

These theologians were both agreeing with a core assumed by wider tradition and claiming it was incomplete. They did not fully resolve this tension. Their implicit evaluation of wider Christendom was that it proclaimed an incomplete gospel and held to an incomplete list of doctrines. Mennonites could not identify with this inadequate version of Christian faith. Yet, they needed this wider faith because it supplied the theology-in-general on which Mennonite theology was or should be constructed.

Progressive and liberal packages

Cornelius H. Wedel

Theologizing with a general core and Mennonite distinctives as add-ons was not limited to the fundamentalist, conservative, or evangelical side of the Mennonite theological spectrum. The theology of Mennonite progressives and liberals exhibited the same characteristic.

Cornelius H. Wedel did not make lists. However, his comprehensive theology was built around a set of Anabaptist and Mennonite beliefs and a set of beliefs shared with majority Christendom. Wedel's four-volume history of Mennonites identified the distinct Mennonite tradition in terms of *Gemeindechristentum* or "Congregation Christendom." It was a believers church Christendom, a pacifist Christendom, posed as an alternative to state church Christendom. In his analysis, congregation Christendom described those who maintained New Testament Christianity when the majority church became the church of the bishop in the third century and the imperial church under Constantine in the fourth. An unbroken succession of groups retained and maintained this believers church Christendom through the centuries, right down to Wedel's own Mennonite people on the prairies of central Kansas.[34]

Wedel also wrote a systematic theology, which exists only in manuscript form.[35] While this work dealt knowledgeably with the classic formulas of Christology, Trinity, and atonement, it did so without reference to congregation Christendom. In effect, Wedel assumed that for these classic issues, the views for Mennonites would be those learned from the wider tradition. Although he did not explicitly divide theology into beliefs shared with Protestantism and Mennonite distinctives, his writings reflect such a division. When he wrote a history with a view to identifying Mennonite beliefs and practices for his church, he depicted the church in terms of traditional Mennonite issues such as rejection of violence and adult baptism. However, when he talked about theology, he used the classic categories of Christendom, and his discussion carried the arguments from American Protestantism without major impact from the Mennonite tradition.[36]

J. E. Hartzler

Progressive J. E. Hartzler posed an assumed general core in his address to the 1919 All-Mennonite Convention in Bluffton, Ohio. This one had a marked liberal-leaning cast. Hartzler noted three essentials "around which may be thrown all other essentials, or non-essentials, if such there be."[37] The three, each having several subpoints, were "The Fatherhood of God," "The Brotherhood of Man," and "Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ as the Divine Savior of Mankind."[38]

Speaking to Western District Mennonite Conference in 1920, Hartzler presented a core that still sounded liberal when he described the "five leading doctrines of Christian Faith around which may be thrown every other detail of the Christian Religion." These five doctrines included Jesus Christ as "the Divine Son of God"; the doctrine of the atonement in which "the Christian God . . . gave his Son in sacrificial death that the atonement might be provided"; salvation from sin, through faith in Christ, repentance, regeneration by the Holy Spirit and adoption in God's family; the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, who reproves the world, teaches believers and comforts the saints; and the doctrine of the Bible, which is inspired, "authentic and trustworthy," and the source of redemption.[39]

Hartzler's article, "The Faith of Our Fathers,"[40] described the Anabaptist and Mennonite additions to this liberal-leaning center. The faith of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist fathers included the following four points:

> (1) That the Bible was an open book . . . for all men . . . . (2) The right of any person, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to freely interpret this Book for him or herself. (3) The right of every person to an individual conscience in matters of religious belief and conduct, and the personal right of dissent in matters political, social, or religious. . . . (4) Religious toleration; in other words, the right of men to differ on matters nonessential to vital faith, and yet maintain a brotherly attitude toward each other.[41]

A similar list a quarter-century later added a fifth point, "complete separation of church and state."[42]

Hartzler's view displayed less tension and less sharp contrast between the lists than that proposed by Mennonite fundamentalists.[43] In "Faith of Our Fathers," Hertzler said the four Anabaptist principles "implied" his liberal core.[44] And going the other way, glimpses of the Mennonite emphases can be found in parts of the liberal core. For example, in the section on "The Brotherhood of Mankind," he said that this doctrine contains "all the elements of right living, "including"service of friends and enemies, . . . the protection of life, rather than its destruction. God only has the right to end the life which He alone began . . . . Brotherhood means no war."[45] Whereas John Horsch separated the lists, established the priority of one over the other, and said that not all the fundamentals were in the Sermon on the Mount, Hartzler contended that the general (liberal) Protestant core was implied in the Mennonite distinctives and the liberal core contains the Mennonite emphases.

Edmund G. Kaufman

Edmund G. Kaufman also exhibited a liberal-leaning theology composed of a general core plus Mennonite distinctives. He described his theology as "basic Christian convictions."[46] His book of that title begins with a discussion of religion as the context for expounding the Christian doctrine of God. Explicitly stated Mennonite perspectives are minimal. Kaufman used the traditional language about Jesus as divine and human, and spoke of him as a divine-human mediator, but his discussion dealt primarily with the human life of Jesus. He described each of the three families of atonement, but his evaluation favored the moral influence theory. Sections on the Christian life did not deal with issues of pacifism and refusal of military service or with church-state relationships. James Juhnke characterizes Kaufman's theological orientation as "a Mennonite-biased Christocentric progressivism."[47]

In an extended footnote Kaufman noted six specific Anabaptist ideas: 1) discipleship; 2) separation of church and state; 3) freedom of conscience; 4) adult baptism; the Lord's Supper and baptism as outward symbols of inward convictions; 5) nonparticipation in war and nonviolence; 6) emphasis on the simple life.[48] While placing these ideas in a footnote does not indicate a lack of commitment, it does show Kaufman's theologizing operated in terms of an assumed general core with specific additions.[49] The tension was unresolved,

and is perhaps mirrored in his life. For example, in China he had not made the Mennonite peace witness central to the gospel proclaimed, and he had supported "Christian General" Feng, who practiced mass baptisms on his army, as "an instrument in God's hand to bring order out of chaos in China." Nevertheless, as president of Bethel College, Kaufman remained a staunch pacifist throughout World War II.[50]

Recent general theology plus distinctives

A. James Reimer

Although the terminology differs, some recent efforts have continued to use the idea of a theology-in-general plus distinctives. For instance, James Reimer has posed the Nicene Creed as the core on which theology for Mennonites should build, and he has rejected the suggestion from John H. Yoder[51] that peace church theology might pose some alternatives to Nicaea-Chalcedon.[52] For Reimer, Nicaea, with its culmination in trinitarian doctrine, constitutes the necessary development and statement in nonbiblical language of the essence of the New Testament's depiction of Jesus Christ.[53] At this level, the classic creedal statements assume for Reimer the *a priori* quality of a theology-in-general–the functional equivalent of doctrines accepted by all Christians in the writers discussed earlier.

   Reimer is aware of the absence of explicit ethical dimensions to Nicaea as well as to Chalcedon's formula and the doctrine of the Trinity. As he has said, "the ethical gets lost" between the first and fourth or fifth centuries.[54] Since he has affirmed the nonviolence of his Mennonite tradition, like the exponents of the two lists, Reimer recognizes the need to add to the core of the presumed theology-in-general. His solution is to "retrieve the historical, narrative, and ethical content of trinitarian christology."[55]

   To preserve the biblical character of Nicaea and thus its role as the general theology on which Mennonites should build, Reimer distances the Nicene formula from Emperor Constantine, who proposed it at Nicaea and participated in the council's deliberations.[56] Reimer then contends that the trinitarian orthodoxy of Nicaea is necessary to anchor "the moral claims of Jesus" in the "very nature and person of God." In particular, this moral claim

includes "a nonviolent love ethic."[57] Reimer believes a trinitarian orthodoxy built around Nicene Christology is "the surest way of guarding against all forms of political and national idolatry (Constantinianism)."[58] For him, the nonviolent love ethic, which must be added to the creedal formula that is without ethics, is the functional parallel to the distinctive Anabaptist or Mennonite doctrines for writers such as Kauffman, Bender, Wenger, or Sider.

If some tension appeared in attempts of earlier writers to hold together their two lists, a parallel tension appears here. How do the very formulations, which Reimer concedes were the end result of a process that allowed ethics to get lost and that contains no explicit ethical dimensions, now turn out to be the best foundation for ethics? Equally ambiguous is how these formulations also become the buttress against Constantinianism, the political theology that legitimated a civil religion, in the very Constantinian church which initiated the fusion of church and state and proclaimed creedal formulations lacking ethics.[59] Reimer does not sufficiently acknowledge that both sides in the Arian controversy sought imperial support whenever it suited them. As R. P. C. Hanson wrote, "Neither East nor West formulated any coherent theory during the period under review of the relation of church and state. When the state brought pressure to bear on them, bishops of every theological hue complained. When it used its power to coerce their opponents, they approved."[60]

Thomas Finger

Thomas Finger suggests a different way to keep emphases from particular classic theologies together with peace church emphases. His approach is as much a methodology as a theology. Finger collects motifs, terms, themes, or content from a great variety of traditions. Sometimes retaining traditional terms with new definitions, at other times retaining traditional definitions and content under new names, he weaves the results into a modern synthesis on top of a peace church framework. The intent is to develop a theology whose bare foundation is clearly Anabaptist and peace church, but which also feels a lot like a Protestant reformed orthodoxy. Finger seems to treat each historic theology or tradition to some extent as incomplete or inadequate, with its full potential realized only in the all-seeing modern synthesis. Or perhaps a better image is to see the various themes and doctrines as discrete and interchangeable

parts to use in building a complete theology, much like using interchangeable parts to customize an automobile.

However, although it is not at all the simple two list approach described earlier, Finger's methodology remains in that genre. It is a more sophisticated version of combining Anabaptist distinctives with other Protestant emphases. This Anabaptist theology is gaining validation from other Protestants in so far as it needs these borrowings to fill out its own incomplete outline. But, this procedure also reflects the recognition that these traditions also have some inadequacies. This approach seems to grant the modern assumption that there is a universally or generally verifiable theology, if we can only identify enough of the pieces. The result is the functional equivalent of a two list approach fusing Anabaptist theology and other theology into one whole.[61]

Scott Holland

Scott Holland's kind of post-orthodoxy might be another approach to a Mennonite theology that begins with roots in an assumed general theology. Holland has worried that persons like John H. Yoder or myself are "sectarian." While obviously cognizant of violence and justice issues, Holland is concerned that a proper theology for the peace church be one that embraces learnings from the world, is accessible in the world, uses some of the language and concepts of American democracy, and serves the world (the public sphere) as well as the church. This theology is arguably searching for a foundation in a supposed theology-in-general, albeit one markedly different from that proposed by any of the other writers discussed thus far.[62]

Two more assertions

> Assertion III: *Although much of the theologizing by Mennonites in this century has assumed a standard core of doctrines located outside of the Mennonite tradition, or in some other way combined what were considered Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist doctrines, there was little general consensus on the identity or the shape of the core or the material borrowed. Theologizing on the basis of a supposed theology-in-general has not produced a consensus on the nature of that general theology.*

This assertion should be obvious from the foregoing discussion. My survey has noted several versions of the supposed theology-in-general–fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal, creedal orthodox, and more. The only new learning here–and it is not really new–is to make explicit that each of these Mennonite theologies or theologies for Mennonites assumed it was related to a theology-in-general, a standard agenda from which a theology for Mennonites acquires validity.

Efforts to construct a theology for the peace church by adding Mennonite distinctives to a standard core has bypassed a very important step. They have assumed that one can build on this core without going through the difficult process of developing a consensus about the nature of the core.

> Assertion IV: *Theologizing on the basis of a core and Mennonite additives was motivated, at least in part, by a perceived gap or inadequacy in the received theology-in-general.*

This assertion too should now be obvious. The several solutions or methodologies display the gap. Although in different ways, each writer suggested either a list or a methodology which would combine Mennonite emphases with doctrines from some other tradition, whether assumed general or particular. None of the borrowed theologies made nonviolence central. In fact, to begin with an imported theology-in-general, as did everyone surveyed except Thomas Finger, was to begin with a theology that had already made nonviolence or Jesus' rejection of the sword peripheral. The tension between needing a presumed core theology-in-general to vouchsafe the truth of Mennonite theology and the perceived incompleteness or inadequacy of that core was never fully resolved.

A further manifestation of the tension comes from the fact that the fused lists or the redefined or revised version of the core will no longer satisfy the other-than-Mennonite guardians of the supposed theology-in-general. Unless they have somewhere developed peace church sympathies, non-Mennonite bearers of that theology will not readily accept the expanded or reshaped core that now includes Jesus' rejection of the sword–whichever one of the supposed theologies-in-general or combining methodologies is in view. I suspect that the effort to retain a theology-in-general has succeeded more in enabling Mennonites to identify with some version of wider Christendom

than it has either produced a genuine peace theology for the Mennonite churches or persuaded other Christians of the truth of Christian nonviolence.

A proposal

These observations about doing theology for the peace churches on the basis of an assumed theology-in-general, while not deciding on which one, does change, or ought to change, the form of the question about a theology for these churches. If we are serious about being a peace church, does a (systematic) theology for us begin with one first developed within another tradition's assumptions or with peace church assumptions?

I suggest we discard the idea that there is a theology-in-general that has an assumed priority and that we must plug into in order to validate our theology. What was an assumed theology-in-general is not really general. Every theology reflects a particular history or tradition, and is specific to a context. Consider the labels attached to the standard programs twentieth-century Mennonite theologies have built on–Horsch's and Kauffman's fundamental ones, the evangelical-oriented core of Bender, Wenger, and Sider, the progressive cores of Wedel, Hartzler, and Kaufman, Reimer's Catholic orthodoxy, Finger's more reformed and evangelical orthodoxy, and Holland's postmodernity. These theologies are not general theologies. Rather, they were first developed in or for a specific tradition to respond to, or reflect, particular needs in that tradition. When others accept them, they are accepting a specific tradition. Alongside those theologies, it ought to be possible for the peace church tradition to develop a theology shaped by its own understanding and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Acknowledging that a theology-in-general is really a specific theology frees us from having to accommodate a theology that does not share peace church assumptions about the centrality of nonviolence in the story of Jesus Christ.[63] Much of the theology of western Christendom has accommodated violence and war, and has done so in such a presumed universal fashion that even peace churches barely acknowledge it. That accommodation is true of the several theologies which twentieth-century Mennonite thinking has tried to build on or borrow from. If these theologies had not accommodated violence, Mennonite writers would not be adding Mennonite lists or making other adaptations. Does the fact that violence-accommodating theology has been so

widely accepted that its specific reference point is usually forgotten qualify it to be the core of a theology for the modern peace church? I think not. Stated another way, if one begins with peace church assumptions instead, is it not possible that a new and fresh reading of the Bible might produce a different, a better rendering of Christology and atonement than what emerged from the Constantinian church? I think so.

Recognizing there are only specific theologies leads to a change in understanding the nature of theological disagreement–from a discussion of orthodoxy versus heresy to a comparison of competing, conflicting, or alternative versions of what it means to be Christian. To posit a theology-in-general is to assume its validity and to place the burden of proof on those who raise questions or pose an alternative. Conversely, to recognize that a received theology-in-general reflects a particular context is to markedly change the burden of proof, which now falls equally on all parties. A theology-in-general no longer has a privileged stance based on number of adherents or length of existence.[64]

I am not saying that the war and violence accommodaters are not Christian. Because I take them seriously as Christians, I challenge their understanding of Christian theology, which lends itself so well to the rationalization of violence. I recognize there are different kinds of Christians, with differing theologies. But, I suggest, the basis for comparing Christian theologies or traditions is a criterion accessible to all, namely the narrative of Jesus. With reference to that criterion I call for the development of a new peace church theology, rather than merely adding a couple of components or trying in some other way to salvage Christendom's violence-accommodating theology. Differentiating Christian theologies with reference to the narrative of Jesus is not an exclusivist or triumphalist stance. It constitutes a more accessible basis for ecumenical dialogue than the assumption that we begin from a supposed common foundation whose character we have not agreed on and which we must characterize differently–calling it incomplete–than do the dialogue partners whose theology it actually is.

The question of violence accommodation is unavoidable. We cannot avoid deciding whether to look at the world from the violence-accommodating perspective of the North American ethos or from the perspective of the violence-rejecting narrative of the peace-church understanding of Jesus. Most

North American Christians make their decision by default: they just accept the violence-accommodating world view without reflection; they do not see the extent to which the received theology-in-general of western Christendom has accommodated war and violence.

One cannot make a decision about Jesus without also making a decision about whether rejection of the sword was intrinsic to his life and work. The question is whether that decision is made by default or with conscious awareness of the issues and their implications. That Jesus is the norm for ethics, that his rejection of the sword is intrinsic to his life and teaching, is not a self-contained idea that is true in and of itself. It is an assumption about what one does with the Jesus we discover in the New Testament. Assumptions about Jesus as the norm of ethics and the rejection of the sword are then understood as a perspective from which to examine all the issues that Christian theology discusses. Theology from a nonviolent perspective is shaped by the assumption that rejection of violence is intrinsic to the reign of God as made visible in Jesus' life and teaching. My challenge to the would-be peace church is to acknowledge consciously and specifically that Jesus means nonviolence, and then to look at our entire theological endeavor from that perspective.[65] The continuation of Mennonites and Brethren as peace churches depends on it.

Notes

[1] I acknowledge the help of John H. Yoder in conceptualizing the problem addressed in this essay.

[2] John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924), 7-8.

[3] John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1942), 325, 370-72, 378-80.

[4] *Ibid*., 373, 359-69.

[5] *Ibid*., 354.

[6] J. E. Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals of Christian Faith," in *Report of Third All-Mennonite Convention Held in First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio, September 2-3, 1919*, ed. A. S. Bechtel (Bluffton, OH, 1919), 84.

[7] Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, 74.

[8] *Ibid*., 68.

[9] Daniel Kauffman, "Upon What Fundamentals Should All Christian People Agree?" *Gospel Herald 3*, no. 19 (11 August 1910): 292, 302; *Gospel Herald* 3, no. 20 (18 August 1910): 307,

317; *Gospel Herald* 3, no. 21 (25 August 1910): 325.

[10] Kauffman, "The Mennonite Church and Current Issues," *Gospel Herald* 9, no. 37 (14 December 1916): 682.

[11] *Ibid*.

[12] Kauffman, "Two Kinds of Fundamentals," *Gospel Herald* 12, no. 51 (18 March 1920): 961.

[13] Kauffman, *The Mennonite Church and Current Issues* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1923), 18-26.

[14] Kauffman, *Current Issues*, 26. Emphasis Kauffman's.

[15] Kauffman, "Unfundamental Fundamentalists," *Gospel Herald* 24, no. 48 (25 February 1932): 1025-26.

[16] Kauffman, "Real Fundamentalism," *Gospel Herald* 34, no. 4 (24 April 1941): 81.

[17] Kauffman's three volumes of Bible doctrines (see below) do not use the language of two lists. However, their outlines follow the pattern of listing general Christian doctrines followed by particular doctrines and emphases of Mennonites. These titles clearly indicate that whatever the internal subdivisions, all contents are necessary as biblical. These volumes also retained the category of "restrictions." Restrictions were negative commands of scripture and contained specifically Mennonite distinctives which when obeyed would keep the Christian saved. They were one element in completing the general gospel borrowed from revivalism and/or fundamentalism. Restrictions included nonresistance, nonconformity to the world, nonswearing of oaths, not suing at law, not belonging to secret societies, and not buying life insurance. For Kauffman on restrictions, see his "Restrictions," *The Gospel Witness* 1, no. 23 (6 September 1905): 178, 184; *Bible Doctrines Briefly Stated*, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1922), 27; *Manual of Bible Doctrines, Setting Forth the General Principles of the Plan of Salvation* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1898), 12-14; *Bible Doctrine: A Treatise on the Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 458, 510-87; *Doctrines of the Bible: A Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1929), 490-544. For John Horsch's discussion of restrictions, see Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, 92-100.

[18] Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18, no. 2 (April 1944): 74.

[19] Bender, "The Mennonites of the United States," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (January 1937): 79.

[20] Bender, "'Walking in the Resurrection': The Anabaptist Doctrine of Regeneration and Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35, no. 2 (April 1961): 102.

[21] Bender, "Anabaptist Vision," 78, 74.

[22] John C. Wenger, *Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1947), 137, 147.

[23] *Ibid*., 137-47.

[24] *Ibid*., 147-79.

[25] That the distinct Mennonite practices are part of a full-orbed biblical faith is clear in Wenger's *Introduction to Theology*. This book claims the Bible as its foundational reference point and does not distinguish general Christian from Mennonite doctrines and practices. The particular practices of nonresistance, nonconformity, and so on are in a section on "The Nature and Function of the Church," which appears in Part III on "God as Redeemer." See his *Introduction*

to Theology: A Brief Introduction to the Doctrinal Content of the Scripture Written in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition, reprint, 1954 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 225-27. In the earlier Glimpses, which did present the two lists, Wenger also maintained the category of "restrictions" prominent among Mennonite Church writers earlier in the century. On restrictions, see note 17.

[26] Ronald J. Sider, "Evangelicalism and the Mennonite Tradition," in *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism*, ed. C. Norman Kraus (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 159-68.

[27] *Ibid.*, 149-50.

[28] *Ibid.*, 150.

[29] *Ibid.*, 155.

[30] Ronald J. Sider, *Genuine Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 104-08.

[31] *Ibid.*, 104.

[32] *Ibid.*, 106-07. Quote, 107

[33] Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Defining 'Mennonite' Diversity and Unity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1983): 285-87; Rodney Sawatsky, *Authority and Identity: The Dynamics of the General Conference Mennonite Church*, Cornelius H. Wedel historical series, vol. 1 (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987), 63-66.

[34] For the rise of state church Christendom and the Waldensian alternative which merged into Anabaptism of the sixteenth century, see C. H. Wedel, *Die Geschichte Ihrer Vorfahren Bis Zum Beginn Des Täufertums Im 16. Jahrhundert*, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 1 (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1900). For Wedel's description of the characteristics of *Gemeindechristentum*, see his *Randzeichnungen zu Den Geschichten Des Neuen Testaments* (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1900), 60-63, 89-90; Abriß I, 4-6, 14-16, 28-30; *Die Geschichte Des Täufertums Im 16. Jahrhundert*, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 2 (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1902), 149-58, 171-76.

[35] Wedel, *Glaubenslehre*, in 4 Hefte (North Newton, KS). For an in-depth analysis of Wedel's theology, see the Wedel sections of J. Denny Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

[36] Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 86-91.

[37] Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals," 88.

[38] *Ibid.*, 88-91.

[39] J. E. Hartzler, "Christian Fundamentals," *The Mennonite* 35, no. 45 (11 November 1920): 4-5; *The Mennonite* 35, no. 46 (18 November 1920): 5; "Christian Fundamentals," *The Christian Evangel* 10, no. 12 (December 1920): 267-69.

[40] J. E. Hartzler, "The Faith of Our Fathers," *Christian Exponent* 1, no. 3 (1 February 1924): 38-39.

[41] *Ibid.*, 38.

[42] J. E. Hartzler, "Philosophy in the Mennonite Tradition," *Mennonite Life* 3, no. 2 (April 1948):44. For a third listing of these principles of Anabaptist faith that are added to the Protestant core, see J. E. Hartzler, "Witmarsum Theological Seminary," in *Report of Fourth All-Mennonite Convention Held in Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana* (n.p.: n.p., 1922), 44.

[43] Hartzler's theology was not as liberal as many of his contemporaries believed or feared.

While he was a cultural liberal and accommodater, his specific views on the classic issues was orthodox, if not as sharply defined as fundamentalists wanted. See Janeen Bertsche Johnson, "J. E. Hartzler: The Change in His Approach to Doctrine," unpublished paper (1986).

[44] Hartzler, "Faith of Our Fathers," 38.

[45] Hartzler, "Essential Fundamentals," 89-90.

[46] Edmund G. Kaufman, *Basic Christian Convictions* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1972).

[47] My reading of Kaufman agrees with the analysis of James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community*, ed. John D. Thiesen, Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1994), 270-73. Quote, 271.

[48] Kaufman, *Basic Christian Convictions*, 201-202.

[49] The materials for *Basic Christian Convictions* came from the course that Kaufman taught for many years at Bethel College. Juhnke notes that "Kaufman both added to, and subtracted from, the materials from his course in ways that made the book more ecumenical and less sectarian. One major subtraction was the unit on 'the Mennonite Church,'" which was reduced to an extended footnote. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader*, 270-71.

[50] Juhnke, *Creative Crusader*, 108.

[51] See note 65 below.

[52] A. James Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Theology from a Radical Protestant Perspective," in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, ed. S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 131-40.

[53] *Ibid.*, 148, 150-52.

[54] *Ibid.*, 142, 150, 152, 156. Quote, 150.

[55] *Ibid.*, 150.

[56] *Ibid.*, 156-59.

[57] *Ibid.*, 161.

[58] *Ibid.*, 160.

[59] For his conclusions, see Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy," 160-61. A different form of the problem between a general core and a specific peace church additive appears in Reimer's article of response to Gayle Gerber Koontz. He identified general revelation, ongoing revelation, final revelation, and special revelation. General revelation "is that which is common to all of us," ongoing revelation is an acknowledgment that our truth is "always relative and on the way," final revelation is an eschatological matter, and special revelation refers to Jesus Christ. While Reimer acknowledged that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is a confessional claim, he added that "we need to make this confessional claim in the context of general, ongoing, and final revelation. To do this is to make a general philosophical- theological truth claim." However, this assertion is also problematic. It is at this point, Reimer says, that "our peace theology can become idolatrous. How? By absolutizing the finite understanding of the meaning of Christ of one particular minority group within the Christian and religious world." A. James Reimer, "Response to Gayle Gerber Koontz," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 88. The primary problem here is the unacknowledged contradiction of claiming that the general revelation common to all is also identified with the particular, special revelation that is Jesus Christ,

which is revelation precisely because it is different from what is common to all.

[60] R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 854.

[61] Finger's synthesis, which contains a great deal of helpful historical and analytical data, is *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985); *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989). For briefer examples of his methodology, see Thomas Finger, "Donald Bloesch on the Trinity: Right Battle, Wrong Battle Lines," *TSF Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (January-February 1986): 18-21; "From Biblical Intentions to Theological Conceptions: Some Strengths and Some Tensions in Norman Kraus's Christology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 53-76; "Still Something Essential in the Creeds," in *Jesus Christ and the Mission of the Church: Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives*, ed. Erland Waltner (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1990), 106-14; "The Place to Begin Mennonite Theology," *Gospel Herald*, 30 July 1996, 1-3.

[62] See Scott Holland, "Anabaptism as Public Theology," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 265-68; "Theology is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71, no. 2 (April 1997): 227-41; "Intellectual and Aesthetic Freedom in the Anabaptist Academy," for a conference on Church-Related Institutions (Elizabethtown College, 1996).

[63] On tensions of holding together peace church ecclesiology with established church theology, see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical* and "The Ambiguity of Ecclesiology in 'the Anabaptist Vision': Implications for a Peace-Church Theology," *Faith and Freedom* 6, no. 2 (August 1998): 3-11.

[64] For example, it is quite obvious that since the fourth century, the theology of western Christianity has accommodated war. The formulas of Christology and atonement, which most often supply the heart of the supposed theology-in-general, are the formulations of the church that began to accommodate war. Since the basis of Christian faith is Jesus and not formulas which emerge in and after the fourth century, it is logical to ask why peace church adherents should base their theology on those violence-accommodating formulas rather than on other options based on and shaped more explicitly by the biblical narratives of Jesus.

[65] Current efforts to reconstruct theology shaped at least in part by the assumption of nonviolence include John H. Yoder's analysis of classic creeds and creedal statements in his *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Elkhart, IN: Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1981), 120-58; C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciple's Perspective*, rev. ed., reprint, 1987 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), and *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); J. Denny Weaver, "Christus Victor, Ecclesiology, and Christology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1994): 277-90; Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*; James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); and *Systematic Theology: Doctrine, Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). Gordon Kaufman's reconstruction of theology is clearly shaped by the assumption of nonviolence as well as by concerns for social justice and ecology: *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1993). Kaufman's retention of the world as a whole as the venue

of restored humanity and restored community (thus retaining something of Christendom's understanding of the church's relationship to the social order), and his near privileging of western, technological ways of knowing make it arguable that he has not entirely surrendered the idea that there is (or ought to be) a theology-in-general.

Appropriating Other Traditions
While Remaining Anabaptist

Thomas Finger

Sociologically speaking, the emergence of explicit, formal theological reflection among Anabaptists[1] is one instance of the adoption of mainstream twentieth-century practices by these groups. It is of a piece in important respects with the acceptance of modern clothing styles, and with the employment of radio, television, faxes, and the Internet not only for information and entertainment but also to express and disseminate Anabaptist beliefs and values.

When cultures which regard themselves as distinctive take up widely-used vehicles of expression, questions naturally arise as to whether these vehicles pervert that distinctiveness. Is the particular content of their tradition being subordinated to forms of expression which inevitably distort or even deny it? Or do those new forms provide means for expressing the original content at least as adequately, and with more relevance, than before? Such questions can be asked, for example, about the impact of the Internet on the Anabaptist value of community. Does use of the Internet harm community, by devaluing its face-to-face dimension and rendering it more impersonal? Or does it enhance community by making it more quickly available to more people?

Similar questions can be asked about the employment by Anabaptists of commonly recognized theological concepts and styles of discussion–for these, after all, have been developed largely by other traditions and within general academic settings. Does framing our issues in thought-forms devised by Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, secular, and other academics inevitably distort what earlier Anabaptists meant to say in contrast to such groups? Or can it help us express our own distinctiveness more fully both among ourselves and to others?

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Let me begin by making a distinction between explicit and implicit theology, following Robert Friedmann. Explicit theology is found in scholarly articles, books, and discussions, and in formal creeds, confessions, and position papers. It seeks to formulate precisely what is to be believed, and to derive this from identifiable presuppositions, norms, or grounds through a carefully reasoned method. Implicit theology refers to those basic convictions which guide the practices and worldview of a religious group but are expressed loosely if at all, and usually without clear connections to norms, grounds, or other convictions. As Friedmann says, even if a group lacks explicit theological documents, "no serious religious movement can be thought of without an underlying implicit theology."[2]

If this is so, then our question cannot be whether we Anabaptists ought to be theological in the most basic sense, for we already have an implicit theology. Our question, rather, concerns what kinds of gains or losses we may experience when we seek to make explicit our largely implicit theology in our encounter with a universe of theological concepts, tomes, and forms of communication developed largely by other traditions.[3] Should we seek to create theologies so uniquely Anabaptist that they exhibit as few positive points of contact as possible with these others? Or can we interact positively with, and even appropriate elements of, other traditions and remain distinctly Anabaptist?

To answer these questions I will briefly outline five features which characterize any kind of Christian theology, implicit or explicit. Next, I will describe these features more fully, give a deeper rationale for some of them, and indicate my understanding of how they should operate in an explicit theology done in Anabaptist perspective. I will then illustrate the role that twentieth-century theologies can play for Anabaptists by examining two very different ones: Hendrikus Berkhof's and Rosemary Ruether's. Finally, I will recapitulate my overall thesis.

Five basic features of the Christian theological task

All Christian theologies:

(1) Are done from the perspectives of particular groups. They are shaped by the specific experiences and concerns of such groups. There can be no

"theology in general" whose particular emphases and ways of expressing them are untouched by such realities.

(2) Intend to make at least some universal claims. Because theology speaks about God, is confessional, and dialogues about ultimate concerns, it intends to speak universally.

(3) Assume or affirm a norm, or norms, which are criteria for determing what beliefs can be affirmed. Among these might be Scripture, communal consensus, communal tradition, religious experience, ethical imperatives, or others.

(4) Are related both critically and positively to certain theologies from the past. All Christian groups define themselves by differentiating themselves from some preceding and contemporary groups and by affirming their similarities with others. Though those with an implicit theology might not recognize such similarities and differences, these are clear when a group is understood in historical perspective.

(5) Are related both critically and positively to certain theologies and other kinds of belief-systems in the present. These differentiations and similarities exist whether or not a Christian group has explicitly reflected on them.

In describing these five features, I have not outlined a "theology in general" to which specific beliefs would have a secondary, more particular role. Nor have I described a foundation upon which less important, more particular beliefs might be built. In fact, I have not mentioned any theological beliefs, primary or secondary, at all. I have only described formal features that outline the territory which can be called "theology." When I affirm that theology in Anabaptist perspective must operate within these parameters, I am not saying that it must somehow be "added on" to something more fundamental. I am only saying what formal features it must have to be considered as theology. Neither am I claiming that Anabaptist discourse which did not fall within this territory would be illegitimate. I am only claiming that it would not be theological discourse.[4]

Anabaptism and the basic features of the theological task

Why can these five features be regarded as basic to theology, and how should they function in a theology in Anabaptist perspective? Here I will speak about explicit theology.

Particularity. Christian theology has always been done from particular perspectives. While awareness of this fact was probably not as strong through most of Christian history as it is today, virtually all explicit theologians of the past must have recognized it to some degree. Medieval theologians, for instance, would identify themselves not only as Christian but also–and often emphatically–as, say, Fransiscan or Dominican. Dominican theologians would be keenly aware that their heavy and controversial adherence to Aristotle had hardly been universally practiced in the Church, and that it contrasted with the Fransiscan predilection for Plato. Similarly, Reformation theologians were highly conscious of their commitment to Lutheran, Reformed, or Anglican theology, and usually also to certain schools within these traditions. Few, if any, reflectively aware explicit theologians would have maintained they were doing "theology in general."

Accordingly, Anabaptist theologians should acknowledge that they are viewing theology's subject matter from a particular perspective. They should admit that they will give certain issues and ways of looking at them fuller consideration than others. They should affirm that however objectively they seek to consider certain doctrines and issues, their awareness is mediated through the lenses of their own tradition.

Universality. While aware to some extent of the particularity of their perspectives, few explicit theologians, if any, have ever thought that all their assertions were valid only within their own traditions. Most have endeavored to make at least some claims which would be valid for all who call themselves Christians. This remains true in fact, if not in theory, for contemporary theologians who emphasize the particularity of their constructions.

James Cone, for instance, asserts that "the finality of Jesus lies in the totality of his existence in complete freedom as the Oppressed One, who reveals through his death and resurrection that God himself is present in all dimensions of human liberation."[5] Somewhat similarily, Rosemary Ruether affirms that Jesus "manifests the *kenosis of patriarchy*, the announcement of the new humanity through a lifestyle that discards hierarchical caste and speaks on behalf of the lowly."[6] (Note, in passing, the similarities of these statements to Anabaptist emphases.) These theologians, despite their very strong advocacy of particular groups, seem to be making assertions about Jesus which all

Christians ought to accept. Whatever their theoretical views about universality, the rhetorical or persuasive power of such statements seems to stem from the strong implication that oppression and patriarchy are always–universally– wrong, and that liberation is always God's will everywhere.

Universality is a characteristic of at least some theological statements for three reasons. First, theology speaks often of "God." Now "God," as Gordon Kaufman correctly stresses, is the name for what is ultimately most real in the universe, That Which stands beyond and critiques all particular opinions and perspectives. Thus whenever theology speaks seriously of God's character, God's will, God's action, etc., it *intends* to speak of something which is universally true, even though its expression reflects its author's particularity in some fashion.

Second, theology is never mere disinterested description of states of affairs. Its language is always, among other things, confessional or convictional: an expression of whole-hearted commitment to ultimate realities, and therefore confession which will issue in committed action. Theological affirmations express, at least implicitly, this kind of commitment on the part of the theologian and seek to elicit it, at least implicitly, from readers. The statements from Cone and Ruether are good examples. Though one could perhaps be a relativist in regard to disinterested truth-claims, it does not seem possible to be a total relativist when it comes to commitment and action. To commit myself unreservedly to a cause, expressed in God-language, I must act as if the ultimate thing I am aiming for–say, peace–is a value which ought to be actualized everywhere. I cannot act as if various forms of violence were equally valid. My particular actions may not always be perfectly pacifist and my understanding of peace may be flawed, but I will be aiming or intending to actualize a value which is always good.

Third, in order to dialogue genuinely about comprehensive issues, all participants must be committed, even if only implicitly, to examining their own statements in light of truth-criteria on which they can agree. All are committed to revising their assertions in view of deeper and wider grounds for truth, and ultimately in view of grounds acceptable to all possible participants, if such can be found.

Of course, as participants begin discovering where they really agree and differ, their awareness of what such criteria might be will be somewhat

vague and unformulated, and may become more so as they proceed. Only through the dialogue process can these criteria become clearer, and then not perfectly so. But for such dialogue even to begin, it must be moving towards albeit if half-consciously, and willing to accept, universal principles which all participants could affirm.[7] (This is so even though such participants will also aim to express and acknowledge their genuine diversities, and may do this more often than the former.)

Here again, universal truth is a reality, yet not something which any party fully possesses but something which all parties intend to discover or actualize or express. Here universal truth, as in the two previous instances, is present as a goal towards which people strive from the vantage-point of their own particularity. Theologically, universal truth is an eschatological reality. It is "not yet" fully present–it is something that we will fully know and experience only at the End. Yet it is "already" present–something which we grasp partially and which draws us further on.

If many theological statements intend to express universal truths,[8] then affirmations by Anabaptist theologians, though uttered from a particular perspective, cannot all be limited to describing what those sharing that perspective happen to believe. Simply to describe the beliefs of Anabaptists in any given era, valuable as that is, is an historical and not a theological undertaking. To speak theologically from an Anabaptist perspective involves intending to make claims valid for all Christians.

When Anabaptists speak theologically, we are not simply saying that we happen to emphasize, say, peace, because we come from a particular historical and social location. We do not mean to say that those who come from other locations have just as valid reasons to advocate violence. We are saying that peace is God's will for all persons everywhere, however difficult it may be to specify exactly what peace may consist of in certain situations. Such affirmations indeed bear the stamp of our particular location and may not be perfectly suitable for every other situation. But it is our *intention* to make them as suitable for as many situations as possible.

In stressing the intention to make universal statements, I do not suggest that one can prove them true in a way which should be satisfactory to all people. I am not advocating a foundationalist position where assertions are based on rational grounds available to everyone. I understand our universal affirmations to be affirmations of faith.

Norm(s). Even if faith statements cannot be proven rationally, every Christian theology involves some norm or norms in light of which its affirmations are validated. To make its claims clearly and coherently, explicit theology in Anabaptist perspective needs to show how its assertions are connected with norms. To validate universal claims by its norm or norms, it must make a convincing case that it or they are truly Christian, that it or they should function normatively for all who want to call themselves true Christians.

Lack of clarity about norms is a weakness of some current Anabaptist theologizing. It is easy to assume that some themes, such as peace, were and are universally held by Anabaptists, and to avoid questions of their ultimate normative basis and of why it ought to claim all Christians.[9]

Closer examination, however, shows that no norm or belief can be derived from Anabaptist history alone. Many different convictions on important topics, including peace, have been held by Anabaptists in different times and places. In view of this, one might seek to derive Anabaptist beliefs from a privileged and therefore normative historical period, perhaps the sixteenth century. Yet even then, beliefs on such major topics as peace, the nature of Jesus Christ, and the shape of Christian community varied enormously. Even if we divide this era into earlier and later phases, numerous diversities still appear.[10]

At best, one might perhaps determine some kind of consensus of major beliefs held by most Anabaptists in most times and places. Perhaps these might form a kind of normative Anabaptist tradition, functioning somewhat as tradition has in Roman Catholicism. But we would still have to ask whether this consensus was arrived at on the basis of certain assumptions operating at a deeper normative level. And we would still have to ask why, with regard to all the slices of history that claim to be Christian, this particular one was selected as normative. If theology in Anabaptist perspective affirms that its norm(s) should be authoritative for all Christians, what reasons can it give for privileging this one historical stream?

In short, to show that a majority of Anabaptists have believed certain things (if indeed this can be shown) is an historical task, not yet a theological one. To affirm that these things ought to be believed because a majority have thought so is simply to presuppose Anabaptist history as normative, without showing why it ought to be regarded as definitively Christian.

I propose that Anabaptist theological themes ought to be believed because they are, and to the extent that they are, congruent with Scripture (as understood in a nuanced sense outlined below). Accepting Scripture as normative corresponds with some major thrusts in Anabaptist history. Not only have many Anabaptists quite explicitly regarded Scripture in this way; Anabaptists of many generations–including the present one–have regarded fidelity to their origins, to something believed and practiced at their beginnings, as essential for maintaining or recovering what is fundamental to their faith.

But when we turn to original Anabaptist movements, whether in the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries, we find them also seeking to recover and be faithful to a more ancient origin: the grace of God actualized through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and its communal outworkings, as recorded in the New Testament. Large numbers of Anabaptists have believed that their ultimate norms lay not within Anabaptist historical experience but in events of this more ancient past and the biblical witnesses to them.

When I affirm Scripture as authoritative, however, I do not mean it as a "flat" book whose parts all equally express the depths of God's will. Scripture contains an internal narrative trajectory by which the significance of its various writings can be assessed. This narrative is of God's intention to bless the entire world, beginning with creation, renewed through Abraham and Sarah, amplified throughout Israel's history, fulfilled in Jesus, initially concretized through the early Church, and to be consummated at Jesus' return. The center of this narrative is the actualization of God's grace through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; this forms my ultimate hermeneutical criterion. Nonetheless, I do not simply refer to "Jesus Christ" as my theological norm, for we cannot understand his significance apart from the apostolic witness and the overall biblical trajectory.

While this norm is congruent with much Anabaptist history, I do not derive its authority from there. I affirm, on the contrary, that Scripture is the norm for evaluating that history. Unfortunately, space does not permit presenting a more extensive rationale for adopting this norm. Nevertheless, I believe it should be accepted by all who call themselves Christian.

Relation to past theologies. Whether or not Scripture is its norm, so long as a theology in Anabaptist perspective intends to make universal affirmations,

it must critically evaluate both Anabaptist history and other past theologies in light of its norm(s). Anabaptist beliefs cannot be evaluated in isolation from evaluating others. For however ignorant particular Anabaptists may have been of other Christian theologies, Anabaptist beliefs, including implicit ones, have neither arisen nor existed in a vacuum. They have always been shaped by positive influences from, and negative contrasts with, other kinds of Christian belief. So have all other Christian theologies.

Take, for example, justification by faith. This doctrine was first formulated explicitly in the Lutheran reformation. Yet early Anabaptists were clearly influenced by it, and in some respects positively. Important features of what they understood and now understand about "faith" they hold in common with Lutherans. At the same time, sixteenth-century Anabaptists raised various objections against Lutheran formulations, some of which clearly reflect their Catholic backgrounds.

One cannot adequately articulate an Anabaptist theology of faith without being aware of its relationships to Lutheran and Catholic notions. Yet a mere positive reference to justification can hardly be evidence of "building" on a Lutheran foundation or that its Anabaptist elements are mere "add-ons." Of course, this could be the case. But it is also possible that the Anabaptist elements might configure the overall notion of faith quite differently than what one finds in Lutheranism, and yet positive continuities between the two could still exist.

Similarly, Anabaptist reflection on Jesus Christ was shaped, both positively and negatively, by the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations. Negatively, sixteenth-century Anabaptists noted that these creeds underplayed Jesus' life and teachings, and protested that verbal affirmation of them apart from Christlike deeds is not really Christian confession. Yet these formulations also impacted Anabaptist Christology positively. Many Anabaptists of the period explicitly affirmed them. Pilgram Marpeck's emphasis on Jesus' full humanity and full deity deeply shaped his understanding of Church, ethics, and sacrament. Most Anabaptists understood salvation as "divinization," as participation in Christ's divine nature, something impossible if Christ were not both fully divine and fully human.[11]

Once again, positive references to Nicea or Chalcedon in an Anabaptist Christology are hardly evidence of "building" on a "creedal" foundation, or

that its more uniquely Anabaptist elements are mere "add-ons." Again, that could be the case. Yet even though positive continuities might exist, the overall Christology could still be shaped quite differently from one developed chiefly from those formulations.

Examination of Anabaptist beliefs in light of other past theologies could also indicate that a theme not often found in Anabaptism should be included in one's current theology. This seemed to be so for me when I first examined the role of the Lord's Supper in the Reformation era and in Scripture. This led me to give this ceremony and sacraments in general more emphasis than Anabaptist tradition seemed to have done.[12] Since then, however, I have learned that sixteenth-century Anabaptists said much about the Eucharist.[13] It was later Anabaptism that minimized it. Still, a theology in Anabaptist perspective, because it seeks to be thoroughly Christian, can incorporate themes that Anabaptists have not traditionally stressed and still be decidedly Anabaptist. One could even decide, on the basis of one's norm, that non-Anabaptist theologies were more correct on certain points than Anabaptists were, and yet one's overall perspective could clearly be Anabaptist.

Relation to present theologies. What was true in relation to past theologies is true here as well. However uninformed particular Anabaptists may be of other Christian and non-Christian perspectives, Anabaptist beliefs today–again including the implicit ones–do not exist within a vacuum. They exist in both positive and negative relationships with other contemporary kinds of thought, as is the case for all other Christian theologies. Gordon Kaufman, in his earlier work, proposed that the thought-forms of today's culture provide a certain kind of "norm" for theology.[14] This norm, however, does not determine whether a theology's content is true but whether its forms of expression are intelligible. If theology deals with "God" and therefore with the ultimate significance of human life, ethical action, and the cosmos, it cannot express these well without engaging at least some current ideas on these subjects.

In seeking to do this in light of its norm, theology in Anabaptist perspective will occasionally find some of its themes related positively to what other theologies or world-views are saying. In these cases it may take over some of their conceptions, or even incorporate some themes not well represented in Anabaptist thought. The mere presence of such elements, however, will no more indicate that these theologies are built on other

foundations than will the occasional appearance of justification or Nicene or Chalcedonian language.

The question of whether a theology is really being done in Anabaptist perspective centers on: (1) whether its overall norm(s) is/are consistent with large sectors of Anabaptism throughout its history (though they cannot be directly derived from that history); and (2) whether Anabaptism provides the dominant particular perspective from which it is being done. Do Anabaptist themes really provide the foremost angle of vision from which questions of Christology, ecclesiology, etc. are asked and in light of which they are answered? Or does some other theology or thought-system? This cannot be determined merely by ascertaining whether elements of other belief-systems, past or present, exist in a theology, but rather by judging whether an Anabaptist perspective more than any other contributes to that theology's final shape.

Anabaptism and some contemporary theologies

Let me concretize my discussion by illustrating how a theology in Anabaptist perspective might incorporate two specific themes from two quite different twentieth-century theologies. Neither of these themes appeared in Anabaptist theologies until the last several years, yet both can contribute to their content and intelligibility without rendering them any less Anabaptist.

Hendrikus Berkhof, a Reformed theologian, wrestles with the traditional Reformed notion of God's omnipotence, which has often centered on the doctrine of predestination. Berkhof is well aware that such a notion can seem to imply that God is all-controlling, and that this is especially problematic to modern people who value human freedom. He notes that Reformed theology has usually sought to derive God's attributes from rather abstract notions of God's transcendence. He proposes instead that these attributes be inferred from what he calls "condescendence."[15] By this Berkhof means God's history with humankind as recorded in Scripture. He traces the general attempt to derive the divine attributes from revelation history to neo-orthodox theology, particularly that of Karl Barth.[16]

If we begin with God's condescendence, Berkof argues we are struck by God's "defencelessness . . . that attribute by which he leaves room for his 'opposite' and accepts and submits himself to the freedom, the initiative, and the reaction of that 'opposite.'"[17] "God steps back" first "by setting a world

opposite to himself." Then, in creating humans, God "recedes . . . to make room for another. That room is needed because the other is to be a real partner . . . . One cannot be a real partner without having one's own area of freedom and initiative . . . . God relinquishes some of his power and makes himself more or less dependent."

Then eventually this defenselessness "reaches its nadir on the cross where he is unable to save himself, where God is silent, and where free and rebellious man triumphs over God."[18] It continues in the Holy Spirit, who works through "defenceless means," and who too "goes the way of the cross, because everywhere he is resisted and grieved. And where he wins human hearts for himself . . . he also molds them into the defenselessness of not avenging themselves, of turning the other cheek, of the preparedness to suffer."[19] However, Berkhof also recognizes that this defenceless God, according to the biblical narrative, will ultimately bring all the divine purposes to consummation. Even through suffering, God conquers all opposing forces. God, then, is also the universe's "superior power." Consequently, instead of referring to God as "omnipotent," Berkhof speaks of God paradoxically as "the defenceless superior power."

Most Anabaptist theologians could profit from Berkhof's discussion of this and other divine attributes. It seems quite legitimate to adopt his term, "defenceless superior power," into a theology in Anabaptist perspective. Berkhof, who has wrestled with traditional Reformed theology more than most Anabaptists, may have attained greater insight into the relationship between "omnipotence" and the Bible's divine "condescendence" than most of us. To charge any Anabaptist who used "defenceless superior power" with building on Reformed theology would be quite misguided. This theme is very consistent with Anabaptism. On points like this, Berkhof has perhaps come more than halfway from traditional Reformed theology to Anabaptism. This is one indication that many "mainline" theologies have changed significantly from Reformation times and cannot be simplistically lumped together in an oppositional stream.

Consider a very different current theology. According to Rosemary Ruether, Jesus announces "the new humanity through a lifestyle that discards hierarchical caste and speaks on behalf of the lowly."[20] This emphasis seems quite consistent with Anabaptism. Ruether affirms it in the context of asking whether women can regard Jesus as normative. In general, she accepts one

strand within the biblical texts as normative for her theology–the "prophetic-liberating tradition." It includes the themes of (1) "God's defense and vindication of the oppressed," (2) "the critique of the dominant systems of power," (3) the vision of a new age which overcomes unjust systems and installs God's reign of peace and justice, and (4) "the critique of ideology."[21]

Jesus' significance can be found chiefly in the fact that he renews this prophetic vision.[22] Ruether adds, however, that women play an especially important role in his ministry. Women of the oppressed and marginalized groups often emerge as representatives of the lowly. For Jesus, "women are the oppressed of the oppressed. They are seen as the bottom of the present social hierarchy, and hence . . . in a special way, as the last who will be first in the Kingdom of God."[23] For this reason, women can accept Jesus as their liberator; his maleness presents no obstacle.

Ruether takes a central biblical and Anabaptist theme, that Jesus identifies especially with the marginalized and lowly, and extends it with an insight which is also biblical: that women are often the lowliest of the lowly. I do not know that this particular emphasis has appeared anywhere in Anabaptism, at least before recent times. Yet this is no reason it should not be incorporated into a theology in Anabaptist perspective.

These two examples show ways in which twentieth-century emphases from non-Anabaptist theologies need not dilute, but can enrich, theologies in Anabaptist perspective. This does not mean, of course, that Anabaptist themes cannot be subordinated to non-Anabaptist schemes in undesirable ways. An example might be Ruether's use of the prophetic-liberating tradition "as a norm through which to criticize the Bible" itself.[24] As employed in her overall Christology, it leads to rejection of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Logos.[25] Although some Anabaptist theologians might largely concur with her reasoning, on the basis of both Scripture and sixteenth-century Anabaptism, not to mention Anabaptist tradition in general, I would not.

I do recognize the possibility that theologies in Anabaptist perspective might base themselves on non-Anabaptist foundations and might indeed treat Anabaptist elements as "add-ons" to them. My illustrations from Berkhof and Ruether show not only how this need not be the case but how other views can enrich theologies in Anabaptist perspective.

Conclusions

When Anabaptists seek to articulate an explicit theology in the twentieth century, we find ourselves confronted by a world of theological concepts, volumes, and discussion-styles formed largely by other traditions. In seeking to articulate the distinct features of our tradition, should we create theologies which reflect as little positive contact with other traditions as possible? Or, as we asked at the outset, can we interact positively with and even appropriate elements of other traditions and remain distinctively Anabaptist?

We should surely be free to express ourselves in novel ways and to develop unique perspectives or even unique themes when the central thrusts of Anabaptism make them suitable. The form and content of the received theological traditions are not sacrosanct. Sometimes forms developed to express other kinds of insights will be unsuitable for expressing our own. At the same time, it is misguided to avoid positive contacts with other theologies whenever possible. This is because Christian theology–if one affirms my five features of the theological task–inevitably involves not only negative but also positive interaction with other theologies and thought-systems. This is so because Christian theologies, despite the *particularity* of their perspectives, seek, first, to make some affirmations that are *universally* Christian; and, second, to do so on the basis of a universally Christian *norm* or norms. Consequently, one cannot simply assume the truth of common Anabaptist beliefs but must compare them with other claims to Christian truth on the same themes. If the norm of acceptability is what is truly Christian (and not what is simply Anabaptist), certain features of other truth-claims will inevitably be affirmed and incorporated in some way into one's theology.

Constructive interaction with other theologies will also occur because articulation of any Christian viewpoint involves both negative and positive dialogue with *past* and *present* Christian understandings. Few Anabaptist positions, if any, can even be stated without their agreeing at least implicitly with features of other past and present theologies. The positive features of these other theologies will inevitably play some role in one's own.

This necessary positive interaction with other Christian theologies means that these others *can* come to form a general foundation to which Anabaptist emphases are simply tacked on. Crucial Anabaptist distinctives, like peace, can get diminished or lost in the process. But this need not happen. It will not

if, first, one's basic norm or norms are congruent with historic Anabaptism; and second, contributions from other theologies are so configured by an Anabaptist perspective that the latter provides the dominant point of orientation in the majority of cases.

Notes

[1] In most instances, I use "Anabaptist" to refer to the Mennonite and Brethren traditions. When I refer specifically to the original Anabaptist movement, I designate it as "sixteenth-century Anabaptism."

[2] *Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 21-2; cf. 20: "it is our thesis that no genuine religious movement can exist without certain underlying `theological' ideas, even if they are not precisely formulated." (cf. 50-1)

[3] A third option is to return to the level of implicit theology and reject further efforts at explicit theology. This journal, however, has pioneered the rise of explicit theology among Anabaptists, and this article assumes the general value of what is already being done. It is designed to discuss the character, promise, and potential problems of these efforts.

[4] Consider this parallel. To affirm that for anything to be considered "music," it must involve several tones or notes at different pitches, is not to indicate a fundamental kind of music to which specific kinds of music, such as "Anabaptist music," would be secondary. Such an affirmation merely describes one feature which anything must have to be considered as music. It would certainly eliminate Anabaptist fraktur art from the territory of music. But anyone who complained that Anabaptism was being discriminated against in this way would misunderstand the purpose of the definition. It would, of course, be possible to define music or theology in such a way that Anabaptist music or theology would be eliminated or reduced to secondary status. But my five features of theology do not do this.

[5] *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1970), 210.

[6] *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 137.

[7] Such conversation also presupposes normative ethical commitments. Authentic dialogue is possible only where all participants are regarded as of equal worth and have an equal right to express their own views and be fairly heard. But to regard all humans as of equal worth is to make a universal ethical judgment or decision about the ultimate value of everyone (or at least about the importance of equal participation among all people.) A somewhat similar argument about dialogue has been developed by Jürgen Habermas. See Stephen White, *The Recent Work of Juergen Habermas* (New York: Cambridge, 1988), esp. 22-4, 48-65; and Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983), 182-97. For fuller development of this theme, see my articles, "Confessing Truth in a Pluralistic World," in David Shenk and Linford Stutzman, eds., *Confident Witness: Practicing Truth in a Pluralistic World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, expected in 1999); and "Should Anabaptist Theologians Seek to Articulate Universal Truth Claims?" read at the Anabaptism

and Postmodernity Conference held in Bluffton, OH, August 1998.

[8] To the three arguments for universality above (or four, counting note 7), I can add another. It seems impossible to state the position of total relativism consistently. To say "All assertions are relative" is to make an assertion that one intends to be universally true, and thus to contradict the statement's content. This is another indication that human thought and language are structured to make affirmations about what is universally true, even if such statements cannot be known to be indubitably true before the *eschaton*. For a fuller discussion, see my "Relativity, Normativity, and Imagination: a Dialogue with Gordon Kaufman," in Alain Epp Weaver, ed., *Mennonite Theology in Face of Modernity* (N. Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1996), 204-19.

[9] E.g., in *Becoming Anabaptist* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), J. Denny Weaver, after candidly describing the violence found among many early Anabaptists, nevertheless concluded that "peace, *rejection of violence*, and non-resistance" is one of Anabaptism's "first principles" or continuing "univeral" norms (120). Some reviewers noticed that Weaver provided no rationale for extracting this principle from the history he reported (e.g., C. Arnold Snyder in John Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology* [Akron, PA: MCC Peace Office, 1991], 84-86). Weaver acknowledged he had derived it from the Jesus-story, not from sixteenth-century Anabaptism (*The Conrad Grebel Review* 13:1 [Winter 1995], 69-86), and he had identified this story as his ultimate norm in previous publications. When he later critiqued Snyder's handling of violence in Anabaptism, Weaver seemed to regard history as normative in some sense, for he insisted that confessing Jesus as Lord prevents one from presenting Anabaptism in a way that makes the sword issue optional or secondary. Instead, one must "tell a story in which violence emerges as a failure and the 'heroes' advocate nonviolence . . . ." (*The Conrad Grebel Review* 16:1 [Winter 1998], 47).

[10] Early Anabaptism is marked not only by some violence but also by literalist eschatological predictions which proved disastrous (see Snyder's evaluation in *Anabaptist History and Theology* [Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995], 380). In later Anabaptism, though violence and predictive eschatology had faded, rigid Church structures and significant Christological differences emerged.

[11] See Alvin Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop, The Netherlands: B. De Graff, 1977), and my article, "Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy: Some Possible Similarities?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31. 1 and 2 (Winter-Spring 1994), 67-91.

[12] The results were written up in my *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, Vol. II (Scottdale, PA.: Herald Press, 1989), 331-48.

[13] See especially John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993).

[14] Kaufman called it theology's "experiential norm." (*Systematic Theology: An Historicist Perspective* [New York: Scribners, 1968], 75-80). He has since repudiated the general orientation of this work. But he would affirm the point which I mention and generally support, at least as strongly.

[15] *Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 114-17.

[16] *Ibid.*, 141.

[17] *Idem.*

[18] *Ibid.*, 142.

[19] *Ibid.*, 142-43.

[20] *Sexism and God-Talk*, 137.

[21] *Ibid.*, 23-24. Ruether adds that this ideology is usually religious.

[22] *Ibid.*, 135-36.

[23] *Ibid.*, 136-37.

[24] *Ibid.*, 24.

[25] *Ibid.*, 122-26. Ruether also rejects the way most Anabaptists would understand the historical uniqueness of Jesus. "Christ," she writes, "is not to be encapsulated 'once-for-all' in the historical Jesus" (138). Jesus, as a model of redemptive humanity, "must be seem as partial and fragmentary, disclosing from the perspective of one person, circumscribed in time, culture, and gender, something of the fullness we seek. We need other clues and models as well . . . from many times and cultures" (114).

Anabaptists and Existential Theology

P. Travis Kroeker

Since first reading Robert Friedman's book on Anabaptist theology, I have taken his description as my own–theology is properly "existential theology."[1] Insofar as the Mennonite or Anabaptist approach to theology is above all existential (rather than dogmatic, creedal, doctrinal, systematic, fundamental, academic, ecclesial, and other such primary descriptors), I have happily continued to consider myself "Anabaptist" despite no longer being a formal member of the Mennonite church. Of course, so described, Anabaptist theology cannot be practiced in isolation from other approaches and traditions, nor can it avoid entering into conversation with alternative theological construals of human existence–Christian and otherwise. In this essay I reflect on what it means to practice "existential theology" and, in particular, Anabaptist existential theology, and I do so in conversation with other approaches and traditions as an embodiment of what I take such practice to entail.

Perhaps it is useful to begin at the beginning: Who coined the term theology, and why? The origin of the word is neither Christian nor Jewish but Greek–the term was coined by Plato in *The Republic* (Book II). What types or models of speech about the god (*hoi typoi peri theologias*, 379a) best represent the truth about human existence and its formative experiences, its ordering, its "good"? Theology for Plato is existential theology. Not content simply to repeat uncritically the tales of the poets or conventional opinions and doctrines about human beings and the gods, he wants to know the truth: how do these tales and teachings illuminate and inform human life in the world? The model of theological education he develops in the *Republic* is devoted to the critical clarification of the assumptions, stories, ideas, and doctrines by which we live in order to find the true meaning of our existence.[2] Without such concern for truth, which is not only a cognitive matter but a moral matter of how to order desire–the quest for truth requires both a certain sort of person and a

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certain kind of *techné* or method–we live in danger of naming reality falsely, bound by fetters of our own making in the artificial light of conventional caves presided over by unenlightened, power-hungry image makers (and their media). For Plato this is a spiritual matter, for the truth of human existence seeks contact with the eternal good beyond all images and external appearances, the true invisible measure of all visible reality.[3]

Hence the central importance of theology. Misconceptions about the god are not ordinary falsehoods. They represent the "true lie" (*to hos alethos pseudos*, 382a, cf. 535d-e), the lie in the soul about "the highest things" (*kyriotata*) to "what is highest" in oneself. The lie of disordered theology is therefore not merely the possession of distorted knowledge; it is a wrong relation to God–a spiritual problem affecting the whole of existence: personal, social, and cosmic. I believe this is no less true for Christians and for Mennonites than it was for the ancient Greeks, and there is good reason for us to have adopted Plato's word in developing our own accounts of the meaning of existence before God. Doctrine is tied to the drama of life, and this drama is not just a personal or communal story or tradition; it is a cosmic drama. Yet our only way toward understanding ourselves within it is the low road of particularity, exploring the narratives, symbols, and doctrines that shape us in order to recover the dramatic spiritual motion they represent.[4] In order to do that properly, we must seek the truth about the spiritual order of reality and our place within it.

Here it is wise to attend to the existential theology of Augustine, who shared the Platonists' concern for the truth and who, like Plato, understood the journey towards it to be a spiritual one toward God as our "homeland," travelled along the "road of the affections."[5] The desire of human existence is to find the true fulfilment of its earthly loves, and this entails the purification of the eye of the heart or the soul so as to see and be guided by the truth, goodness, and beauty that ultimately moves us within the embodied particularity of our worldly experience. For Augustine, however, this path takes a form unexpected by the Platonists–not philosophical dialectic, but tears of confession as we turn to follow the "form of the servant," the path of humble love (which cures our blinding pride) taken by God in the world.[6] We learn what it means to partake of the divine nature when we follow that path, the *via caritatis*, and imitate its spiritual motion; for it is the divine Truth itself

(*ipsa Veritas*), "that Word through whom all things were made," that was made flesh so that God may dwell with us.[7] "Although He is our native country, He made Himself also the Way to that country."[8] It is the bodily particularity, of course, that scandalizes the Greeks, and yet it is crucial to the Christian model of God to recognize the personal intimacy of God's spiritual relation to creation.

In the remainder of this essay I reflect on some representative stories that have helped me re-think in a broader existential context the particularity of the Mennonite, Christian memory in which I dwell, one that is also shaped by other particular memories and motions. Two of the most fateful of these cultural signs in our own context are: (1) the Canadian and North American story or "primal" (as George Grant puts it[9]) of the expanding domination of technological consumer culture, which has led to a growing cultural homogeneity in the service of the liberating promise of technology[10]; (2) the parallel story of religio-cultural diversity in a secular democratic society in which people from many traditions, backgrounds, and identities have had to wrestle with what it means to get along and relate to one another across *different* particularities. These two dramas stand in difficult tension with each other, and the temptation has been to flee or subvert the substantive challenge of the second by appealing to the hollowed-out, externalized, and increasingly generic identities (without meaningful memory) offered by the first, by a commodified consumer vision of "the good life."

In the face of this dangerous, soul-destroying idolatry the irony is that, more than ever, we need the rich particular resources of lived religious traditions and their spiritual disciplines (principles of motion) in order to develop viable alternative forms of human existence. Mennonites, like the other existential traditions represented in the examples below, face the challenge of how to wrestle with this tension in seeking to serve the larger good of our culture. Our form of service seeks to embody the pattern imaged by Christ, taking the low road of kenotic particularity, the humble path of suffering love–recognizing this to be the worldly form of cosmic glory.

My representative stories are novels that I teach in a secular urban university. They have prompted me to reflect anew upon existential theology, the relationship of the spiritual motion given in Christ as exemplified in my Mennonite Christian memory to the time and place in which I live. I offer

these reflections not as an expert Mennonite theologian nor from an academic or ecclesial ivory tower, but rather as someone struggling to give an account of what it means to be answerable for what I have been given to be and to do. These stories have enabled me to chart my own personal, but I trust not idiosyncratic, journey from rural Mennonite village to the city, concluding with the challenge of what it might mean to cultivate the spiritual disciplines of the penitential community of reconciling divine love in our own modern culture.

<div align="center">I</div>

The first story is *Remembering,* a novel by a Kentuckian farmer Wendell Berry.[11] This story is close to home for North American Mennonites who began their sojourn here in rural farming communities, a form of life whose passing Berry laments, a time and place from which many of us are not far removed in memory. Andy Catlett has devoted his life to such a rural community composed of small-scale family farms, but in the loss of his right hand to a corn-picking machine he finds he has "lost his hold" on his motivating vision.

The novel begins in a state of profound disorientation and disembodiment that represents Andy's spiritual condition, as he awakes from a disturbing technological nightmare in the strange San Francisco hotel room to which he has fled. He will find no liberation from his past problems by reshaping his identity through the commodified procurements of urban anonymity. Only by remembering who he is, the defining moments of the life history of his soul, the tangled pattern of embodied memories–words, gestures, voices–will he recover his purpose, the true direction of his bodily and spiritual desire. Andy's movement of repentance and return is captured in evocative prose:

> He is held, though he does not hold. He is caught up again in the old pattern of entrances: of minds into minds, minds into place, places into minds. The pattern limits and complicates him, singling him out in his own flesh. Out of the multitude of possible lives that have surrounded and beckoned to him like a crowd around a star, he returns now to himself, a mere meteorite, scorched, small,

> and fallen. . . . He will be partial, and he will die; he will live out the truth of that. Though he does not hold, he is held. (57-8)

In this complex particular pattern he meets his own life in freedom, significant within the embodied terms in which it is given and remembered, claimed by love experienced in body and soul in a manner connecting him to the cosmic drama itself:

> That he is who he is and no one else is the result of a long choosing, chosen and chosen again. He thinks of the long dance of men and women behind him, . . . who, choosing one another, chose him. He thinks of the choices, too, by which he chose himself as he now is. . . . Those choices have formed in time and place the pattern of a membership that chose him, yet left him free until he should choose it, which he did once, and now has done again. (60)

What Andy Catlett recovers is the memory of why he chose to resist the siren voices of technological and economic "progress" in order to cultivate another way of life on the land. This other way has been given him as a choice by his parents and the people of his community, who have fostered it through the disciplines of love. It is a radically traditional vision of rural existence in which fidelity to marriage, family, farmland, community, and God are richly woven together in a demanding pattern of skill and trust that our dominant urban, technological culture views with either sentimentality or disdain. When Andy, as a young aspiring "professional" agriculturalist–the newly minted product of an agricultural college seeking to make a career in farming journalism, thereby trading on his rural experience to advance his way of life–dares to voice his preference for the Amish farm he visits over the technological farming of large-scale agribusiness, he realizes this is more than an argument about agricultural methods and techniques. It is a cultural battle,[12] a spiritual struggle over the meaning of the "highest things," a good life and a bad one. Agribusiness, says Andy at an academic conference on "The Future of the American Food System," is an abstract "agriculture of the mind" (23) that cannot think humanly and spiritually about what it does, and therefore lacks good judgment. It produces death, not life.

This story holds relevance for existential Anabaptist identity and theology. I find it ironic that just when Mennonite "theology" as a formal

academic discipline is growing–we are rapidly becoming more sophisticated in our understanding of methodology, systematics, and intellectual trends, and we measure our success partly by the number of prestigious professional theologians we can boast–there is less and less of significance distinguishing our way of life from the cultural mainstream. Is our newfound "Anabaptist theology" another abstract "theology of the mind" where no real people and communities dwell, rather than an existential theology cultivating a whole way of life in communion that keeps faith with one another, the land, and God–embracing and embodying, in disciplined skills of love and care, a life-giving vision of peaceable justice? In our rush to join a "progressive" mainstream culture, eager to cash in our hard-earned countercultural identities for careerist success, have we become willing to lose our embodied Mennonite soul?

This is not to say that moving from the village to the city necessarily entails such a loss of soul, but neither is it true that to be *die Stillen im Lande* is somehow an abdication of human cultural, social, and spiritual responsibility. It may be, as Wendell Berry believes, that such a way of life preserves a crucial set of cultural, familial, social, and spiritual disciplines rooted in a vision of existence that our culture powerfully needs to bring it back from a headlong rush toward spiritual (and ecological, civil, economic) death. At the very least this should mean that in our eagerness to dialogue with modern and postmodern theorists and writers, Anabaptist theology dare not cut off dialogue with our past and with those "backward" and "conservative" traditional communities (the Amish, for example) who continue to give visible, embodied cultural testimony to a radically different way of life that judges our own simply by being what it is. I suggest that, because of what we count as worthy models of theology, such a dialogue has become far more challenging and difficult than the conventional forms of academic and avant-garde theological reflection we cite in our footnotes.[13]

II

I turn now to a very different novel, representing a very different context of dialogue, urban, in some ways more recognizably theological–but perhaps only in a shock of recognition. Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev* is set in

the heart of New York, where a young orthodox painter seeks to find the artistic forms by which to communicate the painful tensions of his experience as Hasidic Jew and painter, both to his own community and the wider culture. Thus it too deals with what Annie Dillard calls the "scandal of particularity."[14] As the painter of the "Brooklyn Crucifixion," Asher Lev appropriates the central Christian symbol to express his personal pain and his vision of atonement, and creates scandalous offense on every side. The painting depicts his mother crucified between his father and himself, representing the riveting and poignant familial tension in the novel–an image inviting Freudian interpretations.

Yet the painting is not only a depiction of the painful, indeed violent, conflict of desire. To understand Asher's scandalous art we must go well beyond Freudian psychoanalysis, which reduces religious symbolism to the objectified drama of human feeling. For Asher's feelings (and the feelings he represents in the painting) are themselves organized in relation to religiously (not just aesthetically or culturally) interpreted existence. It is the mother who is crucified, after all, and not simply in the ritual slaughter of a victim in order to achieve the object of desire. The mother's sacrifice is a voluntary self-giving, an "awesome act of will" as Asher comes to see, in the service of a larger, nurturing reconciliation between father and son, and the very different and yet related objects of their love, "ways of giving meaning to the world."[15] Her anguish, embodied in her own personal suffering, also represents and participates in the anguish of the universe and cries out for a form "of ultimate anguish and torment" (313). For this reason the observant Jew Asher Lev, who loves his parents, his Hasidic tradition and community, paints a crucifixion because "I would not be the whore to my own existence" (312).

This forceful language invites us to see how well Asher Lev understands the existential meaning of the Christian symbol he must employ–necessarily, he feels, in full shuddering recognition of the painful scandal it will create. The mother is crucified "between" the way of the father (strict, literal Torah observance–and therefore wary of the visual arts as potentially idolatrous–as the embodied path of atonement in the world) and the way of the son (the path of a gift divinely given that represents the world in a new form, one influenced by the Christian *goyim*, the tradition of Christian art). The borrowed form–the crucifix–and its content is itself profoundly Jewish, even while breaking

scandalously with traditional Jewish forms.[16] In Asher's hands it also breaks with the traditional Christian forms which have themselves been used–idolatrously–to oppress Jews.[17] Asher's "Brooklyn crucifixion" is a scandal to both Jews and Christians. The larger question it raises is, what shall we do with these differing paths, images, embodiments of redemption? How shall we find "at-one-ment" in a suffering world in which fathers and sons and their warring ways destroy one another (313)?

The implied answer of Potok's novel is: not by denying the particularity and embodiment of one's existence (family, ancestral past, religious traditions), nor by denying what is truly and revealingly–indeed, redemptively–embodied in the "other." One might find in embodied forms not available in one's own tradition what is needed to express "at-one-ment" in the tangled particularity of created existence. Such a path of dialogue will always risk scandal in order to participate responsibly in the redemptive task of bringing "the Master of the Universe into the world." Such an existential theology as a way of life will not be afraid to break those idols (reified symbols, traditions, doctrines that have become detached from lived meaning in relation to the living God) that enclose, entomb, encapsulate the light of God's holy presence in the world.[18] It will therefore seek the very heart of God's purpose for the world, rather than narrowly and self-righteously defend its own partial truth as the only path (which is to lust after false, more immediate gods). But it will not break and destroy particularity in a gratuitous manner; it will seek to be faithful to the larger truth that has inspired the particular and that nurtures it through self-giving service.

Existential theology keeps faith with the particular gift of one's own life given by the God whose life and purpose transcends (and therefore breaks) all static images. As images, Torah and cross remain true only as embodied in lives that point in freedom toward the true inner-outer, dynamic meaning of those embodiments and their challenging, illuminating, and saving power. This power is tied to its particularity, and it can only be kept alive by cultivating its meaning in the disciplined lives of committed community members–prayer, the shared reading and study of scripture, worship. Above all it is important, as the wise old Rebbe says, "to open our eyes wide" (271) to see what new thing God is revealing and doing in the world.

Few urban Mennonites have taken the Hasidic path of visible communal

separation from the wider culture. Indeed, urban Mennonites have become quickly acculturated and are, for the most part, virtually indistinguishable from other traditions by way of life and community discipline. Given the virtual absence of liturgical form in Mennonite worship, and the ready willingness to jettison those forms that may offend sophisticated urban tastes (e.g., community fasting, kneeling for prayer, community confession and discipline, and the ordinance of footwashing–all practiced in my own urban Mennonite church for less than a generation), little remains to distinguish the urban path of particular Mennonite witness from others in the low Protestant mainstream.

Indeed, the spectrum of doctrinal options now characterizing debates about Mennonite identity–are we a "peace church," an adult believers' baptism church, an evangelical or liberal church, a "voluntarist" tradition, "synergist" rather than predestinarian, etc.–can readily be found in other Protestant denominations. This does not mean the spectrum or the debates are meaningless or unimportant, or that the above-mentioned practices are unproblematic. However, it does obscure certain scandalous oddities of traditional Anabaptist existential theology, oddities which might offer creative resources for cultivating needed forms of particular Christian witness in our wider culture.

III

The third and most explicitly Christian of the novels that I am bringing into dialogue here is a work that resonates richly with many theological aspects of the Anabaptist tradition (and not just those of the Russian Mennonites!), Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Its hero is Alexei (Alyosha) Karamazov, "a strange man, even an odd one" whose significance is related to his particularity precisely insofar as he "bears within himself the heart of the whole, while the other people of his epoch have all for some reason been torn away from it for a time by some kind of flooding wind."[19] Alyosha's strange path, as "an early lover of mankind" (18), is shaped by Christian monasticism and the commission given him by his unconventional spiritual father, elder Zosima, to "sojourn in the world like a monk" (285). Dostoevsky's hero comes to embody a form of Christian ascetic theology in imitation of the image of the suffering Christ, a form of life with many parallels to Anabaptist

existential theology understood as "ascetic theology."[20] Kenneth Davis has compellingly argued that three influential characterizations of Anabaptist theology–Stauffer's "theology of martyrdom," Bender's "theology of discipleship," and Friedman's "doctrine of two worlds"–can be interpreted as complementary facets of an ascetic theology of holiness, tied to certain medieval and monastic movements of reform.[21] This points to a promising prophetic direction for existential Anabaptist theology, a direction I will explore below.

In Book Six of *The Brothers Karamazov*, entitled "The Russian Monk," Dostoevsky develops, in the voice of Alyosha, his poetic prophetic answer to Ivan Karamazov's powerfully articulate rejection of the meaning of God's creation as expressed by Christ. Dostoevsky wrote these pages in fear and trembling, concerned that in this "culminating point," for whose sake "the whole novel is being written," he would be able to communicate in persuasive artistic form the practical realism of "pure" Christian existence.[22] Not surprisingly, however, it is Ivan's legend of the Grand Inquisitor, not Alyosha's life of the elder Zosima, that has become the most famous of Dostoevsky's prophetic texts in the twentieth century. As Dostoevsky feared, the odd path of Christian asceticism–even in the form of "sojourn in the world"–would not capture the imagination and commitment of Russian culture. This too is foretold in the narrator's preface to the novel: modern critical realists will judge the hero to be "unrealistic," the representative of an isolated, otherworldly path that cannot be recommended as a model for our time. Yet the narrator insists that Alyosha was "even more of a realist than the rest of us" (25) and surely less isolated in the sense expressed by the words of Jesus that stand as the epigraph to the entire novel: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

How does the ascetic path lead us out of the darkness of falsehood and isolation to the light of truth, thus uniting us through death with "the heart of the whole"? For Dostoevsky this can only be understood in relation to Johannine cosmology, God's higher, "spiritual" truth that is nevertheless embodied in the world as the pattern of self-giving, suffering love. Unlike his compatriot Tolstoy, who translated the Gospel into a liberal pacifist moral vision, Dostoevsky sees the Christ of the Gospels is a cosmic apocalyptic

figure who tears open the hidden meaning of everyday life, and exposes it as spiritual crisis (*krisis*, in the literal sense of judgement or decision–in a metaphysical and theological, not just a socio-political or moral, manner). Entailed here is a radical reversal of meaning, cultivated in the ascetic spiritual disciplines, of conventional measures of meaning, truth, and lie. To those captured by a slavishly materialist vision of human freedom and fulfilment, the "tyranny of things and habits" which truly isolates selves (as "rights-bearers") and kills community, the monastic way may seem isolating and constricted. The elder Zosima begs to differ:

> Obedience, fasting, and prayer are laughed at, yet they alone constitute the way to real and true freedom: I cut away my superfluous and unnecessary needs, through obedience I humble and chasten my vain and proud will, and thereby, with God's help, attain freedom of spirit and, with that, spiritual rejoicing! Which of the two is more capable of upholding and serving a great idea–the isolated rich man or one who is liberated from the tyranny of things and habits? (314)

Only one freed from the isolation of self-love can truly love others, and such freedom is made possible through spiritual rebirth in the image of Christ–that is, conformity to the "form of the servant" that builds up human community through deeds of humble love.

Thus in answer to the question raised earlier, it is not *ascesis* per se that "saves"–after all, *The Brothers Karamazov* also gives us the cramped, judgmental asceticism of *ressentiment* in the character of Father Ferapont, who is captured by a crudely materialist religious cosmology (and the Grand Inquisitor too is a rigorous ascetic). Rather it is ascesis in the service of the truth of Christ that saves, a sincere inner penitence where one becomes "also guilty before all people, on behalf of all and for all, for all human sins, the world's and each person's, only then will the goal of our unity be achieved. . . . This knowledge is the crown of the monk's path, and of every man's path on earth" (164). Only such a conscious solidarity with the world's sin and guilt can move human hearts to participate in the divine love that seeks to reconcile the world in a peaceable harmony. Such an asceticism seeks not "otherworldly" purity nor, as the elder reiterates, is it afraid of human sin; it rather "keeps

close company" with the heart where the image of Christ presides, taking the penitential path of continual confession and suffering servanthood in which the re-creative mystery of divine love is powerfully enacted. "And what is the word of Christ without an example?" asks the elder. Alyosha's biography proceeds to recollect examples of the penitential life taken from the elder's memory. They follow a common pattern: an existential revelation of the "whole truth" of life, the confession of solidarity in human guilt, repentance, forgiveness, and a turn to the path of community brought about through active embodied love. To quote Father Zosima again:

> . . . every action has its law. This is a matter of the soul, a psychological matter. In order to make the world over anew, people themselves must turn onto a different path psychically. Until one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood. No science or self-interest will ever enable people to share their property and their rights among themselves without offense. Each will always think his share too small, and they will keep murmuring . . . . (303)

Such a vision of "the truth alone," and "not earthly truth, but a higher one" (308), dies to the pursuit of retributive justice and its alienating, isolating claims (which underlie Ivan's and the Inquisitor's rebellion), in order to be reborn into the suffering solidarity of human-divine community, where God's presence is lovingly served in all its created likenesses on the earth.

Dostoevsky's artistic portrait of ascetic theology has interesting parallels in the Anabaptist tradition, not least in the ascetic theology of Menno Simons. As in Dostoevsky's portrait, Anabaptist asceticism seeks the restoration of true humanity in the image of Christ made possible in the "penitent existence," as Menno calls it.[23] For him, as in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the truth of this image and existence is discerned from within the apocalyptic framework of the "slain Lamb" who rules in the heavenly city, a rule mediated on earth in the suffering servant church. To awaken and to remain attentive to this truth requires rebirth and the existential practice of the disciplines of the penitential life–for it is a truth that is transparent neither in the fallen human soul nor in fallen human society. "All who are born of the truth hate the lie," says Menno, echoing John (and Plato): "Conversely, all who are born of falsehood hate the truth" (330). This cosmic struggle between divine truth and its false, parodic

copies defines the terms of human existence; to serve the truth is an *agon* for which only the re-born are equipped.[24]

Yet this rebirth and awakening is neither simply an inner matter of the heart, nor an individualistic experience. It is a being reborn into the true nature of divine love that becomes visible in the world through embodied expression, the *mimesis* of the spiritual motion of humble love incarnated by Christ. If the pattern is true, then its nature cannot be an abstract or formal or "otherworldly" ideal; it must hold in all aspects of existence. "If you are born of the pure seed of the holy Word, the nature of the seed must be in you" (394),[25] and all things will proceed according to that nature, as Menno's extensive discussion of examples of the penitent life in "True Christian Faith" makes clear. Such love, in the language of *The Brothers Karamazov*, is not a "miracle impossible on the earth," a kind of otherworldly dream "staged" by the Gospel stories and the Christian church for dramatic inspiring effect (237, 58). It is a demanding way of life, yet precisely one for which human beings have been made. That is the premise of existential Anabaptist theology–the Gospel is not an unattainable ideal of love presided over by the church as the custodian of proper doctrine and otherworldly hope, while the realities of worldly justice and social order are addressed by other more attainable means.[26]

Hence the sacraments and the body of Christ must be interpreted in a fully existential manner as well, as the real presence and embodiment of the penitential pattern.[27] The weeping of true repentance, says Menno, is not empty or formal display–it is the expression of a new mind, a new nature, which will become manifest in deeds.[28] Baptism represents the "true new birth with its fruits" of obedience to the inner Word; the Lord's Supper conforms the outer sign to its true meaning, the body of Christ in which those who partake become "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone" and incarnate Christ's kenotic pattern of humble love in all of life.[29] At the motivating heart of this participatory ascesis is neither dazzling miracle nor forensic status–it is the transformation of holy erotic divine love. The culminating image here is the celebratory assembly of the marriage feast of the Lamb.[30] So too in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Alyosha's re-birth is sacramentally and iconically depicted in another of Dostoevsky's "culminating" moments–a chapter entitled "Cana of Galilee," in which Alyosha is granted a vision of the heavenly wedding feast that ties together earthly joy and its heavenly completion. It is this unity

of inner and outer, temporal and eternal, earthly and heavenly, personal and cosmic, that equips him for ascetic sojourn in the world, his ministry of reconciliation that helps transform the community of children from a pattern of strict, retributive justice to that of humble, restorative love.

<div align="center">IV</div>

This brings me to my concluding point, and the one with which I began. Existential Anabaptist theology of the sort described above must be particular but it cannot be isolated. Just as Christ incarnated the creative power of divine love in the particular form of a humble servant, thus reversing expectations for how to understand the cosmic authority of divine rule and its worldly embodiment, so also the community of Christ's followers seeks to embody this pattern in our own time and place. This astonishing image is dramatically unveiled in Revelation 5, in John's vision of the sealed scroll that contains the hidden meaning and destiny of historical existence. No one is worthy to open the scroll and God will not break the seals–human destiny and with it the destiny of creation is mediated in the world by human freedom. God does not interfere magically. John begins to weep–how will God's purposes for this alienated creation be realized? Who is worthy to be the agent of redemptive justice and reconciling harmony in the world?

The answer is given in an amazing conjunction of images. The elder *says* to John, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals"–an image of the Messianic warrior king. What John *sees*, however, is "a Lamb, standing, as though it had been slain"–the Messianic conquering of evil is accomplished by death. The Messianic agency that draws all creation to its fulfilling completion is the power of suffering, serving love that exhausts the strength of evil by patient martyrdom. This calls for an alternative vision of the meaning and end of human existence (represented by a "new song" in Rev. 5: 9-14) founded on the model of worthiness of the slain Lamb.

And yet this ascetic vision of humble, serving love has as its final aim the inclusion of all reality in the joyful feast of the remembering people of God, the descent out of heaven of the holy Jerusalem lit up by the Lamb in whose light walk all the nations, each bringing their own particular gift of

glory to it (Rev. 21-22). It is no accident that Dostoevsky places this vision of the eschatological banquet in the New Jerusalem at the culminating points of existential "re-birth" in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Alyosha is directed by his dead elder to the focus of true worship, "our Sun," with the words "We are rejoicing . . . we are drinking new wine, the wine of a new and great joy. See how many guests there are? Here are the bridegroom and the bride . . . ."[31] Mitya, having undergone the three spiritual torments by which he is brought to penitent confession (though not of the kind sought by his prosecutors), has a dream of "the wee one," an image in response to earthly suffering that enables him to love existence "as it is" and initiates a humble, loving (rather than retributive, accusatory) quest for understanding its meaning. It is an image related to John's vision in Rev. 21:3-4, in which suffering, tears, pain, and death are overcome as God comes to dwell with human beings. Mitya is increasingly sustained by the "new man" that has arisen in his soul,[32] who, in contrast to the tempting image of the "new man" of technological liberal progress, is capable of the suffering, reconciling love of God's dwelling because nurtured by God's gift of joy, "without which it's not possible for man to live" (592).

This is the hymn-singing "underground man" born anew, who knows the transcendent sun of the New Jerusalem–even "if I don't see the sun, still I know it *is*. And the whole of life is there–in knowing that the sun *is*" (592).[33] So also the very end of the novel where Alyosha speaks to the boys at the "big stone" on the occasion of Ilyusha's funeral, about the truth of existence as revealed by the resurrected slain Lamb, that joins in a life-giving union what seems so opposed: unjust suffering and the joy of life, pain and yet praise of creation as it is. As the precocious Kolya puts it: "It's all so strange, Karamazov, such grief, and then pancakes [*bliny*] all of a sudden–how unnatural it all is in our religion!" (773)

Such penitential asceticism, and then *Tweeback* all of a sudden! That the tears of penitence and overwhelming joy mingle together to water the soil of our hearts and enable the seeds of our higher homeland to grow, is something I learned as a child in a Mennonite household and church community. Here we are brought to the center of existential Anabaptist theology, in a conjunction of body and soul, penitence and joy, death and resurrection movingly depicted

also in a well-known passage by Menno:

> Just as natural bread is made of many grains, pulverized by the
> mill, kneaded with water, and baked by the heat of the fire, so is
> the church of Christ made up of true believers, broken in their
> hearts with the mill of the divine Word, baptized with the water of
> the Holy Ghost, and with the fire of pure, unfeigned love made
> into one body. (145)

It is not accidental, I believe, that the Johannine and Pauline images of death
and resurrection are agricultural–as "seed"–and not mechanical or abstract
artistic or intellectual theories. The meaning of our embodied existence is of a
piece with the order created by God, the dynamism of which is the continual
self-giving gift of God's creative Spirit (not dead mechanism, not human
making) that enlivens the world through love. As participants in that cosmic
drama we need not fear to be who we are, so long as we give ourselves to
cultivating the divine seed given us in Christ that joins our particular partiality
to the suffering, celebratory completion of the "all in all."

Notes

[1] Robert Friedman, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald
Press, 1973).

[2] For further discussion of Plato's approach to theology see Kroeker, "The Ironic Cage of
Positivism and the Nature of Philosophical Theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*
22/1 (1993): 93-103.

[3] I trust it will be evident, therefore, why and where I disagree with postmodern Mennonite
voices calling for poetry to replace philosophy and theology. While I welcome Scott Holland's
affirmation of "theopoetics," I cannot agree with his unerotic reading of Plato. Plato certainly
did not fear poetry or the poets, just as he did not fear politics, politicians, intellectuals, and
sophists. What he feared "more than anything" (in himself, in others, and in the city) was to lie
"to the soul about the things that are" (*Republic* 382ab): the willful ignorance of truth, the
manipulation of ideas, images, emotions, desires without regard for understanding their meaning
and good ordering. See Scott Holland, "Theology is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of
Theopoetics," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (April 1997): 227-41. For my alternative reading
of Plato, see "The Theological Politics of Plato and Isaiah: A Debate Revisited," *The Journal
of Religion* 73/1 (January 1993): 16-30. An insightful interpretation of Plato and the poets is
Hans Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical*

Studies on Plato (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). An astute deconstruction of the dogmatic Derridian reading of Plato is Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998): Part I.

[4] Augustine refers to "intentional signs" (*signa data*) as "those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood." *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson (Library of Liberal Arts, 1958), II, 3. In order to understand and interpret those signs properly one must attend to and imitate their existential meaning. Hermeneutics is not only an intellectual exercise.

[5] See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I. One can only chuckle at Rudy Wiebe's depiction of "Augustine's Plato-influenced love of ethereal spirit and the literally untouchable soul," in Wiebe's "The Body Knows as Much as the Soul: On the Human Reality of Being a Writer," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (April 1997): 196. "Love" was not a word Augustine threw around casually–he knew the variety of ways embodied souls experience it, and he tried to understand the good ordering of that experience theologically. Ironically, what Wiebe modestly claims as his own daring insight, namely the wilful autonomy of the male sexual organ, is the subject of unstinting, illuminating analysis by Augustine in *City of God* (Book XIV). I suppose Wiebe will object that Augustine ties this too closely to THE FALL (how negative of him!), a story whose profound spiritual motion Wiebe reduces to a moralistic homily on Mennonite Brethren guilt–see Wiebe's dismissive treatment in the title essay of *River of Stone: Fictions and Memories* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1995), 298f.

[6] Augustine says the following about the difference between his Platonism and the path of Christ: "I began to want to give myself airs as a wise person. I was full of my punishment, but I shed no tears of penitence. Worse still, I was puffed up with knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1). Where was the charity which builds on the foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus? . . . . None of this is in the Platonist books. Those pages do not contain the face of this devotion, tears of confession, your sacrifice, a contrite and humble spirit . . . . It is one thing from a wooded summit to catch a glimpse of the homeland of peace and not to find the way to it . . . ." Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 1991), VII, xx-xxi.

[7] See *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 12-13, 38.

[8] *Ibid.*, I, 11. As Augustine makes clear (I, 10-12), this divinely given spiritual motion by which God comes to dwell in God's own creation is not some form of space and time travel– God comes to where God already is. So also the motion of our return to God is not some spatio-temporal tradition but the fulfilment of our created existence which was designed for eternal communion with God and our neighbors. The cosmic spiritual drama in which we participate has its terms (nature) given by the Creator God who does not abandon us to our distortions of that nature but seeks to cure our relation to the source and end of love. To quote Augustine: "One lives in justice and sanctity when one is an unimpaired appraiser of the intrinsic reality of things. Such a one has an ordered love, who neither loves what should not be loved, nor fails to love what is lovable" (I, 28, my translation).

[9] See George Grant, "In Defence of North America," *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969): 15-40.

[10] I offer an interpretation of this story as one of "spiritual crisis" in *Christian Ethics and*

Political Economy in North America: A Critical Analysis (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), especially chapters 1 and 5.

[11] Wendell Berry, *Remembering* (New York: North Point Press, 1988).

[12] Cultural in the twofold meaning of *cultus*: 1) what we worship, respect, venerate–the teachings, rituals and practices that re-mind us who we are; 2) what we cultivate as worthy of attention, labor, and care so as to serve the good of a place, a community, and a time in all aspects.

[13] Two Mennonite theologians–Harry Huebner and David Schroeder–have conducted a fascinating dialogue with the Amish community, sharing their common struggles over how to cultivate the disciplines of visible Christian community in a seductive consumer culture. The dialogue has not, I take it, been conducted as "field research" for academic publication (the preservation of Mennonite "folk lore") but with the aim of critically and constructively understanding what it might mean to be the church in late modern North America.

[14] See Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), Part Three.

[15] Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1972), 309. Her act of will sharply contrasts to the aesthetic vision articulated in an art book Asher's mother gives him to read early in his formal education, Robert Henri's *The Art Spirit*, where the powerful artistic will is fostered by "freeing" oneself from all creeds and communities. Asher's mother's act of will is a religiously informed and inspired devotion of love toward (neither liberation from nor enslavement to) her family and her community.

[16] For an interesting Jewish interpretation of Jesus' death as another particular form of the pattern of fraternal displacement and redemptive "chosenness" found in the Hebrew Bible, see Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[17] One reason Asher's family is so deeply offended by the crucifixion is that Asher's grandfather (after whom he is named) was killed on his way home from synagogue one Saturday night by a drunken Christian peasant–"somehow my grandfather had forgotten it was the night before Easter" (11).

[18] Hasidic cosmology says the spiritual task of Jewish life in community is to liberate the light of God's glory (*shekinah*) hidden and imprisoned in the shells of hardened worldly forms. This is a messianic task in which, through human deeds of service (sparks of responsibility), the world is hallowed for God's presence. This requires engagement with the powers of darkness; God approaches us in the alien, the partial, the incomplete, and invites us to join in the work that transforms it "into the substance of true life," as Martin Buber puts it. See *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1988), 78; cf. 53f.

[19] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1990), 3.

[20] The term "ascetic" has been used in many ways. Etymologically it is tied to *askeo*, "to work," in the sense of giving artistic form (in the Homeric literature), and to *askesis*, the practice of or in something, especially a "mode of life" (in the religious and philosophical sense). See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Liddell & Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); and *Asceticism*, ed. V. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[21] Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974). On the dialogue with Eastern Orthodox theology see the excellent comparative study by Thomas N. Finger, "Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy: Some Unexpected Similarities," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31.1-2 (1994): 67-91.

[22] See letters 784, 785, 791, and 807 in *Fyodor Dostoevsky: Complete Letters*, vol. 5, ed. and trans. David Lowe (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1991).

[23] Menno uses this language everywhere, but my interpretation focuses on "Foundation of Christian Doctrine" and "True Christian Faith." See *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. J.C. Wenger (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956): 103-226; 321-405. References to these texts appear by page number in brackets in the body of the essay. See also Sjouke Voolstra, "True Penitence: The Core of Menno Simons' Theology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 42.3 (1988): 387-400.

[24] Dostoevsky depicts this insight in his portrayal of Alyosha's conversion, following the death of his beloved elder which provokes a crisis of faith in Alyosha's "virgin heart." It is only when, in response to a sisterly act of love from an unexpected source (the seductive, "fallen" Grushenka), Alyosha experiences for himself the full inner-outer meaning of the elder's teachings that he becomes equipped for the ascetic "sojourn in the world" to which he has been called. It is a penitential rebirth characterized by weeping and ecstatic, erotic confession: "It was as if threads from all those innumerable worlds of God all came together in his soul, and it was trembling all over, 'touching other worlds.' He wanted to forgive everyone and for everything, and to ask forgiveness, oh, not for himself! but for all and for everything, 'as others are asking for me,' rang again in his soul. . . . He fell to the earth a weak youth and rose up a fighter, steadfast . . . ." (362-3)

[25] Menno argues that the nature of divine love into which followers of Christ are reborn is of a piece with "natural love" of parents for children and spouses for one another, where inner intention and external deed are not falsely divided but represent an inner-outer coherence within a larger natural and social ordering of love. "True Christian Faith," 338.

[26] The active involvement of the Mennonite church in establishing the practice of "restorative justice," for example, bears powerful continuing witness to this theological vision.

[27] This existential interpretation of the sacrament of penance and confession is present also in the path of elder Zosima–for which he is criticized by opponents who claim "that here the sacrament of confession was being arbitrarily and frivolously degraded," an ironic charge given the complete religious and moral seriousness of the elder, whose focus is on the power of the Gospel and the image of Christ to transform all of life.

[28] See Egil Grislis, "Menno Simons on Sanctification," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69.2 (April 1994): 226-46: "Menno's understanding of sanctification was remarkable both for its realism and its high expectations . . . . [his] concern was personal but remained in a distinctively ecclesial setting. The Christian love he celebrated was no mere ideal but a participatory reality." (246).

[29] Note the elder's words as recorded by Alyosha: "One may stand perplexed before some thought, especially seeing men's sin, asking oneself: 'Shall I take it by force, or by humble love?' Always resolve to take it by humble love. If you so resolve once and for all, you will be able to overcome the whole world. A loving humility is a terrible power, the most powerful of

all, nothing compares with it. Keep company with yourself and look to yourself every day and hour, every minute, that your image be ever gracious. . . . Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is difficult to acquire, it is dearly bought, by long work over a long time, for one ought to love not for a chance moment but for all time." (319)

[30] See "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 148f., and especially Menno's use of erotic language from the Song of Solomon to describe this vision of fulfilment, 221f. See also Beth Kreitzer, "Menno Simons and the Bride of Christ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 70.3 (1996): 299-318.

[31] *The Brothers Karamazov*, 361. In response to Alyosha's fear to look upon the glory of "our Sun" (a reference to Rev. 1:16; 21:23f.) the elder says, "Do not be afraid of him. Awful is his greatness before us, terrible is his loftiness, yet he is boundlessly merciful, he became like us out of love, and he is rejoicing with us, transforming water into wine, that the joy of the guests may not end. He is waiting for new guests, he is ceaselessly calling new guests, now and unto ages of ages." (361-2)

[32] Note also the role that Grushenka and her purified "worldly love" plays in the conversion of Mitya, who confesses: "Before it was just her infernal curves that fretted me, but now I've taken her whole soul into my soul, and through her I've become a man!" (594)

[33] This redemptive knowledge of the loving source of human solidarity enables Mitya, finally, to speak of his hated sibling rival as "brother Ivan"; his last words in the conversation with Alyosha are "love Ivan" (597). By contrast, Ivan's parting words to Alyosha concerning his brother Dmitri are "I hate the monster! I don't want to save the monster, let him rot at hard labor! He's singing a hymn!" (654) These words occur at the end of his own "three torments" in the form of visits to the illegitimate brother Smerdyakov, but Ivan's journey represents a contrasting movement of "truth" regarding the parricide to Mitya's path. Mitya is publicly accused of a murder he did not commit, and yet recognizes his murderous heart and takes free responsibility for it in a full, life-changing confession. Ivan, who has reserved complete freedom for hatred in his "wishes," is confronted by Smerdyakov with his actual complicity in the parricide, and cannot accept responsibility. At the end of his tormenting visits he too has a dream, not of a "wee one" or an eschatological wedding feast, but a "nightmare" of "the devil" who reminds him of yet another of his poetic creations, "The Geological Cataclysm," which elaborates the existential consequences of modern scientistic cosmology–the appearance of a "new man" in whom the idea of God has been destroyed, making possible the emergence of a titanic, nature-conquering "man god."

Literary Refractions

An excerpt from Andreas Schroeder's novella "Eating My Father's Island" appeared in the second issue of *Rhubarb: Published by the Mennonite Literary Society.* What follows here are chapters two and four of Schroeder's fourteen-chapter yarn which provides an account, in the author's inimitable story-telling mode, of the often bewildering clash of dream and reality in the lives of a Mennonite refugee family in the post-World War II Canadian west.

At the beginning of the story Reinhard Niebuhr, the narrator's father, finds himself, remarkably, to have won "an island in the sun," the first prize in a contest he has entered unwittingly, thanks to the rather zealous initiative of an "English" sewing machine repairman he's happened to meet. "Entering a contest," the narrator remarks in chapter one, "a worldly contest, an *English* contest, had to be considered, for a Mennonite, very poor form. Not one of the Seven Deadly Sins, not enough to be mentioned from the pulpit on Sunday morning, but nevertheless: an undeniable instance of flawed moral judgement."

The incongruous fact of this poor refugee's owning an island richly colors–in one way or another–various episodes in the life of his immigrant family. The two chapters that follow here introduce the narrator's father and mother in the context of their respective home communities. During the course of their lives–and during the course of this story–they will negotiate, with palpable measures of grace and good luck, the peculiar mixture of idyll and albatross father's island comes to represent.

Author note

Andreas Schroeder was born in Hoheneggelsen, Germany shortly after the second world war, and immigrated to Canada with his family at the age of five. He has been founder and editor of *The Journal of Contemporary Literature in Translation* (1968-80) and chairman of the Writers' Union of Canada (1976-77); he is chiefly responsible for the institution of Public Lending Rights in Canada. Schroeder's publications include several volumes of poems; *The Late Man* (Sono Nis, 1972), a collection of stories; *Dustship Glory* (Doubleday, 1986), a novel; and, most recently, two collections of creative

non-fiction: *Scams, Scandals and Skulduggery* (McClelland and Stewart, 1996) and *Fakes, Frauds and Flimflammery* (McClelland and Stewart, 1999). He can be heard on CBC Radio many Saturday mornings, regaling radio show host Arthur Black and their listeners across Canada with unlikely (but true) tales that are sure to raise many an eyebrow.

Hildi Froese Tiessen, *Literary Editor*

Eating My Father's Island
Excerpts from a Novella

Andreas Schroeder

[Two]

My father was a pessimist who'd come by his pessimism honestly. According to Mennonite tradition, the firstborn son inherited the entire estate. The second son became a minister. All daughters and subsequent sons were out of luck. My father was the last offspring of a family of four sons and three daughters, ten years younger than his next-youngest sibling, and an excessively shy, reclusive boy in a loud and rambunctious household. Throughout his youth he invariably found that whenever he finally arrived anywhere, everyone was already packing up and heading somewhere else.

It didn't help that he was also the only member of the Niebuhr clan who refused to worship at the sacred altar of farming–a pursuit specifically and historically designated for the Mennonites by God. He dodged his chores and summer farm-work whenever possible, spending all his time and money on darkroom photography. At age seventeen, rummaging unhappily through the small bag of career options his family had made available to him, he chose– because he assumed it would leave him plenty of time for his darkroom–to apprentice to a cabinet-maker. He was wrong. His master kept him hard at work from morning till night, and considered his photography a counter-productive distraction. The apprentice reports filed under REINHARD, YOUNGEST in Elder Niebuhr's filing cabinet–in a drawer that also contained the fertility reports on each of his thirty-five Holstein cows–were terse and unenthusiastic.

In 1944, at the age of twenty-one, Reinhard Niebuhr astonished everyone by managing, after a lengthy courtship that seemed to be going

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nowhere, to convince the lively and popular Margarete Klassen to marry him. Margarete was the sixth daughter of the Elder Guenther Klassen, a rich landowner from neighbouring Heuboden County.

Margarete was an accomplished musician and a nursing apprentice. They had met ten years earlier at a Mennonite Youth Camp on St. Christoph's Island, where both had been attending a religious retreat. Tall, blonde and artistic, Margarete seemed the very opposite of the short, meticulous, taciturn Reinhard, who spent half his spare time photographing rocks and buildings and the other half printing them again and again, in endless variations of tone and contrast, in his darkroom. Though their talks and walks around this island had been awkward and inconclusive ("You should try photographing people too, Reinhard," Margarete had urged), Reinhard had remembered only her eventual promise to see him again in Berlin, where she was completing her apprenticeship. In his recollections over the following decade, the island had become for him an increasingly idyllic and symbolic place, and he had returned there often, alone on his bicycle, to retrace their walks and imagine a life with Margarete.

But in 1939 the Second World War had stomped into everyone's life "without even taking its barn boots off" as Elder Niebuhr had put it. When the Nazis rejected the Mennonites' claim of historical Conscientious Objector status, Reinhard was given three months' training as a cook and herded, like thousands of other insufficiently dedicated German citizens, out to the Russian Front.

In the years that followed, both the Niebuhr and the Klassen clans suffered many casualties. The first wave paralleled Germany's offensives; the second its collapse. Sons, fathers and brothers died in uniform; mothers and daughters died when the Russian army over-ran their farms and turned them into refugees. Reinhard himself was wounded twice, and during one of his brief medical furloughs, he finally managed to convince Margarete to marry him. He spent his entire accumulated army pay to rent a cabin on St. Christoph's Island for their weekend honeymoon, and much of Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning photographing Margarete on walks and benches all over the island. By Monday noon he was back on a troop train, bound for Poland.

How he survived that slaughter, Reinhard never confided to anyone but Margarete. His unit was flung at Partisan irregulars in Kracow, chased down

through Czechoslovakia by Cossacks and hounded back west by the rapidly advancing Red Army. He arrived in Germany just in time to be corralled by the already occupying Americans, who penned him in a prison camp in Essen and nearly starved him to death.

On his release in 1947 he took one look at his bombed-out, ruined country, gathered up Margarete and his year-old son Peter whom he'd only just met–that was me–and applied for emigration to Canada.

But Canada didn't need any nurses or cabinet-makers. The labour market in the West had been decimated by the war, and Canada's farmers were clamouring for cheap farm help. Ruefully, and despite the fact that Margarete was mortally terrified of cows, Reinhard registered them both as farm labourers and joined the throngs of emigrants jostling for position at the docks in Bremerhaven. Once again, he felt as if he was arriving just as everyone else was leaving.

[Four]

After a supper of bread and borscht, which Mother heated in the kitchenette of a small nearby motel, Father surprised us all by starting to talk about Prussia.

"This stuff was really cheap and easy to come by," he remembered, examining a package of tinfoil drip liners someone had left on the stove. "We used it in our chicken barns back home to make reflectors." He turned it this way and that to catch the light. "For the chicks, right after they were hatched. To keep them warm. And when they called me up for duty in Russia–it was the middle of winter, everybody was freezing to death over there–I sewed whole lengths of it into my coat."

We were nonplussed for several reasons. First, Father hardly ever talked at length about anything. Second, he virtually never talked about his past–even when we pestered him about it. That's why we were a lot more familiar with Mother's stories, her people, her own Prussian childhood on the huge Klassen estate, with its many maids and barn-servants, its barnfuls of fine horses and its far more than thirty-five purebred Holstein milch-cows. To us children it seemed that all our customs, history and heritage came from our mother's side.

"That comes from drowning in Klassens," Father had once grumped. "In Agassiz, if you throw a rock at a Klassen it'll bounce off him and hit two

more before it ever reaches the ground." In our local Mennonite church, founded in 1951 by my grandfather Guenther Klassen, every single one of its sixty-one members was related to us on our mother's side. You couldn't find hide nor hair of a Niebuhr anywhere in B.C. All our father's people had settled in Manitoba.

Tonight, over a hundred miles from Agassiz, a circle of tinfoil was all it took to put Father in a reminiscing mood. "Oh ja, right in between the shell and the lining. That kept me warmer than anybody could understand. In Moscow, at the Leningrad offensive, I was the only one without frostbite. I even sewed it–laugh if you like–into the lining of my hat."

"Tinfoil?" Onkel Jacob snorted, caught between admiration for ingenuity and a four-centuries-old contempt for war and anything associated with it. "Tinfoil!"

Mother laughed. "It's true–when he came back on furlough, he rustled in the most alarming way."

"You sewed it all by yourself, Father?" Gutrun marvelled, never having seen a man anywhere near a sewing machine except to fix it.

"Oh yes, your father was a very accomplished sewer," Mother said. "And a photographer, and a carpenter, and . . . so on."

"A cabinet-maker," Father corrected automatically, but let it pass. "Oh ja, I had that coat for over a decade, and I'd still be wearing it today if the CPR hadn't lost one of our trunks."

"The CPR" Onkel Jacob snorted, lifting his hand and letting it fall onto the table in resounding agreement. "My God yes, the CPR!''

"I was wearing that coat when I met Margarete on St. Christoph's Island. At our youth camp," Father said, apparently to Onkel Jacob. He seemed to be seeing an evocative depiction of this on the kitchenette ceiling. "I always felt that God was . . . particularly close to us in those weeks."

"St. Christoph's Island," Onkel Jacob nodded uneasily, unclear where this conversation was going. "Ja ja, St. Christoph's Island."

Mother blushed slightly. "There were always so many gulls," she remembered quickly. "They were very beautiful; great flocks always wheeling and diving."

"Where was I, where was I?" screeched little Heidi, giddy with all this intimate history.

"You didn't appear until we'd been in Canada for almost two years," Mother said fondly, poking her in the stomach.

"And *still* living in a dirt-floor shack, hoeing corn and beans by hand to pay off our passage," Father groused, though he didn't say it with his usual rancour. "If Edgar Friesen hadn't been so busy counting his profits, he might have saved us that, at very least."

"Oh oh, I believe I smell a whiff of sulphur," laughed Onkel Jacob, who was distantly related to the Edgar Friesens and thus duty-bound to defend them against all slander. "I'm going to see what I can do about that piece of plywood you wanted. There's still enough light outside that I can scrounge around a bit."

"Ach, Reinhard, it wasn't true that Edgar was being stingy," Mother said when Onkel Jacob had left, though I was pretty sure she was saying this primarily for our benefit. "It was just that we were the last of our people to arrive. By the time we got here, everybody's credit had been used up."

"Only twenty-five acres," Father complained, rocking back on his chair's hind legs–something he never did at home. "And there wasn't even enough left over to buy a tractor or machinery."

"Herman and Juergen offered to lend us theirs," Mother pointed out carefully.

"Your brothers live twelve miles away, Margarete," Father said. "They're farming over two hundred acres. When has their machinery ever been available to us?"

"I'm just saying," Mother said.

She sighed and glanced uneasily at us children, all three agog at the frankness of the discussion we were unaccountably being allowed to hear. It wasn't that we weren't aware of these accusations -- we'd heard them in bits and pieces over the years–but this sudden promotion to temporary adulthood, something that never would have happened at home, felt deliciously risky and unreal.

"Twenty-two acres of grass cut by hand," Father said. "I even had to make my own scythe. The hay had to be turned every twenty-four hours. We pitched from dawn till dusk. Day in, day out. For weeks."

"I know," Mother said. "I was helping you."

"I was helping too," I threw in, taking a chance.

"Under the willow tree, by the slough," Mother agreed. "Every day. Taking care of Gutrun in her cradle."

Gutrun snorted. "I bet you didn't even," she said.

I threw the tinfoil I'd been squashing at her head.

"Totally unfenced land," Father continued. "Seven hundred and nineteen fenceposts, and every one of them dug in by hand."

Now he was talking about something even I remembered clearly. Having to stand under the blazing sun, hour after hour, steadying the posts while Father dug, pounded, stretched wire. The day he'd become so obsessed with his digging and pounding and stretching that he'd stopped listening to me entirely and I'd come home with a spectacular sunburn, my back covered with huge, seeping blisters. Mother had been horrified.

"*Um Himmel's Willen*! How is it possible to abandon a child that's standing less than fifteen inches away from you?!"

Father hadn't answered. He'd looked like he didn't even know the answer.

And we still didn't have a tractor. Instead, Father had negotiated an arrangement with the Hoogendoorns on the much larger farm next door whereby, in exchange for his labour during their major ploughing, seeding and harvesting periods, they extended their operations to include our twenty-five acres. But anything smaller that needed to be done during the rest of the year still had to be done by hand.

We had no car either, nor much hope of getting one. I'd always thought this bothered me more than the rest of the family–the pitying looks from my cousins as they moved over to let us poor church-mice into the back seat on Sunday mornings, where I invariably became car-sick–but it obviously bothered Father too, because he made some remark I didn't catch about "providing work for the Samaritans," which had Heidi shrieking with laughter the way kids do when they're trying to ingratiate themselves over something they don't understand. A sharp look from Mother shut her up.

"They don't mean it, Reinhard," Mother sighed, in a way that gave me my first glimpse of the load of sorrow she carried all her adult life. "They don't mean it, and you know that."

"They may not mean it, but they do it," Father shrugged, almost complacent now because he was winning the argument. "They do it! and

they've done it from the day that you and I met. I've never been good enough to marry a Klassen, and they've never missed a chance to make sure I got that message. Deny that, if you can."

Mother didn't say anything for quite a while.

Book Reviews

Richard A. Kauffman and Gayle Gerber Koontz, eds. *Theology for the Church: Writings by Marlin Miller*. Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1997.

Theology for the Church is a collection of previously published articles by the late Marlin Miller. The time frame for the original articles ranges from the mid-1970s through 1995. Many represent sermons or addresses published later in popular periodicals, e.g., *Gospel Herald, Christianity Today*. Some are scholarly papers presented in various forums and then published in academic journals. The original oral mode of these pieces is evident.

The articles are organized into three sections: The Church and Its Witness (eight chapters), Pastoral Leadership and Theological Education (four chapters), and Theology in a Believers Church Perspective (seven chapters). As the editors suggest, the three sections focus Miller's major concerns and scholarly interests.

At one level the book outlines standard Mennonite theology. But at another level it advocates changes or hints at new directions. The theme of the essays is the church as an alternative community of faith in the world. This community is entered at baptism by adult believers; all its members are accountable to each other on matters of lifestyle and biblical interpretation.

The central theme is supported by a series of sub-themes. (1) Church members are to follow Christ in all of life. The life, teachings, and death of Jesus are normative. Christianity ethics is an ethic for the minority–believers, not for the majority–unbelieving society. (2) The gospel is the gospel of peace. Christians should reject violence in all forms, and work for peace and justice. (3) The church is gifted with leaders. The 1960s-'70s Mennonite theology of "the giftedness of all believers" is not sufficiently nuanced. The theology of the "priesthood of all believers" is a borrowed Lutheran concept that has no basis in earlier Anabaptist-Mennonite literature or theology. Leadership is a particular gift given to the church for the well-being of the whole. (4) The Bible should be read and interpreted in the context of the church.

One sub-theme is hinted at several times but not developed. Anabaptist ecclesiology, Miller suggests, is built on a christology different from the Chalcedonian two-nature doctrine. The shape of such a christology is not spelled out; nor are the implications for atonement, a theme Miller was exploring at the time of his death, developed in any form.

The purpose of the original sermons, addresses, papers was either the renewal of the Mennonite Church or a dialogue with a variety of ecumenical groups about peace or believers church theology. Both audiences reflect the world in which Miller worked, as well as his passion for a more faithful Mennonite Church and a better understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition among other Christian traitions.

This collection shows Miller at his best as preacher, teacher, and bridge builder with other Christians. The chapters would be considerably more useful if the editors had provided the historical setting for each item, e.g., Mennonite conferences or consultations, ministers' workshops, or ecumenical consultations. Each chapter has a specific context and agenda which the reader must now guess at.

Theology for the Church would be much more significant if the editors had also provided an introductory or concluding essay outlining Miller's theology and showing how these chapters reflect it. The book makes clear that Miller was breaking at important points with H.S. Bender and John Howard Yoder. Where does Miller fit into the contemporary Mennonite theological conversation and the search for a theology that will give direction to the Mennonite Church in a postmodern world? Miller was a major Mennonite theological figure and leader in the last quarter of this century. Where was he leading the church, and why? How do these essays reflect that journey and that stance?

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Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait. John W. Miller. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

In *Jesus at Thirty*, John Miller opens a fascinating interdisciplinary window onto the study of the historical Jesus. He offers a "psychohistorical" account which builds not only on the biblical evidence of the canonical gospels but also on the scientific insights of developmental psychology. In Miller's view, "Just as it is no longer possible . . . to read the Gospels without an increasingly acute awareness of the historicity and humanity of Jesus, it is likewise no

longer possible to read them without attention to the personal developmental dynamics of the one who meets us there" (7).

In the Introduction Miller defines his interdisciplinary approach and identifies his methodological presuppositions. In succeeding chapters he assesses what he views as primary contributing factors to the personal identity of the historical Jesus: his estrangement from his biological family (ch. 2, "The Starting Point"); the events surrounding his baptism (ch. 3, "The Turning Point"); his relationships with his parents (ch. 4, "Jesus and His Father"; ch. 5, "Jesus and his Mother"); his awareness of the power of evil (ch. 6, "Satan") and his sexual orientation (ch. 7, "Sexuality"). In chapter 8 ("Generativity") Miller analyzes Jesus' public ministry in his search for a "more encompassing psychological perspective that might contribute to [an] understanding of Jesus' *vocational* achievement as an evangelist among the disaffiliated" (79). Miller concludes his portrait in chapter 9 ("Jesus at Thirty") with a summary assessment of "The Man Who Emerges." In a seventeen-page appendix he offers a brief history of psychology of Jesus studies.

The author's conclusions prove as fascinating as they are vulnerable, grounded as they are in an argument from silence. For Miller, "Jesus at thirty" is a man deeply shaped by the unique circumstances of his family of origin, circumstances which must be inferred from the otherwise unexplained silence of the New Testament records: (1) the premature death of Jesus' "father" when Jesus was still young and unmarried, and (2) Jesus' subsequent need to assume the role of primary provider for his mother and his siblings. This set of inferences assists Miller in making sense not only of Jesus' apparent alienation from his mother (John. 2:1-11; 19:25-27) but also of his apparent and surprising status as a celibate heterosexual in a society where marriage was the definitive norm.

Against this backdrop Miller portrays Jesus as a man who experiences profound personal transformation through the discovery of God as "gracious Father" (31) at the time of his baptism. The Satanic temptations which Jesus encounters following his baptism are "the consequence of [this] gracious revelation of the 'father' that broke in upon Jesus at the Jordan" (55). For Miller these temptations are not, as commonly construed, Satanic attacks upon Jesus Messiah, whose messianic identity has just been confirmed by the voice from heaven. Rather, it is Jesus, *beloved son of his father,* who is "sorely

tempted by Satan to *think of himself as the long-awaited Messiah who by signs and wonders would one day deliver his people and rule the world*" (59, emphasis mine). But Jesus decisively rejects this "negative, dark side of [his] identity" (93), commits himself "to do only what God will[s] for his life" (64), and enters into "his own new-found 'calling' as 'generative' prophet-evangelist of God's love for the 'lost' (99).

Miller's work is delightfully insightful, judiciously argued, and solidly documented on both the exegetical and psychological levels. The author shows himself equally conversant in the fields of exegesis and developmental psychology. In an area where studies exhibit sharp divergences and tend toward vivid extremes, his conclusions are sober and non-spectacular. Yet Miller is not afraid to challenge scholarly consensus. Undoubtedly the most controversial elements of his argument are (1) his exegetical conclusions concerning the non-messianic character of Jesus' mission, and (2) his overwhelming reliance on a Freudian paradigm for understanding personality development.

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Who Do You Say That I AM? Christians Encounter Other Religions. Calvin E. Shenk. Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1997.

Shenk's central question is "Can we respect other religions and still view Christ as normative for all?" His answer, presented in the thirteen chapters of this volume–beginning with an "introduction to religious plurality" and concluding with "style of witness"–is yes. But I was not persuaded. My problem was both the question–is this the question that is central to Christians as they encounter other religions?–and the response, one that I found laced with troubling ambiguities if not self-contradictory.

In the Preface, the author describes his academic and missionary background. It begins in 1961 in Ethiopia, where his teaching included African traditional religions and comparative religious philosophy, and moves through "religious study tours" in India, Nepal, Taiwan, Japan, and Turkey (to name a few) to his current teaching at Eastern Mennonite University and research at

the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. In this long career, Shenk candidly acknowledges that "my interest in religions is not merely academic . . . I bring a missiological perspective to other religions" (17). Shenk encounters other religions from the perspective of an evangelical Christian faith which has as its core confession the "uniqueness," "finality," and "normativity" of Christ.

Thus in the first chapter Shenk moves quickly from an awareness of religious plurality to a critique of the "ideology" of religious pluralism. This ideology is a "theological or philosophical assessment of other religions which celebrates plurality" (29) and "relativizes all claims that any religion makes about the truth of its doctrine or practices" (30). Thus, "religious plurality forces us to rethink the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" (31) and to ask "Is Jesus Christ merely a savior, one among many, or is he the unique Savior of humankind?" This seems to require us "either to accept religious pluralism and thereby cast doubt on the uniqueness of Christian faith, or to reject religious pluralism to remain faithful to the Christian tradition."

But are these the alternatives? Shenk believes so, I do not. Chapters 2 and 3 then discuss responses to religious plurality – exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. None of these responses is adequate for Shenk, but pluralism is especially reprehensible. The reasons are that pluralism "disavows the uniqueness and particularity of Jesus as the definitive, final, and normative revelation of God for salvation" (53), "assumes that everyone will be saved by whatever means available" (58), "leads to a relative understanding of truth" (62), "seeks to accommodate Christian faith to other religions by discarding distinctive doctrines of Christian faith" (66), "makes a judgment that all religions are true" (67), and "undermines a traditional understanding of mission" (71).

Such reasons would be sufficient to reject pluralism, if this were what pluralists affirmed. But no writer that I know favoring a pluralist approach holds all, most, or even any of the positions Shenk ascribes to pluralism. At the same time, Shenk affirms that "Christians do not claim too fully and finally comprehend God . . . we don't pretend to exhaust the divine nature" (65) and that Christians "need to be loving and tolerant" (70). How do these assertions hang together?

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with biblical perspectives on religion. Other religions are not "merely human fantasy. There is something of God in them"

(99). But finally we must avoid "Jewish perversions" (110), "false gospels," and "syncretism" (111) and come to affirm the uniqueness of Christ. These themes are again taken up in chapter 6, "Theological Issues Concerning Religious Plurality." Here Shenk says that "the Bible provides convincing evidence that human beings have awareness of God" and that there is a "general revelation" (115). But "special revelation uses the light of Christ, who is the fullness and pinnacle of revelation, to discover and unveil what is hidden in other religions" (117). This allows Shenk to turn to "Assessment of the Religions" in chapter 7. Here he again affirms that "we can believe in the finality of Christ and still value positive aspects of other religions" (142). But what these positive aspects are never comes into view.

Moreover, Shenk argues that affirming these aspects does not mean that "all religions are the same" (who argues this? I don't know). While he rightly points out that "religions not only face in different directions, they also ask different questions" (144), this insight is not developed. Nor does he heed his own advice to avoid overgeneralizing about other religions. Instead, he says the Hindu belief in cyclical time is wrong (145), Buddhists don't have revelation from God, and Muslims wrongly understand it (146). The Quran is "silent about redemption" and there is"a lack of ethical sensitivity" in Hinduism (147). This discussion leads back to Shenk's central question "Who is Christ?" in Chapter 8. Not surprisingly, he reaffirms his understanding of Christ as "final" and "normative" as he turns in the remaining chapters to discuss Christian witness in the context of other religions.

According to Shenk, witness to Christ is the first–and apparently only–duty of the Christian in relation to others: "our task is to witness to Christ as the center of our faith" (178). Since all are called to follow Jesus, then all Christians must all the time be inviting others to that end: "when Jesus is the norm, all other claims are relativized" (176). Yet Shenk says that "this does not deny the reality of the knowledge of God that people had before Jesus came, or the true knowledge which people have today where he has not been named" (181). But such knowledge is seemingly unimportant since "the task of Christian mission is to interact with other religions so there can be an encounter with the Christian message" (183). This theme is pursued in chapter 10 on the "Forms of Witness: Church, Presence, Service, Evangelism." Shenk argues that "the Christian gospel is conversionist" (204); indeed, it is for him

the only theme of the Good News.

Even dialogue is, in Shenk's view, a "form of witness" (209). This I find not only troubling but suspect. Dialogue between persons of different faiths has emerged in recent decades as an important new development in the relations between persons of different faiths. Dialogue is not witness, nor is it aimed at conversion. But this is not Shenk's view. He says that dialogue contributes to "mutual understanding and growing friendship" (213) and that "we listen with sympathetic appreciation to other religions" (214). But finally he argues that dialogue is a "prelude to witness, [has] witness dimensions, and [can] be a witness in itself" (219). If so, then it becomes, as many non-Christians suspicious of Christian invitations to dialogue allege, "a wolf in sheep's clothing," a covert strategy of evangelism. Saying that "we need genuine respect and appreciation for other religions" does not make it so, when the reason for such knowledge is to enhance Christian witness to Jesus Christ. As Shenk remarks, "when we befriend Muslims . . . people may be more willing to discuss personal faith issues . . . in this context witness can be both person-centered and truth-centered." (255) This, alas, is not authentic dialogue.

Yet Shenk also says that in dialogue we need "genuine respect and appreciation" for other religions. How can this be, if dialogue is understood as a form of witness? This is the contradiction that lies at the heart of this volume.

For Shenk the only question in a Christian's relating to people of other faiths is that of witness. Anything else is, seemingly, a betrayal of the Christ that stands at the heart of faith. But is this the relevant question? Why does the fact that some people are Muslim, some Buddhist, some Hindu, some Sikh, etc. call into question central claims of the Christian faith? Why is the Christian called in relation to persons of other faiths to the single note of witness to Jesus as the Christ? Does the multiplicity of faiths challenge the Way to God present in Jesus Christ? Shenk seems to think so, I don't. The reality of other faiths is better approached under the doctrine of God's revelation to humanity then under the heading of God's redemption in Jesus Christ.

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Journeys: Mennonite Stories of Faith and Survival in Stalin's Russia. John B. Toews, ed. and trans. Kindred Productions, Winnipeg, MB and Hillsboro, KS, 1998. *The Silence Echoes: Memoirs of Trauma and Tears.* Sarah Dyck, ed. and trans. Pandora Press, Kitchener, ON and Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 1997.

If you want to know, hear, and feel what it was like to live in the Soviet union as a Mennonite or "German," read these two excellent books. You might cry. You might rage. You might say, why haven't people been told? Not that the memoirists in these collections are self-pitying. No, they just tell it as it was.

Historian J. B. Toews' *Journeys* consists of four fairly long stories edited, abridged, and translated from personal interviews with two deeply religious women and from memoirs written by two men (with more complicated faith), all of them within the USSR. Toews does not say how or when he got three of these pieces, but all are original sources. Sarah Dyck, a literary specialist, has compiled a more eclectic book of thirty-three contributions. As she read more and more memoirs by *Aussiedler* Mennonite and German-speaking Soviet citizens, emigres to Germany whose life stories were being published, especially in *Der Bote*, she knew her work: these moving stories should be translated, made known.

Much has been written about Soviet oppression, but these two books make the topic personal. It is like sitting at the table when your Tante Kathe or Uncle Gerhard begin to talk. Many hours later, numbed and overwhelmed, you find yourself freshly bereaved. You hear that a relative was rounded up at midnight, imprisoned, starved. Another, under guard, was marched through snowdrifts past frozen corpses to chop down trees in Siberian forced labor camps. They had lost not only house, village, and community, but hundreds of years of Mennonite-cherished faith and institutions. And you say, "That's how it was? Oh God, what were we doing at that time? Playing hopscotch?"

These books make accessible to the general reader the insider view, stories of evil but also stories of eloquent endurance, love, faith and, yes, heroism. Says one survivor: ". . . amid the criminality of all this terrible evil, there were always noble persons who clearly saw the injustices of such mass oppression" (*Journeys*, 136). Earlier Mennonite memoirs, often self-published in German, were not widely distributed, and correspondents from the USSR,

wary of reprisals, steered clear of anything that might be construed as "counter-revolutionary" or critical. Only the fall of Communism and the *Aussiedler* migration to Germany have allowed survivors to speak more freely and specific details to surface. Thanks to compilers, translators, and editors like Dyck and Toews, these stories are now available to a larger audience.

The two collections, well edited and translated, differ in format and content. Toews's concise introduction provides a quick up-to-date history of Mennonites in Russia from beginning to end, some 200 years. In her introduction, Dyck is more subjective and passionate. Citing literature and history (Goethe, Solzhenitsyn), she pleads with readers to listen to the "host of witnesses" from the "man-made hell" who know what happened, and to learn from their experiences.

The Silence Echoes, in a loosely organized chronology, describes life in the Soviet inferno through a great variety of forms and voices, in poems, letters, and "as told to" or autobiographical stories. There are haunting childhood memories: of Christmas, a buggy ride with Father, of enough to eat, juxtaposed with a starving child's dream of rice pudding, a mother watching her little ones die. Narrators often seem in shock: "No one could cry. We had lost too much" (32). A half-dozen stories are anonymous, as though to cover the shame of unspeakable events: a mother submitting to sexual demands of the collective farm chairman Vanya in order to save kernels of grain to feed her children, or innocent men purposely being fed salted fish without water so they would die to become shark bait for a floating prison ship. Some only in snapshots, some in stories covering many years, the writers present their evidence. Caught by the Red Army in 1945, Heinrich Peters says peace was "the rapes of our mothers, of our sisters . . . that's how we experienced the days of Liberation" (159).

The most "literary" memoir in Dyck's collection is Dietrich Rempel's "And Life Goes On." At times lyrical, the story of the unfortunate villagers of Eugenheim has unforgettable images: the white shroud of a dead child bobbing in the wake of a tanker carrying deportees into banishment, an old man throwing flower after flower out of a train window to mark the graves "somewhere in the sand" (223).

In *Journeys* Anna Kroeker, in a somewhat jumbled recollection of events, sees miracles of God amidst her greatest hardships. Justina Martens,

introduced as offering "one of relatively few surviving female accounts of Mennonite exile experience in Asiatic Russia during the 1940's" (49) was designated a *Kulak*. Single, she moves back and forth between Mennonite settlements, assists her sister-in-law in raising two children, and is forcibly exiled. Resettled among Russians in frigid northern Kazakhstan, without proper shelter, food, or clothing, yet put to work, she relates how she managed in a situation where all you can think of is staying alive. Martens focuses on how she kept spiritual life going, indeed becoming a *de facto* preacher to young German (Mennonite) boys and girls, quietly and illegally.

Abram Berg, a journalist trained in animal husbandry, describes his time in jail, on prison train transports, and in Karlag, a Karaganda agricultural concentration camp, the "Island in the Steppe." Struggling with his fate, Berg is driven to leave a record so that "at least some of the people he had known would not be nameless victims of a massive terror" (97). Memoirists do not tell everything. Most steer away from personally incriminating or intimate subjects, but Berg dares to reveal how savvy a survivor needed to be and to mention male-female sexual contacts in forced labor camps. He does not discuss God, but asks why Soviet policies were so insane.

The fourth "faith" witness in *Journeys* is a Mennonite minister, Aron Warkentin. His is an ongoing conflict with God. Following his unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to Canada in 1929, he is imprisoned and experiences the shock that Mennonites first felt when targeted for their religious and ethnic background. "We often asked ourselves why God was dealing with us so severely" (160). Subsequently, he concludes that "there are simply things in the human story which cannot be understood or explained" (179). During the Great Terror in 1937, a man with five children, he is arrested, sentenced to ten years, stuffed into a locked cattle car, then floated north–"Our heavily loaded barges glided along this tributary of the Dvina River like colossal coffins" (183)–eventually reaching an almost certain death camp in distant Kotlas.

In all the accounts the editors seek to reproduce the style of the original story teller, so you shouldn't read to criticize technique. The compelling content of these memoirs precludes literary dissection. The awkwardness of certain passages adds to their authenticity; these are ordinary people telling about events that well up: how it was, for instance, when suddenly you and your hard-working parents were pariahs. How they took away even the family cow.

Why mice tasted good. How it stank when you were locked inside a fetid "red wagon."

Memoirs generally either merely report events or are introspective. Dyck says her writers are gentle, grateful, and they write to remember, to respect their tortured dead, and to appeal to the world to end tyrannical oppression. But these two collections do more. They raise the ultimate problem of good and evil, when evil appears stronger. They show how individuals respond under situations of terror, how faith helps people to survive, how brutality can become everyday, how ethnic hatreds are perpetuated. In this way they raise political questions of how Soviet citizens of German-speaking background became scapegoats. Are they really introspective? Not directly.

These memoirists leave the answers to others. Driven to break the silence, they simply tell the truth as they saw it and trust, as Jesus said, that "the truth shall make you free." A survivor, Franz Thiessen, muses, "Why am I writing this? Writing organizes one's thoughts . . . allows us to remember and calms the soul." Or it may be, as Toni Morrison has said, that the function of freedom is to free someone else. Perhaps these stories could awaken consciousness of oppression, as Dyck so fervently expresses it.

But there is another objective. Often, remembering bodies thrown out on the windswept frozen steppes, the story tellers in both books challenge the reader: Does anyone remember? Does anyone care? These books say, Yes.

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