



Foreword 3

## Articles

The Mennonite Challenge of Particularism and Universalism:  
A Liberation Perspective  
*John Kampen* 5

Responses to John Kampen  
*Nancy R. Heisey* 29  
*Gilberto Flores* 34  
*Tom Yoder Neufeld* 40  
*Malinda E. Berry* 47

Mennonites as a Plural Minority Church within Pluralism –  
A German Perspective  
*Fernando Enns* 52

Who Defines Family?  
Mennonite Reflection on Family and Sociology of Knowledge  
*Peter C. Blum* 68

## Reflections

- Christianity and the Family:  
Ancient Challenge, Modern Crisis  
*Rosemary Radford Ruether* 83
- Harold Who? A Twenty-something Glimpse of the  
Anabaptist Vision  
*Valerie Weaver-Zercher* 96
- 

## Book Reviews

- Duane K. Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, and Philosophers: Seeking  
the Peace of the City*  
Reviewed by Gordon D. Kaufman 104
- D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing  
Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*  
Reviewed by Peter C. Erb 108
- Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village*  
Reviewed by Ed Janzen 110
- Jean Janzen, *Tasting the Dust*; Sarah Klassen,  
*Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love*  
Reviewed by Miriam Pellman Maust 112
- Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds.  
*Anabaptists and Postmodernity*; J. Denny Weaver  
*Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity:  
A Proposal for the Third Millennium*  
Reviewed by Phil Enns 115

## Foreword

When searching for a cover photograph for this issue that depicted ‘diversity’ and ‘pluralism’, my colleague Jim Penner reminded me that I didn’t need to look much further than the neighbourhoods of my local community. So he gathered together the children that play daily in his own back yard and posed them for the front cover of *The Conrad Grebel Review*. They were thrilled! The group assembled on the climber is a microcosm for the multicultural diversity that exists in my city, and indeed, is increasingly evident in most urban areas of the world. The households of each child are also representative of family diversity, some being raised in single parent families, others living in extended family groups.

Mennonite scholars and others are grappling with issues of historic and theological identity as the ‘face’ of global Mennonitism is increasingly pluralistic and diverse. The international picture reflects the fact that the majority of Mennonites in the world today do not have ancestral links with sixteenth-century European origins, even while they may hold closely to the beliefs of Anabaptist radicals. Mennonite World Conference statistics suggest that it may not be long before there are more Mennonite church members in Africa than in North America. The Mennonite church that I attend has members whose backgrounds vary widely in terms of ethnicity and religious upbringing, a scenario that is increasingly familiar, but very unlike the solidly Russian Mennonite churches that both my parents grew up in. All of this demands new and creative theological and sociological paradigms of Mennonite identities.

This issue’s lead article by John Kampen, and the four responses to him, were originally part of a forum at the 1999 annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. Drawing on comparisons with Jews and African-Americans, Kampen utilizes Joel Kotkin’s notion of a ‘global tribe’ that possesses a sense of shared mission, culture and peoplehood amongst its members. He suggests that stories of suffering and survival, whether rooted in mythologies of origin or part of an ongoing global liberation struggle, might provide the basis for a shared identity in the global Mennonite church movement. The four different responses to Kampen’s essay demonstrate how much an individual’s subjectivity and **personal location** shapes

his or her perspective on issues of identity. Similar issues are addressed by Fernando Enns but from a German Mennonite perspective. He raises the question whether the Mennonites, as a pluralistic minority church with polygenetic origins, might not be well prepared to be a positive presence within a pluralistic society like Germany is today.

A pluralism of origin and ethnic identity is complicated today by diversity in family forms and structures. As a historian, I know that laments over the crisis in the contemporary nuclear family mask ideas and realities of family life that have shifted and evolved greatly according to time and place. This is aptly shown in Rosemary Radford Ruether's engaging and sweeping survey of Christian notions of the family through the ages. We are delighted to include Ruether's recent public address at the University of Waterloo as a Reflection in the *CGR*. Sociologist Peter Blum takes a theoretical approach to similar issues, drawing on Peter L. Berger's idea of family as a social construction and observing the dialectic between 'official' definitions of family and families themselves.

Finally, in addition to a collection of book reviews, this issues contains a Reflection by Valerie Weaver-Zercher, whose essay reveals that identity is also about generation. According to the historical canon, Mennonite educator and church leader Harold S. Bender shaped Mennonite identity in a decisive manner for the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, as Weaver-Zercher points out, many of her twentysomething generation don't know 'who' Bender was. She goes on to reflect on his pivotal ideas about 'righteousness', juxtaposed against more contemporary language of doing 'what's right'.

Marlene Epp, *Editor*

**Cover photo:** Photography by Jim Penner of children in his neighbourhood.

# **The Mennonite Challenge of Particularism and Universalism: A Liberation Perspective**

*John Kampen*

The various and changing historical circumstances of the spectrum of persons who have carried the name “Mennonite” in the second half of the twentieth century has resulted in much attention being directed to Mennonite identity. This is a complicated issue as the manifold manifestations of this historical movement attempt to identify themselves within their societies as well as in relationship to one another. This paper evaluates the results of some of the research, primarily from sociology, to examine questions of Mennonite identity. Since this analysis frequently debates the perception of Mennonites as a ‘minority,’<sup>1</sup> I will examine the experiences of the two other ‘minority’ peoples in North America, particularly with regard to problems their experiences pose for some directions in which Mennonites have sought answers to persistent questions about their identity on this continent. I then examine some possibilities that emerge when issues of identity are examined from the vantage point of perspectives on globalization as a context for understanding Mennonite particularism and universalism.

The experiential basis underlying this paper and for attempting to understand some implications of both the ‘minority’ and ‘global’ status of Mennonites derives from a substantial number of years spent in both Jewish and African American contexts. Hence, this evaluation has been developed primarily in a North American setting and is thus limited, both with respect to issues arising from international contexts and to the experiences of certain other peoples in North America. Hispanic, Asian, and Native peoples are apparent examples of omissions. While this analysis may be helpful in providing a framework for discussing challenges raised by some of these other traditions, its value for that purpose is not mine to determine.

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### **Mennonite Identity in Sociological Perspective**

Mennonite identity has received a good deal of attention by sociologists in the past quarter century, in part spurred by data provided by the Kauffman-Harder study of 1975.<sup>1</sup> This study itself was precipitated by a perception that Mennonites were in the midst of an identity crisis.<sup>2</sup> The perception has been that Mennonite identity is threatened in the process of adapting to the social changes of North American society. These studies have focused upon the issues of urbanization, assimilation, individualism, and secularization. Permit me to cite a few examples.

Donald Kraybill has applied the sociology of knowledge to address the question of Mennonite modernity and identity.<sup>3</sup> He argues that “the abundant sociological evidence makes it virtually impossible to argue that the Mennonite phenomenon is merely a religious one devoid of ethnic expressions.”<sup>4</sup> This claim permits him to compare the experiences of Mennonites with that of other ethnic groups that migrated from Europe to North America. For him, “Mennonite identity consists of socially constructed images which Mennonites hold of themselves. . . . (It) is a dynamic composite of group self-images transformed and reconstructed over time and social space.”<sup>5</sup> He constructs a model explaining the changes in Mennonite identity from the standpoint of modernization theory and the three-generation hypothesis in ethnic studies. The three-generation hypothesis is based on observations of the experiences of European immigrants in urban environments in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where the nature of the ethnic identity seemed to change with each generation. The first generation could be labelled the “Retainers”; they expressed their identity in forms such as speech, food, and dress while maintaining a specific, intrinsic sense of how things were to be done. The next generation, the “Forgetters,” had to compete in urban society and saw the trademarks of their ethnic identity as a liability, preferring to learn “proper” English and to adopt “typical” American interests and customs. The third generation, the “Retrievers,” became bored with a blasé melting pot culture, but their “reconstructed ethnicity is abstract, historical, and symbolic – an ethnicity reserved for special occasions, holidays, tours, and family gatherings.”<sup>6</sup>

Having created an eclectic model for the study of modernization, Kraybill argues that the traditional Mennonite ethnicity in North America was formed

on the basis of martyrdom, codified in the *Martyrs Mirror*, and then gradually replaced by humility as an organizing idea for Mennonite and Amish self-perception.<sup>7</sup> This stance was effective until the multi-faceted challenges of industrialization threatened it at the end of the nineteenth century. A vigorous program of cultural revitalization based upon the codification of ethnic attire, the formalization of theological doctrine, and the institutionalization of church structures and programs permitted it to delay the effects of the onset of modernity. From the standpoint of the three-generation hypothesis, the “retainers” of the first generation stretched their traditional but quite elastic ethnicity to the middle of the twentieth century. A modernized ethnicity emerged in the wake of the influence of H. S. Bender and his colleagues at Goshen College with the publication of *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* and the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.<sup>8</sup>

Steve Nolt has provided a historical context for these Mennonite ‘ethnicities’.<sup>9</sup> He documents how the connection of Pennsylvania Mennonites with a broader coalescing Pennsylvania German culture permitted them to develop what felt like a distinctively Mennonite place in the American cultural landscape. The identification of Mennonites from Russia with “high” German culture permitted a similar possibility in the American plains states. Of course, Mennonites in Paraguay, Mexico, and Canada illustrate the same point, perhaps even more dramatically. Nolt then points to the modernized ethnicity of ideology and institution which characterizes a good deal of Mennonite life in the midwestern United States, the movement which is identified by Kraybill with H. S. Bender but which already begins with people such as John F. Funk.<sup>10</sup> Nolt could have pointed out how this parallels the institutional development for other groups in North American society, both for ethnic groups and for the rise of the voluntary association which, it has been argued, is a unique development originating in the U.S. experience.<sup>11</sup> These institutional developments should be understood from the perspective of ethnic identity.

A convenient summary of the variety of approaches to the question of assimilation is provided by Leo Driedger in the conclusion of *Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment*.<sup>12</sup> He articulates the task: “In contrast to forces of modernization, secularization, and assimilation, what are the countervailing forces of identity which Anabaptist Mennonites and Brethren in Christ wish to promote?”<sup>13</sup> Surveying the literature concerning minority

identity, Driedger concludes that Mennonites are in the midst of a transformation from the territorial and cultural identification of a rural way to life to an ideological, historical, and institutional identification. Leadership and identification also receive mention.

Joseph Smucker's study of the impact of urbanization on Mennonite identity in a small congregation in an urban setting provides an interesting case study on the nature of the transformation.<sup>14</sup> Smucker notes how revised definitions of "community" and "service" were key to the conceptual adaptations made by a sample of Mennonites living in a metropolitan area as they attempted to resolve the tensions between the newly affirmed values of individualism and the ability to maintain their Mennonite identity. While Smucker argues that the emergence of the significance of the self is a somewhat new and foreign element in traditional Mennonite beliefs, it is sustained by a variety of sharing and support groups. Mennonite affiliation becomes "a sort of pit-stop for emotional refueling and identity reinforcement, required because participation in the larger urban environment offers no assured support."<sup>15</sup> He notes that the dominance of this new language of psychological support and assurance can permit avoiding direct confrontation with definitions of being Mennonite. The religious content of what it means to be Mennonite can be replaced by the "therapy language" of the church community.

In all of these studies the conceptual framework is derived from studies of ethnicity and assimilation based on theoretical frameworks developed almost exclusively on the basis of European immigration to North America. The quaintness of this analysis could lead us to overlook other factors that impinge on issues of identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It overlooks the fact that the Mennonites of North America who are mainly of European origin are both Caucasian and Christian, and hence share these two aspects of their identity with the majority of the population. We are discussing and basing our work on theories about the assimilation of foreigners and their ethnicity in a context where the rest of the world does not even recognize these strangers as foreign. Significant changes occurring in North American society within the context of global movements suggest that such studies may be inadequate.<sup>16</sup> In order to proceed to an examination of the impact of globalization on questions of identity, we must recognize certain challenges to how those of European background have formulated their identity.



Historical experience in the twentieth century has created an awareness of the problematic nature of certain portions of the Christian tradition. Most of the crucial basic Christian claims have also been a major factor in the communal development of Mennonite identity, even frequently providing the foundation for justifying stances considered distinctive. For example, the Mennonite tradition has based its teachings on nonconformity and nonviolence upon biblical grounds, frequently citing the example of Jesus as justification. Theologically, the centrality of the trinity has been affirmed with an emphasis on christology. A corresponding awareness of the limitations of this approach is now fundamental for analyzing the appropriation of the Christian and biblical elements that have been considered a major avenue for articulating Mennonite identity. This analysis is particularly important here because the assertion of some common identity based in the Bible has been a perceived manner of moving Mennonites beyond perceived ethnic limitations. These issues may be most profound for those of European ancestry. The first challenge I wish to discuss came to broader awareness in the wake of attempts to understand the significance of the holocaust.

### **Mennonite Identity and the Implications of the Holocaust**

Anti-semitism poses a particular problem for some of the ways Mennonites have described their own identity. It is interesting that Mennonite denominations have never undertaken an examination of the theological implications of the Holocaust for Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. It is in that context that most of the work in Christian theology concerning anti-semitism has originated. Some research concerning Mennonites in Germany during the Hitler era has become available: the most comprehensive study is *Mennoniten im Dritten Reich: Dokumentation und Deutung* by Diether Götz Lichdi. Here Mennonites are portrayed as giving quite broad support to the Nazi regime because it brought order, economic support, and self-respect to the German nation.<sup>17</sup> The attraction of the Nazi movement for diaspora Germans also is an important and significant topic among Mennonites.<sup>18</sup> An analysis of the Canadian scene is not reassuring.<sup>19</sup> I recall that the *vorsänger* ("song leader") in the small Western Canadian church in which I was raised, where the worship service was entirely in German, drove a Mercedes-Benz from the earliest times I can remember –

quite a statement in a rural community filled with veterans immediately after WW II.

Here we are dealing with the fact that the Christian tradition, through its long history of teaching and theology concerning Jews and Judaism, provided the groundwork for the support of this systematic attempt to obliterate the Jewish people. Mennonites share in that history. Repentance in this case is not simply a call to the task of mending fences with another group who were the victims of massive atrocities in a cultural system that Mennonites freely participated in and supported. Rather, it calls for a re-examination of how Mennonites have adopted as their own what Rosemary Ruether has dubbed “Christian triumphalism” or created their own particular elitist version of it. Let me cite one example of this phenomenon, the Believers Church paradigm.

This is a concept that has been embraced rather vigorously by most Mennonites in an effort to create a broader theoretical framework by which to engage in shared work and study. This admirable effort has produced some of the most significant work in Mennonite thought in the past five decades. There is, however, a danger in such a construction because it tends to become an idealized concept that removes adherents from an analysis of historical responsibility. Let me cite an example from the present discussion. An admirable comprehensive attempt to describe this entity is the work of Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers Church*.<sup>20</sup> Durnbaugh devotes a number of pages to the Confessing Church in Germany as an example of the Believers Church.<sup>21</sup> The role of this group is very important in its opposition to the policies of the Third Reich.<sup>22</sup> But we should understand what using the Confessing Church as a model means for our perceptions of the Mennonite theological stance towards the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup> Such a stance saves Mennonites from examining themselves and their own history with regard to it.<sup>24</sup> There is a tendency to place the blame for Christian complicity on the state churches and the major denominations, without examining how Mennonites were involved in this travesty or share a theology that provided real or tacit support for it.

One area where the presence of the Jewish people challenges Christians is in their identity as a biblical people. Substantial work has been done on the relationship between Christian sacred texts and anti-semitism.<sup>25</sup> The most obvious questions center on texts such as the diatribes against the Pharisees in Matthew 23; the crucifixion account in Matt. 27:24-26, in which Pilate washes

his hands in a declaration of innocence while the Jewish people “as a whole” cry out that “His blood be on us and on our children!”; and John 8:31-47, in which “the Jews” are said to have their origin in the devil. The first response is to notice the very different meanings ascribed to these texts by Jews and Christians. Concerning Matt. 23, we might suggest that this text has more to say about hypocrisy within religious communities, including Christian and Mennonite, than about the Pharisees. But Jews see in it a denigration of the particular group of persons who laid the foundation for Rabbinic Judaism, hence the formative social movement for modern Judaism, perhaps equivalent to the Anabaptist movement for modern Mennonite identity.<sup>26</sup> Ample historical evidence suggests these texts have been used to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian faith to Judaism, the foundation for Christian triumphalism, and the theological justification of the inquisition and the Crusades. In the modern world they have provided a framework for evangelistic efforts which targeted the Jewish people. Can Mennonites develop a biblical hermeneutic that challenges this kind of Christian triumphalism, thereby permitting them to approach other religious traditions as well as Judaism in a different manner, or develop other criteria to help them make intelligent judgments about other religious traditions? This is an important task for a Christian group that claims to be “biblical” and that speaks of its own identity in part through the use of that adjective.

### **Mennonite Identity and the African American Experience**

The other significant challenge to a biblical identity which I will address arises from the African American experience. Here Mennonites share a common Christian religious identity with African Americans.<sup>27</sup> But the history and cultural experience is very different for African American Christians from that of Caucasian Mennonites in North America. The obvious point is that Africans had no choice whatsoever about coming to America. For this reason they do not fit many of the paradigms developed to describe subsequent ethnic experience in America. Furthermore, they have developed their identity within a context constructed to keep them subservient.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, after emancipation and the well-known failure of the promise of the Reconstruction era, W. E. B. Dubois writing in 1903 recognized that “the problem of the twentieth century is the

problem of the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>28</sup> Life behind the veil becomes the dominant motif of Dubois’s book, probably the most important work on this subject ever written.<sup>29</sup> When he refers to the veil, he is not pointing simply to the difficulties immigrant groups know about from moving into a culture or country where the customs were different from theirs or where they did not know the language. That kind of veil is penetrable, because they gradually learned to understand something of the customs as well as the language or at least enough to get by. Dubois was referring to a separation not based on culture; it had its origin in legal mandates reinforced by the economic and political system which benefited from this enforced bondage as well as the social and religious forces which sanctioned it, and which continued and continue to perpetuate it long after the original legal mandates are no longer considered valid. The issue of this century has been the color line, and we don’t seem to be much further along at the end of the century than at the beginning. In his book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Derrick Bell argues that racism is a permanent feature of American life that can be resisted and defied but never defeated.<sup>30</sup>

This problem again cuts to the heart of the biblical roots of Christianity, and it raises questions about both Mennonite theology and the Mennonite way of life. With regard to the use of the Bible, it is possible to speak of the European coup, how Europeans co-opted the sacred book, made it their own, and convinced the rest of the world that this version was true. Many are appalled by a heretical Black Jesus, while not recognizing the heresy of the Germanic figure that dots the walls of most homes and churches. A re-examination of the texts and the presuppositions with regard to those sacred traditions is in order for uncovering other viewpoints.

A surface reading of the biblical account suggests that Africa is much more important than customarily thought. Most readers are only remotely aware of the Ethiopian kingdom which took over Egypt in 760 B.C.E. when Kashta, the Ethiopian ruler, began the twenty-fifth dynasty by assuming the title of Pharaoh. This lasts until 664 B.C.E. with the ascendancy of Assyria. Just as notable is the consolidation of a dynasty in the area of Ethiopia, later called Nubia, that halts the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires at its northern borders, remains an unhellenized kingdom, and establishes a continuous African

kingdom that lasts a thousand years. Under the influence of the European coup, western scholars tended to disconnect Egypt from the rest of Africa. Part of the “oriental” interest of nineteenth-century European scholars led to a great deal of research on Egypt, including archaeological work that still appears in major tours of North American galleries. The analytical perspective of this work included the Fertile Crescent and its relationship to Mesopotamia. It has led African American scholars to note how European scholars appeared unable to imagine that black Africans were able to develop the civilization being uncovered in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> This view has generated considerable debate concerning the African nature of Egypt and Egyptians.<sup>32</sup> How different this esoteric debate looks to an African American scholar reading Egyptian history!

Lest we be inclined to view the debate over these issues as insignificant, witness the furor caused by the work of Martin Bernal, the author of *Black Athena*.<sup>33</sup> This scholar of Chinese history, who has dared to venture into a re-evaluation of the African and Asian contributions during the formative stages of Greek civilization, has evoked an ongoing debate. His major argument is that many of the substantive elements that went into the formation of classical Greek civilization were adapted from Africa and Asia. While his reappraisal is frequently less radical than that of other significant African American scholars, the controversy has been extensive simply because of how it undercuts the perceptions a Caucasian civilization has of itself and where it came from.<sup>34</sup> Also worthy of note are two significant interpretive traditions in the African American community, the study of which is still in its infancy. Extensive research has begun on the particular usage of the biblical tradition that has sustained the African American community.<sup>35</sup> African American scholars also have been instrumental in the development of a second area, the ideological criticism of biblical texts. This is a particular method, related to the field of cultural criticism, rooted in the concerns of the black community, which evaluates texts as to whether and how they contribute to its liberation struggle.<sup>36</sup> This method raises profound questions for how those in communities of European background appropriate and use biblical texts.

While people of European descent share minority status with African Americans, the circumstances are so vastly different that respective fates within this system are difficult to compare. Members of the Caucasian race benefit from the system; their identities are formed and informed by it. Not only are

they the majority race, they are also the group in power and derive benefits, including the maintenance of their lifestyle, from that position. This fact challenges most profoundly the Mennonite perception of their existence as “the quiet in the land,” a servant people. In contrast to comparisons with the Jewish community, Mennonites here share aspects of a religious tradition, but neither race nor lack of power. Hence Mennonite identity is challenged in a different way. These challenges may point to greater problems in developing strategies for dealing with identity issues in a globalized world.

### **Globalization and Identity**

In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman, foreign affairs columnist for the New York Times, describes the impact and inevitability of the global economic forces profoundly reshaping the world.<sup>37</sup> In what many would see as a rather optimistic view of a global future – Friedman refers to himself as a “globalist”<sup>38</sup> – he describes its emergence as possible only after the end of the cold war, dating to the fall of the Berlin wall:

The globalization system . . . is not static, but a dynamic ongoing process . . . [which] involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before – in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before. . . . In previous eras this sort of cultural homogenization happened on a regional scale – the Hellenization of the Near East and the Mediterranean world under the Greeks, the Turkification of Central Asia, North Africa, Europe and the Middle East by the Ottomans, or the Russification of Eastern and Central Europe and parts of Eurasia under the Soviets.<sup>39</sup>

He goes on to note the demographic shifts, “a rapid acceleration of the movement of people from rural areas and agricultural lifestyles to urban areas and urban lifestyles more intimately linked with global fashion, food, markets and entertainment trends.”<sup>40</sup>

The journalistic license of Friedman’s depiction can be recognized and the positive interpretation of its effects can be contested, but the tone of inevitability pervading it is true of other recent volumes. It does capture the

feeling of peoples around the globe, particularly certain elites, who are attempting to find a coherent and meaningful way of life in the midst of these powerful forces.

In the midst of his optimistic and inevitable scenario Friedman sees “a powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind by this new system.”<sup>41</sup> He notes the inability of people to compete in this powerfully driven system as well as the shifts in power. The loss of power by the middle and lower classes is a worldwide phenomenon,<sup>42</sup> and we have ample evidence of the political destabilization resulting from this backlash.<sup>43</sup> While the inevitability of his analysis carries a certain conviction, its optimism could be misleading.

The opposing case has been argued by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith.<sup>44</sup> The first two sentences of their volume explain its purpose:

The first goal of this book is to help clarify the form of what is being called the *global economy* and to show how the rush toward globalization is likely to affect our lives. The second goal is to suggest that the process must be brought to a halt as soon as possible, and reversed.<sup>45</sup>

They then propose that society follow the opposite path: “we should instead seek to create a diversity of loosely linked, community-based economies managed by much smaller companies and catering above all . . . to regional markets. It is not economic globalization that we should aim for but the reverse: *economic localization*.”<sup>46</sup> How far this response is actually helpful to “poor countries and the poor in rich countries” could be debated. It is not clear that either the optimistic predictions of Friedman or the resistance strategies of Mander and Goldsmith form an adequate analytical basis for constructing a response to our changing world.

In *Jihad Versus McWorld*, Benjamin Barber attempts to account for the apparent contrast between these competing portraits of the changes in our world.<sup>47</sup> He notes that the global marketplace abhors parochialism, fractiousness, and war. International peace and stability are essential for a functional world economy and for the well-being of the multi-national corporations which thrive in that environment. War interrupts the efficient operation of this system, regional wars close markets. International law helps assure an operative system of global markets which provides the framework of trust necessary for its

functioning. The information-technology imperative makes science and globalization allies; the pursuit of science and technology demands open societies. These pursuits do not respond well to borders or other boundaries. These global imperatives are transnational, transideological and transcultural. At one level they suggest the realization of the Enlightenment dream of a universal rational society. McWorld seems to be the natural culmination of the modernization process. These impulses are, however, in competition with forces of global breakdown and national dissolution.<sup>48</sup>

Regional wars polarize peoples and fragment nations with violent results and excessive bloodshed. Religious fundamentalism is portrayed as a reactionary phenomenon on a global scale and becomes villain or scapegoat for many progressive policy advocates. Many would see these elements as simply reactionary forces, a throwback to a pre-modern world. They “appear to be directly adversarial to the forces of McWorld.”<sup>49</sup> But this may not be an adequate description of the relationship between these two phenomena:

Jihad stands not so much in stark opposition as in subtle counterpoint to McWorld and is itself a dialectical response to modernity whose features both reflect and reinforce the modern world’s virtues and vices – Jihad *via* McWorld rather than Jihad *versus* McWorld. The forces of Jihad are not only remembered and retrieved by the enemies of McWorld but imagined and contrived by its friends and proponents.<sup>50</sup>

The forces of both globalization and localization are locked in “a kind of Freudian moment of the ongoing cultural struggle, neither willing to coexist with the other, neither complete without the other.”<sup>51</sup> While these forces wishing to combat the globalist impulses employ tools such as ethnicity, fundamentalist religion, nationalism, and culture, they are themselves frequently in large part the creation of the modern mind, especially in the particular formulations they have at present.<sup>52</sup>

Included among those attempting to find their way in the midst of these powerful competing forces are the Mennonites. The globalization of the worldwide Mennonite church could be seen as evidence of the phenomenon described by Friedman. It is apparent in the emerging structures such as the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), and it has been noted in denominational



periodicals and other venues for the past number of years.<sup>53</sup> The president of MWC is from Indonesia, the vice-president from Ethiopia. The African membership of 405,000 for the Mennonite churches in 2000 does not lag very far behind that of the combined total of 444,000 in North America.<sup>54</sup> The total membership of the North American churches constitutes slightly less than 40 percent of the world-wide church. These figures do not account for the variety of ethnic backgrounds which comprise the Mennonite churches of North America. Mennonites need to come to terms with the question of identity in a global context, a question just as important, or even more so, for Mennonites of European background as for the majority of the church body.

From the analytical perspective of Barber and others,<sup>55</sup> questions of Mennonite identity can also be understood in the context of the dialectical tension between global and tribal forces. The forces of modernization and urbanization constitute part of this global phenomenon of which all are a part. In *Undoing Culture*, Mike Featherstone states the argument like this: “[I]n contrast to those arguments which assume that the logic of modernity is to produce an increasingly narrow individualism, a narcissistic preoccupation with individual identity which was common in the 1970s, today we find arguments which emphasize the search for a strong collective identity, some new form of community within modern societies.”<sup>56</sup> While some issues remain the same, the locus of attention has shifted. Globalization theory provides a basis for examining a collective identity in the midst of the conflicting powerful forces at work in a global world.

### **Mennonites and Tribalism**

In the literature describing globalization, “tribalism” often appears as its antithesis.<sup>57</sup> Having observed this phenomenon Joel Kotkin researched five “global tribes” to determine the factors making them able to compete and survive in the modern world: “Global tribes combine a strong sense of a common origin and shared values, quintessential tribal characteristics, with two critical factors for success in the modern world: geographic distribution and a belief in scientific progress.”<sup>58</sup> He proposes that these global tribes will

become more important as nation-states continue to decline in significance. They share three critical characteristics:

1. A strong ethnic identity and sense of mutual dependence that helps the group adjust to changes in the global economic and political order without losing its essential unity.
2. A global network based on mutual trust that allows the tribe to function collectively beyond the confines of national or regional borders.
3. A passion for technical and other knowledge from all possible sources, combined with an essential open-mindedness that fosters rapid cultural and scientific development critical for success in the late-twentieth century world economy.<sup>59</sup>

As these present and future tribes play an increasingly important role in the world economy, “Their success – based on the foundation of cosmopolitanism, knowledge, ethics, religion and ethnic identity – suggests a shift in future debates about effectiveness in the modern world away from conventional obsessions with the technology, the ‘scientific’ and the systematic.”<sup>60</sup> Kotkin asserts that “it is their enduring sense of group identification and global linkages, far more than their dispersion, or the extensiveness of the business empires, that most clearly distinguishes global tribes from other migrating populations.” He uses the “vocation of uniqueness,” attributed to Martin Buber, to describe this sense, also referring to it as a shared sense of mission.<sup>61</sup>

Such an option finds theoretical support from Michel Maffesoli, who sets the “tribal paradigm” off against an “individualist logic” to bring an “essentially relationist perspective” to the analysis of the function of micro-groups in contemporary society.<sup>62</sup> He finds there is a certain “social dynamism” related “to the ability of micro-groups to create themselves.”<sup>63</sup> In other words the “tribes” exhibit a certain kind of creative energy which is expressed in the new forms that emerge in relationship. They are based on network rather than ideology.

The tribal option provides a different viewpoint on global Mennonite identity. It opens up the possibility for Mennonites to think of themselves as one of these “global tribes, dispersed groups held together by a common culture,”<sup>64</sup> a sense of a shared mission, culture, and peoplehood. The priority

of the *Martyrs Mirror* as a foundational document of the Anabaptist-Mennonite experience around which a mythology of origin is constructed can be, and certainly has been, argued.<sup>65</sup> It has served as a source of identity for many generations of Mennonites, even after the emphasis on suffering was spiritualized into pietism.<sup>66</sup> It also seems that the significance of this foundation myth can be understood through the themes of struggle and survival.<sup>67</sup> The story gets retold to legitimate the present struggle over faithfulness to the tradition, and to authenticate the fact (or miracle) of survival. Kotkin sees struggle as a the foundational element of the vocation of uniqueness shared by global tribes.<sup>68</sup> The significance of the suffering theme for Mennonite identity is adequately documented.<sup>69</sup> The theme of survival is very apparent in the Russian Mennonite experience of the twentieth century, so much so that Frank Epp made the subtitle of his history of the Mennonites in Canada covering the 1920s and 30s, *A People's Struggle for Survival*.<sup>70</sup> The themes of struggle and survival then link to experiences common to a number of peoples throughout the world. There is an unanticipated way in which this legacy has prepared Mennonites for survival in a global world.

The Mennonite story is also one of wandering. Sometimes due to religious persecution or mistreatment for other reasons, sometimes to take advantage of opportunities for religious tolerance or for economic and political reasons, the Mennonites of European origin have been a wandering people. It could be argued that Mennonite approaches to church and state relations have made it easier for them to be a wandering people. The theological emphases in the Mennonite experience that have provided ideological support for substantive international and cross-cultural Mennonite missions and service experiences have also contributed to making Mennonites a nomadic people. Kotkin argues that one strength of successful global tribes is their worldwide diasporas, sometimes connected with homelands, with a connection that ties them together and empowers them to be historical protagonists on the global stage.<sup>71</sup> This provides them with experience in negotiating the particular blend of cohesiveness and openness which makes them important actors on that stage.<sup>72</sup>

The theme of survival is the most central issue to emerge from the Jewish experience with the Holocaust. Experiences of the survivors are a central topic in the continuing drama of interaction with that event. The question of survival in this case derives from a significant context, modernity.<sup>73</sup> This

event challenged the possibility that there was hope in world progress; that the modern world was a place where varieties of individuals and peoples would be nurtured and permitted to prosper. Precisely out of that challenge the emergent theme for Jews became “survival” in the modern world, whether against the threat of extermination or assimilation.

The struggle for survival has characterized African American life since the first Africans stepped ashore on this continent. As we have seen, this question is as urgent now as it was in 1840. Delores Williams explains the meaning of “faith seeking understanding” as “exploring faith so that I provide theological resources to issues confronting African-American women and the black community trying to survive in today’s world.”<sup>74</sup> She develops what she calls the “*survival/quality-of-life tradition of African-American biblical appropriation*.”<sup>75</sup> She finds a powerful statement of this kind of survival in the promise to Hagar in Gen. 16:10-12.<sup>76</sup> In deriving a basic principle for African American biblical interpretation Vincent Wimbush suggests a similar direction: “the function of the texts is not to convey timeless ethical and moral propositions, but to present a picture of individuals and communities struggling to discover what it means to strive – and very often fail – to be human in the highest key.”<sup>77</sup> This hermeneutical approach, Wimbush argues, will permit the African American community to utilize the biblical materials in its struggle for survival. In a recent address Riggins Earl argued that the “ethical beauty” of earlier generations of African Americans is that they “chose to survive.” The significance of their ethical stance is that they chose life over death.<sup>78</sup>

The argument of this paper is that the themes of struggle and survival and the attendant stories of those experiences provide the basis for a shared identity in the global Mennonite church movement. “Shared” does not mean it needs to be unique to that body or group. What it means is that the common experiences related to the shared mythology of origin provide the basis for a common culture that is recognizable even though it may find many particular forms of expression in various geographical locations or language sets. Good evidence suggests that the sixteenth-century Anabaptists provide one important source for that mythology of origin. An important advance in the self-understanding of that mythology was based on Walter Klaassen’s *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant*.<sup>79</sup> The globalization perspective extends that positioning within the European intellectual and religious traditions into broader

areas. The biblical account also furnishes another source for a shared mythology of origin.

The hermeneutical task with regard to the biblical materials for developing and nurturing this global Mennonite identity is formed around the interaction of the biblical text and these stories of struggle and survival. Engagement in this hermeneutical task is of a different manner than has been true heretofore. The biblical text is engaged as an ally in these experiences of struggle and survival. Here the interaction with Jewish and African American experiences can be helpful. The history of Christian anti-semitism provides ample evidence of how the biblical story can be used to support a triumphalism that oppresses and destroys. This provides an important point of caution for all those utilizing it as basic formative material. Given the pervasive way anti-semitism has been woven into Christian theology, the disentangling of that element from Mennonite use of this material that has relied so heavily on basic Christian formulations for the justification of its own positions points to the difficulties in using the materials for the formation of identity. The biblical record as an account of struggle and survival need not support Christian triumphalism. But a good deal of critical evaluation and creativity is required for it to function in support of the liberation efforts of people engaged in struggle and survival. A critical disengagement from triumphalist theologies coupled with a heightened appreciation for peoples' stories of struggle and survival are necessary. A greater understanding of the stories and hermeneutical techniques that have permitted the Jewish community to construct a basis for life and community from those same texts could be helpful. The African American experience also can be instructive.

African American history challenges any claim by groups of European origin to a comparable minority status in the United States. The history of Christians of African descent is a story of such tragic proportions that comparisons pale in the telling. Precisely for this reason this history is very important for a discussion of using the Bible as a foundational document for the identity of a people. Significant benefit can be derived from a critical appraisal of how the biblical materials were appropriated to support a system of subjugation and oppression. Continuing analysis of these materials is important to free them for use in forming an identity that supports persons around the world in their struggles for survival.<sup>80</sup> Also instructive is a greater understanding

of the use of the Bible in the African American community. How did the Bible, forced on to that community for the purposes of social control, become adopted by it as a source for liberation? What was important in that foundation myth that permitted it to function this way? Continued research and a heightened awareness of how this document has continued to function as a source of support for the African American community could be instructive in helping a global Mennonite community evaluate and develop the use of this foundation myth as a support for its own struggles and survival.

This hermeneutical task employs a biblical text chastened by a history of Christian triumphalism and empowered by struggles for recognition, dignity, and liberation. Such a biblical text can provide a foundation myth for a global tribe whose identity is rooted in struggle and which interprets its survival in terms of a shared mutual support for communities around the world engaged in similar kinds of struggles. Such a global tribe, then, links its own survival to the ongoing struggles of peoples around the world for survival and liberation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Peachey, "Identity Crisis Among American Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 42 (1968): 243-59; Calvin W. Redekop, "The Mennonite Identity Crisis," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 87-103; Calvin W. Redekop, "The Sociology of Mennonite Identity: A Second Opinion," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Calvin W. Redekop and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham: University Press of America/ Waterloo: Institute for Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1988), 173-92, see 188. But note the comment of Donald B. Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Ethnicity," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 153-72, see 172.

<sup>4</sup> Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. This claim is vigorously rejected by Calvin Redekop in his response in the same volume, "The Sociology of Mennonite Identity: A Second Opinion" (173-92). He rejects the ethnic category as an inadequate sociological category for describing the Mennonite experience. He argues that the "Anabaptist-Mennonite phenomenon is and was a religiously motivated utopian movement . . . and as a religious movement, on the basis of its utopian goals and social oppositions, was constantly faced with 'ethnicizing' tendencies, but never accepted, or capitulated to, becoming a sociological ethnic group because of the religious ideology which was at the heart of its origins" (173). While this appears to be an attractive option, it may be that such an idealization neither

accurately describes the historical Mennonite experience nor provides an adequate theoretical foundation for constructing a response to the original question which sparked this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity," 158-59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-60. (This section is based on the article by Marcus Lee Hansen, "The Third Generation in America," *Commentary* 14 (1952): 492-500.)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-63.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-65.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Nolt, "A 'Two-Kingdom' People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and American Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (1999): 485-502.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 497. In contrast to Kraybill he sees this process already in the efforts of persons such as John F. Funk. I assume that, for Kraybill, Funk is still part of this earlier revitalization process.

<sup>12</sup> James Luther Adams, *Voluntary Associations: Socio-cultural Analyses and Theological Interpretation*, ed. J. Ronald Engel (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1986); D. B. Robertson, ed., *Voluntary Associations: A Study of Groups in Free Societies* (Richmond: John Knox, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Leo Driedger, "Identity and Assimilation," in *Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment*, eds. Leo Driedger and Leland Harder. Occasional Papers, no. 14. (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990): 159-75.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Smucker, "Religious Community and Individualism: Conceptual Adaptations by One Group of Mennonites," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (1986): 273-91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>17</sup> Rodney Sawatsky, "Response," *Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment*, 182-86; Nolt, "'Two-Kingdom' People," 502. A globalization perspective would also have implications for the analysis of the factors of modernization found in the study of J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale/Kitchener, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Diether Götz Lichdi, *Mennoniten im Dritten Reich: Dokumentation und Deutung* (Weierhof/Pfalz: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1977), reviewed by Walter Klaassen in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53 (1979): 87-89. See also Hanz-Jürgen Goertz, "Nationale Erhebung und religiöser Niedergang: Missglückte Aneignung des täuferischen Leitbildes im Dritten Reich," in *Umstrittenes Täufertum 1525-1975: Neue Forschungen*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 259-89.

<sup>19</sup> Relevant material with regard to the Ukraine is found in Meir Buchsweiler in Hebrew, *Ethnic Germans in the Ukraine towards the Second World War: A case of double loyalty?* (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute/The Society for Jewish Historical Research, 1980), now available in German, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Ein Fall doppelter Loyalität* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1984). Noteworthy is the Mennonite experience in Latin America: Peter P. Klassen, *Die deutsch-völkische Zeit in der Kolonie Fernheim, Chaco, Paraguay, 1933-1945: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der auslandsdeutschen Mennoniten während des Dritten Reiches* (Bolanden-Weierhof, Germany: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1990); John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi?: Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Kitchener: Pandora Press/Scottsdale, Waterloo: Herald Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites*

*Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962); "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspapers of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites, in the 1930's," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1965; Jonathan F. Wagner, *Brothers Beyond the Sea: National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1981); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-91.

<sup>23</sup> Historical analyses of the role of the Confessing Church have not always been as kind as Durnbaugh. For a sympathetic but critical view, see John S. Conway, "The German Church Struggle and Its Aftermath," *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, ed. Abraham J. Peck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 39-52.

<sup>24</sup> I am not criticizing Durnbaugh for including the Confessing Church as an example of the Believers Church. I am more concerned with how those who had members of their churches in Germany during the time prior to and during the Third Reich might use the information collected by Durnbaugh.

<sup>25</sup> Note the experiences of the German writer Hans Harder, who left the Mennonite church prior to World War II because of the presence of many avowed Nazis. He was active in the confessing church from 1933 to end of World War II. His experiences are recorded in various places, e.g., the introduction to the translation of his novel, *No Strangers in Exile*, trans. and ed. Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> A few important works include: Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Peter Richardson with David Granskou eds., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity; Volume 1: Paul and the Gospels* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986); Stephen G. Wilson, ed., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity; Volume 2: Separation and Polemic* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986); Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987). The most recent work covering anti-semitism in antiquity is Peter Schäfer's, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> The question of the historical role of the Pharisees in the establishment of Rabbinic Judaism has no simple answer, and I do not investigate that topic in this paper.

<sup>28</sup> This analysis simplifies the African American experience, which is influenced by both non-Christian African traditions and various streams originating in Islam. However, the integral connection of African American history with Christianity in North America, as well as the present critical analyses of these issues undertaken by African American scholars justifies such an exploration of this question and its implications.

<sup>29</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1961 [orig. 1903]), 23.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



<sup>31</sup> Derrick Bell is the attorney dismissed by the Harvard Law School because of his protest of their refusal to hire Black faculty members. He sets forth the following proposition: Black people will never gain full equality in the U.S.. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance. See Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic, 1992), 12. On the origins of American racism in its Puritan past and the legacy of that tradition, see Paul R. Griffin, *Seeds of Racism in the Soul of America* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Note the essays of Charles Copher in *Black Biblical Studies: An Anthology of Charles Copher; Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible* (Chicago: Black Light Fellowship, 1993). Note also Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 5-48 and the essays he has collected in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 127-84.

<sup>33</sup> Note the works cited in the previous note. See also Frank Yurco, "Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?" *Biblical Archeology Review* 15 5 (September/October 1989): 24-30.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. 2 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987/1991).

<sup>35</sup> A thorough analysis of the conflict with a citation of the relevant literature has been provided by Jacques Berlinerblau, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> The results of the largest project of this nature ever undertaken can be found in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Vincent L. Wimbush, "Biblical-Historical Study as Liberation: Toward an Afro-Christian Hermeneutic," *Journal of Religious Thought* 42 2 (Fall/Winter, 1985-86): 9-21; Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way Through the Struggle," in *Stony the Road*, 57-77; Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa*, ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 175-99.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-74.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>45</sup> Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, eds., *The Case Against the Global Economy: And For a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); Jerry Mander, "The Dark Side of Globalization: What the Media Are Missing," *The Nation* 263 (July 15-22, 1996): 9-10, 12-14.

<sup>46</sup> Mander and Goldsmith, *Case Against the Global Economy*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Goldsmith, "The Last Word: Family, Community, Democracy" in *Case Against the Global Economy*, 501-14, see 502.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1996; orig. Times Books, 1995). An earlier essay was "Jihad vs. McWorld," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1992): 53-65.

<sup>49</sup> One could question the wisdom of using the term *jihad* to characterize the one side of the spectrum in this dialectical struggle. Barber uses the term to represent the "dogmatic and violent particularism of a kind known to Christians no less than Muslims, to Germans and Hindus as well as to Arabs" (*Jihad vs. McWorld*, 9). In the "Afterword" to the paperback edition he does grant that "the great majority of devout Muslims who harbor no more sympathy for Islamic Jihad than devout Christians feel for the Ku Klux Klan or for the Montana Militia might feel unfairly burdened by my title. I owe them an apology, and hope they will find their way past the book's cover to the substantive reasoning that makes clear how little my argument has to do with Islam as a religion or with resistance to McWorld as a singular property of radical Muslims" (299).

<sup>50</sup> *Jihad vs. McWorld*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>53</sup> Susanne H. Rudolph and Loyed I. Rudolph, "Modern Hate: How Ancient Animosity Get Invented," *The New Republic* (March 22, 1993), 25.

<sup>54</sup> Note now the Global Mennonite History Project, established by Mennonite World Conference and coordinated by John A. Lapp. See "Toward a Global Mennonite/Brethren in Christ Historiography," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15 (Winter-Spring 1997): 3-133; John A. Lapp, "The Global Mennonite/Brethren in Christ History Project: The Task, the Problem and the Imperative," *CGR* 15 (Fall 1997): 283-90.

<sup>55</sup> *Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory 2000*, ed. Elizabeth Baechler (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, Newton/Winnipeg: Faith & Life, 1999), 2, 18.

<sup>56</sup> See also Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>58</sup> Note that this term constitutes the sub-title for Barber's book. See also Featherstone, *Undoing Culture*, 120.

<sup>59</sup> Joel Kotkin, *Tribes: How Race, Religion and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy* (New York: Random House, 1993), 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, trans. Don Smith (London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage, 1996), 97. Note especially pp. 72-100 on tribalism.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>65</sup> Kotkin, *Tribes*, 16. Donald Kraybill "takes for granted the fact that the Mennonite experience is an ethnic experience—one that has distinct cultural expressions beyond mere religious ones. .

... A common history, a collective biography, a transgenerational cultural legacy and a shared fate constitute the ethnic glue which fuses Mennonites together above and beyond religious experience" (Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity," 157). He follows Parsons in saying that an ethnic group has a "distinctive identity which is rooted in some kind of a distinctive sense of its history." For Steven Nolt "ethnicity is, most basically, a shared sense of peoplehood" (Nolt, "A 'Two-Kingdom' People," 486). In *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, Leo Driedger sets forth as the purpose of the volume "to add the Mennonites to this middleman list" of "minorities who survive as middlemen, working between the seams of the elite and the masses, the well-to-do and the poor, political radicals and conservatives and religious performers and conservationists." Jews, Armenians, East Indians, Copts, Greeks, and the Chinese are cited as examples. This appears to be Driedger's attempt to describe a similar phenomenon to that discussed here.

<sup>66</sup> See Kotkin (*Tribes*, 30) for the importance of an elaborate mythology of origin as the basis for a "vocation of uniqueness." Note Kraybill above. See the comments by Rudy Wiebe, "Flowers for Approaching the Fire: A Meditation on The Bloody Theater, or Martyrs Mirror," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 16 2 (Winter 1998): 110-24.

<sup>67</sup> Rodney J. Sawatsky, "History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition Through History," PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1977, 22-56; Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity," 161-62.

<sup>68</sup> The relationship of these themes may help explain how Mennonites could deal with the contradiction of martyrdom posed by Nick Lindsay, whom Jeff Gundy quotes as suggesting "The only good Mennonite is a dead Mennonite."

<sup>69</sup> Kotkin, *Tribes*, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Sawatsky, "History and Ideology," 86; Kraybill, "Modernity and Identity," 167.

<sup>71</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*. One can also see this in novels such as that of Rudy Wiebe, *The Blue Mountains of China* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>72</sup> Kotkin, *Tribes*, 16-20.

<sup>73</sup> Featherstone, *Undoing Culture*, 126-57, evaluates the role of travel and migration in a global, postmodern world.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., Irving Greenberg, "Religious Values After the Holocaust: A Jewish View," in *Jews and Christians After The Holocaust*, ed. Abraham J. Peck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 63-86.

<sup>75</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), xi-xii.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-22, then developed in 23-59 and 108-39.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent A. Wimbush, "Biblical Historical Study as Liberation: Toward an Afro-Christian Hermeneutic," *JRT* 42 2 (Fall-Winter 1985-86): 9-21, see 17.

<sup>79</sup> Riggins R. Earl, Jr. in his keynote address to the 11th National Conference on the Future Shape of Black Religion, sponsored by Wright State University and held at Omega Baptist Church, March 16, 2001. He is the author of *Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs: God, self and community in the slave mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

<sup>80</sup> Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1973; rev. ed. 1981). See also Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Examples of this type of analysis from a variety of cultural perspectives include: Daniel Smith-

Christopher ed., *Text & Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert eds., *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998); Vincent L. Wimbush ed., *The Bible and the American Myth: A Symposium on the Bible and Constructions of Meaning* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999).

## Responses to John Kampen

### Nancy R. Heisey

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It would be tempting simply to say yea and amen to the direction of John Kampen's paper, since I am in fundamental agreement with the direction Kampen sets and the questions he raises. I am not going to speak to the wealth of resources that this paper has collected concerning the conversation about Mennonite identity, other than to underline Kampen's first point: that nearly all of this conversation has been carried out among Mennonites of European descent and, I might add, among men, in the United States and Canada, without taking into account both the increasing diversity of the Mennonite family in the United States and Canada and the now-global nature of the Mennonite churches.

I also found striking and convincing his second major area of discussion, that of the problem of anti-Semitism for Mennonites. Kampen argues that by claiming our identity as Believers churches, we are able to identify ourselves with those in the German churches who resisted the Third Reich. Instead, Mennonites need to face the reality that some of us, specifically in Germany and Canada, but also elsewhere, supported the Nazi regime and by extension its policies which led to the Holocaust. Kampen asks whether in response to this reality Mennonites today could "develop a biblical hermeneutic that challenges . . . Christian triumphalism" towards Jewish people. He points to the recent work among biblical scholars and historians of antiquity which may provide a backdrop for the construction of such a hermeneutic, a list from which Mennonite authors are absent. One Mennonite writer who has specifically addressed this question comes not from the Mennonite academy but from the front lines of the Christian Peacemaker Teams. Kathleen Kern, in her book *We Are the Pharisees*, deals both with the biblical material and with the problem

of late-twentieth-century Mennonites who “see the Nazi era as a historical aberration” and “believe that anti-Semitism is on the wane.”<sup>1</sup>

In a third point, Kampen explores the shared history but different experiences of African Americans and white Mennonites, especially in the United States. He calls for a re-examination of the scriptural tradition Mennonites have claimed with an eye to what he sees as its “Germanization.” I can only agree, recalling an exercise I like to carry out with students in introductory Bible classes. I tell them to turn to the maps at the back of their Bibles and find the one that shows the largest amount of territory for the biblical world. Almost without exception, the maps include much of Mesopotamia and Mediterranean Europe but are cut off right at the Nile Delta. Have the biblical mapmakers simply forgotten the call of the psalmist to “Let Ethiopia (what we now know as northern Sudan) hasten to stretch out its hands to God” (Ps. 68:31)? Or have they chosen to ignore this and other similar passages, and if so, why?

While Kampen further suggests that Mennonites need to consider the ideological reading of texts that has characterized African American biblical studies in recent years, he might also have indicated a need for a different reading of our own history. I was struck with this point recently in coming across the memoirs of Peter Hartman, a Mennonite who lived in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia during the American Civil War. I learned that the farm on whose land the buildings of Eastern Mennonite University now stand was a slave-owning farm. Hartman insists that Mennonites in the South were opposed to slavery, although he admits that they did exchange their labor with slave labor, he himself at times working with slaves on neighboring farms. Hartman recounts several stories of mistreatment of slaves that he witnessed, but hastens to add that some slave owners he knew were good to their slaves.<sup>2</sup> One is reminded of the comment by Edward Bell, author of *Slaves in the Family*, that for whites dealing with their past of slave ownership, it always seems that one’s own slave-owning family were “good masters” while the farm down the road had “bad masters.”<sup>3</sup> How much more deeply are we willing to elaborate and nuance the stories of our own past, whether on responses to slavery in the nineteenth century or on racist personal and institutional behaviors in the twentieth?

It is Kampen's final point that I want to respond to in more detail. After providing background on current literature about the process of globalization, Kampen suggests that Mennonites should see themselves as one of the many peoples seeking a way in this globalizing reality. He gives extensive attention to the work of Joel Kotkin in *Tribes*, noting three important definitional aspects of Kotkin's "global tribes": "a strong ethnic identity," "a global network," and "a passion for technical and other knowledge." It seems that ethnicity as a factor is absolutely fundamental to Kotkin's case, which raises a question about Kampen's suggestion that Mennonites see themselves within such a framework. In what sense can the global Mennonite community be thought of as an "ethnic" community? Kampen offers perspectives from a quarter-century of Mennonite sociological research on identity questions.

Kampen suggests that "the assertion of some common identity based in the Bible has been a perceived manner of moving Mennonites beyond perceived ethnic limitations." He later suggests that the African American appropriation of the Bible for survival and quality of life provides an alternative to the triumphalist Western Christian biblical hermeneutic which, at least by suggestion, he believes that many Canadian and U.S. Mennonites share. This move in relation to the Scriptures could be made by an enhanced Mennonite understanding of the sixteenth-century documents of Anabaptist suffering and survival. Edgar McKnight has recently offered a perspective, drawing on a piece of our sixteenth-century story that might not at first glance be included in Kampen's proposal but could perhaps actually enhance it. Reading the story of the Anabaptists in Münster, McKnight applauds "their reading of the Scriptures so as to engender an encounter between believers and the text." Other Christians, perhaps including many contemporary Mennonites, fall into equally problematic positions of striving for "guidance and control" through "dogmatic and historical frameworks." McKnight offers instead "a comprehensive hermeneutical system" with movement between circles of praxis, doctrine, history, and literature. And he emphasizes that it is the biblical readings of Christians in the Two-Thirds World who have emphasized the praxis dimension of biblical reading, in a way similar to the African American methods described by Kampen.<sup>4</sup>

I would suggest one further perspective that both draws on and moves beyond ethnicity as a marker of Mennonite identity. This perspective speaks

to how Canadian and U.S. Mennonites might demonstrate acceptance and commitment to a shared fate with Mennonites around the world. While accepting that ethnicity “is usually conceptualized as a common origin or culture resulting from shared activities and identity based on some mixture of language, religion, race, and/or ancestry,” Charles Ragin and Jeremy Hein add that “ethnicity is profoundly *contextual* (it takes many forms, depending on associated conditions) and deeply *interactive* (it is closely intertwined with political and economic institutions, events, and processes.”<sup>5</sup> It is within the contextual and interactive dimensions of the global Mennonite network, I suggest, that both the problem and the potential of Mennonite ethnicity lies.

Kotkin, in addition to the central characteristics cited above, stresses that global tribes are characterized by a moral and ethical foundation.<sup>6</sup> Recently Mennonite World Conference (MWC) acknowledged the centrality of such understanding with the publication of *From Anabaptist Seed* by C. Arnold Snyder. The introduction to this slight pamphlet underlines the author’s belief that “it is possible to speak of an ‘historical core’ of Anabaptist-related identity.”<sup>7</sup> Based on that core, Snyder suggests three areas, all significantly ethical in character, that mark “living the faith”: truth-telling, economic sharing, and pacifism.<sup>8</sup> Thus the story of Anabaptist origins, with its insistence on practical discipleship, connects to the importance of the moral aspects of a global identity as described by Kotkin.

For the purposes of this response I will discuss only economic sharing. It would be fascinating to consider how such sharing has shaped one piece of this global identity – the partnerships built over the last seventy-five years between Mennonites of German descent in Canada, Germany, Russia, the Ukraine, Paraguay, Brazil, and Mexico. While I have done no in-depth research which would demonstrate it, I am convinced that concrete and significant economic sharing has characterized this slice of the tribe. The recent history of Mennonites in Paraguay would offer an important example.<sup>9</sup> Statistics I do have, however, paint a different picture of other clans within the global Mennonite tribe.

The budget of the MWC is assessed to the member conferences on a “fair share” basis, determined by factors related to comparative international economic data (specifically Gross National Product) and conference-based statistics. Thus, for example, the fair share in 2000 for conferences in Africa,



with a total membership of 356,849, is one cent per member per year. The fair share for Latin America, with 61,482 members, is twelve cents per member. For conferences in Canada and the United States, with total membership of 250,298, the fair share is \$1.51 (US) per member per year. The general experience of Mennonite World Conference is that member conferences in general have not met their fair share of this budget. Here I think the primary question is how Mennonites in Canada and the United States have responded to the MWC request. In 1998, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada contributed a little over a third of their fair share, the Mennonite Church in the U.S. contributed slightly more than half, and the General Conference Mennonite Church in the U.S. contributed fifty-seven percent. Statistics are no better for other U.S. and Canadian Mennonite/Brethren in Christ groups. Altogether, those contributions amounted to forty-seven cents per member (in those groups) for the year 1998, a sum embarrassing even to mention in light of North American Mennonite contributions to our own schools and colleges, congregations, church, and para-church agencies.<sup>10</sup>

It might be asked whether this contribution record really expresses a commitment to global economic sharing among Mennonites. Certainly there are a variety of other ways by which such sharing goes on, both formally and informally. It might also be argued that contributions to MWC are a drop in the bucket in the face of the kind of economic sharing which would truly make an impact on our global tribe. But I suggest that when Mennonites in the U.S. and Canada find it so hard to connect to an organization which by design is determined to shift the balance of decision-making power in the direction of the worldwide Mennonite majority, we have not gotten very far. It must be noted in contrast that Mennonites in Europe are consistently on top of their fair share contributions to MWC, which are actually higher per member than those for churches on this side of the Atlantic. As a topic for another reflection, beginning with Kampen's thoughtful comments on the foundation for our tribe of shared struggle and survival, we might ask what it is in the experience of Mennonites in Europe which propels them more strongly toward the body that at present most clearly puts a face on the global Mennonite tribe.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Kern, *We Are the Pharisees* (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995), 38-77, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Peter S. Hartman, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Lancaster, PA: Eastern Mennonite Associated Libraries and Archives, 1964), 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Ball, speaking on WSLU, North Country Public Radio, "Readers and Writers On-the-air: Call-in on Contemporary Literature," Nov. 4, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar V. McKnight, *Jesus Christ in History and Scripture: A Poetic and Sectarian Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 313-17.

<sup>5</sup> Charles C. Ragin and Jeremy Hein, "The Comparative Study of Ethnicity: Methodological and Conceptual Issues," in *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, ed. John H. Stanfield II and Rutledge M. Dennis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), 255.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Kotkin, *Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy* (New York: Random House, 1992), 24-25.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Miller, "Preface" to C. A. Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, 37-47.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Stoesz and Muriel T. Stackley, *Gardens in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco, 1927-1997* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Statistics provided by Kathryn Good, Director of Administrative Services for Mennonite World Conference. Since that time, integration on the Canadian and U.S. sides, and separation of the Mennonite Church Canada and the Mennonite Church USA, have changed the structures, and it is not clear how that will affect the sense of participation in MWC.

**Gilberto Flores**

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My approach to John Kampen's paper arises from the experience of individuals, churches, and communities in Central America in general, and in Guatemala in particular. This experience has guided them in their search for a life-given identity. Mennonites in Central America see themselves as heirs of the first Anabaptists, without appealing to a particular biological inheritance. Their affirmation is of a theological nature, and their identity is bound to faith. With that identity in mind, they have survived the harshness of suffering, persecution,

and rejection. I approach Kampen's paper with the inheritance of an identity that arises from this different reality, and therefore with a perspective that enriches the already abundant worldwide Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage.

It is obvious that Kampen's paper is written from a white perspective. His paradigms are relevant for the main stream of Mennonites but not for 'other' Mennonites who come from different backgrounds and do not identify themselves as part of an ethnic Mennonite group in particular. These 'others' are part of the Mennonite church rather than part of an immigrant European group. The point of convergency is theological and is a matter of Christian faith rather than biological origin.

When I listen to John, I recall memories of Mennonite churches in Central America that are mainly poor churches, that work with the poor, and that walk with them. Many times the poor, the indigenous people, and women experience threats to their rights and suffer greatly. In such circumstances Mennonite congregations do not have time to talk about survival. They cannot dedicate much time to that type of reflection, because reality demands that they direct their efforts to announce peace and justice in favor of those whose rights look trampled. The Mennonite church and the community are tightly connected by an urgency to provide a sense of hope to their members.

Kampen uses certain words that I would like to highlight in my response, words related to identity: Ethnic, Ethnicity, Tribe and Global Tribe, and Myth, Religious Ideology, Meta-narratives. All these words bring to mind remembrances of a pilgrimage, a journey of churches, people, and communities who experienced pain, rejection, racism, and even death because of their characteristics and beliefs. Because they perceived life with different paradigms than others.

In that social context the Mennonite church in Central America walked alongside these people. Immediately the church thought about service and so helped them to survive. Pastoral care, solidarity, and an intentional presence in the midst of conflict were also part of the church's response. In the process, the church was confronted by the authorities and other powers, and society in general asked about the church, Who are these people that act in this manner? This helped the church to examine itself and discover a vacuum of identity, and to look for answers and a solid foundation to establish and express the reason for the church's presence in that part of the world. So, how does a

church survive without defining why it exists in a specific place? How can it maintain its identity if in its task the church becomes a-historic? For the Mennonites in Central America this was vital.

People in the church and outside it began to wonder about the existence of the Mennonite church in the midst of a huge confusion of churches and exotic religious groups. How could the Mennonite church be something valuable and integrated in a society with enormous contradictions? For example, in Guatemala, more than sixty percent of the population is composed of different ethnic groups, speaking more than thirty-five different languages. And most live in poverty. The middle class is not strong enough to become an important component of the social equilibrium. But a small segment of the population – three to five percent – are wealthy and rule the country like private property. This minority sees itself as the dominant culture and creates an unjust, fragmented society without compassion and solidarity.

Once, some people from communities where the church was trying to serve asked: What sort of church are you? What kind of people are you? On another occasion, in a violent and dangerous situation, a person who was trying to discourage people from attending church exclaimed: *Por el amor de Dios, qué hacen ustedes aquí?* (For God's sake what are you doing here?) *Esto es peligroso. Es mejor si se van, aquí no pueden hacer nada!* (This is dangerous! It is better if you leave now, you can't do anything here.) Such questions and observations were important at the beginning of a journey for the Mennonite church in Central America in the midst of social violence, persecution, fear, and death.

These questions from other people led the churches to ask themselves, Who we are? Where do we come from? Where do we find roots? What sort of people are we? All these questions brought a sense of urgency to Mennonites to define their identity. We are "Mennonites," but this is a word devoid of meaning if it is just a name, a title, a sign on the facade of a building. This name needs a strong frame, and the church needs to find this frame. The link between Central American congregations and North American mission agencies is clear but a frame of reference from North America does not work. Culturally the Mennonite church in North America sends its message and its messengers wrapped in the robe of the dominant culture of the rich and powerful. This has political and ideological implications that contradict the different environment

of the poor and dependent countries. These contradictions grow when those who send their message and messengers fail to incorporate into their meta-reality that they are not the only Mennonites, when they fail to include in we those who demand their own space to recreate Mennonite and Anabaptist according to a different paradigm.

A negative reaction occurred because the churches, denominations, and mission agencies from North America were associated with the dominant culture and were seen to benefit from it. It is difficult build bridges between these two different realities. If the churches in Central America wanted to survive, they needed a strong identity in order to pursue a new level of participation, acceptance, and witness. Also, if Mennonites want to participate in the social process, they need to approach other groups with a clear definition of themselves. Mennonites in Central America live in the middle of poverty and socially disadvantaged people who suffer violence and persecution.

Here the words used by Kampen become important to me, not just for sociological reasons but because they are necessary for engagement in a productive dialogue with others, not because we need to survive but because we as a church are to be instruments of liberation for others. The task for the churches in Central America was to search for their roots in order to provide a point of reference to help define and shape their identity, and thus become capable in mission. And so the church began dealing with four main streams of identity:

1. The Bible as the root of beliefs and ethics, and as a paradigm for human life and a guide for a people's pilgrimage.
2. Anabaptist history in the sixteenth century as a meta-narrative, a religious ideology, as a strong ethos link, as an example of the urgency of mission, and as an ongoing inclusive community.
3. The indigenous communities, because they were in the midst of suffering with a sense of mission, hope, patience, and courage. As an ethnic group, they appeal to their ancestors, and their traditions and religious patterns, because they were strongest as a community when the suffering was strongest.
4. A sense of "global ownership" offered by the international community, a commonality expressed in a common faith, a common

theology, acceptance when differences appeared, something strong which never died or disappeared.

All these things happened in the middle of a vital situation, not in a setting of tranquility. The interaction between these elements was extremely dynamic: action, reflection, and transformation were the tools used in this process.

In his paper, Kampen, referring to Donald Kraybill, says that traditional ethnicity in North America was formed on the basis of martyrdom, codified in the *Martyrs Mirror*. For some Latin American communities including Mennonites, these words are an exact reference to their reality. These groups were shaped by the reality of suffering. But a difference is rooted in the last part of Kampen's paragraph when he notes that martyrdom was replaced by "humility as an organizing idea for Mennonite and Amish self-perception." The difference comes not from the definition of humility but from the awareness of how the church in North America used this good and exemplary attitude to become passive. This is not how the Latin American churches and communities who embrace Anabaptist theology identified the concept. In critical moments, they used the ideas of ethnicity, myth, religious ideology, and meta-narratives to become combative and prophetic. Anabaptist history gave them many of these elements. And the theology and biblical basis with which Anabaptism challenged the powers and political systems in the sixteenth century were used in Central America to create a bridge between these sociological poor communities of faith and Anabaptist communities of the past. This is an amazing engagement with history. It is a deep anchor that remains a strong component in the identity and hope for survival of these communities. This may help explain why these communities do not consider themselves to be an entity separate from the Anabaptist legacy. They never say, "the Anabaptists did," as documents written in North America usually say. Instead they say, "we the Anabaptists did."

Kampen uses words such as Globalization, Urbanization, Assimilation. "McWorld" to describe the essentials of a new order where a global economy, high technology, and fast communication is turning our world into a small village. This new world system affects the poor communities directly. I want to tell you a story which I hope will show both the dilemma facing communities where globalization has arrived and the critical importance of the Mennonite church's role.

There is a small town called Chimaltenango in Guatemala. It is a tranquil community where the majority of the population are *cackchiqueles*, an ethnic group with an agricultural tradition. These *cackchiqueles* work mostly on their very small family farms and produce food for their consumption. The leftovers are sold for income and permit them a limited margin of economic resources used to buy things they can't produce. One day, this community received a huge surprise: several cloth factories were coming to town! Suddenly there were people from Korea and Taiwan looking for houses to rent or buy, maids to work for them, and construction workers to build their factories. All these things changed the face of the town and produced fears and hopes at the same time. What good news for a community with a high level of poverty! Where the youth had no job opportunities, now jobs were coming to town! The young people abandoned school, especially girls between thirteen to eighteen years old. The men abandoned their small farms in order to gain real money and become consumers. The salary range was low, the hours of work long. The people had no time to spend with their families. The church became secondary and many traditional values changed. Perhaps the sole benefit for the people was a small amount of cash in their pockets.

A friend of mine, a sociologist, observed that: "The consolation from globalization for those people is a little bit of cash and a sense of a regular job in the middle of a circle of poverty. The people can buy goods and consume, but you can see the deterioration of their community. Their very identity as a community is in danger." The consequences for them are evident: violence and unconformity; more poverty; fewer children, especially girls, attending school; continued abuse of workers; and so on. The consequences for wealthy countries are equally evident: less cost to produce goods; goods cheaper to buy; more capacity to compete in the global market; more money in the bank.

The reaction from the churches and community leaders began with a new approach to the Bible, a different presentation of the gospel, more involvement in political issues, and a quest for the *cackchiqueles'* cultural roots and an active, prophetic kerygma: Jesus the Prince of Peace demands that the powers and principalities, expressed in this kind of economic system, respect the life and unique reality of the people God creates. Mennonites talk about survival in North America. But in this response and illustration we have

meaningful examples of Mennonites from another reality. Might it be incorporated into the North American meta-narratives as well?

In the context of the global village, North American Mennonites who affirm their strong biological links with the Anabaptists of the twenty-first century should recognize that they cannot talk of their survival without counting the rest of the world's Anabaptist Mennonites. The Anabaptist-Mennonite theological and ecclesial identity will survive if it transcends the purely biological and affirms the strong interdependence that the global churches are proposing.

### **Tom Yoder Neufeld**

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John Kampen's essay deals with a question that continues to vex Mennonites: How to think about and nurture a sense of identity that takes into full account our multi-national and multi-ethnic identity and that moves "beyond perceived ethnic limitations." Kampen points out that Mennonite sociologists, in trying to speak to the issue of Mennonite identity, work with the analytical categories of ethnicity and assimilation. He notes that such analysis is marked by a certain "quaintness," in that it overlooks that Mennonites are both Caucasian and Christian, and thus share in their identity in these important respects with the majority of the population. It is thus inept at coming to grips with what has become a global Mennonite community of faith. This is an important point, even if Kampen does not sufficiently recognize that, ironically, "Mennonites of North America" includes persons and congregations of African American, Hispanic, First Nation, and Asian derivation, not to mention the many who bring no particular ethnic pedigree to begin with. The 'global' reality of diversity is increasingly resident 'at home.' But to acknowledge this would only sharpen the importance of the issues Kampen raises.

As an alternative to a simple minority identity, Kampen draws heavily on his deep familiarity with Jewish history and scholarship, as well as on his long engagement with the African-American community, believing that these two realities provide important challenges to how Mennonites might forge a



sense of identity for the future. Germane to the identity of both communities is the experience of suffering, struggle, and survival – for Jews the Holocaust, for African-Americans slavery and racism. Kampen suggests these as “the basis for a shared identity in the global Mennonite church movement.”

In order to learn from these communities, Kampen proposes that Mennonites first come to terms with their own anti-Semitism, both by acknowledging their complicity and by thoroughly rethinking their missionary stance (a “Christian triumphalism” buttressed by anti-Jewish biblical hermeneutic). Second, Mennonites can learn from an emerging African American liberationist hermeneutic of Scriptures, but only if they again first come to terms with their complicity in the racism from which they have benefited; in effect, they need to divest themselves of their privileged place in a new global reality that benefits the few at the expense of the many.

In the new global reality in which Mennonites must forge their identity, the old *ethnic* identity is inadequate. Instead, Kampen suggests Mennonites come to see themselves as one of Joel Kotkin’s “global tribes,” held together by a mythology of origin which, like that of Jews and African Americans, has as its constituent elements suffering and survival – elements that marked the experience of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, of the Mennonites of Ukraine in the mid-twentieth century, of Ethiopian Mennonites in past decades, and of Congolese, Colombian, and Central American Mennonites in the present.

I am grateful to Kampen for a deeply thoughtful and thought-provoking exploration of the question of Mennonite identity. My response can only touch on a fraction of the issues he has brought to the table, however. Let me begin by praising his attempt to find a sustainable identity that transcends old ethnic identities, even as it incorporates them. That is an ongoing personal project of mine: 1) I grew up in a Russian Mennonite home (mother, Kanadier Kleine Gemeinde background; father, Russländer Mennonite Brethren), but in Austria where the Mennonites I knew were all Austrians who had only recently been Catholic or Lutheran. They were no less Mennonite for all that. 2) I am married to a Mennonite of Ohio Swiss Mennonite background on the one side and of French Mennonite vintage on the other. 3) I am now a member of the second oldest Mennonite church in Canada, which, due to God’s wonderful sense of humor, has become home to a Central American refugee community of approximately sixty persons. It is a wonderfully benign growth in the belly

of an old body, constantly making any ethnic self-description both inevitable and instantly problematic, if not destructive. 4) At the school where I teach, we present “pre-ethnic” Anabaptist history and theology as a publicly available set of perspectives and convictions. But we sometimes struggle not to allow ethnic definitions to determine the parameters for our study of Mennonite history, sociology, music, and literature. So I applaud Kampen’s attempt to find a centre of identity larger than ethnicity. I also agree that the twin themes of suffering and survival are in fact common ground for many Mennonites around the world, most especially among brothers and sisters in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America.

Having said that, I’m restless about the specific nature of his proposal. Let me share some of the reasons for my restlessness, even misgivings, in no particular order. First, I wonder whether making the foundation of identity the suffering and survival of the few at the hands of the many does not, ironically, make it difficult to see oneself as complicit in the sins of the many. I strongly suspect that when suffering and survival become “the mythology of origin,” it is only a short distance to making that suffering the *sine qua non*. Ironically, such a mythology can lead to the moral myopia Kampen rightly laments. Further, such a mythology runs the danger of making survival itself the objective of corporate efforts. We see the effects of such a mythology at work in places such as Palestine or the former Yugoslavia. Suffering and survival do not in and of themselves provide an identity that is open and hospitable, least of all toward those who threaten the survival of one’s group, ‘tribe,’ or *ethnos*.

Second, suffering and survival are essential to the history of some, perhaps even many, Mennonites past and present. They do, as Kampen suggests, provide a powerful bond among Mennonites of various backgrounds and nationalities. I have witnessed it in the interaction between 1920s Mennonite immigrants with a still-fresh memory of their suffering in the Ukraine and Mennonite immigrants of the 1990s with an even fresher memory of their suffering in Central America. I give thanks for stories of faithful suffering and stories of sometimes miraculous survival. But what brought the “new” Mennonites into the Mennonite family of faith was, interestingly, not the *Martyrs Mirror* nor the stories of persecution in the Soviet Union. It was the good news of new life in Christ. I would contend that this is true for the vast bulk of the world-wide Mennonite community of faith. The mythology of

origin that has attracted these diverse folk, many of whom have known suffering as intense as any the “old” Mennonites have experienced, are not stories of past suffering and survival – even as those themes will hopefully become part of the rich texture of our shared narrative – but a larger mythology of origin, one shared with the *whole* of the Christian community: the biblical story of redemption and liberation through Jesus Christ.

That was no less so in the sixteenth century. Our Anabaptist forebears emerged as an identifiable group because they pushed the implications of a myth of origin *shared with the broader Christian community* beyond the tolerance level of that larger community. As a result they experienced suffering and ultimately the ravages of ethnicization. They were the effect of marginalization by the larger Christian community which, Anabaptists held, was not heeding its own foundational tradition.

The subsequent struggle for survival played havoc with the theology that brought Mennonites into being in the first place. At the cost of oversimplification, suffering and the attempt to survive it resulted in becoming an *ethnos*. But ethnicity and evangelical theology don’t mix well. Just as ethnicity played havoc with theology and faith, so theology has repeatedly played havoc with ethnicity, resulting in a deep ambivalence whenever Mennonites have wanted to be a church and not simply a tribe. Ethnic North American Mennonites of European derivation have been reluctant to dilute their ethnic identity. But they know that if they protect such an identity for its own sake, they betray the core demands of a gospel that called them into being. Mennonites have dealt with this conundrum in various contradictory ways: some have chosen to exist as living fossils; others have done mission work *beyond* the confines of ‘our’ community; some have become open communities with an identity crisis. I wonder whether suffering and survival as central elements of identity help to move us into a more global reality, or push us further back in the direction of ethnicity in the most problematic sense of the term.

I would therefore argue, thirdly, that the true mythology of origin at the root of our existence as a global Mennonite community is a Christian gospel shared broadly with the larger Christian community. It is a mythology that is in the end more destabilizing than it is supporting of our present identity if conceived of ethnically, most especially among the old *ethnoi* of Swiss and

Russian Mennonites. And that is how it has been from the beginning, as it should be now. As Mennonites we are heirs first and foremost not of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, but of first-century Jewish heretics who transgressed the boundaries of their community and opened the door to ‘us’ outsiders. Why? Because it lay at the heart of their particular *Jewish* theology that the creator of *all* favored *all*; that the *Jewish* messiah was indeed the Christ of *all* humanity. They were able, albeit with considerable difficulty and no little pain, to come to think of this convulsion in their faith culture as ‘good news’ – good news not only for those hitherto outside but also for themselves as insiders. As a culture, as a community of faith, they enacted the risky venture of being willing *not* to survive. They had learned from their master that their survival lay precisely in their willingness to risk their lives, individually and corporately. The risk, regrettably, was real. And they paid an enormous price. Arguably the most tragic development for the Christian community of faith is that the ‘guests,’ the new members of the family, came to displace the ‘hosts’ and finally to push them out of their own home. Kampen’s attempt to sensitize his fellow Mennonites to anti-Semitism suggests that this inhospitality continues.

Jesus’ words to the effect that if you hang onto life you will lose it, and, conversely, if you are willing to lose it for his sake and that of the gospel, you will gain it, is relevant not only to individuals but to groups attempting to settle the question of their identity. I would argue that this is precisely how Mennonites came to be a global ‘tribe’ to begin with. Not suffering and survival, however deeply empathetic we should be with suffering and grateful for survival, but promise, gospel, and mission, is an adequate explanation of how the Mennonite community got to be global. They need to be the essential elements in a mythology of origin that can sustain an identity that is open and transformative in a profound Christian sense.

Some will counter that Mennonites are not a religious group devoid of ethnic expression, nor should or even can they be. Of course it is true that all religiosity finds cultural expression and becomes enculturated, sometimes even resulting in an *ethnos*. But the important question, since we are speaking of a mythology of origin, is from what such cultural concretions emerge and what sustains them. I fear that if a mythology of *suffering* and *survival* are to be the source of sustenance, then the ‘tribe’ that will emerge will be in danger of not being willing to risk for the sake of “the other.” It may not in the end be a

people in mission, the kind of mission that has a chance to radically affect the tribe's self-identity. It might well become reactionary at its core, as our history as Mennonites attests over and over again.

An identity focused on its own survival has precious little to do with that part of the global Mennonite community that is vulnerable, that knows suffering, but that nevertheless is madly trying to get word out – not about what it means to be 'Mennonite' but about what it means to experience Christ and to follow him in life. In such places 'Anabaptism' is increasingly invoked not as a historical memory but as a mode of behavior in the present. Not survival but *self-giving* is more likely to be at the core of the sustaining mythology of these Mennonites.

Kampen may be restless with me here. I wonder whether he might not hear my mission-oriented comments as heading in the direction of exactly the Christian anti-Judaism he understands to be still a largely unacknowledged part of the Mennonite ethos, participating in the triumphalism of the larger Christian tradition that has had such a devastating effect. **Such is not my intention.** But I simply do not believe that a mythology of origin not centered in the inherently transgressive confession that Jesus is Lord is big enough to sustain us as a global, faithful, Christian (as in messianic) Mennonite community. I would rather let some arguments give way to a humble and even contrite silence, than to allow a confession that "Jesus is Lord" and a requisite missionary stance fall into the category of "triumphalism." It may well be, given the enormity of our sin, that our witness can at best be done with "respectful whispers rather than in tones of lordly triumph."<sup>1</sup> A hundred years of contrite silence is, however, still preferable to cutting off the witness at its knees. Not to keep that confession alive even as "*Arkan Disziplin*" (Bonhöffer) is to betray precisely those Jews of the first century who transgressed their borders and ethnic boundaries to share their Jewish messianic 'heresy' with grateful Gentiles. It is adherence, after all, to Jesus' peaceable lordship "over all" that stands in greatest tension with the arrogance and hatred that paved the way to the Holocaust. It is not adherence to, but betrayal of, Jesus as Lord over all that rendered Christians blind to the unimaginable horror of slavery and racism.

Coming to terms with anti-Judaism and racism is central to the agenda of North American Mennonites of European origin. Many of our brothers and sisters here and in other places on the globe may well have their own histories

of horrors that set the context for their witness. They, and together with them we too, will need to find a way not simply to survive but to live within such circumstances with hope, and with a stance of engagement and transformation befitting those who know not only the cross but Easter, who know not only about suffering but about resurrection. Easter is finally not about survival but about rebirth, about re-creation. It was Easter that let our Jewish forebears foolishly risk their identity for our sake. We have little alternative to do so too, if we do not want to betray our origins either in the first or the sixteenth century. Such “losing oneself” has nothing to do with assimilation to the prevailing culture. It has everything to do with participation in the scandalously globalizing and yes, tribalizing, phenomenon called the body of Christ.

To conclude, I will return to the personal note I began with. I do not have the luxury of dealing with these questions in abstraction or from a distance. Every week I must answer the question of who is a Mennonite together with a Bob Kernahan, a Mario Cabrero, or a Susan Kampenson. And I must do that within the mostly generous but sometimes also wary embrace of the second oldest Mennonite Church in Canada. The only thing that allows me to answer the question in a way that affirms a common identity is a shared rootage in a myth of origin and a myth of destiny that is as old as biblical faith, centered on the confession that Jesus is Lord. Who is a Mennonite? Whatever else, a Christian who believes in Christ and who follows him in life. Any other answer betrays, I fear, the origins of the Mennonite community and curtails its global reality.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, “A Peace of God?” *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (Nov.-Dec. 1999):43.

**Malinda Elizabeth Berry**

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My brother, sister, and I are biracial, ethnic Mennonites. Our mother – a Swiss American Mennonite – is a Hostetler from the Oak Grove Mennonite Church community of Smithville, Ohio, where she grew up with Yoders, Ramseys, Gerigs, and Mussers, among others. Our father – an African-American Mennonite – is a Berry from a small Mennonite mission church, Newtown Gospel Chapel, in Sarasota, Florida, where he worked as a migrant laborer during his childhood. Our parents both went to Mennonite colleges, participated in voluntary service, and served on various boards and committees in the denomination. We are Mennonites. We also have present in our collective experience the marks of segregation, racism, and difference. The following is from an essay written by my sister:

Growing up in a family with a black father and a white mother never seemed out of the ordinary to me. I had a typical childhood and was raised in a typical home. . . . [My brother, sister, and I] attended a private Mennonite high school as well as a private Mennonite college. We grew up in a safe and nurturing environment. We took swimming lessons and piano lessons just like our friends. I now find myself expecting to be treated like everyone else, whether or not I happen to be a few shades darker.

Unfortunately for me, the problem is not as simple as I often like to make it appear. Classification of a person's race is frequently dependent upon her skin color, probably because it is the easiest way to categorize her. . . . [I]dentity is not altogether cut-and-dried; it is not based solely on skin color. . . . People who fall between specific groups are tossed around, attempting to find where they "fit in" socially and culturally.

I am proud, as a white Mennonite, to have such a fascinating history. I am proud, as an African American, to have such an inspiring heritage. These are two distinct characteristics that have created me. They have shaped me to become a mix and swirl of combinations of ideas, thoughts, and experiences. . . .<sup>1</sup>

I believe that when it comes to addressing questions of race, ethnicity, culture, and story we are dealing with issues of the psyche. I do not use this word as a technical term in the context of psychology or psychiatry; rather I use it to refer to the realm of internal and internalized constructions of our human experiences.

John Kampen's chief argument that themes of struggle and survival could and should provide the basis for shared identity is intriguing, but will it work? In addition to using particular narratives to make thematic parallels at an intellectual level, Mennonites desperately need to grapple with the Why? question. Why do they hold back when given the opportunities to bring together stories of suffering and persecution, stories of survival and peoplehood, under a common narrative? The answers to this question are deep and unending, so both the answers and the question must be processed with caution. In this spirit, I offer two observations in hopes that the path ahead might be cleared to a modest degree.

In order to create a common narrative, Mennonites have often searched for an image or symbol that is the foundation for this narrative and gives shape to a common culture. In the past, that image came from shared myths and stories of origin found in the biblical narrative, but in some ways the Bible has proved to be too broad.<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyrs often appear too remote, not too remote to capture the imagination, but too remote to connect to the current reality of North American plenty experienced by the majority of Mennonites in the United States and Canada. Moreover, so many Mennonite meta-narratives come from a European context that some groups write these stories off as irrelevant, even if the themes of persecution and suffering mirror their own heritage. Are there images from secular history that might avoid this pitfall? In the days of Ellis Island, the "Melting Pot" became a popular image and metaphor for the American project of nation-building. For a long time this image held sway because boiling things down into the same goo was the dream. With the movement for multicultural diversity, however,



the Melting Pot was deconstructed and exposed as a racist, imperialist, colonial farce. The “Salad Bar” replaced it because human equality began to mean respecting difference – letting a carrot remain a carrot, a cucumber a cucumber, and so on.

Like all metaphors, images, and analogies, the Salad Bar becomes limp if its symbolism is stretched too far. However, its weaknesses point to larger, systemic issues related to multiculturalism that can help us grapple with some of the subtleties of today’s question. Here are two observations about the reality of salad. On most salad bars, there are ingredients to build your own salad. Therefore, if I dislike broccoli, not only do I not have to pick it out of my salad, I can avoid it altogether. Most salad bars also have different kinds of ready-made salads available – potato, gelatin, three-bean, etc. These salads within the salad bar come with some kind of “binding agent” giving them distinct flavor, texture, and color unlike the containers of sunflower seeds, bacon bits, and garbanzo beans. In other words, as Salad Bar users we can make choices about what goes on our plate. We can pick and choose what items we want, either by putting together our own combination of ingredients for our ideal salad or by selecting a prepared salad that parallels real-life sociological patterns. We choose where we live based on who the neighbors are and what the surrounding community is like. For example, some of us move toward urban contexts where we will find cultural and racial diversity, while others move toward rural or suburban contexts where neighbors have more in common with each other.

If we use the salad image, we must also confront the role of the dominant culture often ignored by this image. I suggest that the dominant culture is like the salad dressing poured over a garden salad, coating every piece of lettuce – romaine and leaf alike, smeared across every radish, gluing every bean sprout to a tomato chunk or hard-boiled egg.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps our common narrative and the culture it creates and shapes could function like the orange gelatin that keeps crushed pineapple, pear chunks, banana slices, and shredded carrots suspended in a molded ring. There are limits to this image, though: unless it is kept refrigerated, gelatin becomes a gooey glob without definition or shape. I believe that we have the ability to affect and shape dominant culture – for good and ill – but the question at hand requires us only to affect dominant *Mennonite* culture.

Because many North American Mennonites are members of the western European diaspora, thinking about dominant culture is not always a priority. However, in order to effectively build relationships with other communities which also define themselves through stories of suffering and survival, Mennonites must work to recognize the power that the dominant culture has in shaping how others perceive them, even if they do not own the reality of that culture. At the societal level, this means that white Mennonites need to start thinking about themselves as white, and therefore as the benefactors of dominant culture, *even though historically Mennonites have defined themselves as separate from that culture.*

In his textbook about the dynamics of difference and dominance, Richard Burkey discusses the relationship between subordinate groups and the dominant group. In subordinate/dominant relationships, some groups “are expected to accept a variety of forms of discrimination, to discard their culture, or to adopt an extreme form of subservient behavior in the presence of dominant group members.” In other cases, subordinate groups “may be given relative freedom to live in their traditional manner as long as they . . . accept the authority of the state.”<sup>4</sup>

Mennonites in North America, as much as they may avoid owning it, have become a subordinate group fitting into Burkey’s latter category. Mennonites are not a persecuted subculture based on ethnicity. A second reality is that as the Mennonite tribe has come to include ethnicities beyond the Germanic family, white Mennonites have become the dominant group within the tribe, and Mennonites representing other ethnic and racial groups are a subculture within a subculture. By shying away from this truth, nothing is done to examine how subordinate groups are treated. Instead, prejudice and harmful stereotypes go unchecked.

The catch-22 of being a minority but also a majority within that minority requires that special care be taken to listen to stories and not to force divisions of loyalty. That is, we must avoid making people choose one identity over another. This is also why Mennonites need to journey toward a more global identity in order to be a church of whole people. This journey requires divulging our secrets and listening to new stories. And perhaps in listening to new stories, old narratives may find new meaning and new heroes may be found.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Anne Berry, "Race-related," in *What Mennonites are Thinking: 1998*, Merle Good and Phyllis Pellman Good, eds. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1998), 5, 8.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the fact that slaveholders and slaves used the same text – the Bible – to such radically different ends demonstrates the difficulty of simply appealing to Scripture to "make things right."

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian "Multicultural Mosaic" is not free of this problem either. Even though different colors of tile are used to make the entire mosaic, grout still holds the tiles in place, something that could easily symbolize both separation to preserve community distinctives and larger cultural expectations created by the dominant or majority group.

<sup>4</sup> Richard M. Burkey, *Ethnic and Racial Groups: The Dynamics of Dominance* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1978), 103-109.

# **Mennonites as a Plural Minority Church within Pluralism – A German Perspective**

*Fernando Enns*

For Peter J. Foth on his sixtieth birthday<sup>1</sup>

Once upon a time there were two Mennonites, sole survivors of a shipwreck. They found refuge on an unknown island somewhere in the vast ocean. After a while they were discovered. To the surprise of their rescuers, the two had founded three Mennonite churches, each with buildings of its own. Asked why they had done this, they responded: One attends the one church, the other attends the other. And why the third? That's the church to which neither of us goes!

## **The Problem of Describing a Plural Minority within Pluralism**

One of the challenges of describing Mennonites lies in their plurality. The roots alone of this religious denomination in the sixteenth century's "left wing of the Reformation" can only be described as polygenetic<sup>2</sup>; there are no historical confessions of faith that would have been adopted by all Mennonites in like manner,<sup>3</sup> and despite an agreed on conscious renunciation of hierarchic ministerial offices, concretely descriptive moments of unity elude them. The strict congregational structure of organization, oriented towards the autonomy of the individual congregation, did the rest in shaping pluralistic developments within this minority church. Basically, Mennonites can be described only within their specific local context.

A second challenge arises from the church landscape in Germany, in which the two state churches dominate. The Mennonites are perceived, if at all, by these bodies as "a Protestant free church" and often assessed as (and

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limited to being) 'not-a-State-church'. As a result, the riches of this tradition can hardly be discerned, and it only seldom appears as a serious partner of dialogue. At best Mennonites are regarded as an exotic sliver within the landscape of confessions, though still known as a "historic peace church" by experts.<sup>4</sup> Many Mennonites in Germany still define themselves in just these categorical terms, namely in the listing of characteristics that distinguish them from the state churches. On the one hand, this apologetic behavior can result in a negative 'image' of the state churches; on the other, it leads to a holding of positions lacking reflection and sound argument.

From these short remarks one can already suspect a potential identity crisis. The fear of losing identity always involves the danger of fundamentalism and the conservation of handed-down convictions with reasoning no longer understood because it is not exposed to larger social discourse nor is its plausibility proved.

In pluralistic forms of society that have developed in the modern age and have experienced a radicalization in so-called postmodernism, the identity issue has become a reality for *all* areas of life. Most Mennonites live in democracies in a globalized world, where pluralism seems most properly to belong. Cultural variety, variable and competitive philosophies of life, and different ideas of values and norms of behavior exist simultaneously next to each other. That also holds for the religious sector in general, both as a result of and an initiator of secularization. As a result, the question of an identity of one's own imposes itself more strongly now than in former times. Due to massive breaks with tradition – also among Mennonites – seemingly nothing can be taken for granted anymore: who we are, what we want, what we stand for. If everyone is to find his or her own salvation, will only a few individuals who are satisfied with themselves remain? In confessing faith this amounts to the question: What is truth? To what do church fellowships orient themselves, which criteria are irrefutable, and how have they developed? Validity threatens to lead to indifference, while relativism hinders clear orientation to what is right or wrong; uncertainty is the result.

In this paper, I will try to react positively to the challenges of the present, out of the collective experiences and developments of this distinct tradition, especially with respect to the challenges of pluralism, in order to try a *reflective translation* of the tradition in the context of the present. For this it is first

necessary to describe pluralism as a social challenge. Then the special challenge of pluralism in church and society must be recognized, and a possible interpretation advanced that leaves behind the static and simplified classification of 'Church - Sect - Mysticism' (Troeltsch),<sup>5</sup> in order to ask about possibilities of identification out of a Mennonite perspective that could arise from a treatment of just this tradition. The leading question here is: Shouldn't a pluralistic minority church with polygenetic origins be superbly prepared for its church presence within pluralism? This approach could lead to a sharpening of identity that in turn would dispense with the one-sided photo-negative of the state church as a static opposite.

### **Pluralism as a Modern Phenomenon**

Years ago Peter L. Berger argued that "modernity plunged religion into a specific crisis, into a crisis which is unquestionably marked by secularism but, more important, characterized by pluralism."<sup>6</sup> Next to the Industrial Revolution there are specifically European phenomena which contributed to it: capitalistic market economy and pluralistic metropolises, as well as complex ideological structures brought about by the Reformation and the Renaissance. Indeed, a perpetual pluralization of all dimensions of society since the sixteenth century can be observed. The renewal of the church through re-commitment to the central biblical message of the grace of God in Jesus Christ was achieved only at the price of losing the institutional unity of the church.<sup>7</sup> The questioning of traditional authorities and claims for validity emerging with the Enlightenment demanded a general rational accounting and thereby drove everything religious into the area of privacy. The succeeding relativization resulted in further pluralization, which at the same time proved to be a protest against the universalizing demands of the Enlightenment. In the same way the Age of Romanticism contradicted these tendencies of universalization with the postulate of individualism; and insight into historical limitedness deepened the tendencies to relativism. These developments help us recognize the potential for the formation of pluralism today.

"Confusing pluralism with a vague 'pluralism and diversity', of pluralism and individualism or of pluralism and relativism is the intellectual and cultural pest of our time."<sup>8</sup> The temptation is to leave everything undecided and not to commit oneself. But nothing is gained this way, for diffuse claims of power

will arise and will be much more problematic than merely different plural forms of expression. This is a real experience among existing Mennonite congregations. It is very easy for congregationalism, with its anti-clerical trends, to turn into an uncontrolled power performance of individuals, thereby working against mutual understanding. But if we take pluralism not merely as relativism or individualism, then it has describable even if highly complicated forms. And this description is necessary, if pluralism is not simply to be accepted as destiny. In all its usages 'pluralism' has as its central theme "the connection of many elements in relationship to each other and to their field of reference, which is not determined or limited by a superordinate principle of unity and which is therefore experienced as problematic and in need of clarification and structure."<sup>9</sup>

What follows for the religious situation? It can now be described as "postsecular religiousness," which takes for granted that the tradition of secularization has been broken. The resulting necessity lies in a *conscious turning* to religion. Today, people are challenged first to make a conscious decision for religion and then to choose a very specific content and social form of it. Philosophies of life, like religion, are not simply handed down as destiny by earlier generations and accepted almost unreflectively, but are offered as a choice. Berger calls this the "compulsion to heresy."<sup>10</sup> In the pre-modern world heresy was hardly a choice, for the believing person found him- or herself in a situation of relative security that was only occasionally questioned by heretic deviants. By comparison, says Berger, in the modern age heresy becomes a typical necessity, for the believer finds him- or herself in permanent insecurity that "is occasionally fended off by more or less fragile constructions of religious affirmation."<sup>11</sup> Earlier social and institutionally secure agreements are not taken *eo ipso* anymore today, but must be searched and fought for. Then, building on that, a "quasi-sectarian" community constitutes itself.

But the building of community is necessary, since the individual needs a social safeguard for his moral and religious ideas in order to make sure of their plausibility. This is why Michael Welker and others plead for a structuring of pluralism. The construction of a community and the relatedness of different communities to each other allow for an emerging of network systems. It isn't easy to think in such complex categories. Yet they are only an image of a reality which is possibly even more diverse. The prospects of pluralism are

obvious, and a pluralistic minority church, such as the Mennonites are, should be aware of them: the many different gifts in the church are here granted room; the limitedness of human knowledge is taken seriously; liberation from provincial traditions and horizons is made possible; a capability for ecumenical breadth is developed; rash denunciations are hindered; alternatives to standardized world views can be discovered; and lastly, differences of opinion do not necessarily need to be done away with.

A pluralism understood in this way, though, requires certain disciplines: first, the will to confess to that which is considered right, true and good, but also, secondly, an interest in alternative endeavors; and finally, striving for perfection through communication. If this desire for interchange declines, then the bases of pluralism go to pieces. If faith is not seen as a possession or as a principle, if it always stands within the probation of the prevailing situation, then this is the best requirement for the structuring of pluralism, and the life of believers can take place in dialogue. The process of dialogue is the element of structure of pluralism. Further conditions for a functioning of these processes are the protection of minorities and a willingness to correct one another or to allow correction.

### **Mennonites as Plural Minority**

#### *Polygenetic Source and Polyform Development of Mennonites*

If there is one unifying feature of the roots of Mennonites in the Anabaptism of the sixteenth century, then it is “aggressive non-conformity,”<sup>12</sup> although it found structure in very different forms depending on the context and the personalities involved. Anabaptists of various stripes stood, on the basis of the New Testament, for a Reformation orientated more radically than that of a Luther or a Zwingli, whether in Switzerland, Southern Germany, or the Netherlands. The resulting persecutions and suffered martyrdoms are a witness to the reaction of a pre-modern society, for which heresies still posed a strong and feared irritation. On the basis of this persecution a lay piousness gradually formed itself, displaying “anticlerical, anti-church, anti-authority, antidoctrinal and anticultural traits.”<sup>13</sup>

Of course a formation of confessions took place here, too, such as the Articles of Schleithem of the Swiss Anabaptists of 1527.<sup>14</sup> But it wasn’t until later that these Articles could be considered an expression of a part of the



Anabaptists: baptism on confession of faith, rejection of oaths (so as not to make commitments competing with the confession to Christ, and as a sign of truthfulness in every situation), renunciation of violence and a refusal to take offices of authority, as well as a strict dualism of church and world. This dualism required a separation of those who wished to give the imitation of Christ priority in their lives. This stance, gradually adopted by many, led the Mennonites into a seclusion and a churchly piousness averted from society, and soon brought them toleration in certain areas. H.-J. Goertz observes that their previous aggressiveness now turned inward and led to countless quarrels and separations in a struggle to maintain the purity of the church. Arguments now took place not with the surrounding societies but among the Mennonite churches, and led to separations and schisms, so that they developed quite plurally.

But Anabaptists and early Mennonites cannot be described as pluralists in the postmodern sense. They rather tended – as a reaction to their rejection by surrounding societies – to a diversity which, as an identity-forming factor of unity, merely characterized their existence as a ‘heretic’ group within a society that was at least territorially uniform. As such, though, they contributed to the continuing pluralization of society as a whole, this pluralization being one of the varieties of Protestantism.

### *Pluralistic Churches Today*

This development explains – paradoxically – why Mennonites were much more at the mercy of trends in the history of ideas than were the established churches and other comparable denominations that preferred a stronger commitment to their own denominational Confession of Faith. Even today this can be shown by the various forms of devoutness of the Mennonites in Germany (about 40,000 baptized members<sup>15</sup> today).<sup>16</sup> The Mennonite churches in the north and the west were and are more urban (e.g., in Hamburg or Krefeld). Wherever they were tolerated or later even respected for their economic success, they assimilated themselves into the middle classes and were emancipated for the most part. Enlightenment and liberal thinking influenced these churches. By comparison, the churches in the south (Rheinland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, and Bavaria) had always remained small and were found mostly among the agricultural population, sometimes in

seclusion on scattered farms. Strengthened by pietistic influences, this led in part to a stronger scepticism and isolation from surrounding society.

In the turmoil of World War II, it was immigrants from the former Eastern territories who founded new Mennonite congregations in Western Germany. Even before the war there had been strong efforts by these people to prove again and again that they – like the Lutherans or the Reformed – were obedient citizens whom the authorities had no need to fear and who claimed their rights and duties like everyone else.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for instance, by the end of the nineteenth century the principle of defencelessness had been practically given up and left up to individual conscience. They brought to the churches in North and South Germany a style of piety strongly conforming to society.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, since 1972 Mennonites from the former Soviet Union have emigrated to Germany. Often there were so many of them in one city that they could quickly found their own large churches. Only seldom did they seek contact with existing Mennonite church conferences or congregations, because the differences between their piety and that of the others in Germany were considerable. The time of repression in the Communist era had simply conserved many religious convictions over decades, or let them ‘clot’ to static, unfounded positions, or led others into total secularization.

In a new study of Mennonite confessions of faith by the *Mennonite World Conference*, one bit of common ground becomes visible. For Mennonites the Bible is the basis of faith and the manual for life in the discipleship of Christ. And that’s it, in most cases, for any kind of common ground. Colombian Mennonites seek first and foremost to commit themselves as a peace church for justice. Some North American Mennonites<sup>19</sup> (and Amish<sup>20</sup>) continue focusing on withdrawal from the “world,” the search for a simple lifestyle within an exclusive brother- and sisterhood, sometimes rejecting all technical advance. Some European Mennonites pursue conscious involvement with the ecumenical movement, because the biblical foundation is shared with all Christians in the church worldwide.<sup>21</sup>

Even though there have been repeated attempts to formulate a common theology of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition they are not really convincing. At the most, single theological premises determine the interpretation of history. Rather it is probably the socio-historical phenomena first, from which – in

theological reflection – efforts were made to produce denominational characteristics. For this reason there was a reliance, particularly after the experiences of World War II, on the theological positions of North American Mennonites.<sup>22</sup> A new construction of identity took place: “They brought an until then unknown ‘Anabaptist identity’ and gave us a world-wide horizon both with missionary and with church welfare aid.”<sup>23</sup> A new discussion on peace witness and nonviolence returned into the consciousness of the churches, and was now brought with intensity into the worldwide ecumenical movement.<sup>24</sup> The “Bender School” did its part in correcting the “image of the Anabaptists, which had been distorted by confessionalistic polemics . . . But this school of research which, since the 1970’s, had to give way to a revisionist, de-confessionalized, also a more strongly socio-historically oriented Anabaptist research, was not free from interpreting the idealistic image of its own present-day church and from viewing its own history too uncritically or idealizing it.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Religious Pluralism**

Before we can ask about how to deal constructively with this tradition, we must grasp pluralism in its particular church and religious moulding. Below we will investigate how intra-Mennonite, denominational, and religious pluralism portrays itself. This differentiation is necessary, for sometimes pluralism comprises different forms of expression for one and the same thing, and sometimes the one thing disintegrates into an immense number of things. Even if the question of truth cannot be dispensed with, it seems advisable to be aware of three different levels and to consider their limitations.

#### *Pluralism and Mennonites*

The little story at the beginning of this paper indicated the variety of Mennonites. The joke lies in the fact that the two persons and the three churches call themselves “Mennonite.” In Germany alone the Mennonite church falls into many different mergers which consider themselves legitimate representatives of the Anabaptist or Mennonite heritage and strive to carry it on. This effort takes place in extremely different ways, so different that sometimes they cannot even communicate with one another. The points of dispute are not only about

non-essentials but about elementary statements of faith, like the understanding of Scripture, the church, or positions of service.

How can these congregations all call themselves “Mennonite,” and how can they, in spite of all their differences, somehow actually feel connected? Mennonites who have been abroad and have met other, foreign Mennonites, will have felt it: a feeling of belonging together and with it an extension of trust beyond dogmatic differences. Explaining this feeling merely as the sociological phenomenon of a minority situation is not sufficient. There is, in addition, a factual unity through a mutual “story.” Even today Mennonites share the one “story” of Anabaptism, they form a story-telling community in which it is passed on.<sup>26</sup> This means there are – in spite of breaks from tradition – uniting (implicit) axioms, even if they are difficult to describe in words. As long as they do not deny each other being a Mennonite, this form of pluralism functions. But attempts to put mutuality into doctrinal or confessional sentences almost always fail. How could it be otherwise with a denomination which traces its roots back to a polygenetic source and which shows later polyform developments?

### *Pluralism within Denominations*

Pluralism in the ecumenical movement portrays itself somewhat differently. Recently I, a Mennonite pastor and theologian, was asked to marry an Adventist woman and a Catholic man. The wedding was to take place in the University Church of Heidelberg, which belongs to the Protestant State Church in which Lutheran and Reformed Christians are united. And probably there were other denominations as well among the Polish, Indian, and German guests. This is the ecumenical reality in which we live.

Within the various Christian denominations, differing and even contradictory teachings derived from the biblical witnesses. Efforts towards reaching agreement began even before the age of the ecumenical movement. Today the model of *reconciled diversity* is predominant, which assumes that the church in itself remains plural and that this should be seen as positive. The adjective is key: If denominations live together ‘reconciliately,’ then they are not contradicting an awareness of the one, world-wide church of Jesus Christ. If all of them being churches is mutually acknowledged, then their contrasts can be seen as an enrichment. The deciding point here, too, is that being reconciled is brought about through the unifying “story” of God with his people,

as testified to in the Jewish-Christian tradition. There is a pole, a center that has a unifying effect: The confession of the triune God, who is also the God of Abraham and Sarah. But because this basis, the biblical canon, is itself laid out plurally, it is only logical that there are different denominations. This realization allows us to endure contrasts positively, without everything becoming relative. The confession of faith is not watered down through plurality; rather in constant, reciprocal examination it becomes steadfast – in the ideal case, even optimal. But one must ask critically to what extent this model of reconciled diversity is in itself capable of ecumene. There are traditions whose understanding of the nature of the church does not seem to allow for this model.

*Pluralism among Religions*

Another level necessary to distinguish is the pluralism of religions. In the ecumenical student dormitory where I am director of studies, there are Christians of very different traditions as well as a Jew and a Muslim. Can we celebrate worship together in our chapel? We do. But what happens here? Do we pray to the same God, or do we merely speak together, each to ‘her’ and ‘his’ God? Do we speak the same language? The words are comparable, but what is said is understood differently by each one and surely connects each person with different experiences. There may be some common ground within the monotheistic religions, but we do run into absolute borders with Buddhists and Hindus. Different perspectives in their entirety confront each other. There are different models to describe this relationship: exclusiveness (we lock each other in); inclusiveness (in the end non-Christians are people of the “Christian” God who hasn’t revealed himself to them yet); pluralism (different ways of believing, with equal rights).<sup>27</sup> In the pluralistic model the question remains: Shall a universal God be considered here, to whom finally everything can be traced back (a “normative understanding”)? Or do we completely sacrifice anything common (a “descriptive understanding”)? A further question must be asked: How are absolute statements, without which religion virtually cannot seem to exist, to be understood? Confessions of faith that contradict each other cannot be equally “true.” Yet we must stress that, in reality, this is what we see is happening.

The problem stems from the fact that we cannot judge one “perspective of entirety” over another. We are always already within a confession, a

community of story-telling which obstructs this universal perspective. What remains is the possibility of each confessing our own faith to each other, in the hope that the others can hear it even if they will never completely understand everything. We remain Christians, Jews, or Muslims. But we are not condemning each other, nor merely co-existing, but respecting the other's faith. The result will be neither heteronomous nor arbitrary, for each person will hold as true that in which he or she believes. Pilate's question stays unanswered even today. But we must live with each other and, ideally, help each other to become better Muslims, better Christians. Real communication is conceivable, if at all, in the area of ethics, for the protection of all of life. "Until the manifestation of truth in the visio beatifica *in patria*, the pluralism of the consciousness of truth *in via* must be tolerated and shaped from the perspective of faith."<sup>28</sup>

*Theological Legitimation of Unity in Diversity: Pluralism out of Faith*

A last point can be mentioned only briefly: The question about the theological legitimation of attempts to shape diversity. We could go back to the well-known picture the Apostle Paul presents of the body and its many members (1 Cor. 12). The happenings at Pentecost are also an illustration of how the one Spirit brings about the plurality of languages, yet understanding each other is possible (Acts 2, Joel 3). Differences remain but without prejudicial effects. And the problem with the Tower of Babel was not its height but its builders' aspirations towards uniformity and conformity. Based on thinking along these lines in the last years, the doctrine of the Trinity in systematic theological reflections in the West has experienced a renaissance, not least in encounters with Orthodoxy.<sup>29</sup> If we believe in the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then plurality in God is already applied. "Just as I and the Father are one . . ." (John 17). There have always been disputes in the church over the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. It must be emphasized that God is more than the almighty Father, more than the suffering Jesus on the cross or the risen Christ, more than the moving Spirit. God is all of that in relationship to each other. And hence God is conceivable – if at all – only in a dynamic relationship to us, not in a static oneness and a mere opposite.

Over and above that, an important revelation of the Reformation – and therefore of all churches that came out of it – is the knowledge of the "unavailability" of faith.<sup>30</sup> Faith is not the work of an individual or of the

church, but a gift of God, the work of the Spirit. The faith of the other person is beyond all human action. The community of believers that forms itself out of the remaining diversity, in which differences have no further discriminating effects, is the community of the body of Christ. A “pluralism out of faith” originates on these grounds (Chr. Schwöbel). A critical aspect is the relationship of *verbum internum* (what the Spirit teaches in the heart) and *verbum externum* (the message of Christ).

### **Freedom of Faith and the Idea of Peace as Prerequisite of Pluralism**

Mennonites have always belonged – unconsciously! – to the sponsors of pluralism and have always lived as a plural minority church. But which element of this tradition can be brought into the pluralism debate constructively, not in an ahistoric way, denying the ‘nasty trench between,’ nor in an idealistic, romantic way, projecting present connections into the beginnings? Which implicit axioms of this tradition can be newly expressed in discussion with today’s experiences of pluralism?

First, Peter Berger claims that “the heretic imperative can become a help instead of a hindrance, for religious faith as well as for reflection.”<sup>31</sup> Since the beginning of Reformation the demand for freedom of faith and conscience – first as a reaction, then justified independently – has stood in the foreground.<sup>32</sup> Even today it provides the argument that the state should not rule over the church. The believing person should be able to decide freely and not – as in the case of pedobaptism – have his or her faith and confession predetermined by others. Neither a church office nor a statement of confession valid for everyone shall be set above the freedom and the conscience of the individual. The autonomy of the congregation requires that this demand finds expression in the institutional form. To this day baptismal candidates as a rule give a personal confession of faith to the congregation before they are accepted into it by baptism.<sup>33</sup> Consequently the ‘heretic imperative’ is a given.

Second, shouldn’t the awareness of living as a “peace church” also suggest that not everyone must believe, think, and feel the same? Doesn’t the renunciation of the use of violence<sup>34</sup> as a means of asserting personal convictions point to the legitimacy of variety? One restriction should be made, though: Where the demand for non-violence led to isolation and sometimes even into self-righteousness, there the idea of non-violent conflict resolution is

not central. Their personal spotlessness is sufficient, and this leads – in contrast to pluralism – to pure individualism. But it is not similarly contradictory if the demand for nonviolence is understood as a witness to those who *think* differently. Living a testimonial alternative is in itself not an absolutization of one's own position, if it is not forced on the other person.

Both convictions, that of freedom of faith and conscience and that of non-violence, stem from original situations in which Anabaptists and later Mennonites argued apologetically. Mennonites could now move from being sponsors of pluralism to becoming constructive designers of it in a completely different way from their Anabaptist forbears. They would do so without giving up their own identity. Quite the contrary, for with help from these central claims, their identity has been sharpened and made possible again. So a pluralism becomes visible which neither defends itself against heteronomy nor leads to arbitrary thinking. If Mennonites introduce the “Anabaptist inheritance” in this reflective and constructive way, they could make an important contribution within the ecumenical fellowship of churches. For that, however, this plural minority would have to translate freedom of faith and peace-theology into the situation of postmodernity.

### **Conclusion**

Mennonites have remained a plural minority since their polygenetic beginnings at the time of the Reformation, and quite stably so. They form a community which did without established dogmas and unifying confessions of faith. Yet their common ‘story’ unites them, a story unthinkable without common axioms such as standing up for freedom of conscience and the idea of peace. And so today they offer an ecclesiastical alternative to the state churches which in part face (post)modern demands in a different way. Mennonites are this alternative by virtue of their experience as a plural community and their awareness of minority. It is a church tradition, always leading a shadowy existence, and yet asserting itself, propagating itself, and bringing forth live congregations. Sometimes this tradition has succeeded through isolation, sometimes through raising a firm voice. Membership affiliation always occurred – at least ideally – by voluntary and conscious choice. Either way, Mennonites often built a form of counter-culture to ruling society.



Possibly, in times of breaking away from traditions, of secularization and the loss of significance of the institutional church, all of this must first be learned laboriously by the state churches. Mennonites sometimes lack the (theological) competence to bring their collective experiences fruitfully into the general denominational and socio-political dialogues. They will be dependent on the ecumenical community to endeavor to be church, together with other church traditions, within pluralism. Thereby they will discover that the state churches, which once belonged to their worst persecutors, today face similar tasks as they do themselves. They will discover in them comrades-in-arms for a more just and more peaceful society. Conversely, will the state churches want to listen to the experiences and reflections of the Mennonites?

(Translated by Anita Lichti, Stuttgart)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Foth is pastor of the Mennonite Church of Hamburg and Altona. He has contributed to the fact that Mennonites in Germany have become able to find their way to each other. He was chairman of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany from 1990 to 1999 and has become theological mentor to many.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. Deppermann, W. Packull, J. Stayer, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 82-122.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H.-J. Goertz, "Zwischen Zwietracht und Eintracht. Zur Zweideutigkeit täuferischer und mennonitischer Bekenntnisse," in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 43/44 Jg. 1986/87, 16-46.

<sup>4</sup> Next to the Church of the Brethren and the Quakers (Society of Friends).

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in H.-J. Goertz, "Religiöse Bewegungen in der frühen Neuzeit," in *Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte* Vol. 20, Munich 1993, especially under II. Probleme und Tendenzen der Forschung, 59-110.

<sup>6</sup> P.L. Berger, *Der Zwang zur Häresie*, Freiburg 1992, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Here and in the following Chr. Schwöbel, 'Pluralismus,' II. Systematisch-theologisch, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. 26, 724-39.

<sup>8</sup> M. Welker, "Missionarische Existenz heute" in A. Feldtkeller and Th. Sundermeier (Publ.), *Mission in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main 1999, 60. Cf. for the following reflections further articles in this book, and also M. Welker, *Kirche im Pluralismus*, Munich 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chr. Schwöbel in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, loc. cit., 724.

<sup>10</sup> Heresy is declared as "choice" etymologically. Cf. P.L. Berger, loc. cit., 40f.

<sup>11</sup> "Heresy, once the trade of marginal and eccentric types of people, has become by far a more general condition; heresy has indeed become universal," 44.

<sup>12</sup> H.-J. Goertz, 'Menno Simons/Mennoniten,' II. 2. Frömmigkeit, Theologie, konfessionelle Identität, in: *TRE*, Vol. 22, 453. Cf. his, *Die Täufer: Geschichte und Deutung*, Munich 1988.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> "Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes, sieben Artikel betreffend," in H. Fast (ed.), *Der linke Flügel der Reformation*, Bremen 1962.

<sup>15</sup> All numbers from *Mennonite and Brethren in Christ World Directory 1998*, compiled by Mennonite World Conference, Strasburg.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. here D.G. Lichdi, *Über Zürich und Witmarsum nach Addis Abeba: Die Mennoniten in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Maxdorf 1983, 151-81.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. H. Penner, "Die Ost- und Westpreußischen Mennoniten," *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein*, Vol. 1 1978, Vol. 2 1987. Also: D.G. Lichdi, *Die Mennoniten im Dritten Reich. Dokumentation und Deutung*. Schriftenreihe des Mennonitischen Geschichtsvereins Nr. 9, Weierhof/Pfalz 1977.

<sup>18</sup> In spite of these differences the German Mennonite churches have been united in the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany, K.d.ö.R. (AMG) since 1990, ca. 6,600 members in 52 congregations. The 'Russian-Germans' form various different unions. The largest number, though, based more on estimates and cited very differently, are presently composed of independent Brethren Churches, which are not organized in larger unions. They are hardly represented in the institutional ecumenical movement.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., C. Redekop, *Mennonite Society*, Baltimore and London 1989.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. L. Hege/Chr. Wiebe (Publ.), *Les Amish: Origine et Particularismes 1693-1993*, Ingersheim 1996.

<sup>21</sup> The AMG is integrated in the ecumenical movement on different levels: Union of Protestant Free Churches, National Council of Churches in Germany, and in part in the World Council of Churches as well. The Union of German Mennonite Congregations ("Vereinigung") and the Mennonite Church in the Netherlands ("Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit") are founding members of the World Council of Churches (1948).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. above all the contributions of the Bender-School and of John Howard Yoder, who increasingly became the speaker for the Mennonites in ecumenical-theological discussions.

<sup>23</sup> P.J. Foth, "Hüben und Drüben. Der Einfluss der amerikanischen auf die europäischen Mennoniten seit 1945," in *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch 2000*, published by the AMG, Lahr 2000, 55-60.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the so-called Puidoux Conferences in D.F. Durnbaugh (ed.), *On Earth Peace. Discussions on War/Peace-Issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches 1935-1975*. Elgin, IL 1978. The impulse for an ecumenical Decade for Overcoming Violence was introduced at the VIII General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare 1998; cf. F. Enns, "Impuls zur Gegenbewegung: eine ökumenische Dekade. Das ÖRK-Programm zur Überwindung von Gewalt vor und nach Harare," in *Ökumenische Rundschau* April 1999, 48. Jg., Heft 2, 167-75.

<sup>25</sup> H.-J. Goertz in *TRE*, loc. cit., 454. It is to the credit of Goertz and his extensive contributions that large corrections could be made in Anabaptist research.

<sup>26</sup> Recently more often at the Anabaptist Mennonite Theological Seminary Bienenberg in Switzerland.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the "story-concept" by D. Ritschl, *Zur Logik der Theologie*, Munich 1988: "The identity

of an individual or of a group can best be expressed through 'stories'. People are what they say about themselves in their 'story' (or what is said to them) and what they make out of their 'story'," 45.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., R. Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums: Von der Aufklärung bis zur pluralistischen Religionstheologie*, Gütersloh 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Chr. Schwöbel, "Die Wahrheit des Glaubens im religiös-weltanschaulichen Pluralismus," in U. Kühn (ed.), *Christlicher Wahrheitsanspruch zwischen Fundamentalismus und Pluralität*, Leipzig 1998, 116.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Chr. Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, Edinburgh 1995. M. Volf refers the Trinitarian-theological reflections of Jürgen Moltmann to ecclesiology in *Trinität und Gemeinschaft: Eine ökumenische Ekklesiologie*, Mainz/Neukirchen 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Chr. Schwöbel in *TRE*, loc. cit., 734.

<sup>32</sup> P.L. Berger, loc. cit., 48f.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. W.Klaassen (ed.), *Anabaptism in Outline, Selected Primary Sources*, Kitchener, Ontario 1981, chapters X, XII, and XV. Here several references from the sixteenth century can be found. Cf. also H.-J. Goertz, *Die Täufer*, loc. cit..

<sup>34</sup> Though some other churches have set baptismal phrases they mirror the same freedom of conscience; e.g., the Mennonite Church in Krefeld: "Do you desire to live your life as a right (real) Christian looking up to God, and as a disciple of Christ, as your free conscience commands you? If you so desire, then answer: Yes." This is followed by baptism in the name of the triune God.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. die "Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes" in H. Fast (ed.), *Der linke Flügel der Reformation*, Bremen 1962.

## Who Defines Family? Mennonite Reflection on Family and Sociology of Knowledge

*Peter C. Blum*

*Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 12:47-50 (NRSV)

Recent reflection on family among Christians has taken on a rather urgent tone, whether the assumptions behind the reflections are more "conservative" or more "liberal," in any of the several senses attached to those terms. This tone has been increasingly present in Mennonite reflection, most recently and obviously in discussions of sexuality, but also in other areas, including divorce and remarriage, domestic violence, etc. While there are many dimensions to this sense of urgency, I will address only one dimension that is quite abstract and presuppositional and thus generally left implicit. I suggest that before we can clearly address questions of whether the family is somehow in trouble, or declining, or simply changing, we should give attention to how the very notion of family is defined. What I have in mind is neither a lexicographical nor theological inquiry, but a sociological inquiry. As 'sociological' might suggest rather narrow parameters, perhaps a more appropriate term is "social theoretical." I will convey the nature of the questions I want to raise by beginning at the level of personal reflections.

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**I**

My own thinking about family has been stirred most recently by reading *Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage* by novelists Dennis and Vicki Covington.<sup>1</sup> The Covingtons are Christians and have a strong desire to live a Christian life, yet the story of their marriage is fraught with infidelity, doubt, and pain. The chapters alternate between the voices of Dennis and Vicki, never quite allowing the reader the comfort of seeing the book as co-authored in the sense we might expect. Moments of prayerful oneness and even spiritual ecstasy are juxtaposed with disturbingly vivid accounts of extramarital relationships, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and various other actions which they do not hesitate to identify as “sin.” The process of building a family is portrayed as extremely difficult and even painful, as the Covingtons first find themselves apparently unable to have children, and then successfully bring two children into the storm and stress that is their life together, facing the reactions of the children to their failures as well as the reactions of each other.

The Covingtons chose the word ‘cleaving’ for their title because it not only is a term with biblical resonance but also carries a double meaning. Vicki writes:

In Genesis, the Bible says a man is to leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife. The word means to adhere to, to cling, to hold fast an attachment to someone or something, as in bone to skin, hand to sword, the tongue to the roof of the mouth in thirst. But in English, unlike Greek or Hebrew, cleave carries a second, opposite meaning: to part or divide as by a cutting blow.

We cling as long as we can, but eventually every marriage ends with a cutting blow. Divorce takes half. Death takes all. And every step of the way, we *cleave*, knowing that we are being pulled apart. Love plays us like an accordion. Together, apart, together, apart. And though we may call marriage a sacred covenant, it is also an imperfect human contract, regardless of whether fidelity prevails. Marriage is a place for realists, for soldiers, for warriors, for lovers. *To wed* is derived from the German *wetten*, which means “to bet.” Marriage is, at its root, a risk, a gamble.<sup>2</sup>

The Covingtons' book was both a painful and a joyous read, since I have always been ambivalent about literature that reflects on the difficulties of family life. Everyone knows that commitment to one's family can be arduous and painful as well as joyous and fulfilling. Yet I seldom find that the words of others give voice to the self-centered and adulterous impulses that sometimes haunt my heart and thus my marriage and my family life. The Covingtons' story of their stubborn love for each other and their children, their brutally honest story that does not pretend that love conquers all, clearly articulates my sense that building and maintaining a marriage is much more than simply applying someone's ideal. Indeed, the Covingtons clearly embrace an ideal of marriage and family life that is explicitly Christian. Their story reminds the reader, however, that an ideal turns out all too often to be a train in the distance, to borrow a lyric from Paul Simon: "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance. Everybody thinks it's true."<sup>3</sup> Family (with a capital 'F') is a train in the distance, an ideal to which we pay reverent homage. Our own particular families are much more noisy and imposing because of their proximity, and usually more obviously in need of dreary, ongoing maintenance.

Contemporary Mennonite confessions of faith have clearly emphasized the ideal of biological family built around a monogamous, lifelong, heterosexual marriage relationship. The 1963 Mennonite Church *Mennonite Confession of Faith* states: "[God] ordained that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and that the two shall become one in love and mutual submission. It is God's will that marriage be a holy state, monogamous, and for life."<sup>4</sup> The more recent *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective* similarly affirms: "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. . . . According to Scripture, right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship."<sup>5</sup> The 1975 Mennonite Brethren confession is equally clear on the matter.<sup>6</sup> This ideal has become increasingly manifest in recent Mennonite discussions of homosexuality. No one denies that Mennonites experience broken families, nontraditional families, families that are not based on a recognizably "churchy" marriage or even a legal marriage, families whose locus is a couple of the same sex, etc. Deviations from the ideal are often precisely the focus of attention. There is often a familiar subtext to contemporary discussions, however. It is assumed that the incidence of these "problems" is especially high in contemporary

society and that this is symptomatic of sociocultural decay.<sup>7</sup> The Covingtons' account of their marriage may strike many readers as confirmation of such decay, yet contemporary social science suggests that their experiences are neither especially unusual nor uniquely contemporary.

I experience the contrast here as tension in my own life, since I identify myself both with the discipline of sociology and with Christianity, and my reflection on my own family is unavoidably informed by both these identifications. The tension is heightened by the fact that I can identify with the Covingtons in many of my mental and emotional struggles. Inasmuch as friends and acquaintances drop hints of their own struggles, I find that I am not alone. Various lines of questioning can arise from this experience of tension, but I want here to focus mainly on a seemingly abstract set of questions which I will refer to as "sociology of knowledge" questions. These questions revolve around how the concept of family is socioculturally defined, and around how much influence various individuals and groups within a social context have on its definition. The central question is: Who defines family? I am *not* speaking here of a dictionary definition. To ask What is a family? is to ask about both our understanding of vision and our understanding of reality. But whose vision? Whose reality?

In an important sense, these questions are just as fundamental as our understanding of scripture. The intent of Mennonite confessions is to reflect current Mennonite readings of scripture, yet significant New Testament emphases are not made central. Most notably, there is generally no mention of Jesus' claim that he came not to bring peace but a sword, to set family members *against* one another (Matt. 10:34-39). That Christian discipleship can mean that the family does not have primacy in at least some cases is taken for granted by any Mennonite perspective. Still, some principles of selection always underlie the emphasis placed on this or that scriptural reference to family.

By focusing on sociology of knowledge questions, I do not intend to undermine or trivialize efforts to discern a normative vision for family in scripture, nor to suggest specific ways in which official Mennonite definitions of family have been misguided or in error. I do explicitly intend, however, to "make things difficult" in a Kierkegaardian or Nietzschean sense, to suggest that our discernment of a normative vision is a project that is "human, all too human," that there are elements of our finitude which will unavoidably cast

shadows on the project in one way or another, precisely because we all suspect that so much is at stake.

## II

The phrase “sociology of knowledge” requires clarification. It is sometimes understood as implying a Marxian materialism, but I am not using it in that sense. My primary theoretical source for a sociology of knowledge perspective is the work of Peter L. Berger who, along with several co-authors, has probably done more than anyone else to popularize the phrase, “social construction of reality.”<sup>8</sup> Though influenced by Marxian insights, Berger’s sociology of knowledge endeavors to synthesize them with decidedly nonmaterialist currents issuing from Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, and perhaps most prominently, phenomenological philosophy. It is this more phenomenologically “constructionist” bent of Berger and his coauthors that I have in mind.

However, there are varying accounts of what it might mean for something to be “socially constructed,” and as Ian Hacking has reminded us,<sup>9</sup> different “things” may be socially constructed in different ways and in different senses. I will make the predictable move of emphasizing that “family” is a social construction, but I will also clarify what this means in a Bergerian key, thus introducing a caution regarding other possible connotations.

Readers familiar with Berger’s work will know how a phenomenological perspective places distance between his and more materialist varieties of the sociology of knowledge. Less often emphasized in discussions of his work is the ubiquitous influence of Nietzsche. Nietzschean suspicion is much more important to Berger’s sociological enterprise, I would argue, than Marxian suspicion. The difference is that Nietzschean suspicion is an unquenchable suspicion. Marx’s project assumed – as Karl Mannheim’s also arguably did – that there is at least potentially a place to stand from which we can see with completely unclouded vision, a place free of illusion and untruth. Nietzschean suspicion is the suspicion that striving for this epistemological utopia is the greatest of lies. There is no time when one reaches a point of view that cannot be further questioned. There is no perspective that is immune to the question, as Berger puts it, “Says who?”<sup>10</sup> I believe that Berger embraces this unending Nietzschean suspicion as a part of his understanding of human finitude. It



does not lead to a facile, self-defeating denial that there is any truth but to an increasing allergy to the hubris that proclaims it has grasped the very hem of Truth's garment as opposed to seeing it, as Paul put it, "through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

I have made a gesture toward showing that Nietzschean suspicion is not necessarily at odds with an Anabaptist Christian outlook in another context,<sup>11</sup> and Berger understands himself as somehow balancing it with Christian conviction, albeit of a theologically liberal variety.<sup>12</sup> Berger's sociology of knowledge is shot through with Nietzschean suspicion. Grasping this helps us understand Berger and Luckmann's programmatic placing the sociology of knowledge at the center of sociology.<sup>13</sup> In Berger's most popular book, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, it is as if the suspicion of Nietzsche is indistinguishable from a sociological perspective.<sup>14</sup> This also helps make sense of Berger's claim, following Weber, that sociology is value-free. Sociologists are obviously never free of value commitments, but the suspicion they bring to bear on value commitments is indifferent to whose knowledge it is aimed at or to whether their intentions are beneficent or malevolent. As a sociologist, I have no way of preventing my own suspicion from being turned upon my own values.<sup>15</sup>

With this in mind, we can fruitfully give our attention to some of the things that Berger and his associates have written about family. However I will not rely primarily on Peter and Brigitte Berger's book about what they called "The War Over the Family."<sup>16</sup> That book has been quite controversial in some sociological circles because it is perceived as being conservative in outlook, and justifiably so. The insights that Berger believes the sociology of knowledge yields regarding the family are found most explicitly in other writings and are mostly re-presented in summary fashion in the Bergers' book on the family. I want to draw attention, to insights developed in the well-known paper by Berger and Thomas Kellner, "Marriage and the Construction of Reality,"<sup>17</sup> and in two books Berger wrote in the sixties which established his reputation, *Invitation to Sociology* and *The Social Construction of Reality*.<sup>18</sup> These insights may be grouped under three headings: (1) Berger's general idea of the family as a social construction and its implications regarding the importance of "official" definitions of family; (2) the more specific characterizations of family as a locus of "nomos-building" and as a "mediating structure," which imply the

limitations of official definitions; and (3) the implications of Berger's views on the dialectic of structure and freedom for both official and unofficial definitions of family.

To call family a "social construction" for Berger is, first of all, to observe that it is an ongoing product of *negotiation*. The term "construction" is problematic partly because it may suggest a process that is wholly or in large part a matter of human volition. Though human freedom is one of Berger's central concerns, it is clear throughout his work that social construction is never a simple matter of individual choices. The reality of a marriage is built – or better, rebuilt – in the give-and-take of everyday conversation of husband and wife, with the constructors usually having little or no sense that they are literally remaking themselves so that their reality is a *shared* reality. It is never simply a matter of two individuals realigning their own perspectives to the reality of a new situation. Two distinct biographies – two distinct histories, we might say – must be rewritten. The writing of a present narrative necessitates the rewriting of past narrative.<sup>19</sup>

In Berger's analysis, this rewriting process is by no means isolated from larger projects of narration. We are never in a position to compose our story apart from the pressures of other stories not of our own making. Some of these stories are those of the others with whom we are doing the rewriting. Others are what I have already been calling "official" in one way or another, stories that we take for granted as valid or true because they are taken for granted as authoritative in our communities. Berger has always clearly endorsed Durkheim's view that social reality confronts us *as reality*, as the way things are objectively. Regardless of whether or not society is a "thing" in an ontological sense, it is just as thing-like in our experience as anything else.<sup>20</sup> As Berger notes, a courtship process, or more broadly, "falling in love," as spontaneous and irrational as it may seem, is completely shot through with normative expectations current in the social context.<sup>21</sup> It is the foreground in a cultural *Gestalt*, the background of which is mostly assumed as given, not chosen.

Official definitions provide the main background against which our own definitions are shaped, including those of marriage and family. They are, what make our own definitions possible. Official definitions are inextricably intertwined with the cultural webs of significance within which we become able to signify and to understand as individuals. Construction in Berger's sense

is emphatically not creation *ex nihilo*. It requires some sort of raw material and much of it was itself socially constructed before we arrived on the scene.<sup>22</sup> This is the sense in which human beings are social products. Whether our own reactions to them are positive or negative, there is no sense in which we have an option as to whether or not we will take official definitions seriously; it is as optional as breathing.

But Berger is no strong social determinist. Human beings are social products, but society is also a human product and not in a mechanistic sense. Human beings are not simply reactors but genuine actors who interpret their context and act based on their interpretations. This is evident in Berger's treatment of marriage as a "crucial nomic instrumentality in our society."<sup>23</sup> By "nomic instrumentality" Berger calls attention to the fact that the reality negotiated in a marriage, because of the intimacy and interactive density of the relationship, is of paramount significance in the individual's experience. For Berger, conversation between significant others is one of the most important loci for the construction and maintenance of a meaningful order in one's life, a *nomos*. We never make sense of either the world or ourselves in isolation from others, and the closer one's relationship to an Other, the more crucial is the interaction for the making of sense, of meaning.

Berger's view of the importance of intimate relationships is intertwined with his ongoing concern about the modernization process. Especially in the context of modern societies, where the distinction between public and private spheres is salient, intimate relationships become crucial for *nomos*-building. The family is one of several crucial "mediating structures" in modern society – institutional arrangements that provide a sort of nomic buffer between the impersonal social order (especially the state) and the individual in contexts that are highly industrialized and urbanized.<sup>24</sup>

Berger's use of a more "functionalist" idiom at this point is easily misread as implying straightforward determinism. But this would be to ignore the deep influence that existentialist thought has exerted on Berger's understanding of human agency. A central argument of *Invitation to Sociology* is that a broadly Sartrean conception of freedom – i.e., libertarian freedom in the philosophical sense – is compatible with sociological understanding.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on such sociological concepts as intentionality, charisma, role distance, and sociability, among others, Berger defends the view that human agency responds to

sociocultural imperatives with genuine choices based on interpretive understanding. The importance of the Sartrean concept of “bad faith” for this argument reinforces the insight that Berger is assuming a non-determined spontaneity at the heart of human agency. This does not mean that the effects of sociocultural situatedness are simply suspended in the end, or that we are not profoundly constrained by them.

My point here is that Berger’s analysis of the family as a locus of meaningful ordering, or *nomos*-building, suggests there are imperatives driving the social construction of family that operate at various levels and that these imperatives can change as social context changes structurally. Some of these imperatives may operate below the level of overt definition, effecting the very frameworks within which choices are made. On Berger’s analysis, even when they operate at such levels, the response of individuals to these imperatives is not blind but creative. Stories can be told in many different ways, even when there are relatively clear demands made by genre, plot, or convention. In the end, it is families themselves that define what families are in each case, and they do so more as artists or novelists than as culturally programmed computers. Recall that we are often most impressed, in art and literature, by those who *break* the rules in just the right way in order to shape their creation truly (‘truly’ as in the sense of an arrow that flies truly).

### III

One way to summarize what I am drawing from Berger is by formulating two maxims. (I use ‘maxim’ here deliberately, following Alasdair MacIntyre’s view that the results of sociological inquiry are much more like the maxims of Machiavelli than the law-like generalizations often expected of natural science.<sup>26</sup>) The first maxim is this: *Official definitions define family, regardless of families.* We cannot help but base our definition of family on “official” definitions. They remain an integral part of what we are even when we resist or oppose them. They make it possible for us to begin defining family, and hence they unavoidably shape our definitions in deep and decisive ways.

The second maxim is: *Families define family, regardless of official definitions.* If a social grouping becomes a family, if it is *experienced* as family, then in an important sense it matters little that it does not precisely fit an official definition. An academic colleague of mine was deeply disturbed by

the publication of the children's book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*.<sup>27</sup> He argues that the book is not simply morally problematic but in obvious error factually. "You know, of course, that [the book's title is] a lie. Heather doesn't really have two mommies; she's got only one. The other lady is just the woman mommy has sex with."<sup>28</sup> Inasmuch as we are talking about biology, this is obviously true. But who is talking about *biology* when they use the word 'mommy'? Certainly not a stepchild who refers to her biological father's wife as "mommy." Moral considerations notwithstanding, if Heather's *experience* is that she has two mommies, my colleague's attempt at wielding an official definition is unlikely to change that experience in any significant way. We should not be distracted by the controversial nature of the example. The point is that *both* maxims seem to tell us something right about how 'family' actually gets defined in everyday life.<sup>29</sup>

This may seem like a contradiction. We will understand why it is not if we recall the importance of dialectic in Berger's thought. That humans are a social product and that society is a human product is an expression of a dialectical relationship, for Berger. Also, Berger's view of dialectic is explicitly drawn not only or even primarily from Marx, but also from G. W. F. Hegel, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel, among others. Dialectic is often understood in a relatively simplistic way, using the old standby terminology of 'thesis,' 'antithesis,' and 'synthesis.'<sup>30</sup> Take one idea, oppose it with its negation, and you get a new (presumably better) idea. This way of introducing the notion is not adequate if we are to grasp what Berger means by the term in this context.

A dialectical relationship in the broadest sense is, for Berger, a relationship in which there is a deep tension that is ineradicable yet creative. There is a kind of unification or "synthesis" in a sense, but no real distinction between the tension and the unification. The tension is dynamic rather than static, and a simple resolution would mean not just the end of the tension but the failure of the synthesis as well. Simmel's understanding of the individual self, which has profoundly influenced Berger's thinking,<sup>31</sup> focuses on the tensions within the self – its fragmentation, so to speak – which in part constitute its very unity.<sup>32</sup> One of Berger's favorite examples of dialectical tension is that between charisma and institutionalization, explored at length by Weber.<sup>33</sup> Reading *Invitation to Sociology*, one gets the sense that this and other dialectical relationships usually refer, in Berger's thinking, to a fundamental dialectic of structure and freedom.

My two maxims, which are Bergerian in spirit if not in phraseology, are related in just this sort of dialectical way. We could not define family without official definitions, but we will define family in spite of them. The practical upshot of all this, in my estimation, is relatively easy to state, but much more difficult to elucidate. I think that we should always approach official definitions of family as necessary evils. That they are such is not only because they are unavoidable, but also because they are good. How could we even begin without them? I must already possess what I am seeking, in some sense, in order to seek it. But official definitions are also evil, because they are always at a remove from what they seek to define. We take them for truth in a way that Nietzsche warned us about.<sup>34</sup> If we already possess what we are seeking, then why seek it? In current Mennonite discussions, I sometimes get the impression that if my family is built around a heterosexual marriage where no one is physically abusing anyone else, then everything is basically fine. “Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance. Everybody thinks it’s true.” But the train in the distance can become a lie, in Nietzsche’s sense of Truth being a lie. I suspect that it very often does become a lie, in fact.

My use of the terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ will not seem entirely correct, of course. You might think that what I really mean is that official definitions *can become* evil, not that they *are* evil, as my maxim seems to state. There is a sense in which this would probably be a fair criticism. My suspicion, however, is that we will err less often by treating them as necessary evils than we will by seeing them as only potentially evil. This arises from my conviction that we very easily and very often lose track of our finitude. This is especially true when we are dealing with an ideal, with an official definition that we expect to function as a sort of modern Ark of the Covenant. Instead of a dynamic, transforming tension (dialectic) between ideal and real, we want to fix the ideal itself, to make it static. Everyone will agree that ideals can become idols, but this does not seem strong enough to me. I am inclined to suggest that they are always too close for comfort. We cannot, should not, and will not avoid official definitions. But may we treat them with discerning delicacy rather than with loving passion. The loving passion should be saved for the people whom our official definitions tend summarily to include or exclude.

But what exactly is “discerning delicacy”? My reflections here provide at best some prolegomena for further discussion of this question. That I am

inclined not to make any specific applications here is due, in part, to my suspicion that the supposed boundary between theory and application is a boundary in the political sense. That is, it is not a natural feature of the landscape of our experience so much as an imaginary line that marks tension and potential dispute. If I not only formulate theory in an impressive way but also apply it to your situation in a straightforward manner, then I have shown myself to be the expert whose word you must heed. If you reject my ruminations, then perhaps I am the prisoner of an ivory tower where my gaze has never lit upon the real world that you inhabit. More important, if I provide concrete proposals, the sense in which I have moved beyond theory may be illusory. As long as I am situated here, behind the voice you hear in this paper, there is no point at which I have entered your particular context and become anything more than an onlooker.<sup>35</sup>

In short, I believe that the exact shape of discerning delicacy must be established not by another official definition, but by prayerful, compassionate, and dynamic engagement of local communities of faith with the concrete lives of their members.<sup>36</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Covington and Vicki Covington, *Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage* (New York: North Point Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Covington, 211-12.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Simon, "Train in the Distance," on *Hearts and Bones* (sound recording) (Warner Bros. Records, Inc., 1983); also included on Paul Simon, *Negotiations and Love Songs 1971-1986* (sound recording) (Warner Bros. Records, Inc., 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963), Article 15. Howard John Loewen, ed., *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 76.

<sup>5</sup> Article 19. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 72. The 1933 General Conference Articles of Faith do not explicitly state that the union must be between a man and a woman, though this would have been assumed. That other issues were more salient at the time of its drafting is clear: "We believe . . . that only such that are free from all others, and not too close in blood relationship, and fundamentally of the same faith, should be united in the holy bonds of matrimony. Such a union is to be for life, and divorces are unscriptural" (Article VIII); *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God*, 107.

<sup>6</sup> "We believe that God instituted marriage for the intimate companionship of husband and wife,

and for the procreation and nurture of children.” Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith (1975), Article XI; *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God*, 177.

<sup>7</sup> The very assumption that society is in some sort of decline is deeply problematic. For a helpful recent discussion of this assumption, see Joel Best, *Random Violence: How We Talk About New Crimes and New Victims* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), especially 17-21.

<sup>8</sup> The *locus classicus* here is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966), though Berger develops and deploys the general concept throughout his writings.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1963), 111.

<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Blum, “Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism: Confessions of an Errant Postmodernist,” in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press & Pandora Press U.S., 2000), 60-74. See also the outstanding and accessible discussion of Nietzsche in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Berger understands his own theological perspective as broadly liberal in the sense of classical Protestant liberalism, as exemplified by Friedrich Schleiermacher. See Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> See especially the introduction and conclusion to *The Social Construction of Reality*.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche’s name is not often mentioned explicitly but his influence is discernable throughout, sometimes in the guise of broadly Nietzschean themes that Berger draws more explicitly from Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialist sources.

<sup>15</sup> It may still be true that Berger’s defense of Weberian *Wertfreiheit* as a kind of phenomenological “bracketing” is overstated and problematic. The point is that Berger seems to understand clearly that no one’s evaluative judgments are ever immune to critique, and that this can be seen as building a rigorous value-neutrality into the critical gaze. Surely there are never any guarantees that inquirers will be uncontaminated by value, yet the commitment of a community of inquirers to ongoing critique prevents the process of inquiry from collapsing into the sort of hopeless subjectivism that is still the bogey of broadly positivistic methodological dogma.

<sup>16</sup> Peter L. Berger and Brigitte Berger, *The War Over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Peter L. Berger and Hansfried Kellner, “Marriage and the Construction of Reality,” in *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 5-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> The placement of the term ‘narrative’ here is more characteristic of my reading of Berger and Kellner than of their own usage. The idea of narrative – which has gained prominence in academic usage recently – nicely captures what Berger and Kellner actually use other terms to convey, most importantly the term ‘biography.’ For a recent example of constructionist work in which the



term 'narrative' is central, see James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Durkheim's most explicit treatment of the objectivity of social reality is his discussion of "social facts." See Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W. D. Halls, ed. Steven Lukes (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 50-59. Berger and Luckmann make clear that it is part of their project to make this conviction of Durkheim intelligible within a phenomenological framework. See, for example, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> See *Invitation to Sociology*, 35-36 and 88-89.

<sup>22</sup> This becomes especially clear in light of Berger and Luckmann's discussion of internalization in *The Social Construction of Reality*, 129-63.

<sup>23</sup> "Marriage and the Construction of Reality," 8.

<sup>24</sup> See Peter L. Berger, "In Praise of Particularity: The Concept of Mediating Structures," in *Facing Up to Modernity*, 130-41; and Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977).

<sup>25</sup> *Invitation to Sociology*, 122-50.

<sup>26</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 88-108.

<sup>27</sup> Leslea Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Michael Bauman, "No, Heather doesn't have two mommies," Guest Opinion, *Hillsdale Daily News* (Hillsdale, MI), November 30, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> Helpful examples and insightful discussion of how families are defined "from below" may be found in Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *What is Family?* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> These three terms, though they are commonly used in secondary discussions of Hegel, are actually more characteristic of Hegel's predecessors, Fichte and Schelling. Hegel was quite critical of the way in which these terms (and the implication of a constant tripartite pattern) suggest an overly rigid conception of dialectic, a "lifeless schema." See Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966), 74-77.

<sup>31</sup> Simmel's influence has been both direct (via Berger's own reading of Simmel) and indirect (via others such as Erving Goffman, whose understanding of self is thoroughly Simmelian).

<sup>32</sup> "The individual does not attain the unity of his personality exclusively by an exhaustive harmonization . . . of the contents of his personality. On the contrary, contradiction and conflict not only precede this unity but are operative in it at every moment of its existence." Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 71-72.

<sup>33</sup> This dialectic may be seen as pivotal to Weber's whole sociological outlook. It is so presented in Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>34</sup> See especially Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," 42-47 in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), and my own discussion of this notion in "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism."

<sup>35</sup> "Looking on" (or "beholding") is one of the original senses of *theoria*.

<sup>36</sup> This also seems to me fully consistent with an Anabaptist/Mennonite ecclesiology, though detailed development of this point is beyond the present scope. See my comments on local discernment in "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism."

## **Christianity and the Family: Ancient Challenge, Modern Crisis**

A lecture presented at the St. Jerome's Centre for Catholic Experience  
St. Jerome's University, Waterloo, Ontario, March 9, 2001

*Rosemary Radford Ruether*

To begin this strange tale of Christianity and the family, I will read two quotations. One is from a Colorado-based group called Focus on the Family. This is their account of themselves: "Focus on the Family attempts to turn hearts towards home by reasonable, Biblical, and empirical insight so people will be able to discover the founder of homes and the creator of families – Jesus Christ" (Focus on the Family). My second quote is as follows: "If anyone comes to me and cannot hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Jesus of Nazareth). These quotes set up the contradiction I would like to discuss.

Right-wing Christians have tried to portray themselves as the restorers of what they call the God-given Biblical form of the family. What they mean by this is a male-headed nuclear family with a working husband and a non-working wife. But this form of the family is actually the white, middle-class Victorian family of the late nineteenth century, or the family of the 1950s. They claim that this family type is part of the "orders of creation," that is,

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established by God at creation and hence eternal and unchangeable. But this is historically and theologically mistaken. There is no such normative Biblical family. In Hebrew scripture one finds, in fact, many forms of the family. For instance, the tribal clan extended family that quite often included two wives and their children, and their slaves and their children. The type of family these modern Christian conservatives regard as normative was actually a creation of the white middle class in the late nineteenth century, and it is in crisis today for the obvious reason that it never worked for working class people nor for black people, and is no longer working for middle class whites in North America today.

In the New Testament, one finds a significant number of negative statements about the biological family in the early strata of the Gospels, referred to as the “Jesus Movement.” Over against this is a later restoration of the patriarchal slave-holding family in the later strata of the New Testament. In the Gospels, one finds a strong criticism of the biological family, or at least a strong relativization of it. Jesus is portrayed as rejecting his own family – his mother and brothers – in favor of the community of believers. In several stories found in all of the Gospels, mothers and brothers are described as coming to seize him, believing him to be mad, and Jesus repudiates them, saying, “Who are my brothers and my mother?” And looking around at those that sat around him he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. Whoever does the will of God will be my brother and sister and mother.” In other words, the community of faith is seen as negating or putting aside the natural biological family, as in the words of Luke which I quoted at the beginning.

I think that this negation of family in Jesus’ tradition reflects several things. One of them is a belief that the kingdom of God is dawning, a transformed state of reality, in which there will be no marrying and giving in marriage. And indeed those who live now in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom of God also will depart from marriage. In theological terminology, this is “eschatological ethics.” Furthermore, in Jesus’ time many people *could not* marry. Slaves could not marry – and there were a lot of slaves – soldiers could not marry during their terms of service, and many poor people could not afford to marry or were not allowed to marry outside of ethnic groups. Early Christianity was made up of many such disenfranchised or uprooted people, who were without families, and in that context the church or community of

believers became an “alternative family,” or what some writers call a “fictive kin group.” So the church, the community of believers, was understood as the true family of brothers and sisters gathered apart from oppressive systems in a society that supported these marginalized people.

This view of the church as the “true family” continues also in Paul. Paul’s writings are loaded with analogies drawn from the family and the patriarchal slave-holding household of the Roman world. Christians are described as being people who were slaves and have been emancipated and adopted by the father of the household. Or they are like, in another interesting analogy, a wife who has been emancipated because the husband who held control over her has died. The fleshly family of Israel is recorded as having been superseded by a new people, the spiritual people of God and the church. In Paul, the church is a new family related by faith that replaces the old ties of kinship, race, and class. It both severs believers from their biological family and at the same time unites them with a whole range of people with whom one would not have broken bread in one’s former kinship group. But in Paul there also arises a conflict over the idea or suggestion that unmarried women or even married women are liberated from subordination to the patriarchal family by joining the church. This idea later becomes associated with celibacy, but in the early church, women could put aside marriage in order to function in larger society in a new way. Such women were allowed to travel as evangelists, preach, and lead early Christian communities.

Some of the early Christian writings, such as the Acts of Paul and Thecla, exalt the woman of faith who repudiates her family, rejects her subordination, rejects the will of her parents, rejects her fiancé and the right of her family to betroth her to a husband, and leaves home to evangelize, baptize, and preach. Women get converted, reject husband or family, and take to the open road. Paul appears at the end of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, affirming Thecla’s choice and commissioning her to return to her hometown to preach. Now, the Paul of the Pauline epistles of the New Testament, it seems to me, shared some of these assumptions. He also believed that celibacy represented the anticipation of God, and this relativized marriage, so the most committed Christians like himself did not marry. But he was also threatened by these independent women who claimed that conversion to Christ was a basis for throwing off authority and engaging in itinerant preaching.

In the post-Pauline church, represented by epistles such as I Timothy, we find an attack on these single women church leaders, an effort to silence them. "Let a woman learn silence in all submissiveness." "I permit no women teach or have authority over men. They are to keep silent." What these texts unwittingly reveal to us is that, in fact, women *were* commonly teaching and having authority over men in Pauline churches. Otherwise, these admonitions would have been unnecessary. Timothy champions the traditional patriarchal slave-holding family as normative for the church and believes that the church leaders should be drawn from the proven male heads of families. One finds repeatedly in the later strata of the New Testament the three-fold command, "Wives, obey your husbands; slaves, obey your masters; children, obey your parents." These commands seek to re-establish a type of family that had been, in fact, challenged in the earlier egalitarian Christian tradition. But single women, either those who were never married or widows, continued to play a major leadership role in the churches.

The Acts of Paul and Thecla gives us a glimpse of this alternative Pauline Christianity. My hypothesis, and that of others as well, is that there was actually a split between these two positions within the Pauline churches, and that this alternative Pauline Christianity also looked to Paul for his mandate that women could leave their families, repudiate the authority of parents and husband, and preach. Having offered a little taste of this conflict within the New Testament, I want to give you a sense of how this tradition developed, shifted, and was reinterpreted in classic and medieval Christianity.

The second to fourth centuries saw a continuation of the conflict between unmarried women, virgins, or widows and the patriarchal family. Various radical movements within the early church championed the idea of a Christian community of men and women who were equals as a community of sisters and brothers. But these movements were increasingly marginalized by patriarchal Christians who idealized the idea of celibacy but rejected women's leadership. The result of this conflict was a gradual synthesis between patriarchy and celibacy. Males alone came to be the ones who could have public leadership. Women celibates were idealized but only in private forms of asceticism. Married people came to be defined as third-class citizens in the church, those who had chosen a lesser form of life not as holy as celibacy.

A major debate broke out in the late fourth century over whether celibacy and marriage were of equal value or whether celibacy was superior. Jerome, Augustine, and Ambrose – all vehemently took the position that celibacy was superior and the other side was silenced. So, the eschatological interpretation of celibacy was gradually changed into a hierarchy of celibacy over marriage, and then increasingly it came to be identified with the priesthood, which was not the case earlier. I think it is also very significant that the theology or spirituality of celibacy changes as well. Originally, celibacy was identified with anticipation of the kingdom of God, but as it becomes identified with the priesthood, it gets interpreted instead as cultic purity, which is a very different concept. What this meant was that the priest must be pure to celebrate the sacrament, and must distance himself from women and sexuality.

To summarize, three movements were beginning to shape the pattern of the Western church in the late patristic and medieval periods: first, the celibatizing of the clergy; second, the Christianizing of marriage; and third, the marginalizing of women's ministry. The celibatizing of the clergy was a continual effort, from the late fourth century to the middle ages, to force celibacy on priests who had previously been married. Except for a certain elite of the monastic clergy, this mostly failed. For obvious reasons, village priests could simply not survive without a wife in terms of the economics of survival. And many priests resisted celibacy as not having been part of the earlier church tradition. Finally, in the eleventh century, the church forbade all priests to marry and then defined their wives as concubines and their children as bastards. This did not prevent priests from marrying, however, and marriage continued to be typical of poor village clergy, but they were degraded, their wives were considered whores, and their children forbidden to inherit property and to be ordained.

The second movement, the Christianizing of marriage, was an effort to force monogamy – with no divorce or remarriage – on the Christian people. This was contrary to Germanic and Celtic law, which allowed polygamy, easy divorce, and marriage between relatives. There was also an effort to establish very wide degrees of kinship within which you could not marry. This ran counter to the typical pattern of the feudal nobility, and so was aimed mainly

at that class of people. Insistence on monogamy, with no divorce or remarriage, became the church's policy.

The third movement, marginalizing women's ministry, was an ongoing effort to cloister celibate women and to forbid them from public ministry and the self-government of their communities. This effort was resisted throughout the Middle Ages and again during the Counter-Reformation. The major shift in this respect occurred in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The practice of a celibate clergy had created a large number of abuses, and so the Protestant reformers rejected this celibate ideal which had dominated Christianity for fifteen hundred years. In rejecting the celibate priesthood, the reformers also rejected monastic life for both men and women. Recent studies of women and the Reformation have shown that the closure of monasteries had a very different impact on women than on men. There was actually significant resistance on the part of women monastics to the closure of their monasteries. The effect of the negation of both celibacy and the monastic life was to deprive women of any vocation other than marriage. In other words, the monk-turned-reformer could be a Protestant minister, and have a family too, whereas women simply were losing any vocation other than marriage.

Protestantism championed patriarchal marriage as the order of creation, which is where contemporary Christian conservatives get the idea that patriarchal marriage was an ordinance of creation. But the reformers also insisted that nobody could possibly be celibate and not fall into fornication, and thus they tried to insist that everybody should marry. Now the single person was the one who was suspect, which is still the case in much of Protestantism. Another important aspect of the reformers' reinterpretation of the tradition of marriage is that they rejected the sacramentality of marriage. So even while the reformers said everybody should marry, and thus seemed to raise the status of marriage, they simultaneously rejected the idea that marriage is a sacrament. They did that because they thought marriage was a natural institution of creation, not a redemptive institution representative of the new creation established by Christ. The desacramentalizing of marriage also meant divorce was allowed. Catholics had argued divorce was not permissible because sacraments are indissoluble. Under Protestantism, marriage was not a sacrament but an ordinance of creation, yet divorce was allowed, though the grounds for it were narrow and mainly limited to adultery and desertion.



There was thus a significant shift in thinking on marriage in the Western Christian tradition and in Protestantism in the Reformation. The kind of family that Focus on the Family says belongs to the ordinance of creation began to be shaped in the early modern period. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw an increasing economic shift that marginalized women from skilled, paid work. In Protestant areas, single women were looked upon with suspicion, had no vocation, were an anomaly, and had to live in houses headed by men. At the same time, there was a movement whereby married women were removed from membership in guilds or craft-unions, and were increasingly allowed only unpaid domestic work or occasional marketing in the informal economy. It became increasingly difficult for a woman to be a self-supporting householder. Protestantism did not allow women public ministry, nor could women attend university in any country in Europe until the twentieth century.

By the nineteenth century, the family was becoming that of a husband leaving the household to work, with a dependent wife and children. The artist-and-household economy, typical of the late medieval period through the eighteenth century, was a collective work force in which the sons, daughters, and resident apprentices all worked together in the household. There was no separation of work and home. This was gradually destroyed as the production of goods and services were removed from the home to a public economy. Poor women and children were later drawn into paid factory work, while poorer women and children were domestic servants in wealthy households.

As factories were developed in the nineteenth century, the middle-class household was the household of the factory owners. Over time, the middle-class household was increasingly removed from those areas of town where there was paid work, and the household of the factory owner was removed from the areas of factories. As an example, when factories were developed in New England in the 1830s, it was very typical for the household of the factory owner to be located at the head of the area where the factory was, and for the factory owner's wife to be an integral part of the factory management, keeping the accounts, for example. But that pattern began to break down: the owner's household was removed from the factory area, the wife lost her central role and instead was separated in neighborhoods with ornamental gardens. An urban household surrounded by grass and flowers instead of herbs, vegetables,

and chickens, as was the case in earlier times, signaled that it was no longer dependent on any kind of household production.

The ideal family then came to be defined as white and middle class, with a domesticated wife who does not work, and children who do not work. As a full-time wife and mother, the woman was entirely supported by her husband's wages, which he earned in a separate place disconnected from the household. An entire ideology became constructed around this radical separation of spheres between home and work. At the same time, the realm of religion was identified with the private sphere of the home, while the secular realm was identified with the public work force. These in turn were characterized as feminine and masculine respectively, and thus an ideology was structured around this development of the separation of spheres.

This kind of ideal was basically unattainable for most working-class families in the nineteenth century. Working class women always had to work to support the family as did children as well. Black women, of course, were allowed only the poorest work – share-cropping, domestic service, and laundry. Immigrant women workers performed labor as domestic servants and in factories but only to do the poorest work, such as piecework and sweatshop labor. The labor movement by and large championed the middle-class family ideal, and tried to raise a man's wages to the level where his wife could be a full-time housewife.

Nineteenth-century middle-class women began to revolt against the isolated domestication that occurred, and so organized to obtain the vote, higher education, and professional employment. These new turn-of-the-century professional white women remained single, many choosing life long relationships with other women rather than marriage. It was simply assumed that a woman could not have a profession and also marry. One could do one or the other, but not combine them. The way in which white professional women solved this was to bond with another woman, a pattern that came to be called the "Boston marriage."

The twentieth century has witnessed a remarkable series of shifts about gender, work, and family. We've seen this flip-flopping and shifts in ideology almost on a decade-by-decade basis from 1900 to the present, but at the same time there has been a steady direction. Underneath the surface of the shifts in ideology there has been a movement in one direction, basically toward the

two-earner husband-and-wife family. In the United States, this now represents over fifty per cent of households. It is important to emphasize, once again, that the working wife and mother has always been the pattern for black and working class families, but that did not become a controversial issue until white middle-class women sought better pay, professional work, and also wanted a family. In other words, black women who worked long hours as domestic servants, laundresses, or women who did piecework in sweatshops while leaving their kids to take care of themselves, were not seen as a social problem. But when white women sought to become business executives, doctors, lawyers, or college teachers, and also to marry and raise children, suddenly the working mother was defined as a social problem. Working wives were defined as neglecting their husbands and children and causing all manner of social pathologies.

The 1920s saw a significant shift in terms of the ideology of femaleness that included a rejection of the single female bonded lifestyle of the suffragists and women reformers in favor of championing marital, sexual pleasure, including the belief that women too were capable of sexual pleasure. This raised the issue of birth control, which had been avoided by the suffragists and which was considered illegal and immoral by both Protestants and Catholics. Professional women began to argue for combining work and family, which became more possible when women were able to space pregnancies more effectively. But there was also a counter-attack against the working wife, based on a popularizing of Freudian psychology that condemned the independent working woman as pathological. The argument was that she just didn't want to be a real woman, and suffered from "penis envy."

In the next decade, the Depression-era 1930s, this attack on the working wife was installed in the public policy of government and business. It was argued that working wives were the cause of male unemployment, something that was actually completely irrelevant to the Depression. Nevertheless, governments passed laws saying that a woman could only work if she was single, and a married woman should leave the workforce. It became policy that married women not hold jobs outside the home, supposedly in order to prevent them from taking men's jobs. Of course, women with unemployed husbands *had* to work, but what was really happening was that they were being pushed out of better paid work and into lower paid work. They weren't

really pushed out of the labor force, they were pushed *down* in the labor force, and men began to take over what had been the upper level of female professions, such as librarianship and public school teaching.

The 1940s and World War II saw a temporary reversal of these policies, as women's participation in the labor force was suddenly valued. Women were encouraged to take up employment in all areas, including munitions. Contrary to the myth that women war workers were all single girls waiting for a boyfriend to come home so they could marry, most of the women workers were married women who had worked prior to the war. War work really allowed them to achieve a higher pay level. Many of these women also had children, and so the United States federal government for the first and only time recognized the need for childcare and funded a system of daycare for these workers. Then came the 1950s, the end of the war, and the return of the veterans. The government responded with a complete switch in its policies on women workers. Women were laid off employment in droves to make room for the vets. The government subsidized higher education and housing for vets while working women were again attacked as pathological.

The 1950s became an apogee of the ideal suburban family with a full-time wife and mother, driving her kids to piano lessons, to soccer, to whatever. For a brief period of time, women's educational levels actually fell compared to what they had been a few decades earlier. The age of marriage for women also fell, to the late teens and early twenties. In other words, there was a fall in women's education and an earlier marriage level than had existed before. Working class and black women continued to have to combine work and marriage, but they were not visible in this ideological debate.

The decade of 1965-1975 witnessed a new attack by middle-class white women on domestication. Those suburbs were getting stifling, and a critique of the "feminine mystique" emerged from educated women who had been domesticated. Women began to organize a new feminist movement to complete the agenda of women's equality – legally, educationally, and economically. And there were many legislative victories. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, a number of very startling victories increased the number of women in higher education and employment. The capstone of this was the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), by the 1972 U.S. congress, stalled since it was first proposed in 1923. Even though it was passed by Congress, it failed

to be ratified. In 1973 came the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision that legalized abortion in the third trimester. This latter event created the occasion for the mobilization of a right-wing reaction that became an anti-feminist backlash in the next decade, 1975-85. Led by the rise of right-wing Christians who moved into political power and were buttressed by right wing pressure groups, this backlash made one of its first major targets the Equal Rights Amendment, which was blocked from passage by the states.

There has also been a continual effort to roll back reproductive rights, and women's political, legal, and economic gains. Welfare rights were attacked as "anti-family." And it was claimed that welfare allowed black women to live in luxury as "welfare queens." In fact, black women were not even allowed to get welfare until the 1960s, so part of what that decade did was organize black women so they could get on welfare, which they deserved legally but were blocked from getting. When black women began to receive welfare, suddenly they were "welfare queens." At the same time, the actual welfare stipends were continually sinking.

Alongside this back-and-forth in the ideological debate, there was also continual development in one direction. That one direction is the increase of the two-earner husband-and-wife household which, as I said, is now over fifty percent of married households. But there also has been an increasing number of working single-people, men and women, and actually the single person household is something like twenty percent of households, and that is across age groups. There is an increasing number of one-person households and also female-headed households. At the same time, particularly in the last couple of decades, there has been an increasing gap between the rich and the poor in the United States. The middle class has shrunk, creating a two-tiered economy. The lower third live on hourly wages of five to ten dollars an hour, often part-time, without benefits, pensions, or medical coverage, whereas the professional upper class assumes a starting wage of fifty thousand dollars or more with full benefits. The wages of CEOs are typically six figures. It is also assumed that this privileged upper-class of workers should put in fifty or sixty hours a week. In other words, forget the forty-hour week the working class fought for. Now you have an increasing expansion of work time for the professional class, and it obviously makes the balance between home and work even more difficult for the two-earner family with children. Meanwhile, poor families have no

choice but to have two or three family workers, or maybe people working several jobs but without affordable daycare, benefits, or health.

I want to end with saying a word about the church. Does the church have anything to say about this? Is there anything it can do? It seems to me that there is an urgent need for the churches to criticize the unjust situation of women and families, to disassociate itself from the right-wing rhetoric of family values that are actually mostly an attack on women and the poor and that add to the stress and poverty of families. There are three areas that churches should work toward. First, for more equal wages for all, men and women, together with shorter work days, flex-time jobs, full benefits and medical care, and affordable child care in neighborhoods or on the job. Those policies would make it possible for women and men to balance work and family with both men and women having income-producing jobs with time to share child-raising and to have more adequate time together. That is one kind of move that is different from what is actually happening.

Secondly, I think the church should stop making sacred the Victorian concept of the family based on separate spheres for men and women. This type of family was never available to poor or black Americans, and today has become untenable for most middle-class white Americans. The churches should recognize that both men and women have roles in both family care and in work. The church should accept and support a diversity of household and family forms, including single people, gay and lesbian couples and their children, blended families, extended families, black and white. That is, the church needs to become a welcoming place for the actual diversity of households in our society.

Thirdly, I suggest that perhaps there could be a separation between the legal and the sacramental in social, sexual relations. The government should be the place for legal arrangements between partners, such as sharing medical benefits, and so on. The church should focus on creating ways for people to covenant together, to receive sacramental blessing for community and relationships that can support love, friendship, and fidelity.

There are many ways that people are finding to bond together and to create sustainable communities of daily life. The church's support for more diverse forms of the family would allow Christians to reclaim something of the

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critique of the oppressive family that is suggested in early Christianity, together with creative expressions of sacramental covenanting that could support many forms of our lives. By naturalizing a patriarchal nuclear family and failing to see that this type of family is a socially constructed system for a certain type of people, the church has failed to grasp the importance of the critique of the family in the Gospels. The churches have failed to visualize family, not as a fixed part of a divinely created order, but rather as a part of the new creation that critiques the part of society that oppresses women, children, the aged, and the poor. Creating good, just, and loving families is the responsibility of the redemptive process of making creation ever new, of calling to personal and social transformation, and of beginning to imagine and construct various ways of creating sustainable relationships with one another, between partners, and between partners and children.

Once we can take family out of the mythic notion of a fixed institution mandated by God from the beginning, and recognize it as a part of a continually renewed, redemptive hope, we can perhaps reinterpret the idea of marriage as sacramental, mirroring a redemptive community. That is, some kind of sense of new creation and redemptive community anticipated in, among other places, the union of lovers becoming friends, building nurturing families, and becoming co-workers in bringing about the reign of God's justice and peace on earth.

## Harold Who? A Twenty-something Glimpse of the Anabaptist Vision

*Valerie Weaver-Zercher*

On a chilled Saturday afternoon in early December, my father and ninety-one-year-old grandmother and I drive over the coiling roads of the Welsh Mountain in eastern Pennsylvania. It was here, 103 years ago, that Mennonites began mission work among the "mountain people," as they were called. The mountain people earned notoriety in the surrounding valley towns as drunks, inbreeders, and chicken thieves. It was here that my grandparents brought their seven children to church when they joined the mission efforts on the Mountain.

We drive past crumbling shacks and weedy lots while my grandmother tells us the names of the people who used to live here: Ike Boots, one of the first converts; Ben and Liza Green, whom my grandpa would take home from church in his '37 Ford; Harry Millisock, who killed a schoolteacher and walked past the church with a shotgun. Some of their descendants still live here, but most have moved to nearby cities for work. On the mountain they've been replaced by prosperous families at the cusp of the American Dream: yuppies too young to be scared off by the Mountain's reputation, who take cruise vacations and decorate new houses in country themes. Some of them are Mennonites.

We wind down toward Honey Brook, where my grandmother was born. There we will see her battered old elementary school that now sinks into

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the ground, and the spot where the Rutt homestead stood, now marked only by a large maple tree.

On an afternoon drive this heavy with history, I can't resist asking the question that keeps coming to my mind on this day, a couple months before a conference where I must speak about "The Anabaptist Vision" by Harold S. Bender.<sup>1</sup> "Grandma, what do you know about H.S. Bender?" I ask, leaning up from the back seat toward her hearing aid. There is silence. I continue: "He gave a speech called 'The Anabaptist Vision' in 1943 that talked about discipleship, community, and nonresistance." She still says nothing. I offer again, "Harold S. Bender?"

"Well," she says tentatively, "the name sounds a little familiar."

Her response is not much different from that of several friends of mine – all in their twenties, all raised in Mennonite homes, all schooled at Mennonite colleges – when I asked them what they know of H.S. Bender. As with my grandmother, the name rings a faint bell – a very faint one. "Harold Bender? The name is very familiar but I don't know specifics," said one friend. "I know that Al Keim just wrote a book about him, and I know that his middle initial is 'S'," another wrote. Yet another emailed: "An important Mennonite dude . . . Elkhart? There's a book he wrote, I think!"

"The Anabaptist Vision" became a sacred text for many Mennonites in the second half of the twentieth century. By fashioning Anabaptism into a triadic tradition of discipleship, community, and nonresistance, Bender offered a generation of upwardly mobile Mennonites a story of which they could be proud, an "anchor and a locus of self-identification" as they moved into professions and suburbs.<sup>2</sup> Yet the responses of Mennonites at both ends of life – my grandmother and my twenty-something friends – make me wonder whether H.S. Bender and his almost mythical speech have become irrelevant.

My grandma and my twenty-something friends and I peer at the fog that is H.S. Bender from different directions: she, from a life lived mostly before the Anabaptist Vision took hold; we, from our alma maters of Mennonite Church institutions that Bender championed. She, from a nest of farmers, harness-makers, and bookbinders; we, from the land of Starbucks, Microsoft, and Wal-Mart. She, from the country of preachers named John Martin and their wives, Mrs. John Martin; we, from the republic of hyphenated last names. She, nurtured by doctrines of salvation for the lost on the Welsh Mountain,

the inerrancy of the Bible, the distinctives of plain suit and covering; we, clutching still amorphous ideas about inter-faith dialogue, the Bible as a narrative of God's healing, and the sense that we need somehow both to *separate* ourselves from the world *and* to engage it.

In an author's note at the beginning of *The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver writes this tribute to her mother and father: "They set me early on a path of exploring the great, shifting terrain between righteousness and what's right."<sup>3</sup> Righteousness and what's right: these phrases capture the friction we as Mennonites sense these days. This is not just the rub of generations: it's the chafing of purity against relevancy, separateness against engagement, personal faithfulness against social responsibility. This shifting terrain is what makes us feel so unsteady on our denominational feet, poised as we are on the verge of both merging and dividing, coupling and divorcing.

For church people, righteousness means acting in accord with divine or moral law – it is the *Ordnung* that my grandmother lived with daily. It is what migratory and then settled North American Mennonites are skilled at doing: keeping ourselves from evil, following the Bible as we understand it, building families and churches that reproduce themselves. Righteousness is the obvious good, the noble act, the habits of holiness.

Righteousness can, however, warp into collective hubris and sectarianism. It can cause us to cast out people from our midst who may not rise to our standard of divine or moral law. Or it may simply limit us from widening our definitions of morality beyond "not gambling, not smoking, not drinking." Righteousness, as theologian Juan Mackay puts it, is proffered from "the security of the theological balcony."<sup>4</sup> It is most often formulated by educated white churchmen like Harold S. Bender. Bender's speech and its subsequent hallowing among his followers are attempts, albeit noble ones, to preserve on paper a theology of righteousness that transcends time and place.

Kingsolver's second shifting plate, "what's right," is harder to define than the first. In fact, doing what's right defies the very act of definition. A theology of what's right is a "theology of the road, temporary in character, done in the dusty and dangerous path of life," writes Mario Higueros, academic dean of the Latin American seminary SEMILLA.<sup>5</sup> Because the early Anabaptists rarely wrote down their theology but rather lived it, writes Higueros, "we Anabaptists must notice that the insistence on dogmatic, non-contextualized

theological formulations is placing us in complete contradiction to the heritage received from many of our predecessors.”<sup>6</sup>

The drive toward “what’s right,” then, is a drive toward a faith that changes when to change is more faithful than to conserve, a faith that engages the social order when to engage is more life-giving than to withdraw. It’s what drove mediator John Paul Lederach to agree to lead a workshop on humanitarian crises at the United States War College – an institution, he writes, “that I hope my work will eventually help transform and eliminate.”<sup>7</sup> Righteousness would have dictated that he refuse altogether, so as not to sully his hands. Such a negotiation with the world leads to suspended ideals, perhaps, but also to transfusions of peacemaking blood into the heart of our violence-enamored society. This is just one example of a Mennonite trying to do “what’s right” – there are, of course, many more.

I’m sure we have yet to discover all the dangers that may come with doing what’s right. While seeking after righteousness can make one insular or intolerant, searching for what’s right can perhaps make one engaged to the point of exhaustion, relevant to the point of extinction.

Where do we draw the line? is the way the question is most often asked: an important question, granted, in this day of cyber-dislocation, the hallowing of individual liberties, and our own love affair with a consuming culture. But boundary questions such as Where do we draw the line? are questions that Mario Higueros might say are of secondary importance. I wonder if Higueros, who writes that Anabaptist theology “seeks unity in the constant presence of divisions,”<sup>8</sup> would say that questions of where to draw lines are less pressing than questions of how to reach across them to the people on the other side.

Both Kingsolver’s notions of righteousness and what’s right, as well as Bender’s triune points of the Anabaptist Vision, seem slanted toward ethics, lived faith, and outward acts, and away from inner conversion, relationship to God, and grace-filled salvation. Though Kingsolver can evade our scrutiny because she’s not Mennonite, Bender and his followers are coming under fire from Anabaptist scholars today for their emphasis on a works-oriented and rationalist theology at the expense of grace, forgiveness, and evangelical faith. I agree with those who call for an increased emphasis on the inner life of the Spirit and on God’s sustaining grace. But while some fear that my generation

and those following will wander lost in a postmodern morass of unbiblical living, I fear something else for us. I fear instead that unless we are infused with a new conviction of the Anabaptist distinctives of discipleship, community, and an ethic of love – unless these pervade our very Gen-X selves – we will drift in a sea of denominations and “non-denominations” without discernment or pause. I fear that we will become like the students in my husband’s theology class, who responded in the following numbers when asked, What did Jesus do that was so important?: twenty-eight of them said he “died on the cross,” twenty-seven that he “atoned for our sins.” Only two students responded that Jesus “set an example for us to follow.” Indeed, without these very Anabaptist resources of discipleship, community, and nonviolence, I fear that my generation and those following won’t be able to resist the leveling of our faith to a least common denominator of divinely-sanctioned upward mobility, tradition-less megachurches, and civil religion.

As I said before, I do believe that notions of righteousness – held by my grandmother’s generation and codified by Bender – and notions of “what’s right” – desperately sought after by my generation – do often overlap: the fruits of the Spirit, simplicity, resistance to the machine of war, commitment to family and church, prayerful reflection. And I do believe, along with Higueros, that Bender’s three concepts, despite their entrapment in space and time, are helpful maps for our trek across the shifting plates of righteousness and what’s right.

Listen to these thoughts, then, from twenty-something Mennonites: admittedly, college-educated, white North American Mennonites. I want to acknowledge that this is a narrow sampling and apologize for it. But my friends’ words do speak of an Anabaptist theology existing, as Higueros writes, “in action lived out in a specific historical moment.”<sup>9</sup>

*Discipleship* To my grandma and grandpa, the definition was fairly close to an observer’s description of early Anabaptists, which Bender cited in 1943: “No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language . . . is found among them, but humility . . . neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness.”<sup>10</sup> In the words of one of my friends, discipleship is “a never-ending dialogue between God, the community of believers, and me. It is a struggle of using my life to serve God’s purpose, as well as offering it as a

witness to draw others to the healing love of Christ.” Another’s definition: “[Discipleship] is trying to make life choices based on faithfulness to principles of love and respect for people, to the earth, and to what I know of God . . . being present with people, listening to their stories, sharing tortillas, sharing of my own life and experiences.”

*Community* To my grandparents, community meant *Absonderung*, “separation,” attempts at creation of a Christian social order there on the Welsh Mountain. It meant casseroles to the sick, living near your parents, pre-Communion accountability sessions. Today, a friend of mine describes it like this: “Having [our neighbor] plow our driveway, discussing with neighbors what approach to take with the local KKK . . . [Community] is dreaming and planning with friends about how to live more healthfully, how to be true to our heritage, Christian, Mennonite, in today’s world,” this friend says. “I think community offers a realm where we can feel connected, purposeful, and courageous in a way that disjointed, separate living cannot give us.” And another says: “Community . . . means accepting others as people created by God to whom I am inherently connected. For example, in the issue of Matthew Shepard’s death [the gay college student murdered in Wyoming in 1997] – some Christians picketed at his funeral with signs that said, ‘Matthew is in hell,’ and ‘Fags burn in hell.’ I am embarrassed by those persons,” this friend writes. “I would want no part of them – but in reality, because I say that I am committed to Christ, as they say – I am connected. For their actions, I must apologize and somewhat be held responsible. That part of community is always humbling.”

*Nonresistance* To my grandparents, nonresistance meant teaching their children the way of peace, directing them toward alternative service during the war. In the words of a twenty-something Mennonite, “Nonresistance may be fine in times of war, as a response to the draft system. But in our times, we must be actively calling attention to violence in our world – to the violence of racism, to domestic violence, to economic violence . . . to environmental destruction that violently destroys God’s creation.”

So even though they might not know exactly who H.S. Bender was, my friends do not find his trilogy of words foreign in the least. Were he alive today, Bender might not be happy with these re-definitions of his words, with this movement away from “righteousness” and toward “what’s right.” But

whether he'd like it or not, his words from 1943 are being laundered and re-worn today. I like to think that Bender's concepts have been altered gently by both the critique of post-Concern Movement scholars and the re-defining of young adult Mennonites: altered, that is, not eradicated or weakened.

I also like to think that as we work toward merging two denominations, we will escape the danger that overtook Bender himself. The danger is that in the laying down of programmatic frameworks, we begin to believe that control over our denominational destiny is possible. We begin to believe that with enough collective planning for our church's future, we will be able to mold ourselves into the vibrant, missional, and peacemaking denomination that we really should be. Yet we must accept that even well-built schoolhouses will sag into the ground, even once-stately homesteads will be replaced by maple trees and air, and even carefully-constructed churchly initiatives will be forgotten, replaced, or redefined.

Perhaps the best we can do is to try to set our own feet – and the feet of our children – “on a path of exploring the shifting terrain between righteousness and what's right,” as Barbara Kingsolver's parents so wisely did for her. Perhaps the best we can do is take our children and grandchildren for drives through the spaces we have inhabited, the Welsh Mountains of our right intentions, successful projects, and failed ambitions. Perhaps the best we can do is to lend them the maps we've used, and wish them Godspeed on their way.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “The Anabaptist Vision” was Mennonite historian Harold S. Bender's presidential address before the American Society of Church History in 1943. See Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944).

<sup>2</sup> [John D. Roth], “In This Issue,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (July 1995): 277.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Kingsolver, “Author's Note,” *The Poisonwood Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Mario Higueros, “The Anabaptist Vision in the Church of Central America,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (July 1995): 389.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press,

1999), 91.

<sup>8</sup> Higueros, "The Anabaptist Vision in the Church of Central America": 397.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*, 24.

## Book Reviews

*Artists, Citizens, and Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City.* Duane K. Friesen. Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2000.

Duane Friesen is to be commended for sketching in this book what he calls an Anabaptist/Mennonite “theology of culture in its multi-faceted dimensions” (15). The Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition has often understood itself as living and working within an alien pagan world that is to be avoided as much as possible by faithful Christians who have bound themselves together in covenant as disciples of Jesus, seeking to lead transformed lives in keeping with his radical teachings about loving not only neighbors but also enemies. The persecution Mennonites endured from their origins in the sixteenth century helped to increase their suspicions of the outside world over against which they defined themselves; and their continuing to live in close geographical propinquity with each other in the next centuries – as they moved from country to country to protect their faith under stress of ongoing persecution – only furthered their strong sense of solidarity and of the rightness of their distinctive understanding of Christian faith and life. In consequence, throughout much of their history Mennonites have not played particularly active roles in the wider cultures of the societies of which they were part.

At least in North America, however, much of this changed in the last century, as Mennonites increasingly moved out of their rural communities into the city. Many of us became college and university trained professionals in the modern societies in which we live; and we found much in this world outside our traditional communities that we appreciated and deeply valued, and came to respect and love. But the theological traditions we inherited – with their deep suspicion of everything non-Mennonite – have not, for the most part, given us adequate resources for understanding and interpreting these new circumstances. Many permanently leave the Mennonite faith; others attempt to maintain some vestiges of the older traditions but find it difficult to persuade their children, who grow up and become socialized in largely non-Mennonite environments, to take the traditional faith seriously. We Mennonites today desperately need a *theology of culture* that enables us to see, on the one hand,



what is truly of importance in the traditions we have inherited; and what, on the other hand, we can properly and confidently adopt, enjoy, and integrate – from the (hitherto) outside cultural world – into our lives and our faith. It is to that central felt need of today’s North American Mennonites that Friesen’s book is addressed.

How well does the book succeed? I can take up here only a few issues in the complex argument that Friesen offers. The motto of the book, articulating its basic theme, is drawn from Jeremiah 29:7: “seek the welfare [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile, . . . for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (quoted on page 2, and mentioned frequently). Biblical background (and authority?) for the position Friesen wishes to take is supplied in Chapter 1, entitled “Christians as Citizens and Aliens” – a not too promising, but typically Mennonite, dualistic formulation. His intention is “to show how one can develop a positive social ethic and theology of culture by drawing upon the ‘alternative culture’ tradition of the Bible and church history” (33). This is a tall order: one wonders right away whether social and cultural conceptions and practices drawn from the ancient biblical and patristic world can provide much effective guidance in understanding the enormously complex culture of modernity. The task of the book will be to show how “the model of resident aliens” (42) can be incarnated in today’s world.

Friesen believes (rightly) that this approach goes directly counter to the presuppositions of much widely accepted theological reflection on sociocultural issues, so in his second chapter he examines some central ideas of two highly influential writers on these matters: Ernst Troeltsch (especially *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*) and H. Richard Niebuhr (especially *Christ and Culture*). Drawing on his doctoral dissertation as well as the work of John Howard Yoder, Glen Stassen, Walter Wink, and others (including Stanley Hauerwas, whom he strongly criticizes), Friesen argues that Troeltsch’s category of the “sect” (as opposed to the mainline “church”) and Niebuhr’s placement of Mennonites among those who take a “Christ against Culture” position are seriously misleading due to their “Constantinian” assumptions. He maintains that such approaches cannot be the basis for developing a contemporary Anabaptist theology of culture. In the rest of Part One he attempts to sketch “a vision of the church that is an alternative to [such] Christendom models” (34), a model based on an “alternative vision of life” (36) – not an

alternative that would completely displace the wider culture but one that would truly enhance its welfare. Though more than half the book is devoted to developing and sketching this conception of the church, Friesen really does not succeed in making clear (in my opinion) how such an “alternative society” or “alternative culture” can grow up and survive in today’s electronic urban world in which everyone is bombarded twenty-four hours a day with the values and meanings (many of them quite crude) of the wider culture. One cannot but wonder whether Friesen’s whole program may not be based too largely on a nostalgic vision of the good old days when Mennonites really could live in – and could decisively socialize their children into – the “alternative” culture and life of their rural communities.

It is not until page 169, with Part Two, that Friesen really gets around to sketching his theology of the wider culture. These three last chapters take up the “Artistic Imagination” (Ch. 6), the “Dynamics of Dual Citizenship,” (Ch. 7), and “Philosophers...and Human Wisdom” (Ch. 8). Of these, the chapter on dual citizenship is most important, for it tries to work out the way in which the church with its “alternative culture” can be “a model for society” (224). Despite his extensive discussion of politics, community service, vocation, justice, etc., one continues to wonder how the church, conceived here as a virtually alternative society with quite distinctive values and purposes, could ever be a model for the wider society in which it finds itself. “To be a Christian,” he maintains, “means to confess Jesus Christ as the light . . . that . . . ‘lights up’ the entire universe” (269); “Christ is the light that illumines all other truth. . . . [A] christological perspective includes all truth, including the insights of the religions other than Christianity” (257). With this sort of all-enveloping claim defining its basic stance, it is hard to see how the church could be a model for anything other than some kind of *theocracy* seeking to rule the world. Friesen certainly does not intend this, and in fact he states, in his discussion of religious pluralism, that we “should respect difference and not attempt to absorb the other into our own perspective” (262). But having said that, he immediately undercuts it by stating that “Genuine faith entails commitment to . . . [t]he universal claims of Christianity” (ibid.).

The other two chapters of Part 2 (6 and 8) are rather sketchy. The one on art takes up what is a key subject for every theology of culture; but so much of the text is given over to brief discussions of other writers (who do not

always agree with each other) that it is difficult to discern and assess what Friesen's own view of the arts actually is, and precisely how his argument runs. The chapter on "wisdom" misleadingly announces in its title (like that of the book itself) that it will be dealing with "philosophers," but there is really no discussion here either of particular philosophers or of the important place held by the philosophical tradition in western culture. Instead, the chapter sets its tone by beginning with the biblical "wisdom tradition" – something very different from the philosophy practiced in the West for well over two millenia – and then moves on to consider the problem of religious pluralism. It is in this context, surprisingly, that Friesen takes up science (in the brief space of 7 pages), since our "relationship to science is similar to our relationship to other religious traditions" (278). He seems not to recognize that science – far from being another quasi-religious option more or less "external" to today's Christian existence – is one of our most pervasive and dominating institutions, with tentacles moving into virtually all the thinking and action of everyone living in the modern world. Technology, another institution that has utterly transformed all our lives and now seemingly becoming a veritable Frankenstein monster completely free from human control, is not discussed at all. These would seem to be rather important lacunae in a book purporting to present a theology of today's North American culture.

So we have here a first try at "An Anabaptist Theology of Culture," as one of the book's subtitles puts it. It is good to see a Mennonite theologian take up this exceedingly significant subject, a subject crucial for all of today's Mennonites if we are to survive as a distinctive Christian movement. Discussion of a number of major problems is presented here with important suggestions about how they might be addressed, and for that we should all be grateful. This book opens the door sufficiently to enable us Mennonites to see that thinking constructively about the wider culture in which we live today is a task that must be taken up by our theologians and other thoughtful persons, if our communities are to find their way in the modern world. That way can and should be, as Friesen rightly argues, one that will enable us to contribute significantly to "the welfare of the city" in which we find ourselves today.

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D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

If the Bible is the sole authority for Christian life and thought, why hold to a belief in the Trinity, a term which is first attested to only late in the second century? Why insist on the doctrine of the fully human and fully divine Christ as formulated in AD 451? Why accept the authority of the New Testament, since the form in which we have it today was only accepted as canon some three centuries after the writing of its contents? Although he does not raise the questions quite so bluntly, such are the issues faced by Daniel Williams of Loyola University (Chicago) in his most recent study. Williams comes to his task with the fullest qualifications: as a Baptist pastor, he formulates the problem from within his own religious context, but he does so rooted as well in the soil of the early Church – a patristics scholar, he has earlier published a study on *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford, 1995). How applicable Williams's questions are for Mennonites is clear in his fourth chapter on the "corruption" of the early Church, in which the author argues against John Howard Yoder's commitment to the so-called "Constantinian Fall of the Church" in the early fourth century, using the work of another Mennonite theologian, A. James Reimer, to support his case (122-27).

Noting the increasingly "ahistorical and atheological condition" of Evangelicalism and the resulting crisis facing the movement even as "there are grounds for claiming that evangelicalism holds the key to the future of western Christendom" (23), Williams calls Evangelical churches to remember the Tradition (his capital "T" never extending beyond the Council of Chalcedon in 451). He outlines the formation and development of that Tradition to the Constantinian era, then reviews the rise of the theory of a Constantinian fall, before offering a revised (from the Evangelical point of view) interpretation of the role of Church Councils and the Creeds in the perpetuation of the Christian Tradition in the fourth and later centuries. He concludes with a chapter on the linkage between Scripture and the patristic tradition by early Protestant Reformers, including a section on the Anabaptists. In the Epilogue and two appendices Williams advances his challenges to contemporary churches. There he argues that the renewal of Evangelicalism (and the Free Church tradition at large) is linked to the retrieval of the patristic tradition, to a renewed

consciousness that all Christians are “catholics” within the universal Church and that “*sola scriptura* cannot be rightly and responsibly handled without reference to the historic Tradition of the church” (234).

Williams’s argument reflects a growing interest within Evangelicalism. For long there has been a shift of members of that community to Canterbury and to Eastern Orthodoxy, and recently the vocal minority of more fundamentalist converts to Roman Catholicism. But Williams’s work is structured within a less individual concern, fitting, with theological treatments such as that of Miroslav Volf in *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998) and with the ecumenical dialogues reflected in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Examine What Divides and Unites Us* (Moody Press, 1995), *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Intervarsity Press, 1997), and the fine collection edited by Thomas P. Rausch, *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do they Share a Common Future?* (Intervarsity Press, 2000). All these discussions are particularly stimulating and important for Mennonites, now engaged in a Vatican-Mennonite dialogue.

At the root of his book, however, Williams cannot avoid the challenge as posited in Cardinal Newman’s adage: “To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.” The major difficulty for Williams is the curtailment of Tradition to the pre-Chalcedonian period – to Antiquity. In this his approach is reminiscent of the Anglican Old High Churchmen and their wayward step-children, the Tractarians who, wishing to maintain continuity as a third branch of the Church Catholic and able to argue that they maintained apostolic succession (unlike Williams’s Baptist tradition or the Anabaptist tradition), were nevertheless faced with Newman’s argument in his *Development of Christian Doctrine*. That argument might be summarized in our own time by asking: If there is development in the New Testament tradition from the undisputed letters of Paul to the “early Catholicism” of the Pastoral Epistles, from the New Testament to the Epistles of Ignatius, from Ignatius through Nicea to Chalcedon, why close development with Constantine (and thereby reject the full doctrine of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian formula on the person of Christ, indeed the canon of Scripture itself) or with Chalcedon, for that matter?

And for Williams perhaps an even more critical question remains: If *sola scriptura* “cannot be rightly handled” except “in reference to the historic

[patristic] Tradition of the church,” how is one to understand the other distinctive and central Protestant doctrine, *sola fide*, let alone Free Church doctrines touching sacramental grace, ecclesial voluntarism, the egalitarian “priesthood” of all believers, and others for which it would be difficult to demonstrate the clear support of Antiquity?

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Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

We can trust Leo Driedger to keep our awareness of the state of Mennonite society current. This volume, together with *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (1975) and *The Mennonite Mosaic* (1991), establishes a significant library for the comparative analysis of Mennonite society and identity. This is a significant gift to Mennonite communities; the way into the future is marked by such self-awareness. It is a contribution to the broader study of Mennonites and may prove fruitful for the study of society in general.

*Mennonites in the Global Village* has two parts. The first six chapters assess changes that have occurred among Mennonites since the publication of *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, taking stock at the turn of a millennium. These chapters rehearse and work out some of the finer details of *The Mennonite Mosaic*, testing the data gathered there against some themes that resonate with a post-modern or global agenda. Driedger documents the continued urbanization and professionalization of Mennonites, identifying a potential tension between professional enclave and religious identity. He revisits Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan, noting changes due to the influence of modern and postmodern forces. Villages identifiable earlier by their rural values and culture took on the guise of urban suburbs. He observes a shift from local to global village values, together with an increase in access to a variety of media. These changes were especially evident among younger, upwardly mobile, educated urban Mennonites. Driedger works out the politics of homemaking through a discussion of the issue of abortion, noting that

Mennonites have been more opposed to abortion than has society in general and that pro-choice sympathies among Mennonites are more likely to appear among people with higher levels of education.

Driedger uses the final four chapters to lay out future trajectories of identity for contemporary Mennonites. He describes the following transitions: shifts from an ideologically to relationally based identity for young Mennonites; a dialectic between the religious and marketplace needs that educational institutions serve; an opening within churches to the possibility of leadership by women; and shifts from passive to active expression of the Anabaptist peace witness, together with minimization of the peace witness among more conservative Mennonites.

Driedger's strength, especially evident in these final chapters, is the working, re-working, and integrating of research from a variety of sources. He tests observations about Mennonite youth within the context of the significant work of Reginald Bibby and Don Posterski on Canadian youth. Paul Toews's historical work provides a backdrop for his consideration of educational institutions. Driedger's description of the emergence of the leadership of women in the Mennonite church depends on Renee Sauder's research, and J.R. Burkholder's pluralistic peace typology provides a strong basis to assess change in the Anabaptist peace witness.

Driedger depends upon the reader to process the theoretical background and the questions raised by his survey of postmodern Mennonite life. The stage is set by Driedger's schematic summary of postmodern society and a brief, global demography of Mennonites in chapter 1. Further theoretical questions might be anticipated on the basis of his historical review of the rural and urban configurations of Anabaptist communities from the sixteenth century onwards. Peter Berger's 'sacred canopy' and Robert Bellah's 'individual types' continue to be pivotal for Driedger and are the point at which theoretical arguments might be begun. The reader, however, will have to have a background in postmodern theory and philosophy to develop these conversations more fully and to understand postmodern experience more completely. Chapter 3 illustrates this quite well. Driedger provides examples of individuals in Mennonite communities and organizations which fit Bellah's typology. While he successfully convinces us that individualism exists among Mennonites, the deeper question of the nature and role of the individual within a community

remains to be answered. The chapter ends as this theoretical task is engaged. This is unfortunate, because the question of the individual is a critical issue within postmodernism, and a primary and formative element within such a voluntaristic religious group as Mennonites.

This experience is replicated in the book's abrupt conclusion. Driedger suggests that the Mennonite experience of postmodernity has parallels in the pre-modern beginnings of Anabaptism, understanding both as revolutionary struggle. This observation in the book's final paragraph begs a further chapter. Is the notion of "sacred canopy," useful in sociological analysis of Mennonites for so long, able to stretch far enough to cover the theoretical implications of this affinity, and is it translucent enough to explore the individual and corporate nature of community life in postmodern society? Revolutionary times may call for a revolution in our theoretical understanding. A good companion to this work would be a further development of theoretical capital. It would deepen our understanding of Mennonite life and help us grasp the contribution that the study of Mennonites makes to the understanding of society in general.

*Ed Janzen, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario*

Jean Janzen, *Tasting the Dust*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2000

The title of Jean Janzen's fifth collection of poetry, *Tasting the Dust*, reminds me of a night I spent in a leaky southwestern motel during a dust storm. Tasting that dust was elemental, mysterious, and a little unsettling. Reading Janzen's poems elicits some similar sensations for me.

Her poems are grouped around four "windows" of direction – south, north, east, west. Each section is introduced by a poem in response to four Vermeer paintings of interiors, each with a woman in some household activity. A wonderful conceit, this structure provides ways of looking at our contained lives through the suffusion of varied yet specific light. The poems, ranging in settings from the poet's home in California to exotic places like Baku, are riffs on the incarnation experienced.

These incarnate poems begin with the imagery of dust and mountains in the area of the poet's home, where "it takes dynamite to plant an orange



tree." I find most captivating this section celebrating both the upheaval and stasis of nature. In arresting motion Janzen looks at the rotting oranges under the tree, the astringent pomegranate to be tasted, the mountain's snow water to be drunk.

Some poems of the north may be reflective of Janzen's early life in Canada. Full of memories of brothers, sisters, and parents, she alludes to "markings" – those childhood treasures kept in school booklets, those desires to please the elders' request for perfection, those memories of the bear at the tent.

Then there are the painting "readings," the author's reflections on Europe, the east. The great canvasses depicting events in the life of Christ are read from an imagined moment of captured motion. Some of these poems touch on the poet's familial history of torture in Europe. Some were written during her months spent there after winning the prestigious Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Finally, the poems of the west return to the meaning of those dear to us at home – the elemental things that taste like grit, the mysterious unseen that remains open to the senses, the forces moving ground that scare us a little. The touching poem of married love ("Tasting the Dust"), the physician husband "curing himself with soil" in his garden, concludes:

the story of dust, an origin  
so deep and dense, it rose  
like fire to make the mountain,  
  
a narrative of tumble  
and breakage from its sides, . . .  
The mountain offering itself . . .  
for his spade, his touch,  
to make of it a shape and fragrance,  
to taste the center of this earth. (66,67)

Reading these rich poems that converse with us will reward both the inveterate and casual poetry reader. We all know the nuisance of dust; the transforming properties of these particles are ours, too. The poet suggests the cultivation of an other-worldly soil, dynamiting for the planting of fruit if necessary.

Sarah Klassen, *Simone Weil: Songs of Hunger and Love*. Toronto: Wolsak & Wynn, 1999.

What an eloquent voice Simone Weil has been given in the poet Sarah Klassen! Earnest, pleading for understanding, the Weil/Klassen persona in each poem enthralls the reader with an otherwise difficult theme: suffering and martyrdom. Because of this beautiful poetry we are led to consider the meaning of a desire to suffer for others.

No doubt Weil would have agreed with Victor Frankl that “meaning precedes being.” She seems to have been born with this mission for meaning. In “Hunger I” the explanation begins:

I was born hungry.  
 . . . How should they have known,  
 my mother, my kind father:  
 their joined flesh, satisfied,  
 could generate voraciousness,  
 spawn such unseemly thirst and this  
 unearthly appetite. (12)

Part I (“Hunger”) of this three-part collection elaborates on this unearthly appetite: Weil’s precocious childhood; her adolescent sensitivity toward the poor who have been harmed; and her resolve in young adulthood “to eat nothing but God whom I wanted to swallow whole” (19). Part II (“God exists because I desire him”) embodies her work as an activist showing solidarity with coal miners, machinists, potato diggers, fisherfolk. Part III (“We can only cry out”) delves into the mystery of suffering with images of Christ’s passion, Lear’s loneliness, and allusions to earlier mystics such as the anonymous writer of *The Cloud of the Unknowing*.

For the most part, the voice speaks in the past tense, which serves to deliver biographical facts in an offhand manner, heightening interest in Weil’s desire for a more perfect life. Born in Paris to a privileged life, Weil became a philosopher, social activist, mystic, and writer. She taught, but interspersed her intellectual life with stints of manual labor. She developed a mystical feeling for the Catholic faith, but a strong aversion to organized religion and therefore was never baptized. Partly Jewish, she escaped to the U.S. in 1942 only to

return to London, where a year later at age 34 she died of a hunger strike, suffering with and for her French compatriots.

I remember a conversation several years ago with Sarah Klassen when she first offered some of these poems to publishers and was surprised to find a keen interest in Weil. I'm not surprised. The spare, haunting beauty of the Weil poems leads us to look at other times and places, to refugees, misfits, and uncompromising disciples we have known. The poems allude to the strangely ordinary ("I'm sounding so much like my mother. . . ." – "Lyrics from a lycee 3. The teacher," 22) as well as the great mystery ("The unmistakable/ breathtaking wingbeat of grace," 80).

I find the meditative "Pensees" powerful. The poem's pulsing desire to be the hands and feet of God carries a tone of pathos and spent energy. Yet the question remains whether activity can ever reach the model of divine love:

Someone is leaping and leaping in the air  
each time a little higher. This is not  
the way to God. Nor can imagination  
fill the emptiness, command growth of wings,  
defy gravity. (51)

The author's restraint from overt criticism of her subject (Weil) strengthens these poems. Only a hint of personal realism appears in one of the quotations used before them: "There is no great genius without some touch of madness" (Seneca). We are left with the irony that one so hungry refuses to eat, and that points us to consider the multiple meanings of hunger.

*Miriam Pellman Maust, Elora, ON*

Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds. *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*. Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000; J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium*. Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000.

These two books are the first contributions to the C. Henry Smith Series co-sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society and Bluffton College.

*Anabaptists and Postmodernity* is a collection of papers selected from presentations made at a conference of the same name held at Bluffton College in 1998. In the introduction, Susan Biesecker-Mast provides the context for the disparate papers, emphasizing the significance of difference for understanding the relationship between Anabaptism and postmodernity. The essays are helpfully divided into seven groups along the general themes of theory, literature, church polity, worship, religious and social identity, peace/pacifism, and culture. If the reader is looking for either a sustained discussion of a few issues or clarity concerning Anabaptism or postmodernity, the book's diversity is a weakness. However, Biesecker-Mast indicates in her introduction that differences and gaps are where the reader should be looking.

If the introduction sets the context for differences, the first essay by Stanley Hauerwas, entitled "The Christian Difference" tries to clarify the difference between Christianity and postmodernism. According to Hauerwas, postmodernity is the consequence of the historical Church's inability to articulate God's truth and therefore to be faithful. The shift from knowing God through Scripture to knowing God through nature has resulted in a world where people have many different choices and no Truth. Hauerwas describes postmodernity with the analogy of global capitalism, where the market offers up a wide variety of commodities guided largely by the pressure of innovation. Under the burden of the consequences of its faithlessness, Hauerwas concludes that the Church must find a way not only to survive postmodernity but also to flourish.

However, this is not the last word on the relationship between Christianity and postmodernism. In fact, the last word, in this book, offers a fairly optimistic reading of postmodernism and its possibilities for Anabaptism. J. Lawrence Burkholder, in his essay "Following Christ in a Postmodern World," sees postmodernism as "a plea for freedom to be one's own authentic self" (410). While this freedom might have negative expressions, it also offers to Anabaptist-Mennonites the possibility of seeing sacrificial service as an exercise of freedom. The postmodern critique opens up a kind of discipleship that moves beyond obligations and commands to one that is relational. This discipleship does not ignore history and tradition but attempts to appropriate it in an authentically free spirit.

Between the rejection and cautious acceptance of postmodernity for Anabaptists, there is a great deal more. Peter Blum, in his essay "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism," points out the shared commitment to particularity in Michel Foucault and John H. Yoder. Thomas Finger, in "Universal Truths," attacks this same commitment for its failure to acknowledge the importance of universals. A fascinating contrast is established between John Roth's description of the struggles of South German Mennonites as a marginal community entering into modernity in "Context, Conflict, and Community" and Hildi Froese Tiessen's description of the struggles of Mennonite writers as a marginal group within the Mennonite community. One other essay worth noting is that of Chris Huebner, "Christian Pacifism as Friendship with God," which brings together the writings of Derrida, MacIntyre, and Milbank to explore the nature of friendship and God. Indeed, the mix of approaches ranging from the liturgical to the sociological provides additional layers of meaning to the individual essays, and makes this collection more than the sum of its parts.

*Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* by J. Denny Weaver, connects with the more optimistic views of postmodernity in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, focusing on the opportunity Mennonites now have for developing a theology genuinely rooted in pacifism. Weaver sees postmodernity as the demise of Christendom and, with it, the notion of a theology-in-general making room for an Anabaptist theology.

A particular theology for Mennonites as a peace church can now assert its version of truth on a logically equal footing with the theology of Christendom. The context of postmodernity thus offers Mennonites an opportunity virtually unprecedented since the early church: a chance to articulate and receive a hearing for a theology shaped specifically by the nonviolence of Jesus. (21)

According to Weaver, all theology is particular, and what Mennonites ought to be doing is writing a theology that is self-consciously rooted in what is characteristically Anabaptist, namely, the conviction that Jesus lived and taught a life of nonviolence. The book is, then, an extended description of Mennonite particularity and postmodernity as the context for the possibility of an authentically Anabaptist theology.

The particularity of Mennonite theology is approached in three different ways by Weaver. In the first chapter, he argues that cultural differences have led Mennonites in Canada and the United States to do theology differently. He contends that the United States has a civil religion rooted in an originary myth that grounds freedom in war and violence, whereas Canada has no such unifying myth but rather multiple stories of the English and French. The traditional metaphor of identity in the United States was that of the melting pot, which discouraged cultural particularity, while in Canada it was the mosaic, which encouraged multiculturalism. According to Weaver, these national characteristics have had an important role in how Mennonites have done theology. For Mennonites in the United States, being faithful has often led to a general theological challenge to Christendom as a whole. But Canadian Mennonites, according to Weaver, have felt no such need to make grandiose challenges to the state or Christendom.

Chapters two, three, and four comprise the most valuable parts of the book. Here, Weaver examines Mennonite theological work from the twentieth, nineteenth, and sixteenth centuries respectively, arguing that there is a discernible Anabaptist theology distinguishable from the rest of Christian theology. While the argument is ultimately faulty, this does not take anything away from the valuable historical work Weaver has done in organizing the theological work of so many Anabaptist thinkers. What I found most interesting was the section on Mennonite theology in the nineteenth century, a period of time to which Mennonites have most often referred for historical purposes but which clearly had theological importance.

Chapter five is probably the least satisfactory. Here Weaver attempts to make connections between Mennonite theology and Black and Womanist theologies. The link he makes is the common conviction that theology must be ethical while traditional Christian theology has too often accommodated violence. As Weaver has spent the previous chapters emphasizing the particularity of Mennonite theology, this attempt to generalize is jarring. Too often he has to acknowledge that, while there are some shared convictions on the issue of nonviolence, there are striking differences, leading one to wonder whether these theologies function as tokens in his argument or as genuinely particular theologies.

The problem with this book lies not in the message but in the form Weaver uses to deliver it. He fails to make the connection between how Mennonites have historically done theology and how they ought to do theology. He attempts to make this connection by emphasizing the particularity of Mennonite thinking, but this is to focus on the finger instead of on the finger pointing at something. It is true that Mennonites have culturally and historically held to the normative belief that Jesus taught the rejection of violence, but it is not true that what makes this belief normative is Mennonite particularity. A theology that rejects the doctrines of Christendom because it has historically accommodated violence ignores the fact that all Christian theology aims at the same truth. Anabaptist and Mennonite theology through the centuries has its own particular character, but it still shares the same object of concern as that of Christendom. Mennonite theologians can enter into dialogue with black and womanist theologians because they share the same concern for faithfulness. Weaver fails to appreciate the fact that particularity complements commonality, an insight of postmodernism. In the end, he overplays the particular at the expense of what all Christians hold in common, thereby sacrificing the unity of Christ's body. Ultimately, Mennonites are to pursue nonviolence, not because of our history or cultural backgrounds, but because this is what Christ has called us to do.

*Phil Enns, Toronto, ON*

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