



## **The Conrad Grebel Review**

Volume 33, Number 1, Winter 2015

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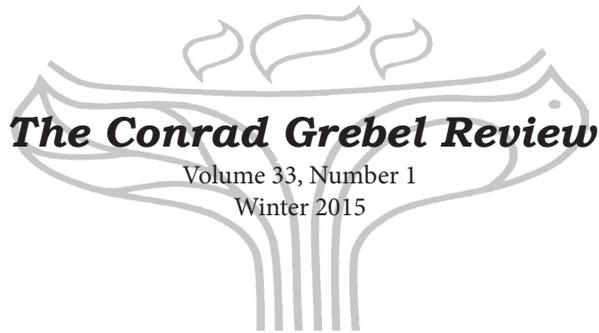
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*Cover photo shows Mennonite women selling items and food at the Relief Sale in New Hamburg, Ontario, May 30, 1970. Credit: David L. Hunsberger (1928-2005)/Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Nearly 6,000 of Hunsberger's photographs are in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College and can be viewed online at [archives.mhsc.ca](http://archives.mhsc.ca).*

## Foreword

We are pleased to present in this issue the Winter 2014 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies given at Conrad Grebel University College. The Bechtel Lectures, a public series established at the College in 2000 through the generosity of Lester Bechtel, provide a forum for leading scholars and professionals to explore topics reflecting the breadth and depth of Mennonite history, identity, faith, and culture. While these lectures have traditionally comprised two presentations by one person, the Winter 2014 lectures were presented by two speakers, Steven M. Nolt and Royden Loewen. Previous lecturers have included Terry Martin, Stanley Hauerwas, Rudy Wiebe, Nancy Heisey, Fernando Enns, James Urry, Sandra Birdsell, Alfred Neufeld, Ched Myers and Elaine Enns, Ernst Hamm, Roger Epp, and John D. Roth. We are equally pleased to offer in this issue an article on the theology of Stanley Hauerwas in relation to Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, an article on martial arts as a model for nonviolence, and an array of book reviews.

*Jeremy M. Bergen*  
Editor

*Stephen A. Jones*  
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## Amish Stories, Images, and Identities: Two Windows and a Mirror on Contemporary Conversations

*Steven M. Nolt*

In the early 1950s a young woman named Gertrude Enders Huntington was pursuing a Ph.D. in anthropology at Yale University.<sup>1</sup> As she considered possible dissertation topics, her professors urged her to study the Amish “before they died out.” At mid-century the reigning assumption was that the Old Order Anabaptist group was in its last generation and certain to disappear. Indeed, one of her professors “was convinced that such a rigid religious orientation was certain to create serious mental illness, which certainly would contribute to the death of their culture.”<sup>2</sup>

The Yale faculty proved to be poor prognosticators. In 1950 there were some 27,000 Amish in the United States and the Canadian province of Ontario. Today there are more than 290,000 horse-and-buggy-driving Amish, and their population doubles every 20 years. Retention rates of youth, which had been 60-70 percent in the mid-20th century, are now 85 percent and higher.<sup>3</sup> As a Quaker, Enders Huntington had more confidence in the staying power of religious dissenters. She did not believe the story her professors used to narrate reality and, although she knew that cultures are not static, she did not expect the Amish she interviewed in Holmes County, Ohio, to be the last remnant of a dying people.<sup>4</sup> Sixty years later

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the author’s Winter 2014 Bechtel Lecture at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Enders Huntington, lecture at Pennsylvania State University, Nov. 5, 2009; her papers and Amish research files from her years of teaching at the University of Michigan were being donated to the Penn State archives that day.

<sup>3</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, and Steven M. Nolt, *The Amish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 155-58, 162-64, 168-70. For the most recent population numbers, see the “Statistics” tab at [www2.etown.edu/amishstudies/](http://www2.etown.edu/amishstudies/).

<sup>4</sup> Assimilation was a dominant framework in the 1950s, and owed its popularity to more than simply melting pot mythology. Demographically, the foreign-born as a percentage of the US population had fallen to a record low (a result of strict immigration laws), so academics were taken with studying social acclimation of minority groups no longer reinforced by newcomers and often cut off from cultures-of-origin by travel limitations of the cold war. Ideologically,

Enders Huntington recalled that the Amish “were considered stupid and were universally disliked. They were backward and they impeded progress for everyone.” But because she did not accept as inevitable the Western story of progress, she was able to produce a thesis that remains a work of academic substance and significance more than a half-century later.<sup>5</sup>

The stories we tell matter.<sup>6</sup> This year’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations at Conrad Grebel University College have followed a theme of story and story-telling. How do we narrate our identities? What stories do we tell ourselves about ourselves, and what stories do we tell others about ourselves? What is the relationship between our many stories—the individual and the communal, the confessional and the ecumenical, the national and the transnational? As someone who studies Amish society and simultaneously counts Amish people as real friends and not merely “research subjects,” and as a Mennonite who, in some ways, recognizes the Amish as spiritual cousins, I think about the stories I tell about the Amish and about myself. How do we think about and represent one another in various contexts and to various audiences?

I invite you to join me in looking through three windows—or perhaps two windows and a mirror. First, I want to examine how North American, and especially US, tourism and popular culture have understood the Amish as a North American “other.” Second, I want to consider how some Amish have recently come to see themselves as North Americans through their sojourns in Mexico as short-term teachers in Low German Mennonite schools. Finally, I will look at how some Mennonite scholars have viewed the Amish as fellow Anabaptists, and I will reflect on my own representation of the Amish to others.

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meanwhile, the civil rights movement championed social integration and condemned giving any quarter to cultural separatism; it would take the coming of the Black Power movement to call such assumptions into question.

<sup>5</sup> Enders Huntington’s dissertation, which focused on the Amish of Holmes County, Ohio, remains an impressive three-volume work (though never formally published): “Dove at the Window: A Study of an Old Order Amish Community in Ohio,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> There is a vast literature on this topic. Two works that have influenced me are Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), and Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003).

**First Window: North American Views of the Amish<sup>7</sup>**

In 1900 the North American Amish population was small—numbering perhaps no more than 6,000—and attracted virtually no public notice. Observers would have been hard pressed to imagine the Amish developing a coast-to-coast reputation, let alone becoming cultural icons. Yet during the course of the 20th century, and without an organized public relations campaign, promotional budget, or celebrity spokesperson, a tiny and publicly self-effacing religious group became widely known. By the turn of the 21st century, comedians, cartoonists, and television scriptwriters could include offhand references with the assurance that audiences—even if misinformed about the details of Amish life—recognized “the Amish.”<sup>8</sup> That most North Americans came to regard the Amish in certain ways said more about the viewers than the objects of the mainstream’s gaze. Still, popular understandings—accurate or not—have an impact on ordinary Amish life, shaping everything from public policy to tourism. Amish identity in the 20th century, then, was hewn not only by Amish convictions but also by the stories that other people told about them.

As I have mentioned, today there are more than 290,000 horse-and-buggy Amish people in 30 US states and in Ontario. But it’s not simply the growing numbers that have raised the group’s profile. Despite remarkable growth, the Amish remain a tiny sliver of the general population. Instead,

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<sup>7</sup> Much of this first “window” is adapted from a section I originally drafted for chapter 11 of Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace. A Global Mennonite History: North America* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books; Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2012), 292-95.

<sup>8</sup> One relatively recent example is a story in the satirical publication *The Onion*, September 15, 2009: “Amish Woman Knew She Had Quilt Sale the Moment She Laid Eyes on Chicago Couple.” After my 2014 Bechtel lecture (on which this article is based), Professor Michael Driedger suggested that comedian David Letterman played an outsized role in bringing the Amish into popular culture by including them in his late-night Top Ten Lists, e.g., “Top 10 Amish Pick-up Lines” (1989) and “Top 10 Amish Spring Break Activities” (1991). I agree, and would add that Letterman’s use of the Amish also illustrates the reflexive, often dialectical relationship of mass media stories and images, since Letterman’s lists often build on a current event or news item. For example, his “Top Ten Signs Your Amish Teen is in Trouble” followed the 1998 Amish “drug bust” story (see mention, below) that was a news story in itself. Comedians such as Letterman had helped familiarize North Americans with the Amish, which then made events like the “drug bust” story more recognizable, which in turn provided more potential comedic material.

they have become a prism and lens, both distinguishing and focusing popular hopes and anxieties since at least the 1930s. Amish people first gained widespread attention in that decade as they became entangled in an effort to resist government involvement in local life.<sup>9</sup> In 1937 Amish parents in East Lampeter Township, Pennsylvania, organized opposition to the consolidation of rural schools and tried to halt construction of a new building.<sup>10</sup> Since most communities were fighting for a share of New Deal dollars, Amish opposition to federal funds was newsworthy, and their cause made the *New York Times*. The image in the news stories was of ill-informed people fighting a futile battle against the future. One article characterized Amish life as “drab.”<sup>11</sup>

An image of the Amish as stubborn traditionalists gained ground as the United States expanded programs that cared for the aged or dictated workplace dress. After 1955 some self-employed Amish farmers stubbornly refused to participate in public social welfare programs. They garnered sympathy from government critics such as the editors of *Reader’s Digest*, and eventually received exemptions in the US and Ontario.<sup>12</sup> As minority rights

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<sup>9</sup> Food historian William Woys Weaver has recently demonstrated that in the early 1930s, a few years prior to the East Lampeter school scuffle, cookbooks and restaurants in eastern Pennsylvania—all non-Amish in origin and ownership—were using drawings of Amish people and the name “Amish” itself to market regional cookery. See Weaver, *As American as Shoofly Pie: The Foodlore and Fakelore of Pennsylvania Dutch Cuisine* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 67, 126-37. Weaver’s is an important corrective to academic publications on the Amish image in popular culture, though I suggest that the *New York Times* articles on schools were the first extended national notoriety that the Amish received.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the East Lampeter conflict, see Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 164-68. I took all seven years of my primary schooling (1974-1981) in the 1938 building that the Amish of East Lampeter had opposed; the building was torn down in 2003.

<sup>11</sup> “Amishmen Battle to Keep Life Drab,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1937, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Peter J. Ferrara, “Social Security and Taxes,” 125-43, in *The Amish and the State*, 2nd edition, ed. Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 125-43; Clarence W. Hall, “The Revolt of the Plain People,” *Reader’s Digest*, November 1962, 74-78. See Dennis L. Thompson, “Canadian Government Relations,” 235-48, in the first edition (1993) of *The Amish and the State*; Thompson’s essay was not revised and included in the second edition. Examples of more recent conflicts with the US government are surveyed in Herman D. Bontrager, “Encounters with the State, 1990-2002,” in *The Amish and the State*, 2nd ed., 235-52.

and identity politics gained ground during the 1960s and '70s, the Amish won additional group-based exemptions. In this context, conflicts over compulsory high school attendance found resolution in a US Supreme Court ruling in 1972. Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote in defense of the Amish dissent, legitimating, as one observer put it, "the right not to be modern." This anti-modern image was closely tied to the logic of the ruling, since the justices' arguments were based largely on the assumption that, as backward farmers, the Amish had no need for advanced schooling.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the century, however, conflicts with the state often conjured popular appraisals of the Amish that were much less sympathetic. Could ultraconservative Amish refuse to immunize their children? Could they persist in using primitive plumbing that undercut public health codes? Local jurisdictions often said no. And when cases of child abuse surfaced, the public was decidedly unsympathetic to the Amish argument that their self-trained counselors and homespun treatment centers were better suited to punish perpetrators and handle victims' needs than were social service professionals, whom the Amish kept at bay.<sup>14</sup>

Another set of popular images revolved around Amish aversion to the latest forms of technology. As rural electrification, telephone cooperatives, and agricultural mechanization became common in the early 20th century, Amish refusal to connect to public utilities and to buy cars began setting them apart from their rural neighbors. After World War II, most Amish refused tractor farming, even though agricultural extension agents encouraged them to "get out of the mud." Working with horses kept their agriculture small scale, and although some Amish adopted hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers, their farming remained labor intensive.<sup>15</sup> More visibly, horse-and-

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas J. Meyers, "Education and Schooling," 87-107, in *The Amish and the State*, 2nd ed.; see also contemporary essays and the court ruling in Albert N. Keim, *Compulsory Education and the Amish: The Right Not to Be Modern* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Nadya Labi, "The Gentle People," *Legal Affairs*, January-February 2005, [www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2005/feature\\_labi\\_janfeb05.msp](http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2005/feature_labi_janfeb05.msp); and the assumptions and argument in William A. Fischel, "Do Amish One-Room Schools Make the Grade? The Dubious Data of *Wisconsin v Yoder*," *University of Chicago Law Review* 79 (Winter 2012): 107-29.

<sup>15</sup> "Urge Amish Use Tractors to Boost Yield of Wheat," newspaper clipping dated Saturday, April 27, 1946, 5, likely from a Lancaster, Pennsylvania, newspaper; copy pasted inside a copy of Bernice Steinfeldt, *The Amish of Lancaster County: A Brief, but Truthful Account of the*

buggy travel marked the Amish as technophobes in nations committed to automobile ownership and multi-million-dollar interstate and provincial highway systems. Indeed, this narrative of aversion to technology may be why the Amish loom larger in popular culture than do the Hutterites. The Hutterites' rejection of private property is arguably a more fundamental rejection of mainstream values, but that can seem abstract when Hutterites are buying and using all the latest farm equipment and operating large scale agro-enterprises. In contrast, the fact that most Amish reject many forms of technology, although they embrace private property, suggests a people strikingly out of step with neighbors who rely on smartphones.

The story of the Amish as fossilized throwbacks of another era was itself a dynamic narrative. Suddenly, in the 1970s, the image of the Amish as irrelevant relics was flipped upside down. The energy crisis and an emerging environmental movement created an atmosphere in which they were hailed as *ahead* of their time, keepers of traditional wisdom in a new atomic age of science and suburbia. Activists certain that "small is beautiful" applauded the Amish as a people who lived off the grid. Indeed, some outsiders began to see the Amish as Luddites opposed to all technology. As such images gained currency in ensuing decades, observers were shocked or indignant to learn that Amish youth used in-line skates and Amish contractors used cell phones on job sites.<sup>16</sup>

Inadvertently, popular understandings of the Amish as technophobes also created a mystique about their products—in effect, an Amish brand—for consumers looking for distinctive goods that bespoke a plain, homespun aesthetic. The appeal of the Amish brand, mostly promoted by non-Amish entrepreneurs, fueled small business growth and a boom in Amish-built furniture and other woodcrafts. Ironically, this demand often encouraged

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*Actual Life and Customs of the Most Unique Class of People in the United States* (Lancaster, PA: Arthur G. Steinfeldt, 1937), housed in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania Mennonite Historical Society. On the dramatic transformation of agriculture during the mid-20th century, see John L. Shover, *First Majority, Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1976), 77-79.

<sup>16</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973); David Chen, "Amish Going Modern, Sort of, About Skating," *New York Times*, August 11, 1996; Howard Rheingold, "Look Who's Talking," *Wired*, January 1999, [www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.01/amish.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.01/amish.html).

Amish entrepreneurs to adopt new technologies in order to boost production and match consumer appetites.<sup>17</sup>

The consumption of Amish products with their enticing brand was intertwined with Amish-themed tourism. By the mid-1950s middle class tourism was mushrooming. Bus and car tours promised views of an old-fashioned way of life for east coast urbanites living in a post-war society undergoing dramatic social change. The Amish Farm and House, the first Amish-focused attraction to charge admission, opened in 1955.<sup>18</sup> Visitors came to gaze at old style farmers living not far from sprawling post-war metropolises peopled with the children and grandchildren of East European immigrants nostalgic for a peasant past.

The same year the Broadway musical *Plain and Fancy* by Joseph Stein, later famous for *Fiddler on the Roof*, presented the Amish as sturdy yeomen who also embodied self-determination and patriotic progressivism. The script allowed Papa Yoder to critique Cold War society—“Look at your world. Poor people you have plenty, and worried people and afraid”—but in the end, Papa admitted that his people would sooner or later surrender sectarianism and join the mainstream.<sup>19</sup>

Nostalgia and avant-garde art merged in the 1970s and stirred an interest in Amish quilts. In 1971 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City included Amish quilts in an exhibition titled *Abstract Design in American Quilts*, which treated functional handicraft as boldly designed modern art. Collectors began flocking to Amish settlements to buy old quilts, which one scholar dubbed “America’s first abstract art.” The sudden rush birthed a new cottage industry among Amish women, and reshaped their quilting tradition as they adapted to demands for contemporary design. “We have to keep up with what colors are fashionable so we can make the changes from one year to the next,” said one. Within a few years,

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<sup>17</sup> Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> David Luthy, “The Origin and Growth of Amish Tourism,” 113-29, in *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*, ed. Donald B. Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1994), 113-29. See a case study from eastern Ohio: Susan L. Trollinger, *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> David L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001), 107-14; quote, 109.

Doug Tompkins, founder of the Esprit clothing company, had filled his San Francisco headquarters with Amish quilts that seemed at once both old-fashioned and cutting-edge.<sup>20</sup>

Hollywood boosted the Amish profile in 1985, thanks to the Academy Award-winning film *Witness*, starring Harrison Ford. The unlikely plot revolved around a clash of cultures that occurred when a hardened police detective, on the run from corrupt cops, hid out on an Amish farm.<sup>21</sup> *Witness* presented Amish people as peaceful, naïve, and totally unfamiliar with modern ways or technology of any sort, creating a popular image of them as principled rural craftsmen in a society undergoing a revolution of personal computers and telecommunication. This same image of naiveté propelled the sales of millions of Amish-themed romance novels in the opening years of the 21st century, offering, as critic Valarie Weaver-Zercher has put it, “chaste texts and chaste protagonists living within a chaste subculture” to modern readers weary of hyper-sexualized mass society.<sup>22</sup>

Popular media had been complicit in shaping public perceptions of Amish identity, but two events near the turn of the new century highlighted how the Amish had become media icons. In 1998 and 2006 high-profile crime stories wove together images of pastoral innocence with hard-edged drama. In 1998 two Amish-reared young men linked to a Pagans motorcycle gang cocaine distribution ring were caught selling drugs to their Amish friends in eastern Pennsylvania. This remarkable collage of images made the “Amish drug bust story” a sensation, but it also revealed that some unbaptized Amish teens lived very differently from their parents, a fact that generated intense media interest. Overnight, *rumspringa*—the Pennsylvania Dutch term for the years when teenagers “run around” and socialize with peers before joining the church—found its way into the vocabulary of reporters.<sup>23</sup> Soon, an independent film entitled *Devil’s Playground* tracked

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<sup>20</sup> Janneken Smucker, *Amish Quilts: Crafting an American Icon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 77-70, 105-12, 167.

<sup>21</sup> D. L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination*, 152-80.

<sup>22</sup> Valerie Weaver-Zercher, *Thrill of the Chaste: The Allure of Amish Romance Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013), 13. The theme of naiveté also spawned spoofs of over-sexed Amish that inverted the chaste stereotype, as for example in the 2008 Hollywood film *Sex Drive*.

<sup>23</sup> Diane Zimmerman Umble, “‘Wicked Truth’: The Amish, the Media, and Telling the Truth,”

drug use among a few Amish teens in northern Indiana. Other media stories focused on alleged child abuse and animal abuse at Amish hands; reality TV shows, such as “Breaking Amish” followed. The theme in this string of exposés was hypocrisy: the Amish had been too good to be true; in fact, they were not very good at all.<sup>24</sup>

In 2006 another crime story propelled public perceptions in a different direction. On October 2, a non-Amish man entered an Amish school near Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, and shot ten girls, five of them fatally, before killing himself. News media swarmed to the crossroads village to cover the horrific event in a place of pastoral beauty. But within hours, a story of lost innocence shifted to one of bewilderment as reporters struggled to understand how the Amish community seemed almost immediately to forgive the shooter and reached out in compassion to members of his family, hugging them at his burial and treating them as fellow victims.<sup>25</sup>

This incident thrust images of the Amish as an unbelievably forgiving people into hundreds of stories around the world. Many writers saw the Amish as living Christian values that many people professed but few practiced. For their part, the Amish were as uncomfortable with this new status as they had been with the drug bust story, though for different reasons. “The news reports have set a high standard for us,” one confided. “We don’t want to be exalted,” another explained. “Now we’re under the public eye. . . . We wonder: can we Amish people really be what the public expects of us now?”<sup>26</sup>

What does the public expect of the Amish now? The fluctuating answers, as religion and media scholar David Weaver-Zercher has argued, have oscillated between two poles. North American popular culture views

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221-41, in *The Amish and the Media*, eds. Diane Zimmerman Umble and David L. Weaver-Zercher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), 221-41; Michael A. Goldstein, “Party On, Amos,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, August 1997, 137-44. On *rumspringa*, see Richard Stevick, *Growing Up Amish: The Rumspringa Years*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> *Devil’s Playground*, directed by Lucy Walker (New York: Wellspring Media, 2002, videodisk); Ariel Leve, “Back to the Future,” *Sunday Times Magazine* (London), January 30, 2005, 20-27; “TLC Takes Amish out of the Country and into the City in New Groundbreaking Series,” press release, August 2, 2012, [www.thefutoncritic.com](http://www.thefutoncritic.com).

<sup>25</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

the Amish as both a “saving remnant”—a simple, pious community living life as it once was and still could be—and simultaneously as a “fallen people”—the subject of exposés and the butt of jokes purporting to reveal the real and repressed nature of their life. Perhaps these conflicting interpretations always go together, because we moderns want reassurance that we need not feel guilty if we admire, but then quietly dismiss, the Amish way.<sup>27</sup>

### **Second Window: Amish Images of Themselves as North Americans**

The stories North Americans tell about the Amish are varied, even contradictory. North American society—if it may be described in the singular—is a complex thing. Nevertheless, Amish people have tended to speak of their host society in singular terms, owing to the two-kingdom outlook animating their traditional Anabaptist worldview. The Amish are “not of this world,” and to the degree that horse-and-buggy Amish live only in the US and Ontario, “this world” is North America and they do not readily identify themselves with it. At the same time, they have not developed the sort of transnational sensibilities found among traditionalist Low German Mennonites who sojourn throughout Latin America and North America and who routinely emigrate across political borders.<sup>28</sup> All of this makes recent Amish ventures into Mexico fascinating, especially as participants recount their work in Low German Mennonite schools, a story casting the Amish narrators as North Americans.

“When visiting the Mennonites in Mexico, our neighbor to the south, we see a culture similar to ours in some ways, yet very different in others,” says an anonymous participant. “Not only have they adapted to a climate and terrain quite different from ours, but they also interact with the Spanish and Indian cultures around them.”<sup>29</sup> These observations come from one of more

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<sup>27</sup> D. L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination*, 185-96.

<sup>28</sup> Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: “Canadian” Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013). The last Amish church in Europe dissolved in 1937, but there was never an old order movement among European Amish in any case. The so-called Beachy Amish-Mennonites, who engage in verbal evangelism and do not live within the old order orbit, have members in a number of African and Latin American nations.

<sup>29</sup> *Called to Mexico: Bringing Hope and Literacy to the Old Colony Mennonites* (Nappanee, IN: Old Colony Mennonite Support, 2011), 327. This book is a compilation of many short essays, some anonymously authored and others with attributed writers, some original pieces, and

than a hundred Amish women and men who, since 2000, have spent from several months to several years teaching in Old Colony Mennonite schools in Mexico.<sup>30</sup> This “Old Colony Mennonite Support” network, as it is known in Amish circles, is a recent example of Amish engagement with the world beyond their own settlements. The letters and publications of participants reveal, among other things, a new view of themselves as North Americans.

The involvement of Amish teachers in Mexico bears some novel marks of mission and international development work, all but unknown in Old Order circles, yet it also expresses and is constrained by Amish history and cultural values.<sup>31</sup> Given its unusual character, this work requires more than a bit of background and explanation before its implications for Amish identity become clear. The roots of the project stretch back to 1995, when Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) staff facilitated a learning tour to northern Mexico for MCC’s Amish constituents living in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. The group visited Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde communities in which the MCC had contacts, and members of these “plain” Russian Mennonites and Amish sensed a kinship that warmed into ongoing contacts apart from MCC channels.<sup>32</sup> Amish woman Priscilla Stoltzfus was surprised that “the Old Colony Mennonite way of thinking seems to be more like the Amish than I would have expected from a group called Mennonite.” For her, the term “Mennonite” connoted “the more liberal side,” but the people she worked alongside in Mexico were “entirely as strict as the Amish,” which she took to be a good thing.<sup>33</sup>

The next year, Mexican Old Colony Mennonite leaders visited Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The Amish remembered these reciprocal meetings this way: “The purpose of this was to help these people be more open-minded. It was also an effort to introduce some cottage industry as an alternative to their crop failure. They now saw the need to improve their

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others reprinted from newsletters.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-401, lists Amish participants in the program.

<sup>31</sup> Mission work in a conventional sense is highly unusual and even discouraged in Old Order Amish circles. See Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 74, 366-67.

<sup>32</sup> Atlee Raber and Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Who is My Neighbor?” in *Called to Mexico*; “History Report. Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico,” [1], 23-33, author’s files; “From the Diary of Our Mexico Trip,” *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* 2, no. 1, May 1999, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” in *Called to Mexico*, 300.

schools and farming practices. They also had a lot of questions concerning church matters.”<sup>34</sup> An immediate outcome of the exchange was Amish interest in economic development. Concerned with what they saw as the Mexicans’ poverty, they raised money to allow Old Colony Mennonites to buy more land, improve their dairy herds, drill wells, and construct a cheese plant to offer an outlet for their milk.<sup>35</sup> These development projects moved forward with Amish assistance, but over time the focus of the relationship became Amish support for reforming Old Colony Mennonite school curricula and pedagogy.<sup>36</sup>

Reforming Old Colony schooling became the focus because it connected deeply with both groups. On the Old Colony side, parochial schooling was at the heart of their identity—a reason for leaving the Russian Empire and *the* reason for moving from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s.<sup>37</sup> It was an area of life most closely regulated by their *ordnung* and served as a marker, much like the horse-and-buggy for the Amish. They resisted suggestions from assimilated North American Mennonite development workers that they change their system of education; but they felt that Amish educators, as “plain people” also committed to separation from the world and successfully dissenting from modern curricula and high-tech pedagogy, might have something valuable to say. On the Amish side, parochial schooling was a point of humble pride. Having won the legal right in the 1950s-1970s to educate their children in their own way, Amish parents had set up scores of schools across the US and Ontario. By the 1990s two or three or more generations had been educated in these schools and had gone on to prove their mettle as operators of thriving small businesses.<sup>38</sup> If there was anything the Amish were willing to talk about, it was their satisfaction with the schools.

In 2000 an Amish-organized Old Colony Support Committee began

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<sup>34</sup> “History Report. Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico,” [1], author’s files; “Old Colony Mennonites Visit U.S.,” *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* 2, no. 2, November 1999, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Campo 70 Cheese Factory” in *Called to Mexico*, 378-83; “Campeche Heifer Project” in *ibid.*, 384-86; “Wells in Campeche State” in *ibid.*, 387-88; “Campo 4 Dairy Co-op” in *ibid.*, 389-91.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Helmuth, “Pioneering the New System Schools,” in *Called to Mexico*, 108-11.

<sup>37</sup> Loewen, *Village among Nations*.

<sup>38</sup> Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish*, 250-71.

sending Amish teachers—virtually all young women with some teaching experience in the US—to Mexico to train Old Colony teachers for existing Mexican Mennonite schools and, in some cases, to start new schools on the “Amish model,” which meant graded classes, phonics-based reading, pedagogy other than rote memorization, the use of workbooks, and the posting of charts and pictures on the walls.<sup>39</sup> During the first few terms, Amish teachers interacted with Old Colony teachers apart from students and outside the school day. Beginning in 2002, Amish teachers “were able to be in schools while they were in session, thus, being able to teach the teachers how to use the new system successfully.”<sup>40</sup>

Logistically, the Amish teacher arrives in a cooperating colony, instructs for several weeks with the Old Colony teacher observing, assisting, and slowly taking more responsibility until the Amish teacher turns the class entirely over to the Old Colony teacher for ten days. Generally, at this point, Amish teachers return to the US to participate in their home church’s fall or spring communion service before returning to Mexico for another stint. Bus and train travel facilitate this shuttling back and forth, and often an older Amish couple accompanies a group of teachers, acting as “house parents,” and providing meals and laundry service to allow teachers to engage in full days of work often stretching into evenings and Saturdays.<sup>41</sup> Not all Amish groups participate in the program—more progressive Amish settlements, such as Nappanee and LaGrange, Indiana; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and segments of Holmes County, Ohio are overrepresented, while highly traditional and especially conservative Amish churches show no interest—nor do all Mexican Old Colony communities host teachers.<sup>42</sup>

However, for the several scores of Amish who have spent time in

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<sup>39</sup> One in-depth account of a teacher’s experience over several years in Las Bombas and Nueva Holanda colonies in Chihuahua State is [Rachel Miller], *A Vision for the Journey: An Amish Schoolteacher’s Mission among the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico* (Sugar creek, OH: Carlisle Printing, 2008). See also “Guidelines for Teachers Serving in Mexico” and “Guidelines for the ‘Main Teacher;” in author’s file. In addition to the typical schools described here, Amish teachers in Nueva Holanda also started a school for special needs children; see Lizzie Hershberger’s account in *Called to Mexico*, 233-34.

<sup>40</sup> “History Report. Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico,” [3], author’s files.

<sup>41</sup> “Serving as House Parents” (various authors) in *Called to Mexico*, 271-80.

<sup>42</sup> Colonies participating in the network include Manitoba, El Camello, Las Bombas, Nueva Holanda, and Moctezuma.

Mexico in roughly the last dozen years, the experience has been important, judging by published letters, accounts in Support Committee newsletters, and memoirs circulating in Amish homes. Indeed, the newsletters' influence reaches well beyond the circle of teachers and house parents, sharing the views of participants with Amish readers of all ages in many communities.<sup>43</sup> Reading these sources<sup>44</sup> reveals a complex Amish self-understanding, one that not only recognizes historical and theological links with Old Colony Mennonites but also toggles between a sense of North American superiority and a hint of cultural relativism—both of which, one senses, are products of spending time in Mexico and new departures of thought for the teachers and those back home avidly reading their letters.

Among these new departures is a sometimes subtle but clear sense of North American superiority. Traditionally, Amish people have not represented themselves as North Americans, but as standing apart from mainstream culture, politically and otherwise. They typically see themselves as subjects, rather than as citizens, and few wax patriotic even when they routinely express the sentiment that “We have much to be thankful for to live in a land of religious freedom” and should “pray for our rulers.”<sup>45</sup> Experiences outside North America, however, yield different sensibilities. “Our government and the American culture, even with its faults, is seen in a different light upon having seen Mexican conditions,” wrote one. “In the United States, honesty is expected in the business world even among non-Christians. Up-front dealings are the norm instead of merely a possibility.” Similarly, having lived in Mexico, “we value in a new way our [U.S.] police forces and emergency services.”<sup>46</sup>

Amish interaction with Hispanic Mexicans is quite limited, given

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<sup>43</sup> *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* began in 1998, and may be contacted at P. O. Box 150, Nappanee, IN 46550.

<sup>44</sup> The presentation here is built very largely on these print sources, although I have conducted two interviews with participants.

<sup>45</sup> *1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life* (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishers, 1992), 157.

<sup>46</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” in *Called to Mexico*, 292; see also Atlee Raber in *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* 9, no. 1, Summer 2008, 3; and Samuel and Rachel Chupp, “911? Do It Yourself” in *Called to Mexico*, 337-38; Elsie Yoder, “This is Mexico,” in *ibid.*, 229; and anon., “Mexican Culture,” in *ibid.*, 358.

the teachers' roles and residency in Mennonite colonies. But life in these communities offers plenty grist for musing. Amish sojourners found Old Colony schools surprisingly deficient. They try to be polite in their reports, but some of their assessment is blunt.<sup>47</sup> The schools rely far too much on rote memorization of the High German catechism and on a hymnal. Unlike the Amish, whose first language is Pennsylvania Dutch but whose schooling is largely in English (the local vernacular), the Old Colony Mennonites' first language is Low German but their schooling is in High German (which they rarely used) rather than Spanish. Moreover, school attendance seemed episodic and unenforced, and parents took too little interest in schooling.

Amish teachers, whose rejection of high school had put them in risk of jail time in North America in the 1950s and '60s, were suddenly placed in the position of encouraging more rigorous schooling and building a case for the centrality of formal education! In letters home, teachers write repeatedly of the value of education, their thanks to past generations of Amish parents who stressed that value, and the blessings of public truancy laws that *require* children to attend school and do not leave such matters to chance. This is a new narrative of the Amish by the Amish.

As well, Amish teachers—all young women—give muted but discernible criticism to the place of women in Old Colony Mennonite society. Accurately or not, they see their Old Colony peers as having limited autonomy. They note that these women do not vote in church business meetings (Amish women do) and that small businesses run by women seem rare, whereas retail and wholesale establishments owned and managed by Amish women have become common in the open economy of contemporary North America. As teachers, the young Amish women spent months living abroad and offering leadership, creative ideas, and direction to male-centered Old Colony school boards. They write monthly reports to the Old Colony Support Committee, some of which are published in the quarterly newsletter.<sup>48</sup>

The sense of northern superiority noted above is conveyed in the subtitle of an Amish-published book of school teacher experiences: "Bringing Hope and Literacy to the Old Colony Mennonites." Negative descriptions of

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<sup>47</sup> Examples throughout *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter*.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Stoltzfus, "Working with the Board and Teachers," in *Called to Mexico*, 264-69.

Old Colony communities also serve as a sort of moral warning to Amish churches. Low morals among Old Colony Mennonites “cause us [teachers] to come home and look at our own issues in a different light. We realize more fully the dangers of allowing or tolerating ungodly conduct among our people, even in small ways, such as reading books with low morals, in filthy language and smoking, in disrespect for parents and the ministry, and wearing revealing clothing.” Said another, “I recognize that in all cultures there are strengths and weaknesses, and in order to maintain anything of value one dare not become lax.”<sup>49</sup>

Such comments suggest the second theme in Amish reporting from Mexico, namely the self-criticism that comes from seeing oneself from another vantage point. Unlike critiques of Low German Mexicans leveled by assimilated North American Mennonites, Amish criticism of this group is wedded to a sense that “each of us need to search our own heart and see where we stand . . . and where we personally need to ‘clean house’ in our heart.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, using Mexican Old Colony Mennonites as a foil works only because the Amish also see themselves as near kin facing the same challenges and temptations. Unlike assimilated Mennonites, the Amish who venture to Mexico have no interest in leading Old Colony people to an evangelical conversion experience.<sup>51</sup> Amish writers accept the Old Colony worldview and basic theological framework, and so their criticisms quickly turn back on themselves. For example, with regard to illiteracy, one teacher wrote, “there are many things to be learned by experience when a person cannot read. Though many of them [Old Colony Mennonites] can’t read, they are by no means dull people. We learn that they grasp solid Christian concepts that we think we’d never have learned if we had not read.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” and anon., quoted in “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” both in *Called to Mexico*, 294.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Amish supporters of the school project invoke the wise admonition of Manitoba Colony Ältester Franz Banman (1927-2009), signaling their respect for Old Colony traditions. A handful of Old Colony Mennonites have married into Amish families in Ontario and joined the Amish church, but these cases do not represent religious conversion in the sense that evangelical and mainline Mennonites use the term; names of such individuals appear in a letter from David Luthy, Aylmer, Ontario, Sept. 19, 2011, author’s file; see also *Called to Mexico*, 66-74, on the experience of John Fehr.

<sup>52</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” in *Called to Mexico*, 291-92.

Amish humility theology perhaps even prompts an Old Order version of cultural relativism: “My own way of doing things—the way I grew up with—no longer seems like the only way to do it,” reflected one teacher. “It’s funny how prejudiced we can become, how defensive we can be of our own ideas and opinions and methods. Experiencing a different culture showed me how narrow-minded I was.”<sup>53</sup> In some cases, spiritual concerns are framed in ways that transcend cultural differences—a somewhat more abstract notion of identity: “Most important, we learn to understand better about God’s unconditional love for us and His will for us to love one another in the same way.”<sup>54</sup>

Also common is the Amish observation that life in Mexico is slower-paced and that northern Amish need to learn to slow down, avoid the trap of escalating commercialism, and spend more time visiting one another.<sup>55</sup> “In Mexico they look at time differently than we do. There is always time for interruptions. After all, what is time? A day later works just as well. . . . It would be nice to always have time for one another, wouldn’t it? We could use some of that mentality.”<sup>56</sup> Old Colony Mennonites offer an image of life as it once was in agrarian North America, and Amish who care about maintaining tradition take note.

Going to Mexico has also inspired northern Amish to give more attention to their own history, stories of migration, and appreciation of language. Teachers express surprise at how transnational stories of migration and of being “strangers and pilgrims” *in* this world shapes Old Colony identity, and contrast that with the less historicized “separation *from* the world” trope more often invoked in Amish circles.<sup>57</sup> Newsletters regularly feature articles about Old Colony history and Russian Mennonite history generally, and end by urging readers to re-familiarize themselves with their own Amish story.<sup>58</sup> “Those who return from Mexico seem, without fail, to testify to a fresh realization of our priceless heritage,” wrote one. Another

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<sup>53</sup> Anonymous quotes cited in *Called to Mexico*, 295.

<sup>54</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” 295.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous quotes cited in *Called to Mexico*, 290-91; also the questions in *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous quotes cited in *ibid.*, 293.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Sarah Bontrager, “Visiting Dr. Gonzáles,” in *Called to Mexico*, 358.

<sup>58</sup> For example, Aaron Hershberger, “Who Are These People?” in *Called to Mexico*, 1-19, as well as frequent pieces in *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter*.

person returned from Mexico “with a longing to thank his parents (who are no longer living) for what they did” in passing on the faith.<sup>59</sup>

Old Colony Mennonites’ commitment to German instruction—though drawing Amish criticism when German is the only mode of instruction—also inspires northern Amish to view their own dialect of Pennsylvania Dutch as “a real way of speaking, not something ignorant and unlearned.”<sup>60</sup> The need to work multilingually—often translating among High German, Low German, Pennsylvania Dutch, English, and Spanish—has made Amish teachers aware of the importance of language and created a sort of “linguistic turn” in their own thinking.<sup>61</sup>

The Old Colony Support project is less than fifteen years old, and its future remains to be seen.<sup>62</sup> The experience has involved too few people and for a too brief duration to have spawned any real transnational identity, although it has already refined Amish identity for participants and their communities. By bringing teachers into contact with other Anabaptist groups in different political, environmental, and cultural contexts, those connected to the Old Colony Support network still see themselves as different from assimilated Mennonites—plainness has been affirmed—but also as decidedly North American in ways they had not anticipated or accented in the past.

### **A Window and a Mirror: My View of the Amish**

Thus far I have reported on how North Americans have narrated Amish identity and how some Amish have begun to tell their own story as North Americans, in both cases speaking as an omniscient observer. Of course, I

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<sup>59</sup> A house parent, quoted in *Called in Mexico*, 298.

<sup>60</sup> Priscilla Stoltzfus, “Effects on an Amish Schoolteacher,” in *ibid.*, 296.

<sup>61</sup> “Lively Languages” (various authors), in *ibid.*, 303-26.

<sup>62</sup> In recent years the program has expanded into the US as some Old Colony Mennonites have moved into Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma from Mexico, and Amish teachers are assisting with schools in these states; see “Teaching with the Old Colony Mennonites in Kansas,” *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* 12, no. 4, Winter 2011-2012, 2. Other more recent initiatives include the publication since 2007 of a quarterly periodical, *Geschichten aus dem Alltag*, of mostly Amish-authored articles for Old Colony readers; and the publication since 2011 of Amish-authored children’s books in German translation for use in the Mexican schools. These books were originally published in English by the Amish publisher Pathway Publishing of Aylmer, Ontario; see Joseph Stoll, “Update on German Book Project,” *Old Colony Mennonite Support Newsletter* 12, no. 2, Summer 2011, 1.

speak and write from my own social and theological location, with particular interests in mind. That's always the case, and cannot be avoided. The questions we have shape the stories we tell. For example, Orland Gingerich's *The Amish of Canada* was in many ways an attempt to explain who the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference was, where it came from, and why it differed from other Mennonite bodies in Ontario, rather than an exposition of the lives of those Canadians who, today, call themselves Amish.<sup>63</sup> This kind of perspective-taking is as it should be, since our academic work has value to the degree that we ask questions that matter. And we ask better questions when we are honest about who we are. The burden is greater for Mennonite scholars, since mainline Mennonites have often used the Amish to enhance ourselves in a game of let's-compare-my-highest-ideals-with-your-worst-examples. Such games may even be cloaked in the language of pastoral concern, but the desire to put the Amish in their place so as to assure ourselves of *our* place, inevitably surfaces.

What then is the relationship—professionally, personally, ethically—of Mennonite scholars and the Anabaptist subjects they study?<sup>64</sup> This question is hardly unique to Amish studies, but it emerged with clarity in the work of John A. Hostetler (1918-2001), an Old Order Amish-reared man who opted for Mennonite church membership and taught anthropology for many years at Temple University in Philadelphia. Hostetler was the first academic to publish widely on the Amish, and from the early 1960s to the '90s was a leading authority, informing millions of people—from academics to tourists—through his widely disbursed writing.<sup>65</sup> Given Hostetler's prominence in introducing the Amish story to those who have followed him, I have found myself thinking about his interpretations as I recognize my own.

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<sup>63</sup> Orland Gingerich, *The Amish of Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1972).

<sup>64</sup> See the thoughtful reflections of Diane Zimmerman Umble in "Who Are You? The Identity of the Outsider Within," in *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, ed. Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002), 39-52.

<sup>65</sup> David L. Weaver-Zercher, ed., *Writing the Amish: The Worlds of John A. Hostetler* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2005), 5-35. Earlier in his career, Hostetler taught at the University of Alberta (1959-1962), the home province of his wife, Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, and also conducted important work in Hutterite studies.

Hostetler's relationship with the Amish was complex. In both Pennsylvania and Iowa, the states in which John was born and came of age, his father fell under the bishops' *bann*. Privately yet directly John would criticize the bishops in uncompromising correspondence over his father's treatment, but then spend years sympathetically explaining the practice of shunning to tens of thousands of readers.<sup>66</sup> As a young man, Hostetler matriculated at Goshen College, where he was influenced by the 1940s interest in the "Anabaptist Vision," later critiquing aspects of its self-assured posture in his Ph.D. dissertation and trying to make sense of Amish life with the latest anthropological theories, invoking such notions as "little communities" (Robert Redfield) and "high-context culture" (Edward Hall).<sup>67</sup>

Hostetler was a student of Harold Bender—dedicating his early works to the dean of mid-century "recovery" of the Anabaptist Vision—and despite criticizing self-confident neo-Anabaptism, he remained deeply indebted to Bender's narrative of Anabaptist origins and meaning. The Swiss Brethren Schleithem Confession, which Hostetler often referred to as the "charter," was the interpretive key for understanding the relationship of latter-day Mennonite and Amish groups. To the degree that Schleithem commitments could be identified in a group's 20th-century practice, the group fit under an Anabaptist "big tent" among theological cousins. In locating Amish on a broad Mennonite spectrum, Hostetler ticked off adult baptism, nonresistance, non-swearing of oaths, and resistance to holding public office as points of similarity. "The Amish today differ from the Mennonites mainly in the extent to which external changes have affected the groups," he wrote in 1963.<sup>68</sup> Differences were mostly surface variations on deeper "charter" commitments.

I wonder if Hostetler's telling the Amish story as a subplot of Swiss Anabaptism was a way that enabled him to make sense of his own ecclesial evolution, and to signal to his still-Amish relatives that he had not abandoned

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 103-106, 154-60; John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), 85-87, 345-48.

<sup>67</sup> John A. Hostetler, "The Sociology of Mennonite Evangelism," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1953); John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 1st ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1963), 9.

<sup>68</sup> Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 1st ed., 50.

the faith or betrayed his heritage.<sup>69</sup> I also wonder how his neo-Anabaptist narrative has shaped my interpretation. Unlike Hostetler, I didn't grow up in an Amish home and have no Amish ancestry, although I did have Amish neighbors in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. My Mennonite church was not much interested in the Amish, and most members would likely have found the Old Orders slightly or even distressingly embarrassing with their old-fashioned ways and lack of interest in evangelism. My introduction to Old Order life came from the sympathetic scholarship of Goshen College historian Theron Schlabach and, soon after graduating from Goshen, from my work as a research assistant with sociologist Donald Kraybill, a former graduate student of Hostetler. Like Hostetler, both these scholars wrote from a broadly neo-Anabaptist perspective that situated the Amish under a "big tent" that included Mennonites of various stripes, Brethren in Christ, and Hutterites. Amish ways were distinctive in that scheme but also broadly expressive of values found throughout the tent. The Amish were first and foremost Anabaptists, so that although they expressed their faith in a different register, it was one that echoed familiar Mennonite convictions.<sup>70</sup>

While elements of these two scholars' orientation continue to shape my thinking about and relationship with the Amish, some of my views have changed over the past quarter-century. First, although I still find value in locating the Amish alongside Mennonites under an overarching Anabaptist canopy, I am increasingly aware that a great many Old Order Amish neither readily imagine that big tent nor tell their story as one chapter in a larger Mennonite narrative. In their telling, the relationship between Amish and Mennonites might be akin to the relationship that Bender described between Mennonites and Presbyterians: joint heirs of the Reformation, all Christians, but each group's story can easily be told without much reference to the other.

In some Amish settlements, my being a Mennonite is a point of interest for my interlocutors, but in just as many I might as well be Catholic or Jewish. For many Amish, I don't represent their story in a different register;

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<sup>69</sup> D.L. Weaver-Zercher, ed., *Writing the Amish*, 28, 60, 64, 67, 122.

<sup>70</sup> See the wonderfully argued chapter 8, "Keeping the Old Order," in Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 201-30; Donald B. Kraybill, *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010).

I'm simply not their story in any meaningful way and haven't been for a long time. Fifty years ago Hostetler could write that "most young people who leave the Amish group become Amish Mennonite or Mennonite"—something that is no longer true.<sup>71</sup> Given their population growth and geographic spread, more and more Amish now live in places with no meaningful connection to a Mennonite population, and urbanizing Mennonites are less apt to interact with Amish (except as tourists). Combined with declining Amish defection rates, the result is that there are very few formerly Amish people in Mennonite churches under age seventy. Common experiences at mid-century—especially Civilian Public Service during World War II—have faded. Moreover, dynamics within Amish society today often accentuate the distance. The fastest growing Amish subgroup, the so-called Swartzentruber Amish, is the most culturally conservative and the least apt, by some measures, to fit within the classical neo-Anabaptist framework or to care about either other Amish or Mennonites.

Here's an example of the inadequacy of the "big tent" model. A typical neo-Anabaptist interpretation of the Amish approach to technology explains their choices as a keen sociological response to modern life, in which the Amish take each piece of new technology and analyze it, asking: Will this strengthen our community or encourage individualism? Will it replace *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft*? The Amish are thought to employ roughly the same categories and assumptions as mainline Mennonite academic social critics. This sort of interpretation is not always incorrect, but as I have come to know, especially, the Swartzentruber Amish via my colleague Karen Johnson-Weiner (who has extraordinary contacts within Swartzentruber groups, and does not view the Amish through a neo-Anabaptist lens), such an interpretation is less satisfying. While technology and community are connected, the Amish logic often runs like this: "If we adopt technology X, then we will be out of fellowship with church district Y, and then who would our children marry? So we can't have X." Such concern reveals serious considerations but not necessarily of the sort framed by the individual-versus-community assumption that might animate the conversation among 21st-century neo-Anabaptists.

Likewise, a neo-Anabaptist theology of believer's baptism leads to

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<sup>71</sup> Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 1st ed., 214.

talking about the decision of children to join the Amish church. Yet for most Amish families the issue is whether children will leave. As I have become aware of the theological assumptions—my own included—behind the sterile language of “retention rates” and “defection rates,” I am more comfortable narrating Amish experiences in terms of children being “born Amish,” even though some Mennonites find such phrasing religiously offensive to their neo-Anabaptist ears. There is still adolescent agency in the Amish world, but I am less inclined to present it narrowly in terms of a search for church membership.

Similarly, as a neo-Anabaptist Mennonite I expected the Amish to be concerned about such things as church-state conflicts involving war and peace, or the USA Patriot Act (because it has implications for border crossers who lack government issued photo IDs).<sup>72</sup> Those matters are not absent, but among the fastest growing segments of the Amish world, the church-state issues they raise are about whether they should concede to installing septic systems, immunize their children, or allow building inspectors into newly-constructed homes before occupancy. Again, I don’t belittle these issues, but they do not obviously seem to connect to a neo-Anabaptist reading of the Schleithem Confession! Indeed, in recent years Amish legal battles in the United States have often drawn allies from conservative Catholic quarters or libertarians, such as the lawyers of the Becket Fund. Today, Mennonite Central Committee advocacy on behalf of the Amish, when it exists, is less a case of representing a constituency than a parallel to MCC work on behalf of, say, a politically marginalized non-Anabaptist group in Asia.<sup>73</sup>

Despite my growing awareness of the spiritual gulf that separates at least some, and perhaps many, Amish from me, my Amish contacts have challenged my faith and religious practice. For example, in 2006 and 2007 I learned about the profound importance of the Lord’s Prayer in the rhythm of Amish spirituality. Lancaster Amish people generally pray the Lord’s Prayer

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<sup>72</sup> Rachel Waltner Goossen, The Mennonite academic who reviewed Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, *The Amish* in the July 22, 2013 issue of *Mennonite World Review* hoped for more discussion of the Amish peace witness and Amish relations with mainline Mennonites; see [www.mennoworld.org/archived/2013/7/22/amish-recent-challenges-analyzed/](http://www.mennoworld.org/archived/2013/7/22/amish-recent-challenges-analyzed/).

<sup>73</sup> Steven M. Nolt, “MCC’s Relationship with ‘Plain’ Anabaptists in Historical Perspective,” in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp-Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011), 135-66.

eight times a day at regular intervals, and suggest that a child's readiness for starting school may be measured to terms of whether he or she has memorized the prayer in both German and English.<sup>74</sup> And in this process of learning, my wife and I recognized that that ancient prayer was not a part of our household life and that our daughters were unfamiliar with it. So we began to use the Lord's Prayer as a family prayer at meals.

So, where does all this leave me in relation to the Amish and the stories I tell about them? When I as an outsider seek to interpret Amish life for other outsiders, I strive, in the interest of fairness and Christian generosity, to highlight the values of Amish society so routinely dismissed by the modern world. Yet that interpretation says as much about my understanding of fairness and what I think the world needs to hear as it does about the Amish themselves. Two decades ago, a reviewer of my book *A History of the Amish* suggested that the text implicitly offered a critique of mainline Mennonites as well as a narrative of the Amish past. He was probably right. The "saving remnant," in the words of David Weaver-Zercher, may lurk close to the surface of my mind as I scan today's Anabaptist panorama. I confess that the values of community, the place of the past in the midst of change, and skepticism toward the modern cult of progress are all virtues I associate with the Amish.

When I consider how I have used the Amish, though, I hope it has most often been in a corrective effort to avoid making my own experience into a universal yardstick. Scholars have big words for such mental traps—solipsism, or essentializing the self—but it comes down to the belief that my world, my abilities and limitations, and my fears, wants, needs, and resources are typical of everyone, and so I safely can make all sorts of assumptions about other people. This temptation is especially real for white middle-class men, since so much of North American society *is* structured in ways familiar to people like me.

Among other things, the Amish have been for me a nearby reminder that there are people who inhabit my modern world, and live with many of the same daily realities as I do but have responded to them in ways very different from my own, and who live quite happily and productively with an alternative they have chosen. My assumptions about technology and

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<sup>74</sup> Kraybill, Nolt, and Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace*, 90-95.

entertainment, higher education, and faith all have been tempered by my association with the Amish. They remind me, gently but persistently, that there are other stories than my own.<sup>75</sup> The Amish are not the only people who could provide such insights; other relationships might offer the same correcting perspective. But in this case the Amish have served me well. May we all find such communities where we can serve and be served, where we can know ourselves as we know others, and where we employ our stories for our mutual benefit.

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<sup>75</sup> Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has famously warned of “the danger of a single story”; see transcript and video of her 2009 lecture: [www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/transcript](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript).

# A Village Among the Nations: Low German Migrants and the Idea of Transnationalism in the History of Mennonites in Canada

Royden Loewen

## Introduction

How do we historians write the history of a people who simply go against the stream?<sup>1</sup> How do we write the Low German-speaking Mennonite migrants into a history of Mennonites in Canada?<sup>2</sup> Estimated to number around 300,000 persons and growing at a rapid rate, they cannot be ignored in a global history of Mennonites; and given their historic ties to Canada, they seem to demand a place in the narrative of this country's Mennonites.<sup>3</sup> My task in this essay is to make a case for their inclusion in the "Mennonites in Canada" story by surveying the central themes and approaches in my *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006*. The context for this challenge is the well-honed paradigm of modernization. The now almost classic *Mennonites in Canada* series by Frank H. Epp and T.D. Regehr pioneered a national Canadian historic narrative, indebted future generations of historians to their work. Like histories elsewhere and

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the author's Winter 2014 Bechtel lecture at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "Low German Mennonites" in this essay to refer to Low German-speaking Mennonite migrants, mostly members of Old Colony Mennonite Church, whose ancestors migrated from Canada to Latin America in the 1920s and '40s. The same term has been employed by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in recent decades to replace the previous term "Kanadier Mennonites." I acknowledge there are thousands of Mennonites in Canada, especially among older generations, who speak Low German but are not part of this story.

<sup>3</sup> This is a figure used by the Low German Ministries program of MCC Canada. By coincidence it is higher than the total number of Mennonites in Canada: 190,000 with reference to the Canadian census of 2001. About 250,000 is the figure if the total number of baptized Mennonites and Brethren in Christ baptized members, 127,000 in 2010, is doubled to account for children. See figures in Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace: A Global Mennonite History* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books; Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2012), 343.

since then, this series hinged on the idea of modernization. It announced this historical trajectory merely with the sub-titles of its three books: “separate” for the history till 1920; then “survival” for the tumultuous ’20s and ’30s; and finally “transformed” for the post-World War II period.<sup>4</sup> It reflected a version of the classical sociological continuum of *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society), or the anthropological model of “from closed to open.”<sup>5</sup> And it was well grounded in the reigning Canadian history paradigm. Foremost Canadian historian Ian McKay describes this idea as the rise of the “liberal order,” that is, the ascendancy of the individual over the community. On the cultural side, this “order” emphasizes a more personal faith, more formal associations, a more differentiated society. On the economic side, it follows an inexorable rise of capitalism over pre-industrial moral economies, of course in measured form, allowing for some poetic critique, described by Antonio Gramsci as strong enough to register and bother but never significantly threatening.<sup>6</sup>

Call it “liberal,” *Gesellschaft*, or “open,” the final outcome of this version of the story of Mennonites in Canada has little room for the conservative, the communitarian, the closed. True, groups such as the Old Order Mennonites and the Amish have been given the role of offering quiescent harmless critiques of modernity from the periphery of society. But until recent times and with relatively few exceptions, the Low German-speaking Mennonite migrants, both communitarian in nature and migrant-oriented, have not had even this role to play.<sup>7</sup> They have not readily fit the trajectory of

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<sup>4</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982); T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> For an example of this paradigm, see the influential work of James Urry, both his *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia* (Winnipeg: Hyperion, 1989) and his *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000): 616-78.

<sup>7</sup> For earlier attempts to achieve this goal of incorporating their story into a wider Mennonite narrative, see Loewen and Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace*, and Marlene Epp, “Pioneers, Refugees, Exiles, and Transnationals: Gendering Diaspora in an Ethno-Religious Context,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 137-53.

modernization, even as quietly bucolic, subversive voices of anti-modernity.

Nor have they wished to be part of this story. They balk at the very unfolding of a progressive, modern Mennonite mindset evident in the history of the majority of Mennonites. In fact, they insist that they are part of the Canadian story even as they hone a new identity of a “village among the nations.” The one thousand or so letters appearing each year in *Die Mennonitische Post* (an MCC publication intended for the conservative and traditionalist Low German Mennonite diaspora in the Americas) testify to an imagined, dispersed village stretching from Canada to Argentina, a “virtual” community consisting of other Low German speakers, kinship networks, and bearers of a common historical narrative of a people of diaspora. I remember all too well a moment of discomfort when I sat down with the senior *Ältester* of a traditionalist church at La Crete in far northern Alberta to interview him, in Low German, for the book Steve Nolt and I were writing for the Global Mennonite History Series. He asked why I wished to interview him, and I said, with a sense of high moral purpose, that we were insisting on including the ‘old orders,’ the plain people, the traditionalists, in our book. Whereupon the *Ältester* said, “No thanks, we don’t want to be part of your story.” I was clearly not part of his “village” or his people’s story. His narrative was one of leaving the acculturated Mennonites of western Canada behind when his parents chose the northern boreal forest in the 1940s, and of being connected to other conservative, communitarian-oriented migrants and their descendants scattered in the Americas. Another factor in discouraging their participation in “our” narrative is that many of these Old Colonist, Reinländer, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Altberghaler, and Kleine Gemeinde migrants have wanted not only to have their cake (a Canadian passport) and eat it too. They want to be able to come to Canada seasonally as it suits them, but to escape to Mexico when the weather in the north turns cold or enough money is earned.

This narrative has undergirded their history over the last century. They rigorously resisted modernization by refusing the terms of the 1916 school legislation in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, then emigrated from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s when they didn’t get their

way, speaking of finding freedom in a “land of heathens.”<sup>8</sup> They didn’t leave permanently, returning to Canada in large numbers even before the end of the first decade. Then, during the 1930s, they hinted they might come back *en masse*, protesting Mexican school closures and vainly hoping Canadian provinces might have changed their policies of assimilation since 1916. In the 1940s they embarked on an “echo” emigration, signaling that they saw a “transformed” Mennonite community in Canada as nothing more than acquiescence to unfaithfulness. In the 1950s and ’60s stories trickled back to Canada of trouble in Mexico as the most conservative of these already recalcitrant people pulled up stakes and moved ever father south, first into the British Honduras rain forest and then in much larger numbers into the intemperate bush land of the Bolivian Oriente. Just as this migration to the southern “ends of the earth” ensued, thousands of others traveled in the opposite direction, northward to ‘return’ to Canada, usually as impoverished and dispossessed ‘grapes of wrath’ Mennonites moving into the heart of southern Ontario.

As the century ended, what might appear as a classic historical u-turn—south from western Canada in the 1920s, then back north to central Canada in the 1970s—became rather more complicated, as stories of poverty and ignorance in the South became fodder for a Canadian press. Alongside stories of a seemingly perpetual migration leading to a dynamic, sometimes discordant, “village among the nations,” the Low German-speaking migrant community was seen to stretch across the Americas. It consisted of far northern La Crete, as well as Santa Rosa in the center of the Argentine pampa, the eastern parkland community of Northfield, Nova Scotia, the hinterland of the city of Liberal in the semi-arid plain of western Kansas, and hundreds of places in between. Even as this essay is written, the diasporic village of Low German migrants is incorporating new places in Quintana Roo near the white beaches of Cancun, Mexico, in Yacuiba, Bolivia, on the Argentine border, and on the very land vacated by their forebears south of Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

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<sup>8</sup> Isaak M. Dyck, “Emigration from Canada to Mexico, Year 1922,” trans. Robyn Dyck Sneath, 2005 (unpublished manuscript in possession of author, 2005), 35. This material was published most recently as a book: Isaak M. Dyck, *Die Auswanderung der Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde von Kanada nach Mexiko* (Cuauhtemoc, Mexico: Imprenta Colonial, 1993).

How then do we write this story into the history of Canadian Mennonites? The fact is that even most of the 60,000 Low German-speaking, Mexico-oriented Mennonites in southern Ontario fall out of the trajectory of modernization or the liberal order for two reasons. First, most arrive in Canada with a commitment to avoid the signposts of this “transformed” Canadian Mennonite world—that is, life in medium-sized cities, institutions of higher education, global agencies of development, the arts and sciences. They remain Low German-speaking at home, assume a place as working class folk in fields and factories, and find their bearing in transplanted Old Colony and Sommerfelder churches of the south. Second, because they did not hone nation-centric lives, they don’t really want to be included in the story of transformed Canadian Mennonites. Their loyalty to Canada was minimal after their ancestors blamed it for yielding to British imperial cultural imperatives and attempting to force a “militaristic” English education on their children. Nevertheless, they continued to flirt with Canada: having left the “untrue north” for the more predictable “heathen south,” they kept their Canadian passports, dreamt of white Christmases in Canada, returned to it opportunistically, and abandoned it at whim.

The Low German Mennonite migrants are an Anabaptist group not at the center of a nation’s history. Canada is about immigrants coming, cities growing, a middle power flourishing, multicultural polity developing, the ascendancy of a liberal order. It is not supposed to be a country of people leaving, passports held pragmatically, or global links over which the government seems to have no control. This nation-centric story by definition excludes groups that do not come to stay, or those who leave, or those who engage Canada in a kind of Mennonite migrant jig. Yet excluding groups solely for this reason is similar, it seems to me, to excluding groups in previous generations that did not fit the reigning paradigms of their time.

Indeed, lately we have written subjects into the history of Mennonites in Canada because we are open to borrowing ideas of critical analysis from the wider scholarly world. Robert Zacharias’s recent *Rewriting the Break Event*, on Russländer and Russländer-descendent writers, has gained traction with the employment of concepts of diaspora and post-colonialism.<sup>9</sup> Anne

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Zacharias, *Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites and Migration in Canadian Literature* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2013).

Konrad's *Red Quarter Moon* has entered the crowded field of family and autobiographical study of Soviet Mennonite life by using methods of self-reflexivity, while Hans Werner's *The Constructed Mennonite*, along similar lines, has made its mark by problematizing "memory."<sup>10</sup> By daring to utilize class analysis, Janis Thiessen's *Manufacturing Mennonites* can address our refusal to acknowledge that, according to the watershed work of Kaufman and Harder, 23 percent of Mennonites in North America were working class (a similar number for those in agriculture, business, and professional fields).<sup>11</sup> By borrowing from the cultural construction of gender analysis employed by third generation Canadian women's historians, Marlene Epp has put another nail in the coffin of "great white man's" history and produced a sophisticated rewrite of the *Mennonites in Canada* series by inserting the word "women" in the middle of that title.<sup>12</sup>

We have yet to see the fruit of a recent decision by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to produce a volume during the next five years that considers the story of "Mennonite Newcomers in Canada," focusing on the rapidly changing ethnic landscape of Mennonites in Canada since 1970, with a possible conference in 2018 on the 50th anniversary of the Society. Other terms and concepts will surely show a new Canadian Mennonite history in time, especially if we historians engage with "affect" and emotion, materiality and artifact as evocative symbol, or inter-specialty within the realm of nature.

### **The Transnationalism Approach**

Within the constellation of critical analyses employed by the wider scholarly historical community is an approach I thought could similarly "rescue" the story of the Low German Mennonites. That concept is "transnationalism,"

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<sup>10</sup> Anne Konrad, *Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2012); Hans Werner, *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Janis Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War Manitoba* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013), 4. The work that she expands on is J. Howard Kaufman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2008).

and in *Village among Nations* I lay out my hope that it can enliven and make more inclusive the story of Canadian Mennonites in the same way as diaspora, self-reflexivity, memory, class, and gender have. This concept feeds off of a cultural studies approach that upsets old normative words like “nation” as social constructions that have their life span and their own set of cultural architects.<sup>13</sup> While the nation-centered Mennonite history of the *Mennonites in Canada* series may have been required to critique denominationally centered histories, it still skews lived social experiences. Quite ironically, to understand the story of Mennonites in Canada we need to embrace the term “transnationalism” and understand it in its full complexity. When we do, we must see it as much more than either a “we are the trunk and you are the branches” mission history or a history of our links to Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Economic Development Associates, SelfHelp Crafts or Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada.<sup>14</sup>

“Transnationalism” is a concept that invites the Low German Mennonite migrants—mostly Old Colony Mennonites—back into the fold. They may have bade Canada farewell in 1922 and moved to Mexico, but the concept of transnationalism may offer a place for their mentality, theology, and folklore that still gives many Canadian Mennonites pause, even discomfort. In it we might even find the old Anabaptist teaching of being “strangers and exiles” in this world, a concept taking its legitimate place alongside others such as the “Anabaptist vision,” the “politics of Jesus,” or the “Lordship of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> With this concept, quite suddenly the central ideas of Old Colony Bishop Isaak M. Dyck, recalling the heady days from 1916 to 1922, take on new meaning. His concern was that the new English-language school legislation of 1916 would do little more than produce “an inextinguishable enthusiasm for the art of war” and lead Mennonite children to embrace the nation-centric mantra of

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<sup>13</sup> See Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, eds., “Introduction” in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2005), [http://epress.anu.edu.au/cw/mobile\\_devices/index.html](http://epress.anu.edu.au/cw/mobile_devices/index.html), accessed August 13, 2010; Nina Glick Schiller and Linda Bash, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68 (1995): 48–63.

<sup>14</sup> Loewen and Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace*, especially chapter 12: “Discovering a Global Community.”

<sup>15</sup> Harold S. Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (1944): 67–88; 1 Peter 2:11; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972).

“one king, one country, one fleet, one flag, one all-British empire: love and sacrifice for the Fatherland.” The migration to Mexico, he wrote, occurred in the best spirit of Anabaptist faithfulness, that is, that “followers of Jesus were . . . born into sorrow, suffering and persecution” to a “walk in all humility and lowliness.”<sup>16</sup> This truly Anabaptist walk was, he said, the way of the forebears in the *Martyrs Mirror*, a pathway through and beyond nations to the only homeland Christians can call home, eternal heaven. It was a transnational cosmology, apparent also in the archived diaries and memoirs of migration leaders of the 8,000 western Canadians who chose Mexico and Paraguay between 1922 and 1928.<sup>17</sup>

Mennonite emigrants who arrived in Mexico and Paraguay between 1922 and 1928 did not fall from the view of either curious Mennonites who stayed in Canada or Mexican commentators. In fact, the *Steinbach* [Manitoba] *Post*, a decidedly Canadian newspaper with a very small regional focus, suddenly catapulted into a paper with global reach, facilitating a transnational flow of information and tying emigrants together with those who stayed. Letters in the *Post* during that first decade in the Global South recorded the settlers’ dogged commitment to trace their agrarian lines on God’s earth without any new national loyalty. In a rare letter stemming from May 1924, the Mexican press heralded the newcomers from Canada as walking in the footsteps of national hero Hernando Cortez, who marched inland in 1517 from Vera Cruz after destroying his ships “as a sign of his determination to neither hesitate nor die.”<sup>18</sup> While translated and reproduced in the *Post*, this cultural linkage to Mexico’s own collective memory was unusual, as many letters served to distance the new residents from their host society. Indeed, in their missives to the *Steinbach Post*, the newcomers described transplanted village and land tenure systems that were essentially their own.

In May 1923 when a young Canadian traveller, P.K. Doerksen, visited

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<sup>16</sup> Isaak M. Dyck, “Emigration from Canada to Mexico, Year 1922,” 3, 2.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Dyck, see Bernard Toews, *Reise-Tagebuch des Bernhard Toews, 1921* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Geschichtsarchiv, Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, 1997); Johan M. Loepky, “A Travel Report to Mexico in the Year 1921,” trans. Delbert Plett, in *Preservings* 26 (2006): 37-44; David Rempel, diary, 6 August 1919 - 26 November 1919, Volume 5015, trans. Jake K. Wiens (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre).

<sup>18</sup> *Steinbach Post*, May 21, 1924.

the new Mexican colonies, he described a land “so backwards, some of the people say that it is a hundred years behind. . . . [with] all the appearance of Bible times. . . . Here one rides on donkeys, walks bare foot, eats . . . and sleeps on the ground.” Still, he writes, the Mennonites in Mexico “seem to be very happy, and when I asked what should I relay to the people in Manitoba their answer was, ‘we are doing well and we are all happy; the Mexicans leave us entirely alone, only the ploughing is hard.’”<sup>19</sup> It was a similar situation in Paraguay, where the 1,700 settlers with a *Privilegium*, the official charter of privileges secured from President Manuel Gondra, in hand, forged up the Paraguay River beyond Asuncion to the northern post of Puerto Casado, then into the Chaco, where, as one letter writer put it in May 1927, “[tree] line cutters from our own people” will aid the surveyors.<sup>20</sup> The Mennonites would draw lines on God’s earth. They were not imagining themselves agents of modernization or the national security of Paraguay, but the creators of a self-sufficient Mennonite community.

In the second decade the Paraguayan Mennonites may have settled in, welcoming the Fernheimers from the Soviet Union and aiding Paraguay’s assault on Bolivia, but in nostalgia-laden letters they endlessly replayed sweet images of the old *Heimat*, “old Canada.” The Mexican Mennonites, however, went further. Betrayed by the Mexican government, which was unable to control Pancho Villa’s disbanded forces from regularly robbing Mennonites and, much worse, closing Mennonite schools for violating the Mexican constitution, they became overwhelmed by nostalgia for the old *Heimat*, especially its reputation for “peace, order and good government.” In the 1930s they clashed bitterly with naysayers who reminded them that Mexico was still a culturally safer abode than modern Canada. To employ terms given theoretical meaning by Ewa Morawska, most of the Mennonites in Mexico saw in Canada not a sweet *Heimat* but a sinister *Vaterland* that had betrayed them in 1916.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in May 1935 Bernhard Penner of Mexico put the debate into a transnational context: “our danger here has been much exaggerated . . . and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., May 9, 1923. A similar description appears in a February 25, 1925 letter.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., November 30, 1927.

<sup>21</sup> Ewa Morawska, “‘Diasporas’ Representations of their Homelands: Exploring the Polymorphs,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 6 (2011): 1029-48.

is not greater than that in Canada, indeed there it is worse.” He had read about the “Bolsheviks, Communists and other demonstrators in Regina,” of “demonstrations in the streets of . . . Saskatoon [where] mounted police officers have had to be called in” and trouble in Ottawa, “at the Parliament buildings [where] machine gun fire [apparently] has broken all the windows.” Everywhere in Depression-era Canada one hears of a “dangerous . . . dependence on ‘relief’ . . . leading to corruption and laziness.” His conclusion imagined a transnational world: “I see danger here, I see danger in Canada, and . . . within the whole world. So, further responses to these charges [against life in Mexico] I intend to ignore completely.”<sup>22</sup>

Canada’s patriotic participation in the Second World War and its seemingly unilinear urbanization created the context of an echo migration. The transnational nature of this migration is noticeable in the flow of information back to Canada, now not only to a German-language paper but to two nascent English language media, southern Manitoba’s *Altona Echo* and the *Carillon News*. They were vehicles for northern gazes into the south, including voices of concern raised by an unlikely chorus of critics, including among others three Canadians—novelist W.O. Mitchell, sociologist Winfield Fretz, and industrialist C.A. DeFehr—and American historian H.S. Bender.

### **Communications and Connections**

However, the stories of these progressive men of the North differed from those of the migrants themselves. By happenstance the 1940s migration yielded a number of women biographers who gave migration a gendered rendition, offering nary a deferential term for father or *Ältesten* but myriad references to health, food, cleanliness, and especially “place.” While one Rosthern, Saskatchewan writer may have identified herself as “Frau Isaac F. Bergen,” the migration she describes is about herself and her family of 10 children and ‘father,’ not about Isaac or following him.<sup>23</sup> Mostly it is about separation from her social space and rebuilding it in East Paraguay, an aspect of transnational mindset that immigration historian Dirk Hoerder dubs a

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<sup>22</sup> *Steinbach Post*, May 15, 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Frau Isaac F. Bergen, “Reisebericht der Frau Isaak F. Bergen,” in *Unsere Reise Nach Paraguay*, 1948, ed. Jacob H. Sawatsky (Sommerfeld, Paraguay: self-published, 2004): 20-37.

“transcultural” phenomenon in a supranational world.<sup>24</sup> Bergen’s 1948 account does reference the preacher who spoke at the Rosthern farewell service, but it accentuates the emotion-laden hymn, “As Lot and Abram Separated.” Concerns expressed in her diary are not so much with finances or religion but with a last lunch at the Hildebrands’: when next “will we all drink so much milk?” The diary attests to a perspective of an uprooted agrarian householder who, while identifying with a specific household and a migrating community, nevertheless emphasizes the particular aspects of migration traditionally accorded to women—sustenance and shelter. Perhaps her emphasis on these aspects is a nod to the patriarchal structure of the Mennonite community, but it also reveals a woman content not to offer any degree of deference to male leaders.

On the train to Montreal, the ship *Vollendam* to Buenos Aires, the riverboat up the Parana to Asuncion, the tarped truck into East Paraguay, the final 24 hours by ox cart, and then on foot to their patch of grass at an imagined village bearing the name Waldheim, Bergen’s story is about the connection of one domestic space in Saskatchewan with another in the rainforest of South America. Along the way she tries her best to replicate domestic space, appreciates the hymns sung, frets about her children’s health, cleans and grooms, and lauds strong women such as “Aunt Derk Klassen . . . a good mother and grandmother.” At Waldheim, however, at a place with “grass taller than my head” close to “clear, wonderful water,” she and her family come to a stop; they “spread a blanket on the ground” and have their first lunch, immediately after which they pitch their three tents. On Monday, Bergen writes, “it is usually washday, but first food is to be secured,” so she “got up early, before the others, and baked biscuits.”<sup>25</sup> Her quotidian notes do not reflect life in different nation states so much as connect two dots in a nation-less world.

The story of the 1950s and ’60s takes Mexican Old Colonists farther south to British Honduras and Bolivia, and again the Canadian connection remains. Letters from the south still flood the *Steinbach Post*, extant till 1967, but another form of transnational flow of knowledge appears in the

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<sup>24</sup> See Dirk Hoerder, “Historians and Their Data: The Complex Shift from Nation-State Approaches to the Study of People’s Transcultural Lives,” *Journal of American Ethnic Studies* 25, no. 4 (2006): 85–96.

<sup>25</sup> Bergen, “Reisebericht der Frau Isaak F. Bergen,” 21, 29, 33.

form of the outsider's gaze into the communities. Young Canadian and US academics—masters, doctoral, and post-doctoral students—follow the Mennonites into the south and offer authoritative analyses.<sup>26</sup> Now a new voice arises within the South as well, as the national presses of the two countries offer apologies for the interloping white, German-speaking farmers in the midst of nascent nationalism. In British Honduras the *Belize Billboard* defends the Mennonites as no ragtag group of Mexican workers but “a group of Mennonites of German origin whose ancestors left Russia in 1874” who in 1922 “migrated to the state of Chihuahua in Mexico [from Canada],”<sup>27</sup> and now in 1957 wanted 100,000 acres “for their agricultural projects” with which to do nothing less than “build up the B.H. export trade in agricultural products.”<sup>28</sup>

A decade later in Bolivia, newspapers such as La Paz's *El Diario* carried similar defenses. The most elaborate, by former “military man” Roberto Lemaitre F. de Córdova, saw Mennonite farming as a “military asset” since, “given the conditions of modern warfare,” a country must till its “uncleared lands, populating them and making them produce.” Naysayers should know that countries in which Mennonites live in “a large number . . . the United States, Canada, and Paraguay” have all “demonstrated their military strength.” Paraguay, he pointedly insisted, had “encourage[d] Mennonite colonization in the Chaco,” a factor in Bolivia's historic defeat in the 1932 War of the Great Thirst.<sup>29</sup> From the perspective of the Global South, the Mennonites were national assets (though plucked from elsewhere on the globe) and would raise the host society's international swagger (no matter

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<sup>26</sup> See A. D. Bushong, “Agricultural Settlement in British Honduras: A Geographical Interpretation” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 1961); Jerry Alan Hall, “Mennonite Agriculture in a Tropical Environment: An Analysis of the Development and Productivity of a Mid-Latitude Agricultural System in British Honduras” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Clark University, 1970); James W. Lanning, “The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia: A Case Study” (M.Sc. Thesis, Texas A & M University, 1971); Edward W. Van Dyck, “Blumenort: A Study of Persistence in a Sect” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1972); Kelso Lee Wessel, “An Economic Assessment of Pioneer Settlement in the Bolivian Highlands” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> *Belize Billboard*, December 4, 1957.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, December 13, 1957.

<sup>29</sup> *El Diario*, April 5, 1968; quotes from translation in James W. Lanning, “The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia: A Case Study,” 122-24.

that their religion forbade embracing a national identity).

Beginning in the 1950s and then increasing in each decade until the end of the century, many Mexican Old Colonists who had headed south came north instead to work in Ontario's growing food industry. It is a phenomenon, captured by theorist Steven Vertovec, that in the second half of the century a 'new' transnationalism replaced an 'old' version, a shift reflecting a crescendoing globalized rural depopulation, faster technologies of travel, and more inclusive state policies. This latter variable exhibited itself in 1979, when one of the programs of the Canadian government's new Multicultural Policy offered a major research grant to Conrad Grebel College, allowing Ronald Sawatsky, a graduate student at the time, to undertake an extensive oral history project among Old Colony Mennonites who had arrived from Mexico in Ontario as early as 1971.<sup>30</sup>

Among the 48 interviews conducted, Sawatsky discovered a particular collective memory of old-timers who recalled leaving western Canada in the 1920s as children, sojourning in poverty-stricken Mexico, and coming northward to a strange new place called Ontario in uncertain circumstances. Anna Peters, who left Gretna, Manitoba for Mexico at age seven with her parents in 1922, said she "remembered well" farm life, recalled "the last evening in Manitoba when we were waiting for the train," the train trip itself, how she and her father "tended to the animals . . . [in] the livestock car,"<sup>31</sup> and even hearing that the reason for it all was that the "church, the preachers . . . were committed to running their own schools, in our own language." Thirty-two years later, in 1954, after a generation of privation on a "small patch of land," she recalled the 12-day 'return' organized by an unscrupulous Mennonite on "a truck with a tarp tied over top [with] . . . more than forty people, five families, each with seven or eight children. . . . The truck box . . . completely full, from corner to corner," and then misery in Ontario, living illegally in a condemned, boarded up "old brick house," until friendly Port Rowan "Russlaenda" Mennonites came to the rescue with "stoves and

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews by Ronald Sawatsky in "Mennonites from Mexico Oral History Project," organized by Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, funded by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, deposited at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario [hereafter MAO]. All interviews were translated from Low German and transcribed by Kerry L. Fast; paper copies in possession of author.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, interview #7350 with Anna and Cornelius F. Peters, May 16, 1979, Aylmer, Ontario.

clothing, bed frames, food” and avenues to soybean, tobacco and tomato field work, as “none of us had anything.”<sup>32</sup>

A generation later Kerry L. Fast, a graduate student at the University of Toronto, conducted some 20 interviews with Old Colony Mennonite women in southern Ontario.<sup>33</sup> In her work a new phenomenon became apparent: northern Mexico had always been within striking distance of Canada, but improved roads and car technologies had over the decades turned 12-day road trips into 3-day affairs, now often repeated as seasonal trips. Fast’s interviewees, while comfortably integrated in southern Canadian communities and fluent in English by 2006, highlighted those return trips.

Of these interviews, one with Elisabeth Rempel (a pseudonym) was typical. She was the eldest child, age seven, when her family left Zacatecas state.<sup>34</sup> After a summer of field work they returned to Mexico to auction off their belongings, and came back north the following summer intending on permanence in Ontario. At age 18, Elisabeth was compelled by her parents to join them back in Mexico, where she at once married a fellow Old Colony Mennonite, and together they moved to Canada, although for only a short time as “my parents were down there [and] . . . I had relatives there.” Then, when Mexico could not sustain them, they fled to Kansas to work as undocumented ranch hands for two years. Desiring “somewhere [without] . . . fear that you’ll be deported” and “a permanent place for our kids to grow up,” they moved to Canada a third time. Each of these moves Rempel recalled as simply “terrible.” The return to Mexico was especially difficult: it was “just so hard trying to adjust.” She said she had wanted to stay in Canada at the time, but her mother “wouldn’t have any of it. . . . She’s like, ‘no way, you’re coming with us; you’re not of age yet . . . you have to stay with us until you’re at least 20.’”

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews by Kerry L. Fast, May 2006 in “Mexico Mennonite Women of Southern Ontario Oral History Project,” funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant. All names are pseudonyms; typescript of interviews in possession of author.

<sup>34</sup> Interview in English with Elisabeth Rempel, May 23 and 29, 2006, Chatham, Ontario. The interviewee was about 28 years old in 2006; she was the mother to four children and married; she first left Mexico for Canada around 1985.

***Die Mennonitische Post: Letters from North and South***

In 1977 MCC launched an ambitious project to replicate an old medium, a regular newspaper, in the vein of the *Steinbach Post* that had ceased publication in 1967. The MCC-sponsored newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Post*, was an instant hit, and within just six years published 8,000 letters from countries comprising the Low German diaspora, now including Canada, the US, Mexico, Belize, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina. The letters spoke to the transnational nature of this community, an imagined village superimposed onto the western hemisphere, linking hundreds of close-knit places. They spoke of regular travel, nostalgia for old *Heimats*, planned relocations to unsettled regions, and of conceiving citizenship pragmatically as allowing for migration without cultural association with the new host society.

Crucial for the idea of writing Low German Mennonite history into Canadian history, the *Post* also became the platform for an extraordinary conversation, a transnational flow of information across space and a significant cultural divide. It linked accommodating Old Colony Mennonites in Ontario (and other Canadian places) with their second and third cousins in the Southern diaspora, including the most reclusive of the Low German Mennonites, the Old Colony horse-and-buggy Mennonites. In the *Post*, even the strictest traditionalists and ultra-communitarians, located in the farthest reaches of rural Latin America, spoke publicly for the first time—often in broken High German—while those most accommodated to Canadian society spoke of their own highly modern cosmologies, embracing everything their southern kin contested: ease, progress, knowledge, certainty, popularity, self-actualization, and upward mobility, including a missional paternalism sometimes couched in white-man’s-burden language, an incipient invitation to celebrate their acculturation. Within the *Post* two groups of Low German speakers—those fully integrated in Canada, including service workers who had never lived in Latin America, and those resident in the Global South—engaged one another, often indirectly, but in the process introducing two diametrically different worlds.

Letters and reports from Low German-speakers in Canada spoke of life in an economically sound, multicultural country in which legal citizenship was a venerated achievement. In April 1977 the *Post* spoke of the happiness Old Colony families experienced when they finally received their citizenship, without problematizing the process or the achievement:

“Last month seventy six persons from fourteen families, all Mennonites from Mexico, ended their long wait, as they finally all received their citizenship papers.” The achievement was all the more remarkable as the southern Ontarians were all “young families seeking to make a home” who became citizens only after “the intervention from various people [obtained] permission to remain in Canada.”<sup>35</sup> Letter writers or reporters could take a more negative tack if they sensed opportunism among the newcomers: a September 1983 editorial lambasted Mennonites who “unlawfully deal with various government programs” and “benefit from programs to which they have never paid into.” The editor shamed the culprits, stating that “I think at one time the name Mennonite meant more than it does today.”

Generally, the stories of life in Canada were good news stories, full of self-confidence and warm welcomes. In November 1987 one *Post* contributor reported on the ‘Kanadier’ now settling in Winkler, Manitoba, a familiar region from which “their parents or grandparents at one time emigrated and in which one can still speak Low German,” a place in which newcomers could find work in small Low German-speaking factories “with no need to speak English,”<sup>36</sup> close to “the Old Colony Church . . . that offers a traditional spiritual fellowship for . . . these return immigrants.” They could even tune in, stated an article two years later, to Rev. Cornie Loewen’s Monday night CFAM radio program geared to “recently immigrated Mennonites from Latin America, who are not yet very familiar with the English language,” open to sermons on “holy living within a healthy family milieu,” and willing to confront such issues as “tobacco, strong drink, marriage [trouble], depression.”<sup>37</sup> They could assemble each year for the annual “Kanadiertreffen Days,” such as the 1991 meet at Morden, Manitoba’s Stanley Park, where more than 600 newcomers, conversing in “the mother tongue—Low German—happily with a bag of sunflower seeds,” visited, sang “Christian songs in High German, Low German and English,” and took in popular historian Gerhard Ens’s talk, “The Mennonites in Russia: Yesterday and Today,” learning how “through their faith in God our ancestors were able to leave behind their goods . . . and make a practical new beginning in a strange land. . . . They

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<sup>35</sup> *Die Mennonitische Post*, April 21, 1977.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, November 20, 1987.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, December 15, 1989.

feared no pain and trouble when religious freedom was within reach.”<sup>38</sup>

These reports were a cross-current with those emanating from the horse-and-buggy communities in the South. Their idea of citizenship was diametrically opposed to ideas from the North. In a not unusual letter from July 1977, Bolivian J.J. Driedger of Las Piedras, a recently established colony with La Crete, Alberta roots, answered a question he was often asked, namely “whether we are fully at home here?” The short answer, he said, was “in this world we are never fully at home. We are all on a journey to the greatest homeland and cannot make our home here.”<sup>39</sup> Later that year, in September, another Old Colonist Mennonite signing as “the searching pilgrim” from Riva Palacios, founded by Mexican Mennonites in 1967, distinguished Bolivian and Canadian Mennonites. In Canada, as the writer recalled it, children in English language schools were “ashamed to be identified as Mennonites,” reflecting the fact that their parents had snuffed out the corporate memory of “our great-grandparents and grandparents and mothers and fathers, who moved from Germany to Russia, from Russia to Canada and Mexico and so forth.”<sup>40</sup>

From the migrant Low German point of view, Bolivia was a land of second chances, despite inflation and the lack of law and order. One writer could complain from Valle Esperanza in May 1982 that “it is not two months . . . and already money merchants on the street are paying 80 [pesos per dollar]. For flour and other essentials the prices are to be frozen so that it is cheap to obtain and still every week the prices rise.”<sup>41</sup> Another story, from April 1983, spoke of thefts in the horse-and-buggy colonies of Swift Current, Sommerfeld, and Riva Palacios “hit by thieves with armed force” and recurring “for well over a year.” Although the police were “willing to establish patrols in this region, Mennonites don’t want the police in their region.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Mennonites seemed willing to accept antiquated debt laws

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., August 1, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from *Die Mennonitische Post*, July 21, 1977, quoted in Lukas Thiessen, “*Land, and Heimat: The Concept of Home in the Letters of Low German-Speaking Mennonites from Bolivia in Die Mennonitische Post*” (unpublished undergraduate essay, University of Winnipeg, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> *Die Mennonitische Post*, August 4, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., May 21, 1982.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., April 15, 1983.

that meant four men from Valle Esperanza in June 1999 found themselves “imprisoned on account of debt” incurred after a “harvest failure” and given a vague promise that “the government is intervening.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, there were problems such as a March 1992 debacle at Sommerfeld colony, where indigenous Bolivians were squatting on colony land, a “land problem” solved only when “the Indian leaders, both of whom claimed the land, traveled to the capital of La Paz and there signed an agreement, according to which the Indians will move off the land; only one man remains on the land, demanding more money.”<sup>44</sup>

Despite these kinds of challenges, more Mennonites found homes in Latin America. When they came they still searched for the venerated *Privilegium*, hoping for official guarantees of military exemption, local government, and, if possible, their own church-run German-language schools. In December 1989 the *Post* reported on a delegation of Old Colony Mennonites from horse-and-buggy Capulin, northern Chihuahua, seeking land in Argentina. It reported that four delegates—“two colony mayors, one preacher and one deacon—who went to Argentina have come back with favourable reports,” and notes a “friendly” welcome at Santa Rosa, La Pampa province, where the climate “is suitable for crop and cattle farming, similar to what they know from Mexico.” At an August 22 Brotherhood meeting, “attended by those interested in emigration,” the only outstanding issue yet to be settled was that “first the question of the ‘*Privilegium*’ must be ruled on” by the Argentine government.<sup>45</sup>

Later that year a second delegation attempted just that, travelling to Buenos Aires to seek a personal audience with Argentine President Carlos Menem. Unable to speak with the president as he did not have time for them, they waited till November 28 or 29, when “they were supposed to have another chance” to see him. Although “it turned out to be too long a wait,” nevertheless they had been “well received by the president’s officials and [were told] it was not impossible to obtain a ‘*Privilegium*.’”<sup>46</sup> It was reminiscent of other meetings such as the one in 1872, when Mennonites

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., June 18, 1990.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., March 20, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., December 15, 1989.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. See also *ibid.*, May 19, 1995.

had sought an audience with the Russian Czar in St. Petersburg. When they missed him there, they went to Yalta, where they could not meet him and were told by an official that military exemption would not be possible as in the past.

Just as occasional letters from the South criticized northern acquiescence to a capitalistic, consumer culture, these letters from the North sometimes criticized authoritarian church leaders and reckless anti-modernism in the south. The two sets resembled one another, in that their respective cosmologies were spoken without reference to one another—as if they were addressed to sub-readerships within a single medium, the immigrant newspaper.

### **Conclusion**

By borrowing the methods of a broader historical discourse, Mennonite history has often been given a broader, more inclusive mandate. Certainly, discovery of new sources has invigorated Mennonite history, as has allowing current issues of concern in the Mennonite community to guide research into the past in a search for antecedents. Moreover, borrowing new theoretical models from the wider world has promised similar positive results. Just as the very idea of a nation-centric model based on implicit engagement with theories of modernization influenced later generations of historians—recall the words “separate,” “struggle,” and “transformed”—so has engaging the methods of social history and cultural studies enabled today’s historians to write more iterations of the Mennonite experience into the narrative of Mennonites in Canada.

Ironically, one of the fruitful concepts is transnationalism, and its promise is multifaceted. It may allow historians to see any group of Canadian Mennonites within a wider global context of dislocated, ethno-religiously connected members of various diasporas. In addition, it can allow them to reconsider the appropriateness of employing nation-centric paradigms for the study of a people who by their very lives have critiqued such models over the centuries. As well, it may permit historians to revisit the very idea of Anabaptism, and to emphasize not only the ideas of love, community, and peace but also “pilgrimage” and aloofness from patriotism. As this essay has argued, it specifically permits the inclusion in our national narrative of the

large, rapidly growing, reticent Low German population of Ontario, and its Canadian-passport-carrying close kin in the Americas.

Transnationalism overcomes the binary opposition of “Canada vs. the US” and the sometimes forced connection between Ontario and western Canada. It allows for the flow of information across national borders, and for the transcultural or supranational identities of villagers among the nations. Perhaps it can also suggest a way to conceptualize a community whose story has too often been filtered by well-intended missionaries and professionals who produce narratives of social pathology to contextualize their own work. Finding ways to analyze the nature of a community solely to understand how it has survived, adapted, and reinvented itself should always be a historian’s central mission. Writing the Low German diaspora into the fabric of the Canadian Mennonite story can, we may hope, identify the account of “a village among the nations” as part of the story of “our village within this nation.”

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## **The Lordship of Christ and the Gathering of the Church: Hauerwas's Debts to the 1948 Barth-Niebuhr Exchange**

*Brandon L. Morgan*

This essay explores the disagreements between Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr on the role of Christology in Christian ethical judgment that arose at the inaugural World Council of Churches (WCC) assembly, held at Amsterdam in August-September 1948. I want to highlight how the work of Stanley Hauerwas repositions their Christological concerns as ecclesiological concerns. This repositioning will be shown to index Hauerwas's Christian ethics to the same set of impasses explicated in the Barth-Niebuhr exchange.

First I will recount the interactions between Barth and Niebuhr, attending to places in their theological work that allow me to trace the contours of their disagreement about the definitiveness of Christ's lordship and its implications for how Christians should address social and ethical concerns. It will become apparent that Niebuhr's skepticism about a more 'realized' account of Christological lordship entails a residual anxiety about global survival, an anxiety that Barth's account of Christological finality seemingly dissolves. Niebuhr's 'survivalism' implies the church's participation in balancing political power relations, while Barth's theology implies the church's witnessing to the objective reality accomplished in Christ.

With these differences in mind, I will turn to Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe* to address his critiques of Barth's and Niebuhr's attenuated account of the church, arguing that Hauerwas risks conflating both Barth's account of Christological finality and Niebuhr's anxious survivalism. Then I will suggest how Hauerwas's turn to the church need not be a turn from Barth's distinction between Christ's lordship and the church (a distinction worth maintaining, given that the church's future is relatively inexplicable to itself).

**Battle of the “Super-Theologians”<sup>1</sup>**

It is perhaps a misconstrual to describe the interactions between Barth and Niebuhr as a “battle,” though this is how the narrative usually runs. This is likely because, long before Barth took the podium at the inaugural Council in 1948, Niebuhr had been aggressively criticizing Barth and Barthians for advocating political quietism and otherworldliness for some 20 years.<sup>2</sup> Although these critiques never produced a sustained response from Barth, the assumption is that their disagreements placed the two at considerable odds, which is most certainly evident in their theological writings and respective conference presentations.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the 1948 conference was “Man’s Disorder and God’s Design,” and the purpose was to “represent the burning concerns of all the churches in this crisis of civilization.”<sup>4</sup> Barth’s address was entitled “No Christian Marshall Plan,” which implied that the responsibility of the churches should not be modeled on the US Marshall Plan (initiated in April 1948), which granted financial support for rebuilding European nations after the devastation of World War II. Barth thought the title of the conference should be reversed, taking “God’s Design” as the logically primary fact through which to interpret the world’s disorders: “It is written, we should first seek God’s Kingdom and his righteousness, so that all we need in relation to the world’s disorder may be added unto us.”<sup>5</sup> Christians should not begin from

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “Super-Theologians” comes from a published recounting of the interaction between Barth and Niebuhr at a meeting in Geneva in 1954 in preparation for the second WCC in Evanston, Illinois. See Henry Pitney Van Dusen, “The ‘Super-Theologians’ Meet,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 7, no. 2 (January 1952): 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> The most pointed essays against Barth and Barthians are found in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 141-93.

<sup>3</sup> A number of texts helpfully recount this event: Scott R. Erwin, *The Theological Vision of Reinhold Niebuhr’s The Irony of American History: “In the Battle and Above it”* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013); Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008); Edward Duff, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Association Press, 1956).

<sup>4</sup> *Man’s Disorder and God’s Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948), General Preface.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, “No Christian Marshall Plan,” *Christian Century*, December 1948, 1330.

ecclesial disunion, contemporary culture, or the threat of the atomic bomb as the gathering point for ethical action, but rather should remain faithful to Christ's "already come, already victorious, already founded Kingdom in all its majesty—our Lord Jesus Christ, who has already robbed sin and death, the devil and hell of their power, and already vindicated divine and human justice in his own person."<sup>6</sup> Barth accused the anxiousness of WCC congregations to ameliorate global disorder as an attempt to Christianize humanity by setting up "an order of justice and peace embracing our whole planet."<sup>7</sup> The WCC had forgotten that Christ's church is not a "continuation of the incarnation of the Word of God" where Christ's lordship falls under the "sovereign power and administrative control of Christendom."<sup>8</sup> The church is not the source of the world's salvation.

For Barth, Christ in his divine lordship—"in his accomplished work of reconciliation on the cross [and] in his resurrection as the sign of the new age"<sup>9</sup>—rules the world far better than the church. Already evident in this analysis of the conference theme is an axiomatic distinction Barth makes throughout his theology between the Christian community gathered by Christ as its head and Lord and the effective freedom of Christ's lordship, which is "fully present" to the community but "also entirely above it."<sup>10</sup> The dialectical relationship between the church as a gathered human community and the Lord who gathers it supplies the means to question whether Christianity's social task should be animated by the ever-present and perennial concerns of the world as if it were the world's ruler. These concerns, like the poor, will always be among us. Thus, "we ought to give

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. This distinction runs throughout *Church Dogmatics* and is related to the dialectical procedures Barth often uses to make his distinctions. Thus he says in *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, "[The church] resembles Him, and the lordship of God set up in Him, and the calling of all humanity and all creatures to the service of God as it has gone forth in Him. Neither it nor anyone else can or should ascribe to it more than a resemblance to this first and final reality, and to its revelation as it has already taken place and has still to take place. It is not identical with it" (793). Similarly in I.1, Barth says of church dogma that "The Word of God is above dogma as the heavens are above the earth" (266). Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 14 vol. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2010).

up, even on this first day of our deliberations, every thought that the care of the church, the care of the world, is *our* care.”<sup>11</sup> Such anxieties are the “root and ground of all human disorder: the dreadful, godless, ridiculous opinion that man is the Atlas who is destined to bear the dome of heaven on his shoulders.”<sup>12</sup>

Niebuhr’s published response to Barth’s Amsterdam address in *Christian Century* magazine reveals their theological divergence, which I suggest is Christological in nature. Niebuhr’s article, entitled “We Are Men and Not God,” claimed that Barth’s account of Christ’s lordship amounted to a “realized eschatology” and implied that Barth allowed his Christological claims to overwhelm the church’s responsibilities for the world. Barth’s emphasis on what Christ has already accomplished avoids the arduous task of dying with Christ through the “crucifixion of self,” without which the Christian is tempted to “share the victory and the glory of the risen Lord.”<sup>13</sup> For Niebuhr, the purpose of the church’s witness to Christ’s work is construed negatively as a way of interpreting God’s judgment upon individuals and nations in order to “disclose the possibilities of repentance” and divine mercy. By emphasizing the “assurance of God’s final triumph over all human rebellions,”<sup>14</sup> Barth ignores the rebellions and perplexities for which Christians require strategies of moral discernment.

These strategies reflect the constructive side of Niebuhr’s argument with Barth. Not only does Barth’s account of Christ’s triumph deemphasize the judgmental work Christ’s death performs, it also neglects the “tortuous and difficult task of achieving a tolerable justice.”<sup>15</sup> Niebuhr views Barth’s revolutionary hope as a form of political withdrawal that sidesteps human anxieties by overcoming them proleptically in Christ’s reconciling act. The church becomes an ark to survive the flood and remains the secluded home for Christians amid political turmoil. Niebuhr concludes his critique with rhetorical poignancy:

[Barth] is now in danger of offering a crown without a cross,

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<sup>11</sup> Barth, “No Christian Marshall Plan,” 1331.

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

a triumph without a battle, a scheme of justice without the necessity of discrimination, a faith which has annulled rather than transmuted perplexity—in short, a too simple and premature escape from the trials and perplexities, the duties and tragic choices, which are the condition of our common humanity. The Christian faith knows of a way through these sorrows, but not of a way around them.<sup>16</sup>

For both men, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection implied specific norms for Christian participation in contemporary social or political circumstances. Not only does their exchange summarize their acute differences regarding Christ and social ethics, it also suggests the terms in which 20th-century Christian ethics would continue to be thematized. The terms never changed for Barth or Niebuhr throughout their interactions, despite the many theological developments found within their vast output. Nevertheless, it will help to examine specific passages in their published works in order to display their disagreements about the efficaciousness of Christ's reconciling act and its implication for Christian social ethics.

### **Christ's Reconciling Act in Niebuhr and Barth**

#### *Niebuhr's Anthropological Christology*

While Niebuhr's Christology primarily functions in a negative way as a hermeneutic of judgment, I do not mean to suggest that Jesus does not function anywhere in Niebuhr's theology as a positive model for Christian action. Indeed, in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, dating from 1935, Niebuhr begins to argue that Jesus' perfect love ethic of self-sacrifice is "the most adequate metaphysical and psychological framework for the approximation of the ideal of love in human life."<sup>17</sup> By this he means that Jesus' ethical demands were a form of religious perfectionism or "love absolutism . . . that maintains a critical vigor against the most inevitable and subtle forms of self-assertion."<sup>18</sup> However, because Niebuhr also believes, and never stopped believing, that self-assertion or egoism is a perpetual and inevitable

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1340.

<sup>17</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1987 [1935]), 132.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 30.

outcome of human nature, an effect of our dualistic selves as both flesh and spirit, bound and free, the law of love that Jesus establishes in the Sermon on the Mount inevitably performs a critical function, revealing the inadequacy of human ethical achievements. Moreover, Jesus' perfectionist love ethic, which is established as law, is embodied among human communities as a relative account of mutuality or, in the political sphere, equal justice. While certain cases may suggest that individuals can be said to ascend the scale of moral possibilities of loving action,<sup>19</sup> this cannot be said about groups, much less about nations, which are of greater concern for Niebuhr than ethics for individuals. Thus, he stresses Jesus' law of love as negating human presumption more than offering a positive example.

It is in this direction of negating human presumption that Niebuhr's Christology develops, mapping out a means of interpreting the anthropological reality of pride (God's judgment) and contrition (God's mercy)<sup>20</sup> through the symbolizing of a crucifixion and resurrection of self. Thus the cross "declares that what seems to be an inherent defect in life itself is really a contingent defect in the soul of each man, the defect of the sin which he commits in his freedom."<sup>21</sup> This individuated but universal defect in human self-assertion comes to full recognition through the cross and, following it, the kingdom of God. Christ's act and the subsequent image of the kingdom that Christ preaches in the gospels do not destroy the sinful world or the sin within it but fully reveal its nature as egoistic.<sup>22</sup> "The righteousness of the Kingdom of God stands above it and condemns it."<sup>23</sup> It is "relevant to every moment of history as an ideal possibility and as a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, Niebuhr's Christology is little studied among his interpreters and advocates. Some older exceptions are Paul Lehmann, "The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr," in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1956) and J. M. Lochman, "The Problem of Realism in Niebuhr's Christology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958): 253-64. A recent and helpful account is Paul R. Kolbet, "Rethinking the Christological Foundations of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 437-65.

<sup>21</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 168.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

principle of judgment.”<sup>24</sup> The cross and the kingdom enter into the world as a negation of human violence and testify that “the Lord is crucified afresh in every human action.”<sup>25</sup>

The revelation of the cross and the resurrection of Christ reflect symbolically “the crucifixion of self-abandonment and the resurrection of self-discovery.”<sup>26</sup> These anthropological categories are matched by the theological pairs of contrition or repentance (i.e., “a contrite recognition of the elements of pretension and false completion”<sup>27</sup>) and faith or “grace,”<sup>28</sup> which reflects a process of drawing the self “out of itself despite itself into the love of God and neighbor.”<sup>29</sup> From God’s side, Niebuhr relates these pairs of the self’s dynamism as products of judgment and mercy. The recognition of judgment through acknowledging one’s fundamental assertiveness compels acceptance of the other, and thus the coming-to-be of the fallen yet forgiven self whose fragmented history now bears subjectively or internally the narrative of God’s relation to history in Christ. In Paul Kolbert’s words, “Christ, therefore, in his life and death provides a principle of judgment that condemns the sinful misconstitution of human life, as well as a certain grace that when ‘appropriated inwardly’ overcomes false hopes and despair and frees one ‘to live a life of serenity and creativity.’”<sup>30</sup>

The Christological moment for Niebuhr is also, and perhaps simultaneously, an anthropological moment. When viewed subjectively by faith, Christ supplies the meaning amid the fragmentary contingency of history, namely that while there is judgment on human pride, there is mercy ascertained through human faith. The recognition of the prideful, contrite self is modeled upon Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection as the anthropological movement of self-assertion through self-denial to a new self of gratitude. While Niebuhr often elaborates his Christology in terms of a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>26</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 149.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>28</sup> Niebuhr often places ‘grace’ in scare quotes.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>30</sup> Kolbet, “Rethinking Christological Foundations,” 449, quoting Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 2: 57-58.

hermeneutic of self, he nevertheless views its benefits as gravitating to the political sphere. Thus he can suggest that “the possibilities of . . . ‘new life through death’” are relevant to “the destiny of civilization.”<sup>31</sup> The experience of judgment and repentance can “establish the validity of the Christian doctrine of life through death for the collective, as well as for the individual, organism.”<sup>32</sup>

What becomes apparent is that Niebuhr develops his Christology in order to provide a hermeneutic of recognition and judgment for the anthropological and collective ailments of human pride and self-assertion. Christology is an explanatory discourse about the experience of human sinful existence and the movement from judgment into contrition, forgiveness, and gratitude. But because his Christology often takes the shape of anthropological description, with crucifixion and resurrection affixed to the self’s movement from abnegation to renewal, it becomes impossible for him to advance any objective form of Christ’s lordship, fully realized or not. The resourcing of his Christological reflections to explain the self and its fragmentation performs only a negative critical task, and stands above earthly individuals and institutions not in the mode of lordship but as an abstract critical principle.

Niebuhr undoubtedly intended to develop his symbolical account of Christ’s reconciling act in just this way. But the underlying flaw is that his abstract mode of critical appraisal remains wholly divorced from historical exemplification. While his Christ is wholly “transcendent,” this is a weakness. Other means of political deliberation beyond an existential response to Christ as a symbol of the self are not made theologically available. Christ reveals the world as it is, but does not change it. Thus, Niebuhr’s Christological ethic is insufficient to alter one’s view of the world as a scene of strife.

Since there are no “martyr nations”<sup>33</sup> who forego their collective pride in the wake of Christ’s act, the anxiety about the risks of international politics, particularly given the atomic bomb, remain unabashedly disconcerting for Niebuhr. This is evident in the meticulous attention he paid to foreign political affairs throughout his life, producing a number of insightful and

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<sup>31</sup> Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, 223.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

perspicacious writings. While he claims that “the believer is challenged to become engaged in the sorrows and sufferings of the world” because she worships a God whose peace is “the triumph of the Cross,”<sup>34</sup> this triumph is at best existentially available and thus invisible to the political scene, which, as noted earlier, was at the forefront of Niebuhr’s concern. The gathering of the Christian community is inevitably animated by the strife of global affairs. This differs significantly from Barth’s claim that the community is gathered by the election of Christ and for no other political reason.

### *Barth’s Christological Realism*

Because Barth’s whole theology is basically an impressive elaboration of Christology, it is impossible to summarize his thoughts here about Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. I only hope to indicate why his account of Christ’s lordship necessarily pits him against Niebuhr. For Barth, Christ’s reconciling act of crucifixion and resurrection entails the judgment of sinful humanity and along with it the “old aeon”<sup>35</sup> of the world.<sup>36</sup> It is a form of theological realism which reconfigures through its historical instantiation the fact of human existence before God. So, “if God in Jesus Christ has reconciled the world with Himself this also means that in Him He has made an end, a radical end, of the world which contradicts and opposes Him, that an old aeon, our world-time . . . has been brought to an end.”<sup>37</sup> The cross of Christ is a “decision and act of God which has taken place actually, irrevocably, and with sovereign power. It is a completed fact, to which nothing can be added by us in time or in eternity.”<sup>38</sup>

The finality of Christ’s cross as the Father’s form of judgment upon human sin, combined with an emphasis on the objectively real impact of such an event, inscribes within the created sphere the already fulfilled act of reconciliation that God through Christ has accomplished. Its finality is a

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<sup>34</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 226.

<sup>35</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 294.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 310. “[T]hese two acts of God with and after one another are the two basic events of the one history of God with a sinful and corrupt world, His history with us as perverted and lost creatures.”

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

given: “the power and lordship of the Son of Man, which as such reach and affect all men, the whole anthropological sphere, and therefore concretely ourselves as individuals” is not merely a possibility, but “a reality, an event which in its scope is actually determinative of all human existence.”<sup>39</sup> In questioning this reality, we might just as well question the “ground on which we walk or the air with which we breathe.”<sup>40</sup>

Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection entails the moment of his exaltation as the Lord of human life and history, separating the “old that is made past in Him and the new that is already present in Him.”<sup>41</sup> For Barth, there is no end to these entailments. “[T]he anthropological sphere is genuinely dominated by the Son of Man as its Lord, and therefore . . . our knowledge of ourselves is included and enclosed in the knowledge of Jesus.”<sup>42</sup> Barth’s understanding of the finality of Christ’s lordship places him at odds with Niebuhr, who sees Christ’s reconciling act as an interpretive lens for the anthropological dynamism of a self already fully defined and elaborated. The Christ event is, for Niebuhr, a revelatory “overlay” to the facts of experience, whose entailments fail to gain historical traction for re-evaluating one’s view of the world. George Hunsinger provides a helpful description of the difference:

Niebuhr exemplifies the kind of theology which thinks in terms of the real and the ideal. Niebuhr thought of love, for example, as representing an unattainable ideal. . . . Niebuhr’s concept of the real was grounded in his anthropology of sin so that love . . . could only be conceived as a critical but elusive ideality. . . . Barth, by contrast . . . was theocentric. It was God who set the terms for what was real. Thus Barth and Niebuhr both used the term “impossible possibility,” but in diametrically opposite ways. What for Barth was the touchstone of reality (love) was for Niebuhr the ‘impossible possibility,’ whereas what for Barth was the ‘impossible possibility’ (sin) was for Niebuhr the touchstone

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<sup>39</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 267.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

of reality.<sup>43</sup>

Though this comparison risks oversimplification, it conveys the substantial reason for Barth's viewing the task of the Christian community to be a witness to the events of Christ already accomplished. Indeed, these events become the definitive grounding of reality and thus establish the parameters of Christian ethical response. This is further shown in Barth's *differentiating* the church from Christ's lordship, a concern Niebuhr was also pressed to emphasize, while nevertheless sustaining Christ as the church's unalterable founder and gatherer. According to Barth, Christ as the Son of God is not only the Lord over time. "He also lives, speaks and acts . . . in time and therefore as participant in what takes place as our history in time."<sup>44</sup> Christ's participation in history is imaged in the church as Christ's likeness: the church "resembles Him, and the lordship of God set up in Him." Christ's lordship is the origin and founding of the church, whose ongoing mode of witness reflects the basis of its initial gathering. Nevertheless, this relationship is unilateral; the freedom entailed in Christ's lordship "may go other ways than those indicated by the human and creaturely limits of His community."<sup>45</sup> Christ's lordship and kingdom are "not identical with" the community but stand over it as its impetus for existence.<sup>46</sup> The community does not witness to itself as the kingdom because "Jesus Himself is the kingdom in all its perfection."<sup>47</sup>

In making this distinction Barth aims to resist the temptation to associate the church as the kingdom of God in an institutional form and thus as the arbiter of Christ's lordship over history.<sup>48</sup> The church's role is rather to witness to Christ as distinct from it but nevertheless imaged by it. Thus, Christ as the head and lord of the church always stands in a dialectical

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<sup>43</sup> George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 38-39.

<sup>44</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, 790.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 793.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 792.

<sup>48</sup> Barth's argument here is elaborated as a critique of what he perceives to be the ecclesiological presumptions of Roman Catholicism. In this case, Barth and Niebuhr's impetus for differentiating Christ from the church are relatively similar, though their constructive proposals go in different directions.

relationship with it, establishing its existence and including it as his earthly-historical form while also standing above it and ruling it as part of the sphere of history. In either moment of this relationship, Barth seeks to retain unalterably Christ's reconciling event as the only thing that animates the gathering of the Christian community. Without viewing itself as the effect of the event of Christ's reconciliation and lordship, the church is a mere simulacrum of the Christian community—a false church.

What this analysis brings to the surface is the theological background to Barth's and Niebuhr's exchange in Amsterdam and their disagreement about the church's role in the social sphere. In suggesting that the care of the church and the care of the world is not a necessary burden for Christians to bear, Barth means to advance the freedom of the church to gather itself according to Christ's reconciling act and his established lordship over it in history. This entails witnessing amidst the world's disorder to the true order established by the finality of the Christ event. From Niebuhr's perspective, this cannot but appear theologically irresponsible, since it forgoes the evident tasks of relative justice and balance of power that should compel the church to act politically. Because Christ reveals but is not efficacious for reality, any role Christ's agency can continue to have is attenuated to the existential self and does not affect the arrangements of political collectives.

Barth and Niebuhr are at extreme ends of a perpetual spectrum; they truly inhabit different worlds. This difference, however, represents the terms of what is at stake for the legacy of Christian ethics to the present. Is it possible to remain committed to an eschatologically present reality without giving the impression that "everything important has already happened?"<sup>49</sup> Is it possible to preserve the difference between Christ's lordship and Christ's church without abstracting Christology as a purely negative or critical discourse? Turning now to Stanley Hauerwas's evaluation of Barth and Niebuhr, I will show why these questions of the "super-theologians" are still taxing Christian ethics.

### **Hauerwas and the Absence of Church in Barth and Niebuhr**

My turn to Hauerwas is not meant to provide an exhaustive account of the

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph L. Mangina, "Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 277.

many ways Barth and Niebuhr influenced his work. Nor in referencing *With the Grain of the Universe* do I hope to attend to the breadth of expansive argument he offers about their theological differences. Rather I seek to show how the contours of Barth's and Niebuhr's different ways of viewing Christian ethics through Christology are inherited by Hauerwas's criticisms of them. Moreover, I will argue that in his 2001 Gifford Lectures Hauerwas repositions their Christological concerns as ecclesiological concerns, which is emblematic of how he indexes contemporary Christian ethics to the same impasses explicated in the 1948 exchange between a Niebuhrian anxious survivalism and a Barthian Christological freedom. While I do not intend to perform an outright criticism of Hauerwas here, I do want to point to a tension in his account of church that spawns from his attempt to wrestle with the differences between Barth and Niebuhr.

Hauerwas often positions himself on the side of Barth and diametrically opposed to Niebuhr, specifically culling from Barth the Christological center of theology that engenders the finality of Christ's lordship over history. His Gifford Lectures express this positioning most succinctly. Along the lines I argued earlier, he claims that Niebuhr's account of Christ and the cross "are not realities limited to the specific revelation found in Christianity; rather they are symbols of the tension we must endure as people who expect history to be fulfilled."<sup>50</sup> Hauerwas locates Niebuhr's limitation in an inability to divorce himself fully from the position, assumed in theological liberalism, that the knowledge we gain through our experiences of the world sets the terms for the theological work that Christ can perform. Because Niebuhr forestalls a Christological realism from the beginning through his epistemic commitment to experience, he finds himself dedicated to working out the achievement of relative political justice without returning to specific Christological commitments in order to do so.<sup>51</sup>

However, Niebuhr's more important failure lay in not providing an account of the church within his ethics or theology, the absence of which Hauerwas sees as integral to Niebuhr's overall project. Niebuhr saw the

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<sup>50</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 127.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

church only sociologically, not as an “ethical or epistemological necessity.”<sup>52</sup> According to Hauerwas, this failure indicates the broader liberal democratic policing of Christian practice which Niebuhr accommodated. As Hauerwas argues elsewhere, “Not only is it Niebuhr’s contention that democracy needs a more realistic vindication, but now that vindication cannot come directly from Christian convictions about God and Christ . . . [it] must be based on theological anthropology.”<sup>53</sup> Eventually, even the theological elements of Niebuhr’s anthropology are foregone along with its Christological moorings. Because Christology, or more specifically Christ’s lordship, is not efficacious within history (a distinctly political account of the church community is lacking), Niebuhr succumbs to accommodating to the political status quo of liberal democracy.<sup>54</sup> What gathers Christians to ethical action are problems that entail balancing national power through attention to democratic constraints. Such a false gathering begets an inevitable anxiety about the survival of national political entities, in this case American democracy, as that which holds at bay the inevitability of global conflict.

Because Hauerwas says that his interlocutors “occupy different worlds,”<sup>55</sup> we may assume that Barth’s thoroughgoing rejection of political and theological liberalism is the side where he sees himself standing. While this is largely true, Barth does receive extensive praise from Hauerwas for developing a Christological realism sufficient to critique Nazism<sup>56</sup> and liberalism. But Barth still falls short because he does not have a “sufficiently catholic” account of the church to support his theological convictions.

Barth is not sufficiently catholic just to the extent that his critique

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>53</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press), 98.

<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-71. “For Barth, the denial of natural theology as well as the discovery of the Christological center in theology were of a piece with his opposition to Hitler. His refusal to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler...was inevitable, given his theological development.” While Hauerwas often relates the “Christological center” of Barth’s theology as the pivotal means of his diagnosing Nazism, this does not necessarily square with his critique of Niebuhr’s Christological shortcomings, since Niebuhr was also criticizing Nazism beginning in 1933. See Niebuhr, “Hitlerism—A Devil’s Brew,” *World Tomorrow*, April 19, 1933, 369-70.

and rejection of Protestant liberalism make it difficult for him to acknowledge that through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are made part of God's care of the world through the church. Barth, of course, does not deny that the church is constituted by the proclamation of the gospel. What he cannot acknowledge is that the community called the church is constitutive of the gospel proclamation.<sup>57</sup>

For Hauerwas, Barth's church "seems to oscillate between claims about what is essential (Christ *is* his body, the church) and claims about the merely accidental and empirical."<sup>58</sup> Because Barth's distinction between Christ and the church functions dialectically, it is impossible to grant any substantially salvific role to the church, thus making it ultimately unnecessary to the order of salvation. As Barth says, "1) the world would be lost without Jesus Christ and His Word and work; 2) the world would not necessarily be lost if there were no church; 3) the Church would be lost if it had no counterpart in the world. It is an act of free grace that Jesus Christ wills to claim its service in this matter. He is not bound to it in His prophetic action."<sup>59</sup> According to Barth's commitment to the independence of Christ's lordship and its role as gathering the church to its task, such claims are simply the logical outworking of this commitment—the church is not necessary as Christ is necessary.

It would be difficult for Barth to suggest that the Christian community is a constitutive part of the economy of salvation, for this could entail claiming that Christ's lordship is a distinctive task of the Christian church. This is how Hauerwas views the matter when claiming that "the place of the church in the history of the universe is the place where Christ's lordship is operative."<sup>60</sup> If that were true, then, according to Barth, the church's freedom within its witness would be significantly hindered along with the freedom he hopes

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<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 145.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 192. Hauerwas is following an argument about Barth's "bifurcated ecclesiology" initially set out by Nicholas Healy, "The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications," *Modern Theology* 10 (1994): 235-70. Healy has more recently questioned his initial analysis in light of Hauerwas's deployment of it. See "Karl Barth's Ecclesiology Reconsidered," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 (2004): 287-99.

<sup>59</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, 826.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 27.

to grant to Christ as lord over the church. The church's perpetual existence would induce an anxiety for its own survival that would be a dangerous and elusive act of will in which the Christian must, like Atlas, consistently carry the church on its shoulders. In the other direction, the church would feel compelled to witness to *itself* as the means of salvation, which entails that one of Christ's purposes in gathering the Christian community was to complete a task of salvation as yet unaccomplished. In this case, Barth remains firm that the survival of the church and the survival of the world is the care of Christ and not that of the Christian.

In using the criteria of "adequate account of church" to judge both Barth and Niebuhr, Hauerwas seems to position himself within their Christological differences in a unique, complex way. He recognizes that Niebuhr's failure to account for the church was due to a commitment to liberalism and thus an insufficient Christology, which saw the church as having an ethical stake in the survival of nations, in this case America. The church therefore failed to take up any political space. But Hauerwas also thinks that Barth's Christological lordship is equally abstracted from a community that is required to mediate it, and thus also limits the extent to which the church embodies a specific political form of life.<sup>61</sup> So, what is animating Hauerwas' account of church?

Different interpretive options are available, and they are bound up in the specific contours of the differences between Barth and Niebuhr already discussed. What seems to be at stake in Hauerwas's work are the questions that these men raised in a Christological mode about the role of Christians in the social and political sphere. While Hauerwas expresses himself in different ways on this subject, the main reason he distances himself from both men is that neither viewed the church as a social political option in its own right. This allows the church to acquiesce to political liberalism. Thus, by locating Christ's lordship more firmly in a church politics, Hauerwas attempts to stretch beyond the theological impasse, though perhaps not without consequences.

According to Nathan Kerr, Hauerwas's social political account of the church is meant to combat the kind of liberal depoliticization of

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<sup>61</sup> This is what Nathan Kerr calls Hauerwas's move "with and beyond Barth against liberalism" in *Christ, History and Apocalyptic* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 95-96.

Christianity that Niebuhr embodies. However, Kerr suggests (among many other controversial things) that Hauerwas's need for a politically constituted church rests "within certain 'ideological' modes of thinking," in which case the stress on the political mediation of Christ's lordship within the church "is literally defined as a matter of the church's *survival*."<sup>62</sup> Indeed, much of Hauerwas's work comprises a response to a perceived bankruptcy of liberal political orders and the accommodation of liberal theological commitments to them: "I can only think the way I think because Reinhold Niebuhr made such important mistakes."<sup>63</sup> Kerr claims that Hauerwas has "allowed his assumptions as to what the enemy *must* be to generate and condition what 'we' as friends of the church must be, politically."<sup>64</sup> What gathers the church for Hauerwas is the impetus for an alternative to liberalism. Thus, the terms of criticism against Niebuhr's liberal anxiety about the nation's survival amid political conflict are transmuted in Hauerwas's theology into an implicit anxiety about the church's survival as an alternative.

While I cannot follow Kerr on many of his objections to Hauerwas, there is an important question here about whether the gathering of Hauerwas's church rests on a desire to provide a stable alternative to contemporary political needs. If this is the case, then a tension arises in Hauerwas's critical appraisal of Barth and Niebuhr vis-à-vis his own constructive task. Can he take seriously Barth's account of the finality of Christ's lordship while also putting it in the service of establishing an anti-liberal ecclesial politics in response to the Niebuhrian problem of theological accommodation? Can Christ's lordship be theologically capitalized for such purposes, or will Hauerwas have to take Barth more seriously in order to move past an ecclesiology often presented in his writings as an alternative to that problem?

According to Peter Dula, it is Barth's view of the transitory nature of the church that Hauerwas struggles to affirm, despite his claim that "martyrdom uniquely witnesses to cross and resurrection."<sup>65</sup> According to John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas is "underawed by the objective reality of salvation and

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 56.

<sup>64</sup> Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic*, 118.

<sup>65</sup> Hauerwas, *Approaching the End*, 61.

history”<sup>66</sup> and, according to Dula, may be “overawed by community because he is overawed by liberalism. Barth was, if anything, the opposite. He was so overwhelmed by the objective reality of salvation history that he was free from anxiety about the survival of the church.”<sup>67</sup> Hauerwas’s theology is truly challenged by Barth’s willingness to claim that “the people of God has in its own way shown itself to be enduring, not . . . by partial or thoroughgoing attempts to secure and maintain itself by adaptation to the world, but in a strange proportion to the way in which, with relative unconcern as to its fidelity and infidelity, it has actually accepted . . . its weakness.”<sup>68</sup> A community cognizant of such a weakness amid political strongholds is available and prepared to recognize that it “exists for the world”<sup>69</sup>—a truly martyrdom church. Indeed, Hauerwas sometimes implies this,<sup>70</sup> but more usual are passages where his being overawed by community bears the specter of Niebuhr’s influence. What may aid him in moving beyond the temptation to develop an ecclesiology shaped by the problem of liberalism is to recall Barth’s (and Hauerwas’s own) acknowledgement of the weaknesses of the church. One weakness is the unforeseeability of its future; there is no definite knowledge of the future arrangement of the church’s mission, what it will become, and where it will witness. There remain unequivocal aspects that invite us to lean into Christ’s lordship over the church as a way of trusting where it will go from here.

### **Christ’s Lordship and the Mystery of the Church’s Future**

Dula highlights Barth’s recognition of this fact about the church, referring to Barth’s claim that “its mystery, its spiritual character, is not without manifestations and analogies in its generally visible form. But it is not unequivocally represented in any such generally visible manifestation and

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic*, 114.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Dula, “For and Against Hauerwas Against Mennonites,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84 (2010): 390.

<sup>68</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, 745. I am following Dula’s reference to this passage of Barth’s.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 796.

<sup>70</sup> See particularly Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 17-31.

analogies.”<sup>71</sup> For Barth, there is no possibility of overcoming the inevitably unforeseeable and therefore invisible character of the *ecclesia visibilis*.<sup>72</sup> Part of acknowledging this unforeseeability—what we might call the mystery of the church’s future—involves a willingness to see the church as existing neither *over against* any particular set of political arrangements nor *because of* any particular set. This humility about its future and its creating possibly surprising kinds of alliances goes hand in hand with a willingness to acknowledge that Christ’s lordship often makes the church other than what it currently is and may require relinquishing its hold on present arrangements. As it turns out, this understanding of lordship as temporally distinguishable from the church is not so foreign to Hauerwas, and neither is the humility assumed in it.

Those who have spent time reading and writing about Hauerwas may not recognize, much less describe, his understanding of the church as humble, at least not as humble as Barth’s. Perhaps this is because Hauerwas has often accused the church in America of *falsely* humbling itself to the whims of liberalism and argues instead for an outspoken church with thick, strong walls. However, it may be that he sees the humility of the church as a vital lesson of his theology as a whole, possibly because he has accused the church of pridefully attempting to control the reins of history as a way of bringing salvation to the world. Depending on whom he is writing against, his emphasis on the church’s humility may remain implicit in, or almost tertiary to, his concerns. So it is a lesson often left for his interpreters to develop more clearly. From my perspective, these paths of Hauerwasian argument are all of a piece, making the church outspoken about its commitments and informing it of its status as specially graced, that is, gathered and directed by a Christological lordship which is not always recognizable and whose direction cannot always be known in advance.

It is beyond my scope to track through Hauerwas’s extensive output in order to justify fully the suggestion that his understanding of Christ’s lordship in the church may include humility about its presence and future.

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<sup>71</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 657, quoted in Dula, “For and Against Hauerwas against Mennonites,” 391-92.

<sup>72</sup> For Barth, this unforeseeable character exists as a sword against the visible church by reminding the community that it exists not only in a creaturely history but also a sinful one.

However, it may help to point to a recent essay, “Bearing Reality,”<sup>73</sup> which interestingly though not surprisingly exists in another collection of essays against liberalism. This essay is unique, not only because Hauerwas interacts with philosophical and literary voices previously absent from his work (e.g., Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, and J.M. Coetzee) but because he also acknowledges that his ecclesiological writing has given the impression that the church’s mission embodies an explicit *solution* to present-day political ailments, a burden perhaps too weighty for the church to shoulder.

Hauerwas here alludes to philosopher Cora Diamond’s powerful description of what she calls “the difficulty of reality” as a way of getting at the difficulty the church faces. For her, the difficulty of reality names experiences “in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way.”<sup>74</sup> According to Diamond, much of philosophy attempts to solve such difficulties as a way to deflect them, avoiding the pressures they put on current explanations. For Hauerwas, many features about the world resist our understanding, most of them involving the violence that humans perpetrate on each other. He admits that, like Diamond’s judgment on philosophy, his view of ecclesiology can easily lend itself to seeing the church as a solution to such difficulties, sidestepping their resistance to Christian thinking.<sup>75</sup> However, when asked if there is anything the church could not do, he responded that “the church cannot make the difficulty of reality less difficult.” What the church can do is “help us bear the difficulty without engaging in false hopes.”<sup>76</sup>

One way of reading Hauerwas here is to conclude that seeing the church as providing a definitive solution to something like liberalism is a false hope, not just because of the pervasiveness of the problem but because the church should not deceive itself about its efficacy in the world. Its efficacy most often involves providing a space for simply bearing the difficulties it faces. The chief difficulty is the often inexplicable nature of history and our weakness in the face of it. Today it may be liberalism, tomorrow will bring

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<sup>73</sup> Hauerwas, “Bearing Reality” in *Approaching the End*, 139-57.

<sup>74</sup> Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), 45-46.

<sup>75</sup> The example in Diamond’s work is of the relationship humans have with non-human animals, though there are many other examples in Christian ethical thought.

<sup>76</sup> Hauerwas, “Bearing Reality,” 157.

its own particular burdens, and the church's response to them will reflect how it is gathered and mobilized by an agency not wholly defined in terms of those burdens. Acknowledging the mystery of the church's future requires a willingness to forgo control of history and instead to hand it over to the lordship of Christ. This handing over implies ecclesial humility about the church's role within that history, which invites the church community to see its witness to Christ's redemption as authorized by Christ's work yet perpetually inexplicable as to where God's mission might reach and what difficulties may need to be borne. In this sense, one could read Hauerwas's strong ecclesial turn as sustaining a Barthian distinction between Christ's lordship and the church insofar as he admits a future that remains, as Barth says, "in the hands of God."<sup>77</sup>

One danger in viewing the fullness of Christ's redemptive activity as already explicably accomplished is that the church will use such explicability to diminish or deny the patent difficulty and incompleteness that human life and the church perpetually bears. The boundaries and mission of the gathered community become just as explicable as the completed work of Christ, thus risking conflation. Undoubtedly this is the danger Niebuhr saw in Barth, though Barth's ecclesial position attempts to forestall it. However, to suggest that the inexplicability of historical reality demands sidelining certain aspects of Christ's redemptive action in order to turn difficulty into skepticism is also theologically problematic. This is likely how Hauerwas and Barth see Niebuhr. What must be acknowledged in this tension, according to Hauerwas's essay, is that Christ's gathering of the church to holiness and witness does not entail rejecting the inexplicability of church or world.<sup>78</sup> On the contrary, Christ's lordship does not deny but reinforces the unforeseeable aspect of the church's mission. Yet it is this very inexplicability, the difficult reality of being called *into* the world as disciples without knowing where that will go, that provokes the appeal of Christ's lordship as an object of faith and trust and not as an authorization of knowledge.

Lordship is a promise of a future that cannot be brought in by force, or be entirely fulfilled or recognized in the present church community.

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<sup>77</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 657.

<sup>78</sup> Hauerwas, "Bearing Reality," 155.

Hauerwas suggests a trajectory in which the church bears the burdens of human life without presuming to eradicate them. Such burden-bearing is a task of humility defining the church as ordered not to its own survival but to the burdens of others who Christ inevitably brings before us. Because it is Christ who gathers the church, “we do not bear reality alone, but rather we share the load by being called to participate in the body of Christ.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Conclusion**

I have sought to trace the elements of Christological lordship, ecclesiology, and ethical practice in the 1948 Barth-Niebuhr exchange as well as specific places in their respective writings in order to suggest what is at stake in Hauerwas’s criticisms of their attenuated accounts of church. While Barth’s Christological realism and Niebuhr’s political realism were at odds on the efficacious nature of Christ’s cross, resurrection, and lordship, in attempting to move beyond them Hauerwas relates his constructive proposal to particular elements in their work. This engenders an interesting tension. While he advocates Barth’s account of the finality of Christ’s work and the reality of Christ’s lordship over history, he subsumes such Christological points within an ecclesial politics often defined by anti-liberalism.

I have also suggested that Barth’s proposal for the church’s freedom from anxiety over the survival of itself and the world is located in his distinction between Christ’s providential lordship and the church’s present historical existence. This distinction reduces the temptation for the church to define its ultimate mission and boundaries according to a set of political or social arrangements of the present, a temptation to which Hauerwas sometimes appears to succumb by seeing the church as a solution to liberal political orders. Nevertheless, there is also in Hauerwas substantial room to develop his understanding of the church’s humility that refuses to see itself as a definitive solution to political straits and as gathered toward such solutions. Developing this humility in relation to the mystery of the church’s future allows for Barth’s distinction between Christ’s lordship and the church to play a substantial role within Hauerwas’s work, and in a temporal frame. The distance between the church’s present existence and its future mission invites the church community to embrace the contingency of its current life

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

and to hand over its survival to the lordship of Christ. This handing over reinforces Christ's lordship over the church as relatively independent of present political arrangements, acknowledging that the church's historical life remains somewhat inexplicably in the hands of God's future.

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## **Martial Arts as a Model for Nonviolence: Resisting Interpersonal Violence with Assertive Force**

*Steve Thomas*

“What would you do if someone attacked you or a loved one?” Not simply a rhetorical challenge, our community in Goshen, Indiana faced this question in 2011 when James Miller was brutally murdered two blocks away from Goshen College, where he taught as a biology professor. A beloved husband and father, this gentle man intervened to stop an intruder armed with a knife attacking his wife, Linda, in their home. While she escaped, James died of fatal injuries from the attack. Deeply disturbed by such a senseless act of predatory violence, we wonder how people committed to nonviolence can respond in situations like this. Supporting strong, protective action like that of James Miller, this article proposes a model for using assertive, nonviolent force to resist interpersonal violence.<sup>1</sup> Responding to the “What would you do?” question, we can move beyond common answers of being either submissive or aggressive to a third way—one that upholds the way of peace—of being assertive, even forceful, to stop violence.<sup>2</sup>

As defined in this article, “force” is the use of any form of power, whether psychological, social, or physical, to make something happen. Force is not inherently negative or positive; it depends on one’s intent and its impact. The definition of “violence” that will be used comes from the World Health Organization: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in

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<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted from an address given on International Peace Day (September 21, 2012) at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Central to this case is differentiating *protective* force from *violent* force. Walter Wink provides important distinctions: force is “a legitimate, socially authorized, and morally defensible use of restraint to prevent harm from being done,” whereas violence is “the morally illegitimate or excessive use of force.” See his *Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 158. Self-defense and physical interventions to stop interpersonal violence are generally seen as morally legitimate and socially authorized by law as long as they are not excessive. While such actions are acceptable in society, this article questions whether the use of physical, protective force is appropriate in following the way of nonviolence.

injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Discovering Martial Arts**

What does nonviolent, assertive force look like in practice? Martial arts offer an example. Using these arts in peacemaking may seem odd. It seemed so to me when I first heard the suggestion, thinking that it amounted to violence against violence. In a seminary class on nonviolence, John Howard Yoder suggested that Mennonites learn martial arts as a potentially nonviolent way of stopping attackers without harming them.<sup>4</sup> This was a significant step away from nonresistance to nonviolent resistance, advocating nonlethal coercive force, if necessary, to protect people from harm.<sup>5</sup>

Following Yoder’s suggestion, I have trained in a martial art, and along with three others in our Mennonite congregation formed a mission group to make peace with martial arts.<sup>6</sup> This initiative led to the formation of Peacemakers, a community-based organization seeking to empower youth and adults with skills to prevent violence and transform conflict. In contrast to the blood sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), we promote Mennonite Martial Arts, mixing traditional martial arts with conflict transformation skills as a form of embodied peacemaking. We refer to our way as “the other

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<sup>3</sup> *World Report on Violence and Health*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 5.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, John Howard Yoder, *What Would You Do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question* (Scottsdale, PA; Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1983), 28. I refer to Yoder’s reflections on violence in this article but refrain from doing so in our organization’s work with women.

<sup>5</sup> Note the shift from the nonresistance of Guy F. Hershberger in *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944) to granting the use of nonlethal coercive force in the nonviolence of Ron Sider in *Christ and Violence* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 46; Duane Friesen in *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 152-54; and Yoder in *What Would You Do?*, 26-42. Mennonites and others with peace convictions who wonder if it is appropriate to use physical force at all should recognize it is employed in Mennonite mental health centers. Out-of-control individuals can threaten the safety of others or themselves. Verbal intervention is usually ineffective, because such persons are not in a rational state. Nonviolent physical intervention is necessary to control violence and restore safety. This method involves five trained people to take down and restrain the person safely (see *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* (Milwaukee, WI: Crisis Prevention Institute, 2004). What can be done in the absence of five trained people? This is where training in martial arts can apply.

<sup>6</sup> The involvements of Wes and Karen Higginbotham, Phil Thomas, and Walnut Hill Mennonite Church (Goshen, Indiana) were essential in this initiative.

MMA.” Learning physical skills, sparring, participating in problem-solving exercises, and role playing help develop the capacity to engage conflict and violence.

This new way was applied when someone attacked my wife, also named Linda. To stop an extended family member high on cocaine from harming her, I used physical force. I took the person down to the floor and held her in a control hold until the police (another form of force) arrived and took her away. I used coercive, physical force to prevent violence in a way which harmed no one. The next day when we were able to visit this person, we did so to be reconciled with her. One day we used the hand of protective force; the next day we extended the other hand of loving care.

### **Assertive Nonviolence**

It is commonplace in ethical theory, legal practice, and social custom that defense against violence is a basic human right.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, there is a moral presumption against harming others, including those who commit violence. Based on a reverence for life, most religious traditions hold these two principles together—the right to protect and the duty to respect life.<sup>8</sup> These principles are often separated when addressing the “what would you do?” question. Many people simply assume either aggression or submission is their only option. Those who believe that the right to protect others and oneself trumps respect for perpetrators usually opt for counter-aggression and often permit lethal force. Those who are committed to nonresistance with an overriding respect for the aggressor often relinquish the use of protective force and call for submission.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Miller. “Killing, Self-defense, and Bad Luck,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 1 (2009): 131. Jeff MacMahan, “Self-Defense and the Problem of the Innocent Attacker,” *Ethics* 104 (January 1994): 252.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief survey of different religious traditions on this matter, see *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice*, ed. Robert L. Holmes and Barry L. Gan (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2005), 4-39.

<sup>9</sup> When director for Women’s Concerns of Mennonite Central Committee US, Beth Graybill asserted that the tradition of nonresistance “has helped contribute to violence against women by implicitly encouraging women to accept abuse as Christ-like suffering, rather than to resist.” As a survivor of a sexual assault, she asked “How does peace theology look different when we put it in the context of violence against Anabaptist women? What does it mean to do theological work experientially, in our bodies?” See “Toward a New Theology: Pacifism

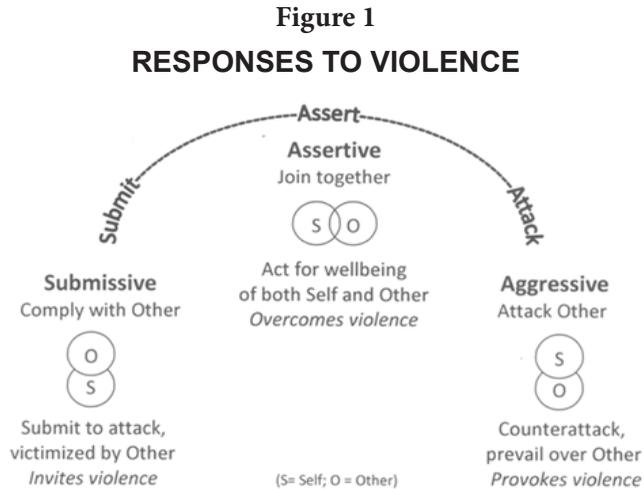
Uncomfortable with either of these options, Lucille, a woman from South Africa, recently sent me an e-mail. She is a survivor of assault and works with others who suffer violence. As a conscientious Christian, she conveys the acute tension between being compelled to protect others while being committed to respect perpetrators as persons too.

Our women and children are constant targets of predators. Surely we must protect them but also show some level of empathy for the lost souls who attack us . . . they too have their story. What are our options?. . . I do not believe that fighting violence with more violence works. But I do not believe Christ expects us to sit back while our women and children are beaten to death or raped. However we must not live by the sword. This is such a hard thing for me to resolve and why I am also attracted to your approach with Peacemakers. . . . Normal self-defense courses can make you paranoid and unsympathetic to the attacker. I don't want to be someone who has seriously harmed or killed my attacker but rather to defend myself in a situation if an extreme one arises with a level of empathy for the person who wants to harm me. I don't know if that is possible but I would like to think it is.

There is a way of holding these concerns together; between submission and aggression there is a wide range of other responses. (See Figure 1.) Rather than being either submissive or aggressive, we can be assertive in a variety of ways. Along with Lucille, I believe that Jesus teaches that we must neither retaliate nor capitulate to violence. He commends assertive, creative action. In *Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink relates Jesus' teaching about turning the other cheek to real world violence. Far from being passive, Wink explains "the third way" of Jesus in these imperative terms:

- Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
- Stand your ground and exercise your own power
- Break the cycle of violence with a creative alternative
- Surprise others with actions for which they're unprepared

- Deprive the other of responses where force is effective
- Cause the other see you in a new light
- Seek the other's transformation and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>



*Graphic created by author.*

When submissive, we allow ourselves to be victimized. When aggressive, we counter attack, seeking to prevail over and against the other. When assertive—its Latin root *asserere* means “to join”—we seek to join the aggressor and act for his or her well-being and that of everyone involved in violence.<sup>11</sup> While being submissive can invite violence and being aggressive can provoke greater violence, being assertive is more likely to overcome violence as it demonstrates a respect for each person involved.<sup>12</sup> Assertive

<sup>10</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 175-93.

<sup>11</sup> Latin *assertus*, past participle of *asserere*, from *ad-* + *serere*, “to join.”

<sup>12</sup> One study concludes that “Violence breeds more violence, so the general solution to violence is a refusal to return it but to respond nonviolently instead.” Experience shows that “an open, accepting, loving response to an aggressor [disarms] in precisely the way the theory of nonviolence suggests. The opposite, violent response is precisely the kind of action that is liable to produce an escalation of violence.” See Peter Macky, *Violence: Right or Wrong?* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 113-14, 205-206.

action can include the use of force—psychological, social, or physical—to stop violence and protect all involved, including aggressors.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Two Hands of Nonviolence**

This third way takes two hands, the “two hands of nonviolence,” as peace activist Barbara Deming describes it. As I picture it, with one hand—palm out, gesturing to stop—we say, “Stop what you are doing,” and with the other hand—extended palm up—we say, “I respect you as a person.” With one hand we are saying “I will not cooperate but will resist your violence.” With the other we are saying “I join you as another human being.” As Deming puts it, when we act in this way we have two hands upon the aggressor. One hand calms him, making him ask questions; the other makes him stop.<sup>14</sup> By tending to the safety of the aggressor along with protecting others, the two-hands approach limits the level of violence and breaks the action-reaction cycle of escalating violence. The disciplined spirit of acting with both hands is powerful. Violence provokes resentment and the desire for revenge; transforming this tendency, assertive nonviolence communicates respect and thereby reduces the desire for retaliation.<sup>15</sup>

Most aggressors need their target to act like a victim. Both hostile aggression and helpless submission reinforce the attacker’s expectation and sense of power. But we can help change the play by not acting in expected ways. Being firm and respectful, while showing courage rather than fear and self-control rather than anger, is unexpected. Acting in this fashion can create a sense of wonder in the attacker and an opening for a nonviolent way out of aggression.<sup>16</sup>

Sociologist Randall Collins describes what it takes for violence to

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<sup>13</sup> Recall the definition of “force” offered at the beginning of this article.

<sup>14</sup> With Deming, I use a masculine pronoun here, recognizing that it is most often males being violent in such cases.

<sup>15</sup> David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 224-25.

<sup>16</sup> On how nonviolence works, see Angie O’Gorman, “Defense through Disarmament: Nonviolence and Personal Assault,” in *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: A Reader on Christian Nonviolence in the U.S.*, Angie O’Gorman, ed. (Philadelphia: New Society, 2000), 241-47. Also see Laura Slattery, Ken Butigan, Veronica Pelicarie, and Ken Preston-Pile, *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living* (Long Beach, CA: Pace e Bene, 2005), 278.

occur. An aggressor must circumvent the emotional field of “confrontational tension and fear” inherent in an antagonistic interaction, and establish emotional dominance over the target. Collins contends it is so difficult for aggressors to turn “emotional tension” into “emotional energy” (strength) that violence is less likely to occur than commonly assumed. Given the nature of violence, he claims that “it is hard to perform” and “most people are not good at it.”<sup>17</sup> Targeted people make it more difficult for aggressors when they express strong “emotional energy” that communicates they are not weak and easily dominated. Recognizing that this interaction is more emotional than physical, people have more power in a situation than they often realize, and they can learn how not to be victims.<sup>18</sup>

Responding with the two hands of nonviolence is a form of “moral ju-jitsu.”<sup>19</sup> In ju-jitsu the violent actions of aggressors don’t work and cause them to lose control. Meanwhile, the resister maintains safety, balance, and the moral high ground. This can prompt a process of wonder, questioning, and reappraisal in the aggressor’s mind. In our safety training we tell stories of how the two hands of nonviolence have stopped physical violence with a strong presence and verbal resistance. For example, a powerful testimony is that of Angie O’Gorman, who faced a sexual assault in her home. She stopped the man who came against her with words alone. Her reflections on the disarming power of nonviolence are instructive.<sup>20</sup>

While many accounts show that the transforming power of word and spirit can create a humanizing encounter and prevent violence, there are situations when words don’t stop violence and the two hands of nonviolence become physical. We tell these stories, too, in safety trainings to illustrate how individuals have overcome violence. Some examples from our area include the following:

- Goshen College students who physically resisted and escaped

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<sup>17</sup> Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 8-24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-66.

<sup>19</sup> Term coined by Richard Gregg in *The Power of Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1934). For more on how moral ju-jitsu works, see Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005), 404-406.

<sup>20</sup> O’Gorman, “Defense through Disarmament,” 241-47.

attempted rapes

- A woman from a Mennonite home who forcefully repelled a rapist after nine previous women submitted to the attacker and were raped<sup>21</sup>
- One of our instructors who intervened in a fight at the school where she worked to restrain the aggressor until the security officer arrived.

Consider the case of Beth Graybill when assaulted in her home. A man with a knife broke in and attempted to rape her. Seeking to protect herself and respect him in order to redirect his action, she first engaged him verbally. When her words didn't work and he forced himself upon her, she physically resisted and was able to wrest the knife from his hand. Rather than using it against him, she slid it under the refrigerator. At that point the man ran from the house and she escaped. He was eventually caught and convicted for his violent assault. After she was safe, Beth visited him in jail in a process of restoration. To strengthen her one hand, she reports how empowering it was to do training in physical defense. Her story demonstrates the two hands of nonviolence in action.<sup>22</sup>

What would Jesus do if assaulted? Without examples of interpersonal, predatory violence against him in the gospels, we don't know what he would do.<sup>23</sup> But consider the witness of two devout followers of his way: Mahatma

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<sup>21</sup> Studies indicate that training in martial arts or physical defense can help reduce the risk of assault, equip individuals to resist violence, and add therapeutic value in recovering from violence. See Leanne R. Brecklin, "Evaluation Outcomes of Self-Defense Training for Women: A Review," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13, no. 1 (2008): 60-76, and S. Margarete Heyden, Billie Anger, Tiel Jackson, and Todd Ellner, "Fighting Back Works: The Case For Advocating And Teaching Self-Defense Against Rape," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance* 70, no. 5 (May/June 1999): 31-34.

<sup>22</sup> View her story in "*Thermostat: How Can We Turn Toward Peace in Time of Fear?*" (Mennonite Central Committee, 2005, videodisk). This videodisk also features the story of Blake, a student in the Peacemakers program who resisted bullying with words alone.

<sup>23</sup> The social, political, and spiritual aspects of Jesus' death make the crucifixion much more than "an act of personal violence." When struck in the face, Jesus didn't turn his other cheek but asserted himself, demanding an explanation for the soldier's aggressive behavior (John 19:20-23).

Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Upholding the way of nonviolence, how did they answer the “What would you do” question? Both allowed the use of physical force to stop interpersonal violence. While committed to nonviolence, Gandhi spoke about opposing evil and protecting others from violence. He even corrected followers who thought they were honoring his way when they allowed their wives and children to be beaten at home.<sup>24</sup>

My creed of nonviolence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent [person] to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have, therefore, said more than once . . . that, if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e., nonviolence, we must . . . be at least able to defend all these by fighting. . . . [Those] who can do neither of the two [are] a burden. . . . [They] must either hide [themselves], or must rest content to live forever in helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi demonstrated his response one day when a man ran into their kitchen and attacked his wife, Kasturba, with a burning stick. What did the master of nonviolence do? He physically grabbed hold of the attacker’s wrist and took the stick away. In the process the perpetrator soiled his robe. Gandhi insisted on washing it for him.<sup>26</sup> Gandhi illustrated how the two hands of nonviolence work together: with one hand he used force to take away the weapon, and with the other he cared for the attacker.

Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. distinguished between nonviolence in the cause of social demonstrations and force used to resist interpersonal violence. Committed as he was to *agape*, King said that ethical appeals “must be undergirded by some form of constructive coercive power.” Power and love are not polar opposites as often thought, where “love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love.” Instead, “what is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless

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<sup>24</sup> From a conversation with Belden Lane, Professor of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University, on August 17, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> [www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/phil8.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/phil8.htm), accessed September 1, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Ved Mehta, *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 13.

and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice.”<sup>27</sup> King added that resisting violence can prompt respect, claiming that when people use force in self-defense they do not forfeit support but even win it “by the courage and self-respect it reflects.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Martial Arts as a Model**

Consider martial arts as a model for using assertive force to resist violence. Holding together the right to protect and the duty to respect life, martial arts promote the use of protective force to stop violence and secure a safe outcome for all involved, including aggressors. Contrary to what is usually depicted in movies, martial artists who are violent, take the offensive, or use excessive force fail to uphold the way of martial arts. As Sensei Funakoshi, founder of modern karate, has said, “The essence of karate is nonviolence. To subdue an attacker without fighting is the highest skill.” The best traditions of martial arts teach a way of peace with physical skills for counteracting violence.<sup>29</sup> As well, these arts have been shown to reduce aggression, increase self-control, and form respect for others.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas*, 218-22.

<sup>28</sup> “Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Social Organization of Nonviolence” (1959), [mlk-pp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/Oct1959\\_TheSocialOrganizationofNonviolence](http://mlk-pp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/Oct1959_TheSocialOrganizationofNonviolence), accessed September 7, 2012. Note also King’s speech “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom” (May 4, 1966), [www.thekingcenter.org/archive/theme/419](http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/theme/419).

<sup>29</sup> Peter Payne, *Martial Arts: The Spiritual Dimension* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 35-36; Fay Goodman, *The Ultimate Book of Martial Arts* (London: Anness Publishing Ltd., 1999), 6-7; Gerald S. Diment, “Training for Nonviolence” in *Martial Arts Training* (March 1993), 68-69; John Stevens trans., *The Art of Peace: Teachings of the Founder of Aikido* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2007); Terrence Webster-Doyle, *One Encounter, One Chance: The Essence of the Art of Karate* (Boston: Weatherhill, 1996); Scott Shaw, *The Warrior is Silent: Martial Arts and the Spiritual Path* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), 35-38; Thomas Crum, *The Magic of Conflict* (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, 1987), 31-49; Terry Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1993), 38-50; A. Westbrook and O. Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere* (North Clarendon, VT: Charles Tuttle, 1999), 20, 362.

<sup>30</sup> Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life*, 251; Crum, *The Magic of Conflict*; Richard Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit* (Berkeley: Blue Snake Books, 2007), 351, 360, 367. For clinical evidence on this claim, see Stuart Twemlow, “The Application of Traditional Martial Arts Practice and Theory to the Treatment of Violent Adolescents,” in *Adolescence*

Training in martial arts can help us face threat with awareness, courage, and self-control. This can circumvent primitive “fight or flight” reactions, enabling us to respond constructively to transform hostile aggression that feeds on fear and anger. We can then employ verbal methods to stop violence before it starts. That is, because we cannot think effectively when our fists are clenched, martial arts can enable us to calm down, gain control, and open our hands so we can use our heads to respond. A less-anxious presence alone may have a disarming effect on hostility. If physical resistance is required, martial arts teach a range of techniques to stop violence.

When John Howard Yoder came upon Aikido, a martial art, in a Fellowship of Reconciliation article, he was impressed with it as a nonviolent response to attack.<sup>31</sup> Affirming the use of nonlethal force, Yoder said, “I am more likely to find [another way out] creatively if I have already forbidden myself the easy violent answer. I am still more likely to find it if I have disciplined my impulsiveness and fostered my creativity by the study and practice of a nonviolent lifestyle, or of Aikido.”<sup>32</sup>

My colleague Tim Peebles, a Ph.D. candidate in theology and ethics at the University of Chicago, is another oxymoron as a Mennonite martial artist. He has extended the study of peace in the university to the practice of peace on the street. In searching for a way to engage violence in his urban Chicago context he too has come to martial arts. He writes:

While Mennonite Anabaptism has had a “word” of peace and reconciliation in response to predatory violence, we have lacked sufficient deeds—powerful and empowering deeds—to go with

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33, no. 131 (Fall 1998): 505ff, and Christine Steerman, “Conflict Resolution/Aikido Program Plan” (unpublished paper provided to the author). On how engaging with martial arts has a therapeutic effect of empowering people, see “Aikido as an Aid in the Psychotherapy of Trauma” in Paul Linden, *Winning is Healing: Body Awareness and Empowerment for Abuse Survivors*, [www.being-in-movement.com/sites/default/files/wih\\_sample.pdf](http://www.being-in-movement.com/sites/default/files/wih_sample.pdf). On integrating Aikido as a kinesthetic pathway for learning responses to conflict, see the work of Donald N. Levine: [www.donlevine.com](http://www.donlevine.com). For a claim that martial arts has contributed to forming a culture of nonviolence in Japan, see Bruce Haines, *Karate's History and Traditions* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1995), 168, 172.

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, “Aikido and nonviolent effectiveness,” April 9, 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Yoder, *What Would You Do?*, 28.

those words. My own search for a deeded word in response to predatory violence and gang conflict has led me to an odd partnership with traditional martial arts. . . . I am using martial arts to give individuals and groups physical competence and emotional confidence for making peace with urban conflicts. Such competence and confidence not only reduces the tendency toward violence (in potential perpetrators) but also increases the capacity to engage violence (for victims and bystanders).<sup>33</sup>

Peebles frames the work of making peace with martial arts in terms of shalom, justice, and power. He places assertive resistance to violence in the larger frame of comprehensive *shalom*; that is, shalom at all levels of human life. At each level shalom involves at least two interconnected aspects: the prevention or healing of injury and the establishment of right relationships. To speak of “right relationships” is to speak of justice. In Peebles’s view, justice is more than legalistic notions of following the law and retaliatory notions of retribution. To heal broken relationships and establish right relationships requires tending various kinds of power and power imbalances. It is to move toward, and perhaps participate in, “power equalization.”

So when we talk, as Mennonite martial artists, of assertiveness, in contrast to submissiveness, on the one hand, and aggressiveness, on the other, we are talking about an attempt to promote just relationships between a self and other in conflict, a relationship that can neither accept the imbalance of power claimed by an Other (submission) or reverses the imbalance by gaining overwhelming power by the self (counter-aggression) but rather attempts to create a “safe place” for both self and other. It is interesting, in this regard, that the word “safety,” most often used in the sense of physical and emotional protection, security, and well-being, comes from the same root as “salvation.” What we Mennonite martial artists are seeking, then, are moments of interpersonal salvation—physical and emotional safety and justice—between self and other in conflict.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> From e-mail correspondence with Tim Peebles, September 18, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

We draw from the teachings of Sensei Ueshiba (1883-1969), founder of Aikido, which he called the Art of Peace. The following statements are quotations from his teachings.

We train in hopes of . . . bringing peace to people around the world. The aim of the warrior is the restoration of harmony, the preservation of peace, and the nurturing of all beings. . . . The art of peace does not rely on weapons or brute force to succeed. . . . The true meaning of samurai is one who serves and adheres to the power of love. Protect the attacker. . . . To injure an opponent is to injure yourself. To control aggression without injury is the art of peace. . . . The art of peace is based on four great virtues: courage, wisdom, love, and friendship.

When threatened with harm, Aikido master Terry Dobson suggests several options: (1) negotiate a reasonable way out; (2) take a solid, centered stance to defuse aggression; (3) deceive by diversion or deflection; or (4) withdraw when all else fails and an escape is open.<sup>35</sup> Aikido suggests non-lethal physical force *only* after all other options have failed and it is *necessary* to stop violence when an escape is not open.<sup>36</sup> In this case Aikido then seeks, following its principles of restoration, reconciliation, and harmony, to neutralize aggression, not aggressors.<sup>37</sup> The rule is to use minimum effective force to prevent violence, to avoid harm to both the aggressor and the target, and to join the attacker in a way to create safety and, ideally, restore right relationships.

Our martial art has a code of conduct to control the use of protective force to stop violence. It states: “(1) Avoid rather than block; (2) block rather

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<sup>35</sup> Dobson, *Aikido in Everyday Life*, 38-50.

<sup>36</sup> Is it wise to physically resist in an assault? Research has shown that physical self-defense during a sexual assault reduces the chance of a completed rape. For a review of studies, see “Self-Defense Training: A Brief Review,” National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, Medical University of South Carolina (no date), [www.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/self-defense.html](http://www.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/self-defense.html). Also Heyden, Jackson, Anger, and Ellner, “Fighting Back Works” (see note 21). Gavin De Becker suggests that people should generally trust their intuition to respond to violence in *The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence* (New York: Dell, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Westbrook and Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere*, 20, 362.

than strike; (3) strike rather than maim; (4) maim rather than kill, for life is precious, nor can any be replaced.”<sup>38</sup> The last clause is the basis for the code: all life, even that of an aggressor, is precious and to be respected. This code “guides our hands,” so to speak: with one hand we protect; with the other we respect.<sup>39</sup> In keeping with this code, we seek to respect even those who mean to harm others or us. This requires us to avoid physical engagement and to use verbal defense as much as possible. If physical defense is necessary as a last resort, we call for assertive force that respects the attacker’s ultimate well-being as well as that of those we are protecting. Without such a code or respect for aggressors, most self-defense training is counter-aggression. What we call for is not simply following a high-sounding ideal, but for something that makes practical sense, because an aggressor is less likely to react with more violence if treated with respect.

### **A Continuum of Force**

Moving from principles to practice, Peebles and I locate a range of techniques along a continuum of force. Different situations call for different responses with varying intents and outcomes. We distinguish between hurt and harm. By *hurt* we mean something that involves some pain—as with a pinch, pressure point, or control hold—but causes no physical injury. By *harm* we mean something that involves physical injury. For less threatening situations, we teach techniques that *hurt* but don’t *harm*. For more violent situations requiring more force, we teach techniques that hurt and can harm, such as a strike to the groin, rib, or foot to stun or immobilize an attacker. Some arts, like judo, teach chokes that constrict the carotid arteries and cause an aggressor to lose consciousness but do not hurt or harm.<sup>40</sup> The aggressor is then laid on the ground without being hurt or harmed while help is secured.

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<sup>38</sup> Adapted from Edward B. and Brenda J. Sell, *Forces of Tae Kwon Do: A Martial Arts Training Manual for Men and Women* (Ann Arbor, MI: Rainmaker Publications, 1979), 109. Regarding physical defense, the authors state that ancient masters of martial arts would seek peace and avoid violence, believing it was more important to find ways to preserve than to destroy.

<sup>39</sup> Apart from higher ethical considerations, even a court of law holds people responsible and liable for use of excessive force causing unnecessary injury or death.

<sup>40</sup> If correctly administered. To test this notion, I had someone do this to me, and I can testify that it doesn’t hurt or harm. But due to risks if done improperly, law enforcement officers no longer use this technique.

**Figure 2**  
**CONTINUUM OF FORCE**

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Type	Submission	Strong Presence	Verbal Resistance	Redirective Touch	Physical Restraint	Minimal Stuns	Moderate Strikes	Maximal Attack	
Technique		eye contact, body language, demeanor	tone, intensity, content	hands on shoulder, arms, back	floor pins, joint locks, blood chokes	blows to rib, groin, foot, solar plexus	blows to face, limbs, joints; body throws	blows to head, eyes, spine; use of knife or gun	
Intent		redirect	redirect	redirect	redirect restrain	redirect restrain escape	escape	escape kill	
Outcome		halt	halt	halt	halt hold hurt	halt hold hurt harm	halt hold hurt harm	halt hold hurt harm maiming death	
Degree	Submissive	Assertive					(Aggressive)		Violent

*Table created by Tim Peebles and the author.*

As shown above, our responses are not limited either to do nothing or to kill the assailant, as sometimes assumed. There are multiple options. While I draw the line for myself between columns 6 and 7 for the limited use of nonlethal protective force, I admit that the lines in columns 5 to 7 between assertive, aggressive, and violent force are fuzzy.<sup>41</sup> Noting “stuns” and “strikes” in columns 5 and 6, we may ask if this model advocates the use of violence to stop violence. Isn’t striking an attacker in the groin violent? It depends on how we define violence. If we define it as the intentional use of physical force or power resulting in harm or injury, then this action is violent.<sup>42</sup> But if we consider severity of harm along with one’s intention and

<sup>41</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of techniques, see Rory Miller and Lawrence A. Kane, *Scaling Force: Dynamic Decision Making Under Threat of Violence* (Miranda, CA: YMAA Publication Center, 2012). While this work lacks a basis in peace and nonviolence, it offers a practical approach to our question.

<sup>42</sup> Recall the World Health Organization’s definition of violence as stated at the beginning of this article, with its reference to “injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or

volition in the definition, then it is not necessarily violent. It may simply be assertive force.

Motives and outcomes matter, and they distinguish kinds of force from violence. The long-standing distinction made by some psychologists between aggression and violence is helpful here. Aggression is behavior directed toward another individual with the intent to cause *some harm*, whereas violence is aggression that intends *more serious harm*.<sup>43</sup> Aggressive force and violent force differ in terms of intent and severity of harm. Along with intent and outcome, another important factor is desire or volition—what John Howard Yoder calls “ill will.”<sup>44</sup> One may perform a physical action with the intent, but with no ill will, to stun or immobilize an attacker in his or her violence. In the Table above, force under columns 5 and 6 moves from being assertive to aggressive, in that some harm may result. But as described, such force is not violent, in that it does not *desire* harm.

With these distinctions, a groin strike to escape a sexual assault can be assertive, aggressive, or violent, depending on one’s intent and desire and on the severity of harm:

- *Assertive*: A hand strike to the groin done with the intent to stun but does not injure
- *Aggressive*: A kick to the groin done with the intent to immobilize an attacker with some injury but no desire to cause harm
- *Violent*: A severe blow with a bat to the groin done with hostile intent and desire to punish a perpetrator with major harm.<sup>45</sup>

Along with these factors, consider the use of force in the bigger

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deprivation.”

<sup>43</sup> Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman, “Human Aggression,” in *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 27–51, [www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/abstracts/2000-2004/02ab.pdf](http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/abstracts/2000-2004/02ab.pdf), accessed September 10, 2012. Also see Russell G. Geen, *Human Aggression*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham, UK: Open Univ. Press, 2001), 2-19.

<sup>44</sup> Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, April 9, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Gandhi taught that if physical force was used it was important to say “I’m not attacking you, I’m protecting others” to communicate one’s intent and desire. From a conversation with Belden Lane, Professor of Theological Studies, Saint Louis University, August 17, 2012.

picture. Even if one would call any kind of strike to the groin violent, weigh this action against the greater harm of a completed assault. Consider the traumatic impact of violence: serious injury, lasting fear, unwanted pregnancy, social isolation, substance abuse, impaired relationships, damaged esteem, depression, counter violence, or death. Violence impacts not only targeted victims and their communities but perpetrators, too. All who are involved become its victims.<sup>46</sup>

While the ends don't necessarily justify the means, here again we must weigh the long-term consequences. In the larger scheme of things, how does a bruised testicle, broken rib, or even a crippled knee compare to a completed rape or murder and the consequences of it for not only the victim and community, but also the perpetrator? Motive, means, and ends must all be held together in determining a response to violence. The ethical value of allowing harm to be done by not resisting violence is uncertain. John Howard Yoder questioned whether an ethic of nonviolence means "letting evil happen without opposing it at all, or whether there are ways of opposing evil if it can be done without harm or ill will." With concern both for would-be victims of violence and for the perpetrator who is morally its victim, Yoder claimed that some kinds of physical resistance are appropriate.<sup>47</sup>

As I have been suggesting, resisting violence can be an intervention not just for oneself and others but for perpetrators, since it recognizes how those who are violent harm themselves too. By not resisting violence we fail, in a certain sense, to care for others involved in the moment or in the future. For this reason, I call what we teach not "self-defense"—with the focus on self—but "physical assertiveness" with concern for all involved. Believing that resistance is a form of compassion, Bill Leicht, a Quaker martial artist and co-founder of Peace Dojos International, says that it is best called "social defense" with a duty to restore broken relationships.<sup>48</sup>

### **Pressing for a Realistic Response**

Earlier I described my use of force (Figure 2, Type 4) to restrain a known

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<sup>46</sup> On trauma from violence, see Carolyn Yoder, *Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Unpublished memo in possession of J. R. Burkholder, April 9, 1979.

<sup>48</sup> From personal conversation and e-mail exchange, September 26, 2012.

person from attacking my wife Linda. Suppose this person had used a knife. What then? In response to this question Linda, who is gentle and committed to the way of peace, said, out of a loving care for this person, that she would want me to go so far as to break the attacker's wrist (Type 6) if that's what it would take to the attack. Not just for her own safety, she explained, but for the attacker, who was on parole. Had she completed her assault with a deadly weapon, she would have gone to prison and suffered serious consequences.

What if I were in the situation James Miller faced—with a violent stranger attacking my partner with a knife? How far would I be willing to go? I think I *should* follow our code of conduct and training in knife defense to remove the weapon and stop the attacker, and I'd like to think I would use assertive force only to protect Linda and respect the attacker. However, I can't say what I would actually do. While in abstract thought it is easy to make ethical distinctions, in actual situations they can become blurred. We may make claims about our likely behavior in a classroom or sanctuary, but on the street or in our home they can collapse. This is where we must be realistic in understanding defense against violence. While we may be skilled in physical defense, we cannot be fully prepared for much of real world violence, which happens in ways that often overwhelm even people with extensive training. As well, those so committed to nonviolence that they claim they wouldn't hit anyone can react violently in the heat of the moment. We all have the capacity to become violent, cave in to fear, or simply freeze when overwhelmed with violence that adrenalizes us with powerful instinctive "fight-or-flight" reactions that impair rational responses.

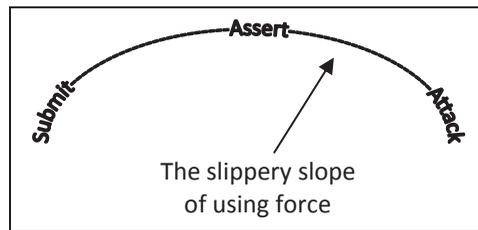
Violence triggers instinctive physiological reactions that impair our ability to think. Rooted in fear or anger and intensified by pain, these reactions prompt us to flee or fight. When fear and anger are sufficiently aroused, the forebrain of higher cognitive functioning shuts down and the aggressive instincts of our animal midbrain take over, adrenalizing our bodies with a powerful chemical cocktail to do what we need to do to survive. When this happens, we may not be able to think straight or be too stunned to think at all.<sup>49</sup> Being realistic about our natural defense mechanisms calls us to be

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<sup>49</sup> The fight-or-flight response is an integrated physiological reaction in the body controlled by the hypothalamus of the brain. When confronted by a threat—physical or emotional, real or imagined—the hypothalamus causes the sympathetic nervous system to release epinephrine

humble about making absolute claims, to understand those who under- or overreact when engaged in overwhelming violence, and to be aware of the slippery slope from forceful assertiveness to violent aggression. If we are engaged in physical assertiveness, pumped up with adrenaline, we can easily slide into attack mode with violence. Because of this, it is important to have a code of conduct to control the use of force as proposed in the model.

**Figure 3**



*Graphic created by author.*

## **Conclusion**

The way of nonviolence is not just a matter of choosing not to be violent. It also requires preparation to develop the skills and capacities to be nonviolent. Archilochos, an ancient Greek soldier and poet, asserted that “We don’t rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training.” Just as soldiers prepare to counteract violence, we would do well as peacemakers

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and norepinephrine (also called adrenaline and noradrenaline) and other related hormones to cope with the threat. When rapidly released, these powerful messengers propel us into a state of arousal where metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, muscle tension, sensory awareness, and pain tolerance all increase. See Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *The Warrior Within: Accessing the Knight in the Male Psyche* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 34-36; Herbert Benson and Eileen Stuart, *The Wellness Book* (New York: Scribner, 1992), 34; Mark Mattson, ed., *Neurobiology of Aggression: Understanding and Preventing Violence* (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 2003). On conditioned responses for aggression, see David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1996). A short form of Grossman’s work appears in “Trained to Kill,” *Christianity Today* August 10, 1998, 2-3. For an extended discussion on how complex and overwhelming violence is, see Rory Miller, *Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence* (Miranda, CA: YMAA Publication Center, 2008), 57-71.

to obtain training to transform violence.<sup>50</sup> For further work, I offer a few suggestions:

- Explore approaches that use martial arts to make peace with interpersonal violence. Discover what we can learn from other embodied practices, such as those in Peace Dojos International, to inform peace studies and to develop programs on the ground.<sup>51</sup>
- Engage people with differing perspectives about violence using the model of martial arts as a bridge to show that the way of nonviolence is not passive but assertive, even forceful. This model may help turn heads and start discussion about the way of peace for responding to violence.
- Develop community-based programs to train children, youth, and adults in transforming violence (Peacemakers Academy in Goshen, Indiana is an example), and freely share the curriculum with those wanting to create programs in their contexts.<sup>52</sup>

Interpersonal violence and our range of responses to it are complex and require additional examination. I hope that the model of assertive resistance drawing on martial arts which I have outlined provides a practical answer to the “what would you do?” question, and that it will prompt further work on the problem of interpersonal violence.

*Steve Thomas is a Mennonite pastor and peace educator in Goshen, Indiana. A black belt in Tae Kwon Do, he is the co-founder and former director of Peacemakers Academy.*

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<sup>50</sup> Physical training in nonviolence also needs teaching for a spirituality of peace. From my faith perspective, I teach students that Jesus is our master in the way of peace, that the Spirit is the source of our power, and that “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but the Spirit who makes us strong, loving and wise” (2 Tim. 1:7).

<sup>51</sup> For Peace Dojos International and its projects around the world, visit [www.aiki-extensions.org](http://www.aiki-extensions.org).

<sup>52</sup> Visit [peacemakertraining.org](http://peacemakertraining.org) for a description of Peacemakers Academy, or e-mail [steveforpeace@gmail.com](mailto:steveforpeace@gmail.com) to request the free *emPower* curriculum.

Duane C.S. Stoltzfus. *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013.

During the First World War, Hutterite farmers were among many religious objectors to war caught up in the efforts of US President Woodrow Wilson's administration to induce young men to register for the draft and enter military training camps. *Pacifists in Chains* tells the story of four such men, each of whom were married and had families, from Rockport Colony in southeastern South Dakota: brothers David, Michael, and Joseph Hofer, and Joseph's brother-in-law Jacob Wipf.

In the fall of 1918, shortly after armistice, Joseph and Michael died in federal custody at Leavenworth, Kansas, victims of mistreatment at the hands of prison officials frustrated by their steadfast refusal to obey orders as wartime conscientious objectors. Their kinsmen, David Hofer and Jacob Wipf, survived similar ordeals and eventually returned to their Hutterite colony and to a grieving extended family. While this episode in civil liberties abridgement has already been well documented by historians, Duane Stoltzfus details the Hutterites' experiences to remind readers of legacies of persecution in American history and to draw attention to periodic failures in "democratic" governmental policies.

A key theme of this volume is the dehumanizing of conscientious objectors, especially once they had moved through the process of court martial and entered disciplinary barracks. Stoltzfus argues that the treatment of the Hutterites "became a shameful example of the failure of a government to stand by its constitutional guarantee of freedom to practice religion and promise to safeguard citizens from torture and other cruel and unusual punishments" (xii). Throughout the war and in the months following, President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton Baker were slow to respond to reports of prisoners' mistreatment.

A strength of this work is its broad attention to conscription in the 1918-1919 era and how the process often fell short of planners' ideals. Debates about conscription in the United States have often centered on questions of fairness, and this particular wartime program had structural problems as well as difficulties with enforcement. For example, several million draft-age men evaded military service by simply not registering. Further, depending on when they became eligible for the conscription program, some drafted

men had more alternatives than others. Central to the Hutterite story is that farm furloughs were never an option for the Hofers and for Wipf, although conscientious objectors who entered military service a few months after they did were able to obtain these relatively attractive assignments in lieu of entering military training camps. The timing of a draftee's engagement with governmental demands on the homefront, it seems, could make the difference between life and death.

The narrative arc of this account follows the Hofer brothers and Wipf from their home community in South Dakota to Camp Lewis in Washington state, where commanding officers immediately noticed that the men "won't fall in" (82). Despite careful and even kind explanations by military officials to the Hutterites that they had to line up with other men and sign papers to receive camp supplies, including blankets, the Hutterites simply refused. At their court martial proceedings, where they relied on military-appointed counsel to defend them, the Hutterites explained that "We can't sign any papers. We don't believe in war. We won't do anything at the army" (81).

Despite pleading not guilty to charges against them, they, like nearly all other court-martialed objectors in 1918 and 1919 were convicted and sent to federal prison. The author recounts the misery that the men experienced first at Alcatraz, where they refused to work, and then at Fort Leavenworth, where Joseph and Michael Hofer arrived so ill that they were immediately hospitalized, and where conscientious objectors were routinely harassed and abused by prison authorities.

*Pacifists in Chains* buttresses the disturbing story of the Hofer brothers' deaths with broader civil liberties activism in this era by Mennonites, Quakers, and advocacy groups such as the National Civil Liberties Bureau. Few American conscientious objectors in the World War I era were as resolutely absolutist in their responses to governmental and military dictums as the Hutterites, and Stoltzfus frames the Hofers' story in the broader context of varied responses to wartime conscription. Archival research in denominational and federal repositories undergirds this work, in addition to the author's interviews with the Hofers' descendants in Montana and Saskatchewan. Eighteen photographs, mostly exterior and interior images of the federal prisons at Alcatraz and Fort Leavenworth, enhance the book.

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Daniel Castelo. *Theological Theodicy*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012.

Tragedy is not a good time to be handing out books on theodicy, but there is nonetheless a need for sound, accessible books help people reflect on suffering and God. This small volume (105 pages) fills that need well. Daniel Castelo presents a thoughtful, Christian, ecclesial framework for living and loving in a world of unexplainable suffering. If we ask whether a good, all-powerful God is finally compatible with evil, we must say something about “good” and “all-powerful” when applied to God, and about “evil” when applied to creation. Who is this God that we try to reconcile with the sheer excess of creaturely misery? Can we be trusted to know good and evil when we see it?

*Theological Theodicy* begins by asking whether theodicy is possible. What both Voltaire and Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov share in their attacks on theodicy is the assumption that by reason and natural moral sense we have what it takes to judge God and the world. Protest atheists assume this vantage point and refuse to indulge a god with such bad behavior. As an alternative, Castelo holds up the church’s belief that God is a mystery who cannot be perceived or understood except through revelation. Only through participation in “worship, prayer, silence, and yes, ignorance” (22) can we grasp what goodness, evil, and providence finally mean. What is needed is an “exercise both of speaking and remaining silent, of pursuing truth wherever it is found and humbly claiming ignorance when appropriate” (25).

A theological theodicy begins with doxology, with the worshipful confession that the God of Israel is eternal love, creating freely and giving creation its own measure of freedom within this love. Castelo’s best work is in his comparisons between the deist god we often revert to in theodicy and the God of Israel who gratuitously gives life to the cosmos and then appears *up to something* within its history. We are caught up into the middle of God’s action as the image bearers of God, and from this middle we are empowered to worship and act in love, if not to understand. Within this middle, the evil of the present world is felt as anti-God and thus anti-human. In this theodicy sin, evil, suffering, and death are bound together (with a brief nod to the devil) as the setting, actions, and consequences of a larger rebellion and of the world in the throes of its created but natural change and development.

But is God really doing something about suffering? It is here that a theological account must say enough but not too much: “The value of the crucifixion is not simply that through such an event Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for us; rather . . . God in the flesh becomes one with us so that the threat to all of existence, namely death, is sustained by God” (84-85). God is overcoming the problem of evil from within. Castelo admits it is beyond our grasp to understand how the cross and resurrection can be a sufficient answer to the sheer excess of human suffering. However, if God is rejected for that, we lose the basis upon which critique, lament, and rebellion depends. *Theological Theodicy* concludes with a thoughtful reflection on the church’s work and posture within God’s mission to overcome evil.

Two omissions are problematic if this is to be a *theological* account. First, a theodicy that does not include Heaven, other than to criticize the escapism of “otherworldly” concerns, ignores a central theme in how believers have sung and prayed through this veil of tears. Second, the extensive biblical pattern of “natural” disasters told as Messianic birth pangs, the wrath of God, or portents of the Day of the Lord seems shriveled when demythologized to only “the outworking of geological and atmospheric patterns of the earth’s development and shaping” (66). Granted, the biblical pattern is easily abused, but naturalizing earthquakes and medicalizing pestilence has not salved our deepest questions.

To fit into the publisher’s *Cascade Companion* format, *Theological Theodicy* had to be more suggestive than thorough about the many implications of a theological rather than a philosophical approach to theodicy. A theological account must wade from confession into philosophical questions about the nature of analogy, freedom, causality, and providence. Readers will need to look for that work elsewhere. But in laying out the wide theological terrain of a Christian theodicy, this is a helpful book.

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Jeremy R. Treat. *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

In this published version of his Wheaton College doctoral dissertation, Jeremy Treat aims to interweave two major biblical themes—atonement and kingdom—often held apart or even put at odds in biblical scholarship and theological literature. Treat writes from within the Reformed evangelical tradition, exhibiting fondness for Luther and (especially) Calvin, and primarily for an audience comprising readers from the Reformed tradition. His book challenges that tradition to develop a theological perspective that better integrates not only atonement and kingdom themes but also biblical and systematic theology.

The book is structured in two major sections—biblical theology and systematic theology. In the biblical section, Treat seeks to demonstrate how an interconnection of kingdom and atonement emerges from the Genesis narrative of creation and covenant, crescendos in the prophecies of salvation and suffering (especially Second Isaiah), shapes the overall trajectory of the gospel narrative (especially Mark), and concludes the biblical canon (Colossians and Revelation). In the systematic section, he strives to formulate a doctrinal framework integrating penal substitution with *Christus Victor* and cross with kingdom.

Treat states his major thesis throughout the book: “*Christus Victor* through penal substitution” (39); “royal victory *through* atoning suffering” (58) “The great exchange on the cross of Christ effects the great transition to the kingdom of God” (139); “The kingdom is the ultimate goal of the cross, and the cross is the means by which the kingdom comes” (247).

Although the author wants to correct the penal-substitution-only/mainly mindset of much evangelical thinking about atonement theology, he does not develop a biblical case for penal substitution but presumes it from the beginning. Nor does he directly engage with substantive criticism of penal substitution, confining critics and apologists to consecutive footnotes (175). While many places he simply glosses penal substitution onto textual exposition not warranting it, he acknowledges that penal substitution is not really there in some key texts cited for his thesis (cf. 58-59, 204-207). Of course, Treat does not set out to persuade on penal substitution—his

intended audience agrees entirely with him on that. Still, he may fail to carry along readers not already convinced.

Even taken on its own aims and terms, this volume has two significant shortcomings. First, while the biblical endeavor to coordinate kingdom and atonement is praiseworthy, the argument stumbles from the start. Treat subtly slides Abraham's substitutionary sacrifice into an atoning sacrifice (61-62), when the text names it a "burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2). He asserts, without citing textual support, that the Passover lamb served to propitiate God's wrath (63). He bypasses Leviticus, offering no exegetical interpretation of the sacrificial cult to corroborate his thesis. He ignores or downplays evidence contrary to his key claim that the Isaianic servant is to be identified with the messianic king. That the Hebrew and Greek texts both explicitly identify the servant as "Jacob/Israel" (Isaiah 42:1 LXX; 49:3 MT) gets no mention, and that none of the four servant songs in Hebrew or Greek identifies the servant as "king" or "anointed" is declared "of little significance" (70-71). And then, declining to exegete Isaiah 53, he opts to "cut to the heart of the matter: the suffering of the servant is depicted in terms of substitutionary atonement" (81).

Second, while Treat's systematic attempt to integrate cross and kingdom is also appreciated, his "kingdom-cross interplay" is mostly a one-way exercise. Penal substitution and *Christus Victor* do not forge an equal partnership—penal substitution does all the heavy lifting. Because the theological relationship between victory and sacrifice is hermeneutically predetermined by "the major biblical theme of the wrath of God" (182), penal substitution holds all the "explanatory power" in atonement theology (223), such that "the victory of the cross is dependent on the vicarious suffering of the Christ" (224). Likewise, kingdom and cross are said to be "mutually interpretive" (141) and "mutually enriching" (247), but the cross holds all the interpretive keys. Treat does elaborate "the cruciform nature of the kingdom" (229), but not the actual content of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing (cf. 92-94). In effect, he does not consider how the kingdom might reorient our view of the cross because, I think, he does not expect Jesus' enactment of the kingdom to reveal anything about how God achieves victory (cf. 42-43).

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Royden Loewen. *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Scholars who write about Mennonites, and Mennonites themselves, frequently identify and self-identify with reference to a nation-state, as a way of differentiating a huge diversity in historical experience and geographic location: as in Russian Mennonite, Indonesian Mennonite, Congolese Mennonite, Canadian Mennonite, for instance. But certain Mennonite groupings, largely because of their persistent transnationality, do not develop—and actually reject—a sense of national belonging. In this fascinating and important study, historian Royden Loewen analyzes the Low German Mennonites of the Americas, whose ongoing movement between north and south over nearly 100 years is unprecedented in global migration history. Loewen, who holds the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, proposes that these Canadian-descendant Mennonites have created, or “imagined” (with reference to, but unlike, Benedict Anderson’s well-known work), a “transnational village” that exists “among nations” but is not tied to any one nation-state.

The story begins in Canada in the early 20th century, as traditionalist Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan see their relationship with the nation begin to erode, particularly with regard to public education laws enacted in 1916. Disillusionment with Canada as a utopia for religious freedom prompts 8,000 Mennonites to emigrate to Mexico and Paraguay. This story is fairly well known in the annals of Mennonite history; what follows is less understood, at least by North Americans. The word ‘Canadian’ in the book’s title gestures to the starting point of what becomes a diasporic epic, but it also indicates an ongoing relationship—one that combines longing, nostalgia and antipathy—that Mennonites in Mexico and Latin America maintain with their homeland, and that is expressed poignantly in letters published in their transnational press.

The book’s eight chapters follow the sojourners as they scatter in three directions over three generations: first, those who remain in the environs of the settlements established in northern Mexico and the Paraguayan Chaco in the early 1920s; second, those who moved further south in Mexico and to British Honduras (now Belize), Bolivia, Argentina, and elsewhere in

Paraguay; and third, those who opted to 'return' to Canada beginning in the 1950s. This dispersion was not one-directional, however, as many families developed a pattern of moving back and forth across borders in response to the seasons of agriculture and employment opportunities more broadly, citizenship laws, extended family relations, and the fissures of church life.

Loewen's usage of the idea and reality of a village to shape this study is creative and thought-provoking. The book breaks new ground by pushing us to think about Mennonites, and indeed other groupings of people with shared characteristics, in ways that go beyond the common ethnic or national or religious categories. While the village presented here is 'ethno-religious' in identity, it is also essentially about "kinship networks, common codes of conduct, folklore, even gossip, and shared ways of making a livelihood" (231). Though the approximately 250,000 Mennonites are scattered over tens of thousands of miles, their village exists through remarkable connections maintained by letters, newspapers, and travel.

Loewen's study confirms that while the Low German Mennonites might be considered traditionalist or conservative, they are not static. Rather, they are perhaps more dynamic than so-called modern Mennonites, in that they are literally in constant movement as they seek ever more satisfying places to transplant their village identities, and are always evaluating whether to move towards greater alignment with modernity or towards a deepened nonconformity vis-à-vis whatever nation-state they choose to settle within.

*Village among Nations* is theoretically sophisticated and will be inspirational to students and scholars of transnationality, migration and diaspora, religious and ethnic identity, memory, and nationalism. It is also full of engaging personal stories. Group identity does not happen void of personal choices, individual personality, familial negotiation, and pure happenstance. Accordingly, Loewen is careful to present his concept of village formation through the myriad experiences of men, women, and even children living in diverse spaces from Bolivia to British Columbia. The numerous personal stories are among multifarious sources used, such as oral histories, diaries/memoirs, transnational newspapers, local histories, and ethnographic studies done by other scholars. *Village among Nations* offers a sympathetic glimpse into the complex lives of a little-understood community while also presenting a fresh analysis of how Mennonites are

living out their economic and religious aspirations 'in the world' but not 'of the nation'.

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# CALL FOR PAPERS

## *Mennonite Education: Past, Present, and Future*

**October 16-18, 2015  
Bluffton University  
Bluffton, Ohio**

Mennonite educational practices and institutions in the 21st century face a time of upheaval and transformation arising from the impact of new communication technologies such as the Internet and digital media, from changing assumptions about the organization and worth of knowledge, and from shifting religious and cultural demographics. On the occasion of the publication of a new biography of Mennonite historian and educational pioneer C. Henry Smith, the C. Henry Smith Trustees and the Mennonite Historical Society invite proposals for panels, workshops, and presentations from teachers, researchers, administrators, staff, students, and others invested in Mennonite education both within and beyond Mennonite educational institutions.

We encourage presentation proposals from across the academic disciplines on a broad range of topics related to the past, present, and future of Mennonite education in all of its varied North American settings, from early childhood through graduate programs.

Deadline for proposals for papers or panels: May 15, 2015  
Send inquiries and proposals to Gerald Mast:  
mastg@bluffton.edu.

**For more information:**  
[www.bluffton.edu/conference/](http://www.bluffton.edu/conference/)

# CALL FOR PROPOSALS

## *Global Mennonite Peacebuilding: A Conference and Festival*

June 9-12, 2016

Conrad Grebel University College  
Waterloo, Ontario

This conference and festival will bring together academics, practitioners, artists, and church workers from around the world to dialogue and reflect on Mennonite peacebuilding accomplishments, failures, challenges, and opportunities in varied international settings, past and present. It will explore traditions and contemporary expressions of Anabaptist/Mennonite peace beliefs and practices, enable academics and practitioners to learn from each other, give expression to peacebuilding ideals through the arts, and assess and re-envision Mennonite peacebuilding practice.

Organizers invite proposals that situate specific subjects within the framework of global Mennonite peacebuilding. For suggested topics and themes, see the website for a list that is exemplary, not exhaustive. Other topics or themes that foreground peacebuilding from a Mennonite perspective are also welcome.

Priority deadline for submission of proposals: October 1, 2015

Final deadline: December 1, 2015

**For more information on the conference, the organizing and advisory committees, and proposal submissions:**

[www.uwaterloo.ca/grebel/global-mennonite-peacebuilding-conference](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/grebel/global-mennonite-peacebuilding-conference)