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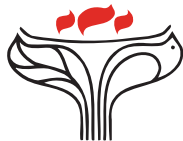
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# The Conrad Grebel Review

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## Foreword

With this issue, Derek Suderman begins his tenure as editor of *The Conrad Grebel Review* (CGR). He joins the ranks of CGR's distinguished editors during its first 35 years: founding editor Walter Klaassen (1983-1987), Rodney Sawatsky (1988-1990), Arnold Snyder (1991-1997; 2003-2009), Marlene Epp (1998-2002), and Jeremy Bergen (2009-2017).

The CGR editorial board, comprising the editorial staff, faculty members of Conrad Grebel University College, and external scholars, is responsible for the journal's overall intellectual direction and content. The journal's board members and staff appreciate the counsel provided by a team of consulting editors.

CGR will continue to honor its mandate as a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry devoted to advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives. The journal welcomes submissions of articles or reflections in keeping with this mandate, as well as brief responses to published articles.

*W. Derek Suderman*  
Editor

*Stephen A. Jones*  
Managing Editor

*April 2018*

## **“Binding and Loosing” in Matthew 18:18 and the Mennonite Church Canada 2016 Decision on Sexuality**

*Rudy Baergen*

Throughout the ages the Christian church has needed to engage in the challenging task of ethical discernment. Learned theologians, compassionate pastors, and countless gatherings of praying believers have sought out God's will not only in mundane but also in life-threatening situations. In recent decades, Christian bodies across the denominational spectrum have been called to reconsider their traditional positions on same-sex marriage. Many church leaders would concur that it has been one of the most difficult discussions in generations, often very painful and divisive. Many times it has led to a parting of the ways within the faith community.

This essay begins by considering anew the far-reaching mandate that Jesus gave to the church in the Gospel of Matthew: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Matt. 18:15-20 has often been a reference point when dealing with unrepentant sinners, but it has at its core a just-as-important preceding step, namely that of discerning right from wrong. Before there can be confrontation, repentance, or discipline, there must be agreement on what is the sin in focus. I will start by reviewing the meaning of the binding and loosing terminology of Matt. 18:18 in its literary and social context, concurring with those who suggest that the primary setting of this verse is within the sphere of discernment and the application of the will of God in all matters. In Matt. 18:18 Jesus offers the binding and loosing hermeneutical principle to his followers, named as the church, to aid them in their ongoing discernment and management of sin.

With that as background, I then pose this question: Might the binding and loosing mandate shed some helpful, and perhaps even healing, light onto contemporary discernment processes around committed same-sex relationships?<sup>2</sup> Mennonite Church Canada, a small but major Mennonite

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 18:18. All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> Terminology is important in this discussion. While the discernment within the Church around matters of sexuality is larger than same-sex marriage, the latter became the focus

denomination of about 225 congregations, completed such a discernment process, designated as Being a Faithful Church (BFC), in the summer of 2016, and this perhaps provides us with a test case.<sup>3</sup> I say more about the BFC process below. I will contend that even while the multi-year process did not often refer to the binding and loosing mandate, upon analysis it does indeed provide a modern-day example of this hermeneutical principle at work.

In the last part of the essay I point to some ways in which the binding and loosing paradigm of Matt. 18:18 sheds light upon that particular ecclesial process, and conclude that the ancient hermeneutical principle continues to offer a valuable template for the discernment of today’s ethical issues.

### **Matthew 18:18-19 in Its Literary Context**

Matthew 18:15-20, part of the fourth of five major discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, is found within the third and final division of the Gospel (16:21-28:20), which recounts the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 18, describing the nature of the community of “this soon-to-be-crucified-but-risen” Lord, fleshes out one of the significant plot developments in 16:21-28 (Jesus will suffer in Jerusalem; followers must deny themselves and take up the cross).<sup>5</sup> The new community is to be marked by humility (18:1-5), care for the “little” one (18:6-7), perseverance (18:8-9), and concern for the one who has gone astray (18:10-14). Sin is to be identified and confronted, and the sinner dealt with accordingly if there is

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in the Mennonite Church Canada Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process to be considered below. The preferred terminology ultimately used in the BFC discernment was ‘committed same-sex relationships’ and will be the common usage in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> For a full documentation, see the Being a Faithful Church tab on the Mennonite Church Canada website. The discernment process officially ended at the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in 2016 and the Task Force was decommissioned. In the interest of full disclosure, the author served as a member and co-Chair of the BFC Task Force and was obviously supportive of the final recommendation. The perspectives offered here are personal and not part of the BFC process.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), further developed by Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), chapters 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 148.

no repentance (18:15-17). Authority to bind and loose on earth as in heaven is given (18:18). Where two agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by the Father in heaven (18:19). Where two or three gather in his name, Jesus is there among them (18:20). The immediate literary context of 18:15-20 sounds a note of compassion for the one who has gone astray (18:10-14)<sup>6</sup> and unlimited forgiveness for the one who has sinned (18:21-35). Chapters 19 and 20 continue to describe how this new community is to function.

Several preliminary comments about 18:15-20 are in order, all of them having implications for how to understand the binding and loosing terminology.

It is often noted that the unit, verses 15-20, shows signs of several different traditions compressed together by the Gospel writer. Verses 15-17, immediately following a thought about the deep compassion of the Father in heaven for the lost sheep, outline a process of confrontation of sin and, if need be, discipline. And then verses 18 and 19 are each set aside with the formula “Truly I tell you,” giving a sense of stand-alone statements with their own contextual history apart from the previous verses. We should expect a pre-Matthean context for parts of the text.

Only here in Matt. 18:17 (twice) and in 16:18 (“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church”) do we find the Greek word “church” (*ecclēsia*) in the Gospels, and on both occasions it is connected to the mandate of binding and loosing. (The NRSV’s earlier “member of the church” in 18:15 is a contemporization of the Greek “your brother.”) The use of the term “church” is a post-Easter description for the community founded by Jesus. Here Matthew is remembering and articulating the mandate given by Jesus for a future time. The mandate is for the church and not just the first disciples.

Commentators generally accept that the phrase “against you” in verse 15, set apart in the NRSV, should be left out of the main text. While it is found in the majority of the Greek manuscripts, it is not found in some of the most dependable ones. Arguments can be given both for and against

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<sup>6</sup> Compare with Luke 15:3-7, where the concern is for the sheep who has never been part of the fold.

including the phrase, making a conclusive decision difficult.<sup>7</sup> Omitting it broadens the concern beyond a personal sin committed against “you” to any sin that offends the community. I conclude that the context suggests that “against you” is an early interpolation, and the implication and teaching of this text should at least be considered in that light.

The Greek verbs in verse 18, *deō* (to bind, to tie up, to bind in chains) and *luō* (to loose, to free, to liberate), are common in the New Testament. But it has long been recognized that this binding and loosing terminology had a significant Semitic context and usage. Here in Matthew 18, no explanation of the terms is offered or apparently needed. The Greek terms are commonly believed to correspond to the Hebrew *’āsar* (אָסַר -‘to tie, bind, imprison’) and *hitīr* (הִתִּיר -‘to unfasten, loosen’) and the Aramaic *’āsar* (אָסַר -‘to tie, bind’) and *šēra’* (שָׁרָא -‘to loose, to release’).<sup>8</sup>

The connection between the “binding and loosing” of Matt. 16:19 and 18:18 and the “forgiveness and retention” of sin of John 20:22-23 raises an interesting discussion. The common structure of four clauses and the conferring of authority by Jesus suggests there might be an affinity between them, but what exactly it is remains unclear. The Greek terms in John (*aphiēmi* = forgive; *krateō* = retain) are not the traditional binding and loosing terms in Matthew. However, Mark 7:8 points to the fluidity of the terms used in John 20. There, when Jesus criticizes the Pharisees, the same Greek words are translated “you abandon (*aphiēmi*) the commandment of God and hold to (*krateō*) human tradition.” Thus, the same Greek terminology used in John 20:23 for forgiveness and retention of sin is used in Mark 7:8 for the broader traditional discerning practice among the rabbis of binding and loosing.<sup>9</sup> The translation found in John should not overshadow Matthew. I will say more about this below.

The authority given to the church to bind and loose is underlined by verses 19 and 20, which declare the presence of the Father in heaven

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), 45, doubts that it should be included.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Büchsel, “δέω (λύω)” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT], Volume 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 60-61.

<sup>9</sup> J.A. Emerton, “Forgiving and Retaining,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 13, no. 2 (Oct. 1962): 325-31, postulates a common Aramaic saying based on Isaiah 22:22, from which it was possible to move from the sense of ‘releasing’ or ‘setting free’ to ‘forgiving of sin.’

and the spirit of Jesus in this holy endeavor of the community. God's own presence and Jesus' spirit will enable this work through the church in future generations.

### **The Social Context for Binding and Loosing in Matthew 18**

1. Undoubtedly there is a Jewish and biblical background to the binding and loosing terminology found in Matthew's Gospel. Duncan Derrett suggests that the metaphor is as old as the Book of Psalms which, for example, speaks of Joseph having been given authority by the Pharaoh to bind and teach his officials (Ps. 105:22).<sup>10</sup> Many commentators see a point of connection between the authority to bind and loose given to Peter in Matt. 16:19 and the management of all the king's domestic concerns entrusted to Eliakim in Isaiah 22:22: "I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut and no one shall open."<sup>11</sup> The prerogative of loosing and binding was earlier practiced by the priesthood and by the elders at the gate (Deut. 22:15; Ruth 4:1; Lam. 5:14) but eventually monopolized by the rabbis in later Judaism.<sup>12</sup> As they took over and developed the priestly practice of pronouncing clean and unclean, they began to judge actions as 'tied, bound' or the reverse, 'unfastened, loosened.'<sup>13</sup> In so doing, they stood on traditions going back many centuries.

2. Throughout Christian history, strongly influenced by John 20:23, many have understood binding and loosing in Matt. 18 as giving the church the authority to forgive and retain sin.<sup>14</sup> To whom exactly this authority is given (the Pope as heir to Peter? the Sacrament of Penance? the pastor? a select group of elders? each of Christ's faithful?) and how exactly this might occur has been much debated. Often the authority to forgive sin on God's behalf has been nuanced within Protestant circles to refer to the authority exercised through the preaching of God's forgiveness in Christ (and evidenced by what

<sup>10</sup> Duncan Derrett, "Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29:23 [sic])," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 1 (March 1983): 114-15.

<sup>11</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, "κλεις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT], Volume 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 750.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Derrett, "Binding and Loosing," 115.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Patrick Barber, "Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter's Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16-19," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 4 (2013): 950.

then happens in the earth-bound church community). God’s forgiveness is channeled through the faith community’s redemptive actions.<sup>15</sup> Writes one commentator: “If disciples forgive other disciples’ sins against them, the sins are removed as an obstacle to the community oneness; if they continue to hold onto the sins against them, the sins remain as obstacles to community harmony.”<sup>16</sup>

However, it is doubtful that the binding and loosing of Matt. 18:18 should be limited to the retaining or forgiveness of sin, even though it comes within a larger literary unit dealing with community forgiveness. Rather, the point of these verses is the identification and confrontation of an action commonly accepted as sin, along with a call to repentance and a disciplinary procedure to deal with a failure to bring about communal resolution. Authority is granted to redefine the status of the offender as “a Gentile or tax collector” (18:17), i.e., someone outside the church fold (which might be an act of community shaming yet does not rule out love and mercy, as in the case of the lost sheep). The procedure and the admonition presuppose prior discernment and a semblance of agreement on what is the sin. What happens if the confronted individual maintains that the action is not sin? Moral discernment, while not named in the text, must be a prerequisite before the procedure outlined in 18:15-17 can be put into effect with integrity. Thus, moral discernment and community response to sin are inseparably intertwined.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 285.

<sup>16</sup> C.H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 255.

<sup>17</sup> John Howard Yoder also makes this link between discernment and community response in his work with binding and loosing. See John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1994), 6; *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 329. While Yoder was perhaps the most well-known Mennonite theologian of the 20th century and his work on Christian ethics helped define Anabaptism, he is also remembered for his long-term sexual harassment and abuse of women. Documentation and discussion of these abuses are found at <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/john-howard-yoder-digest-recent-articles-about-sexual-abuse-and-discernment-2/> and in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015). I believe there is value in continuing to engage Yoder’s written work, but within the wider context of his

Furthermore, in the literary context of chapter 18, which includes the preceding verses 10-14 and subsequent verses 21-35, Matthew seems to be guarding against any restraining of forgiveness within the community. Why would the church not want to forgive sins? It is to do so “seventy-seven times” (v. 20). Then too, while Jesus claims the power to forgive sins on behalf of God, to the protests of the Pharisees (Mark 2:10 parallel), it is not clear elsewhere in the NT that the apostles practice such unilateral authority.<sup>18</sup>

While forgiveness of sin is the focus of John 20:23, and plays a significant part in the literary context around Matt. 18:15-20, it is not the primary concern of these verses.

3. Several other options for the meaning of binding and loosing are generally dismissed as irrelevant to understanding Matthew 18. Occasionally, for example, commentators propose that binding and loosing refers to exorcism or control of the magical.<sup>19</sup> But in the context of Matthew 18, why would the church want to loose a demon? Others point to the rabbinical practice of retaining or dissolving vows. Again, while shedding light on the process of binding and loosing, the matter of vows is not part of the context of Matthew 18.<sup>20</sup>

4. The rabbinical use of binding and loosing in the context of placing and lifting of a ban is a more likely social context for Matthew’s usage. The Jewish historian Josephus describes with disapproval how the Pharisees during the time of Hasmonean queen Alexandra (c. 70 BCE) were “at liberty to banish and recall, to loose and to bind whomever they would.”<sup>21</sup> Binding

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personal, scholarly, and churchly legacy.

<sup>18</sup> Derrett, “Binding and Loosing,” 115, for example, cites Acts 8:22-24 as an example of the lack of such a unilateral prerogative. The rabbis never claimed such authority; their primary interest was not in forgiving sins but in determining what was or what was not a sin.

<sup>19</sup> Richard H. Hiers, “‘Binding’ and ‘Loosing’: The Matthean Authorizations,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (June 1985): 234-35, argues that “binding” and “loosing” in intertestamental NT writings refer to the binding of Satan and satanic beings, and the loosing of such beings “or their erstwhile victims” (235), but in the end seems to acknowledge that there are other more convincing explanations for the use of these terms in Matthew 18.

<sup>20</sup> Z.W. Falk, “Binding and Loosing,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 25, no. 1 (1947): 92-100. Vows made under incomplete information, false assumptions, or duress could be absolved. The schools of Shammai and Hillel both accepted the ‘release’ from a vow, but the former was more restrictive than the latter (Falk, 93).

<sup>21</sup> Cited by J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to*

and loosing is also associated with such authority in traditions preserved in the Talmud.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for overzealously binding and thus barring entry into the kingdom (Matt. 23:13)!

5. This notion of including or excluding from membership is closely connected to the authority of discerning, teaching, and defining acceptable behavior. Joachim Jeremias notes that in Rabbinical literature, binding and loosing are almost always used with respect to halakhic<sup>23</sup> decisions, grounded in juridical practice.<sup>24</sup> The terms were associated with what was and was not bound by the Law.<sup>25</sup> Rabbinical decisions properly arrived at by an authentic majority were considered ratified in heaven, and “so are accepted by God as if legislated by himself.”<sup>26</sup> The ongoing rabbinic process creates “the path that one walks,” constantly being fine-tuned and updated through face-to-face contemporary application.<sup>27</sup> This background, in which binding and loosing were commonly associated with the responsibility of determining right or wrong behavior, and of applying the law to specific situations, is most likely the best explanation for Jesus’ use of the terms in Matthew’s Gospel. Mark Allan Powell summarizes:

A majority of scholars now recognize that the terms “to bind” and “to loose” are best understood with reference to a practice of determining the application of scriptural commandments for contemporary situations. . . . Jewish rabbis “bound” the law when they determined that a commandment was applicable to a particular situation, and they “loosed” the law when they determined that a word of scripture (while eternally valid) was

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*Matthew* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996): 245. See *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 434.

<sup>22</sup> Hermann L. Strack und Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* (München: 1922), Volume 1, 739-41, cite examples but also note that rabbinical usage is not limited to this.

<sup>23</sup> Halakha (“the path that one walks”) constitute the binding practical application of the 613 commandments (mitzvoth) in the Torah subsequently preserved in the Mishnah and the Talmud.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremias, “κλεις,” *TDNT*, Volume 3, 752.

<sup>25</sup> See Barber, “Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder,” 947, for a number of examples.

<sup>26</sup> Derrett, “Binding and Loosing,” 113; Strack und Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, 741-46.

<sup>27</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 5.

not applicable under certain, specific circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

The social context of binding and loosing within Matthew's Gospel, Powell suggests, is the rabbinical application of the law to specific situations. A classic example from the Talmud rules on when a fallen pigeon must be returned (bound to the law of ownership) and when it can be kept by the finder (loosed from the law).<sup>29</sup> Powell notes that for the rabbis (and he suggests for Matthew as well) loosing the law never meant dismissing scripture or countering its authority. "The law was never wrong when it was rightly interpreted. The issue, rather, was discernment of the law's intent and the sphere of its application."<sup>30</sup> In the example of the lost pigeon, the law against stealing is not rescinded, but the rabbis "sought to define stealing in a way that would determine just what behavior was prohibited."<sup>31</sup>

Michael Barber helpfully clarifies that there is actually a confluence of concepts around binding and loosing, including teaching authority, authority over social boundaries, and management of sin.<sup>32</sup> One concept flows into the next. Even if one concludes that Matt. 18:15-17 primarily refers to forgiveness of sin or the use of the ban and excommunication, those are the follow-up and concluding outcome of the preceding discerning authority of binding and loosing. Forgiveness or discipline presuppose prior discernment, teaching, and agreement on the moral standards to be upheld. This may require extensive debate and airing of different views before consensus might come. Thus the broader concern of Matthew 18 is not mere obstinacy on the part of an unrepentant sinner, but moral discernment and the church's role in it. Discernment and community restitution/maintenance are not mutually exclusive but are two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Allan Powell, "Binding and Loosing: A paradigm for ethical discernment from the Gospel of Matthew," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 6 (December 2003): 438-45. Powell's work has been significant in the development of my own thoughts on the use of binding and loosing in Matthew's Gospel.

<sup>29</sup> "A fallen pigeon which is found within fifty cubits—lo, it belongs to the owner of the dovecote. If it is found outside of a fifty-cubit range, lo, it belongs to the one who finds it." Baba Batra 2:6. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988) 561.

<sup>30</sup> Powell, "Binding and Loosing," 439.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Barber, "Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder," 947.

I contend that this indeed is the social context from which to understand Jesus’ use of binding and loosing. Powell gives a number of examples of how Jesus, seeking to fulfil the law and find its true intent, becomes involved in binding and loosing.<sup>33</sup>

- Jesus binds the law prohibiting murder as applicable to anger and insults (5:21-23), and binds the law prohibiting adultery to include lust (5:27-28).
- Jesus binds the prohibition against adultery as applicable to divorce and remarriage (5:31-32; 19:3-9) but also looses his own prohibition in instances of *porneia* (NRSV “unchastity”).<sup>34</sup>
- Jesus binds the prohibition against swearing false oaths to include all oaths (5:33-37).
- Jesus binds loving the enemy to the commandment to love your neighbor (5:43-48).
- Jesus releases plucking grain to relieve hunger from the prohibition of work on the Sabbath (12:1-8).
- Jesus releases performing works of healing on the Sabbath (12:9-14).
- Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus binds the commandment “Honor your father and your mother” to apply to caring for one’s parents in old age (15:3-9), denouncing the Pharisees for voiding the word of God.<sup>35</sup>
- Jesus responds to the question about paying taxes to Caesar in light of the biblical prohibition against idolatry (22:15-22): Should paying tax tribute to a man who claims to be a god be bound or loosed from the law of idolatry?

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<sup>33</sup> Powell, “Binding and Loosing,” 441-42.

<sup>34</sup> See page 15 below for a comment on the rabbinical discussion on divorce and remarriage.

<sup>35</sup> As noted above, the parallel passage in Mark 7:8 is especially intriguing in that it uses the same Greek words as found in John 20:23: “You (*aphiēmi* = abandon/release/forgive) the commandments of God and (*krateō* = hold to/retain) human tradition.”

It becomes amply clear that Jesus was engaged in binding and loosing to clarify God's way for daily life.<sup>36</sup> In Matt. 18:15-20 Jesus in turn gives this authority, in his name, to the church, including the first steps of discernment, naming sin, teaching, and then moving forward into pastoral procedures of managing sin in the community. He gives the church the rabbinical authority to determine what is right and wrong and to act on that basis. Binding and loosing at its heart seeks to implement the will of God in all matters of daily living.

6. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for binding when they should be loosing and loosing when they should be binding. His words in Matt. 11:28-30 are striking in this context: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The tension lies between "making void the word of God for the sake of human tradition" (15:6) and "condemning the guiltless" (12:7). In navigating that tension, Jesus declares that his intent is to fulfil the law—that is, to cut through to the moral logic of the law, free it from human tradition, and bind it to God's will. In so doing, God's way will be properly applied to contemporary life and to new, yet unforeseen, situations.

What are some of the guiding principles that Jesus uses in this work? Powell notes that central to the binding and loosing that Jesus initiates is a hermeneutic in which scriptures interpret scriptures, and certain scriptural mandates have priority. Among these are the Golden Rule (7:12), favoring mercy over sacrifice (9:13; 12:7), giving priority to love for God and neighbor (22:36-40), and having clarity on the "weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (23:23).<sup>37</sup>

More generally, the Sermon on the Mount lays out a number of guiding principles for binding and loosing in the community of Jesus that are

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<sup>36</sup> Again, Jesus was by no means alone in this work of binding and loosing on many matters named in this list. See for example *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011) for numerous references to these issues in rabbinical literature.

<sup>37</sup> Powell, "Binding and Loosing" 442. For a brief treatment of Jewish hermeneutics in the first century, see Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975). Of particular interest is the Midrashic interpretation and the guiding rules developed. See 32-38.

fleshed out throughout the Gospel. These include compassion for “the least of these,” humility and meekness, thirst for justice (righteousness), purity in heart, love of enemy, refraining from easy judgment of others that leads to hypocrisy, being light and salt, integrity of word and deed, love for the unlovable, forgiveness, freedom from earthly treasure, radical trust in God, paying attention to the type of fruit that the tree bears, and watchfulness until the end. Truly, Jesus gives a tremendous resource to the church in its task of binding and loosing.

As the manifestation of God’s presence, Jesus claims the rabbinical authority to bind and to loose. He in turn gives that mandate to the church, together with the gift of the Spirit. The authority to do this work is not because his followers are wiser, more pious, or more educated, but because they do the work in the name of Jesus who dwells among them (18:19-20; John 20:22-23).<sup>38</sup> The mandate is given not to individuals to act upon alone or to the clergy and the elite, but to the community gathered in Jesus’ name (18:20).

### **Ecclesial Application of Binding and Loosing**

Indeed, from its inception the church has taken on the task of binding and loosing. Already in the NT documents the church is engaged in this task as it confronts new realities. We see this, for example, with divorce and remarriage. Even before Jesus’ time, divorce was a contentious issue. While the rabbinical school of Hillel took a lenient interpretation of the law of Moses (Deut. 24:1), easily allowing a man to write out a certificate of divorce to his wife, the school of Shammai bound divorce to the law of adultery except on grounds of unlawful sexual behavior.<sup>39</sup> In his answer to the Pharisees in Mark 10:10-11, Matt. 19:3-6, and Luke 16:17, Jesus categorically binds divorce to the law on adultery, presumably in the interest of protecting women from economic hardship and social marginalization. But in Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:7-9, the position of Shammai is re-established, i.e., divorce of the wife is loosed from the law against adultery on grounds of her unchastity (*porneia*). Is this Jesus

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>39</sup> This ruling derives from the passage regarding a certificate of divorce in Deut. 24:1. The NRSV renders the Hebrew term in Deut. 24:1 with the vague “something objectionable.” A more literal translation of the Hebrew would be “a matter of nakedness” (cf. Lev. 18:6ff).

speaking, or the community of Matthew adapting his words?<sup>40</sup> Either way, a particular issue in the Matthean community is evidently being addressed in a new way.

Equally intriguing is the fact that Mark's Gospel, commonly believed to be written for a Gentile Roman audience in which women had the legal right to divorce, adapts Jesus' prohibition against divorce to include women. And the Apostle Paul, writing even earlier, adds another wrinkle when he looses divorce from the law of adultery by unbinding a believer from marriage to an unbeliever "if the unbelieving partner separates" (1 Cor. 7:15). The mandate of binding and loosing is obviously at work within the NT!

Other examples of binding and loosing in the NT community involve fasting and food laws, food offered to idols, Sabbath observance, and male circumcision. With regard to the latter discernment, the Jerusalem Council speaks in the name of the Spirit to release Gentiles from certain expectations of the law (i.e., circumcision), but binds them to other stipulations (e.g., abstaining from foods offered to idols). To what extent was this a conscious process of binding and loosing in fulfillment of the mandate laid out by Jesus in Matthew 18? In all these cases, the issue was not about going beyond Scripture but rather about properly binding and loosing new circumstances.

What might contemporary ecclesial processes look like if they would consciously seek to apply the binding and loosing paradigm?

### **Mennonite Church Canada's BFC Process in Light of Binding and Loosing**

In 2016 Mennonite Church Canada concluded a multi-year discernment process regarding committed same-sex relationships. The process had begun nine years earlier in response to persistent voices from congregations and individuals requesting that the denomination's existing official statements be reconsidered. Among these documents, *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*<sup>41</sup> declares with reference to divorce and remarriage that "God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman

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<sup>40</sup> Many commentators agree that Jesus probably spoke categorically against divorce, and that the exception clause is added by Matthew. J.C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew: The Penguin Testament Commentaries* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 309, suggests this is an example of the church practicing Matt. 18:18. See also Gardner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, 290.

<sup>41</sup> *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), 72.

for life.”<sup>42</sup> An earlier statement on homosexuality in 1986, while repenting of “rejection of those with a different sexual orientation,” understood the Bible “to teach that sexual intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in marriage and that violation of this teaching is sin.”<sup>43</sup>

The BFC process consisted of the annual preparation and dissemination of a document with discernment questions made available to local congregations, discussion groups, education classes, and regional and national Assemblies. Feedback and responses determined the content of the next round of discernment. Throughout the process the resources prepared by the Task Force sought to frame the endeavor as a spiritual discernment, grounded in the insight and wisdom of the Christian Scriptures and invoking the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the opening document author Robert J. Suderman, then General Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada, stated that the Church must always discern, and that when it speaks again it can repeat what it has said before, it can modify what it has said, or it can change what it has said.<sup>44</sup> At the end, in the Assembly of 2016, after hundreds of submissions, thousands of conversations, much emotional discussion and earnest prayer, and one final national Assembly discernment time, a strong majority of delegates from churches across Canada approved a final recommendation. It affirmed the continued use of the Confession of Faith, respectfully acknowledging that some congregations and individuals through study of scripture and their journey of discernment had come to a different understanding of committed same-sex relationships than commonly understood by readings of the Confession; it recommended that space be made to test alternative understandings in the Body to see if they are a nudging of the Spirit of God; and it called for the church to continue in conversation in the implementation of the recommendation.<sup>45</sup>

While the multi-year Mennonite Church Canada BFC discernment did not often make public reference to binding and loosing, a number of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>43</sup> *Resolution on Sexuality*, 1986. [www.home.mennonitechurch.ca/1986-resolutiononhumansexuality](http://www.home.mennonitechurch.ca/1986-resolutiononhumansexuality), accessed April 10, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Robert J. Suderman, “Being a Faithful Church: Testing the Spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment,” [www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf), accessed April 10, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> “Being a Faithful Church 7: Summary and Recommendation on Sexuality,” [www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf), accessed April 10, 2017.

tenets of the ancient rabbinical procedure are clearly at work:

1. We have observed that in the Rabbinic mode, the binding and loosing paradigm assumed that a new dilemma had arisen that needed to be bound to or loosed from previous laws. Individuals brought to the rabbis new circumstances to determine whether or not they should be bound to an existing law. Likewise, the Mennonite Church Canada discernment process began with a request from congregations and individuals for a new consideration of the decisions and teachings around committed same-sex relationships. While some churches and individuals maintained that the “sin” was clear, that there was no need for new discernment, and that the church should continue with community binding and loosing as it had been doing, others argued that the present context puts into question the exact nature of the sin. These voices contended that previous statements and interpretations of biblical injunctions do not speak to the present experience or social reality of loving, committed same-sex relationships. After some years of debate in the local, regional, and national levels, the national Assembly agreed to re-enter a time of discernment. Thus, the discernment process began, as in the rabbinical binding and loosing model, because a significant part of the faith community asked again, “What exactly is the sin we wish to confront?” To be fair, even at the end of the BFC process voices continued to insist that no new discernment on this matter was necessary and the steps of Matt. 18:15-20 simply needed to be applied.

2. The ancient rabbis ruled that there were several grounds upon which one could be released from a vow. Among them was the stipulation that there must be new evidence which put into question the veracity of the vow previously made. Likewise, in offering new *halakoth*, the binding or loosing paradigm was applicable only to situations that brought forward different circumstances or new evidence. This was not to be a backdoor process of abolishing the law.

In regard to Mennonite Church Canada’s discernment around committed same-sex relationships, many voices pointed to these considerations:

a) Broad acceptance of new scientific evidence for sexual orientation as given and not chosen, and the argument that this evidence had not been sufficiently considered in previous rulings. What is the moral logic (intent)

of biblical injunctions of marriage being limited to one man and one woman for life? What was the moral logic in that culture behind the prohibitions against same-sex relations? What does it look like to apply the moral logic of previous rulings in light of new scientific understandings of sexual orientation and same-sex attraction unknown to previous generations? How do we in a social context that accepts these understandings of sexual orientation apply the moral logic of Matt. 19:12, where Jesus seems to allow that not everyone will be able to accept celibacy?

b) The dissonance between, on the one hand, the nature of same-sex relations in focus in biblical prohibitions against same-sex intercourse and, on the other, present questions around loving, committed monogamous same-sex relationships. The new social sexual reality, very different from what earlier generations experienced, had to be considered. Thus there seemed to be grounds to apply the binding and loosing hermeneutic to this discernment matter.

3. In Matt. 18 Jesus gives the mandate of binding and loosing to his followers, named within the text as the church; binding and loosing is envisioned as a churchly process. In the opening paper of the BFC discernment, Robert Suderman spoke of the work as an ecclesial exercise,<sup>46</sup> and this became central in two significant ways. First, participants were reminded that this was not a political process but a spiritual exercise seeking to discern the mind of God for our time. Congregations were encouraged to ground their discernment in the disciplines of prayer, worship, Biblical study, openness to God’s Spirit, and careful listening within the Body of Christ.

Second, BFC was to be a churchly process in the tradition of Anabaptist ecclesiology. Special attention was to be given to a key ingredient of the 16th-century Anabaptist understanding of discernment, in which authoritative Scripture was interpreted by the hermeneutical community of believers through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>47</sup> An application of the Anabaptist

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<sup>46</sup> “Being a Faithful Church: Testing the Spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment.”

<sup>47</sup> For discussion of the Anabaptist community hermeneutic, see the chapter “Congregational Hermeneutics” in Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), 157-85; John H. Yoder, “Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41, no. 4 (1967): 291-308; Gayle Gerber Koontz, “Ecclesiology, authority, and ministry: An Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective,” in *The Heart of the Matter: Pastoral Ministry in Anabaptist Perspective*, ed. Erick Sawatzky (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press,

hermeneutic determined that the decision would not come from the top down, hammered out by a selected group of experts, scholars, or clergy, but instead would be developed by communities of ordinary believers engaging with Scripture and one another with the help of the Holy Spirit. The BFC discernment occurred in local, regional, and national settings of the church in which experts, academics, individuals personally affected, and people of strong persuasions were all invited to participate. Despite this ideal of an inclusive churchly process and thankfully a strong level of participation, not all congregations and individuals felt included in the activity.

Who, in the broad spectrum from the local to the cross-denominational international church, made up the hermeneutical community? While there was an awareness of the watching world—Mennonite, Christian, and beyond—this discernment was limited to the body of congregations committed to covenanting together within the Mennonite Church Canada family. Given these limits, it is as if only one rabbi among many (Mennonite and beyond) pronounced a conclusion. While the discernment involved more than “two or three gathered in my name,” it was only one small family among many. The broader church discernment continues to evolve.

4. While the final recommendation of the Mennonite Church Canada process was supported by a solid majority of Assembly congregational delegates, the decision did not receive unanimous approval either at the Assembly or within local Mennonite churches across the land. Already in the early stages, it became apparent that there would not be national or local consensus on what exactly is the sin to be confronted. Difference of opinion and alternative interpretation of Scripture continues, in the tradition of the distinguished rabbis Shammai and Hillel. The question of how we can best use Scripture in the discernment of our time became a significant study of its own.<sup>48</sup>

The practice of binding and loosing, as in the NT church, does not necessarily lead to easy agreement. (It often took the rabbinical schools several generations to arrive at widely accepted *halakoth*.) The Mennonite

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2004), 60-73.

<sup>48</sup> See Being a Faithful Church 4: “Testing the Spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment: Using the Bible in Helpful and Unhelpful Ways,” [www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf](http://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/21857/BFC-Book.pdf), accessed April 10, 2017.

Church Canada recommendation acknowledged, with a strong majority, that there is no consensus on what exactly is the sin to be confronted and thus called for creating space for different interpretations. The final report concluded in effect that it is premature to practice the next steps of Matt. 18:15-17, which might lead to the breaking of communion. The fourth point of the recommendation recognized the need for ongoing listening and dialogue.

5. Jesus knew that in applying the mandate of binding and loosing, the community constantly walks a line between “making void the word of God for the sake of human tradition” (Matt. 15:6) and “condemning the guiltless” (12:7). Both of these dangers were voiced throughout the discernment and were respected in the cautious final recommendation, which allows for testing alternative interpretations within the Body. While for some “making space” was seen as abandoning Scripture and the previous Confession, for others it fell short of a full application of justice and mercy for the guiltless.

6. When the rabbis bound or loosed a new circumstance, they never discounted the authority of the law. Jesus also spoke not of abolishing but of fulfilling the intent of the law (Matt. 5:17). For example, his teaching on marriage in Matthew 19 with its exception clause does not annul the law against adultery. “The law is never wrong when rightly interpreted.”<sup>49</sup> Is this reflected in the Mennonite Church Canada binding and loosing process?

The Mennonite Church Canada decision on sexuality did not rescind the Confession of Faith statement that “God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.” However, the resolution does call for permitting testing spaces for congregations whose study and conscience convict them that new understandings of same-sex orientation and attraction present a new circumstance that must now be bound to or loosed from teachings of Scripture in a new way—in other words, be aligned in a new way to the intent and moral logic of Scripture. In this testing space the laws against promiscuity, rape, and sexual abuse all remain intact for same-sex relationships as they do for heterosexual relationships. Committed same-sex relationships continue to be bound to the law against adultery and to covenantal commitment. But in the context of new understandings of sexual orientation and new social circumstances, loving, committed

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<sup>49</sup> Powell, “Binding and Loosing,” 439.

same-sex relationships could be loosed from the exclusively heterosexual definition of marriage in Article 19 of the Confession. The essence of the law, the covenantal faithfulness of two individuals becoming one kin, might be applied in a new way. The decision on sexuality does not rescind the Confession of Faith statement but calls for making space for communities to test their desire to bind committed same-sex relationships to the same ethic and privilege as that of committed heterosexual relationships. In so doing, new life circumstances might be bound or loosed to fulfill the intent and moral logic of the law and the teaching of Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has explored the question of whether the binding and loosing paradigm might shed some light on present ecclesial discernment efforts. New moral dilemmas will constantly confront God's people. The Christian church shares with the rabbis of old the never-ending task of implementing the will of God in changing times. In the ancient practice of binding and loosing, the rabbis bound or loosed new moral circumstances to or from the existing relevant teachings and laws. Jesus, too, practiced binding and loosing, and in Matt. 18:18 he passes the task on to the church. Matthew 18 assumes a discernment and naming of sin, and then calls for a pastoral effort to bring about community resolution of the matter. At its best the contemporary church will fulfill Jesus' mandate by continuing this work, which will require intentional process and careful theological guidance. In the end, as in the case of the ancient rabbis, the church might find itself applying Scripture in different ways. The application and understanding of Scripture for new circumstances, after all, sometimes created intense debate among the rabbis for generations before—if indeed ever—they achieved consensus. Still, when the church engages in binding and loosing, it can take much comfort in the fact that it is engaged in the process that Jesus envisioned, even when it doesn't lead to easy agreement. The presence of God and the Spirit of Jesus are to be found in the process, Jesus tells us.

Mennonite Church Canada's discernment process on committed same-sex relationships is one illustration of the ongoing work of binding and loosing that the church must do. It is not a question of leaving the authority of Scripture behind, or even of going beyond Scripture, but of continuing

Jesus’ binding and loosing work through the church.

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# Historical Anabaptist-Mennonite Pneumatology: A Review of Confessional, Catechetical, and Devotional Materials, 1525-1963

Jamie Pitts

## Introduction

Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians display evident investment in academic and pastoral discussions around Christology, ecclesiology, theological method, the interpretation of Scripture, and ethics. When other topics are treated—if they are treated—they are most often subordinated to one or more of these central topics.<sup>1</sup> If this scenario results in a rich body of reflection on a few areas of interest, it also raises the possibility that other important areas of theology and church life are being underemphasized. In this essay I draw attention to one of those underemphasized areas, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

It has become a commonplace that North American Anabaptist-Mennonites lack a robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit or, more generally, a “spirituality.” In academic circles, Steve Dintaman’s 1992 article, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” is usually credited as beginning a discussion that was extended by Paul Martens and various participants in the debates over whether or not John Howard Yoder reduced theology to ethics.<sup>2</sup> The conversation in North American churches seems to have gone on much

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), which is largely about Jesus and the ethics of nonviolence. Another example is A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001). Much of this book is about method and, as the title indicates, a method rooted in “classical” theological sources and articulated in order to sustain an ethics.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen F. Dintaman, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 205-208; Paul Martens, “Discipleship Ain’t Just about Jesus: or, On the Importance of the Holy Spirit for Pacifists,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 32-40; Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012). See references to additional entries in the debate over Yoder in Jamie Pitts, *Principalities and Powers: Revising John Howard Yoder’s Sociological Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 148-49.

longer: Brian Froese documents controversies among California Mennonites in the 1920s and after over contacts with Aimee Semple McPherson and early Pentecostalism; the influence of the charismatic movement in the Mennonite Church of the 1970s led to the formation of Mennonite Renewal Services and the creation of a study document, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church”; and today questions are raised about how North Americans might respond to the strong Pentecostal currents in Global South Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In spite of these conversations, there has been little sustained work on the Holy Spirit by Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians in recent years.

The few recent writings that touch on these issues call for renewed attention to pneumatological resources in Scripture, early Anabaptist history, and the Global South churches.<sup>4</sup> This call is welcome and deserves serious uptake. At the same time, it shares a common historiographical assumption that what matters most is idealized stories of origin and how these interface with the present.<sup>5</sup> For Anabaptist-Mennonites, it supports an assumption that what happened between roughly 1550 and 1950 has little bearing on what we might think or do today.

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Froese, *California Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2015), 67-71; Harold E. Bauman, “Charismatic Movement,” *Global Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1990), [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Charismatic\\_Movement](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Charismatic_Movement); the Mennonite Church, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church” (1977); Conrad L. Kanagy, Tilahun Beyene, and Richard Showalter, *Winds of the Spirit: A Profile of Anabaptist Churches in the Global South* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2012), 246-49.

<sup>4</sup> Martens, “Discipleship Ain’t Just about Jesus,” 34-37; Kanagy, Beyene, and Showalter, *Winds of the Spirit*, 246-49. Discussions about the “global church” and the “Global South” sometimes assume that the “Global North” is homogenously white, middle class, and secularizing, and that charismatic impulses come only from outside. This approach ignores both the long involvement of white Mennonites in charismatic movements, as signaled above, and the influence of Pentecostal-oriental Latinos, African-Americans, and various migrant groups. See, for example, Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Sawatsky has questioned how this historiographical structure misshapes narratives of Anabaptist-Mennonite history. See Walter Sawatsky, “20th-Century Anabaptist-Mennonites Re-Shaped by Context—First, Second and Third Worlds,” in *Prophetic and Renewal Movements: The Prague Consultations*, ed. Walter Sawatsky (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2009), 177-87. For a very critical reading of general Christian historiography along these lines, see Robert Louis Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1971).

The burden of this essay is to offer a narrative of Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings about the Holy Spirit, and, when possible, accounts of experiences of the Spirit, that extends from early Anabaptism into what is too often regarded as an uninteresting “middle period.” Although I will offer a synopsis of early Anabaptist pneumatology and touch on some recent developments, much of the essay surveys confessional, catechetical, and devotional materials from the 17th century through the early 20th century. I stop in the mid-20th century, as the growth of Anabaptist-Mennonite academic theology and increasing interaction with Pentecostal and charismatic movements after that date make for a proliferation of sources that deserve their own study.

There are, of course, significant limitations to my approach. Highlighting this period and its “official” Anabaptist-Mennonite literature keeps the focus on (relatively) powerful white European and North American men and their writings. This focus wrongly excludes the perspectives and experiences of women, people of color, and people from outside Europe and North America. It also lacks a certain scholarly thoroughness: there are sure to be valuable pneumatological insights from other writings, such as sermons, other occasional pieces, meeting minutes, hymns, letters, and diaries, in addition to what can be gained from visual art and architecture, historical reconstructions of marginalized experience, oral history, and so on. All these sources are worthy of study, and a comprehensive treatment of historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology requires their inclusion. At the same time, there is value in small beginnings. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to synthesize a narrative from these readily available sources. Moreover, beginning the process of narrating an historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology that includes, rather than excludes, the middle centuries may be an important step toward an interpretation of Anabaptist-Mennonite history as a developing pneumatological tradition—and not simply a Christocentric ethical tradition that lost its original pneumatology.

This last comment brings me to the argument, or story, that I want to unfold in this essay. The typical story of an early pneumatological fervor followed by restrained biblicism is true, but only partially so. Although reticence about the Holy Spirit and experience of the Spirit is visible throughout the tradition, so is the quest to know, understand, and experience the Spirit. That quest has often involved interactions with other

Christian movements, such as Pietism, Revivalism, Pentecostalism, and Fundamentalism; sometimes these interactions have eroded commitment to traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions and practices, at other times they have strengthened them. I contend that these interactions and their fruits should be understood as constitutive of Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology: part of how Anabaptist-Mennonites have sought to know, understand, and experience the Holy Spirit is by learning from other Christians. Other constitutive features of this pneumatology include a strong association between the Spirit and disciplined community, a persistent epistemological tension between Word (Jesus, Scripture) and Spirit, and an occasional emphasis on the Spirit's role in consummating history (eschatology).

The story is told in four parts. The first part reviews the strong pneumatological elements of early Anabaptism as well as the reactions against pneumatic excesses. That pattern—striving for the Spirit and reactive wariness—characterizes much of the history that follows. The second part focuses on the many, mostly Dutch and North German Mennonite confessions and martyrologies produced during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The final two parts look at Anabaptist-Mennonite interactions with Pietism and Revivalism and fundamentalism. In the conclusion I review the story, summarize some of the major themes, and suggest what difference telling this story might make to the church today.

## I

### **Early Anabaptist Pneumatology, 1525-1554**

The most prominent account of early Anabaptist history is Harold Bender's "Anabaptist Vision." In that 1942 presidential address to the American Society of Church History, Bender contended that Anabaptism could be described in terms of (1) its understanding of Christianity as the practice of discipleship; (2) its insistence on the voluntary character of the church, which character implies adult baptism, separation from and criticism of ungodly society, suffering, and mutual aid; and (3) the ethic of love and

nonresistance.<sup>6</sup> Bender's summary relies on the "clear line of demarcation" he drew between Anabaptists on the one hand, and spiritualists, mystics, revolutionaries, and antinomians on the other.<sup>7</sup> This historiographic decision meant that the Anabaptists who most emphasized the Spirit were read out of the history. Anabaptism was identified with sober biblical ethics, not an abundant, sometimes messy life in the Spirit.

Bender's "Vision" has been subject to thorough criticism, and charismatic tendencies have been identified even in his model Swiss Anabaptism.<sup>8</sup> In St. Gallen, in eastern Switzerland, Margaret Hottinger and other women prophets led a healthy Anabaptist charismatic community in 1525. This community eventually fell into disrepute for its associations with sexual promiscuity and the bizarre proclamations of at least one member.<sup>9</sup> Although scholars suggest that Michael Sattler's 1527 "Schleitheim Confession" is in part a response to excesses at St. Gallen,<sup>10</sup> Schleitheim is by

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<sup>6</sup> Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), <https://www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/d-av.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Bender thought all true Anabaptism came from the movement that broke from Zwingli in Zurich. Most historians later accepted the very different approach outlined in James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Depperman, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975): 83-121. My narration of early Anabaptism is indebted to polygenesis historiography, with its identification of three primary early Anabaptist movements (Swiss, South German/Austrian, and North German/Dutch), as well as later scholarly "softenings" of this tripartite division through identifying commonalities and contacts among the movements. The term "softenings" comes from Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 10-11. For a comprehensive introduction to early Anabaptism that accounts for both differences and similarities, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Byrd, "Sixteenth Century Anabaptism and the Manifestation of Glossolalia." Conference paper, Society of Pentecostal Studies, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, 2014; Auka Jelsma, "'A Messiah for Women': Religious Commotion in North-East Switzerland, 1525-26," *Frontiers of the Reformation: Dissidence and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 40-51; C. Arnold Snyder, "The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism (1520-1530)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80 (Oct. 2006): 593-94; George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirkville, MO: Truman State Univ. Press, 2000), 228.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Snyder, "Birth and Evolution," 594.

no means anti-pneumatological. The unity of those gathered at Schleithem is, according to the document's cover letter, secured in the face of "a very great offense" introduced by "some false brothers" who, "thinking to practice and observe the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ . . . have fallen short of the truth and . . . are given over to the lasciviousness and license of the flesh."<sup>11</sup> The ensuing theological argumentation that defines its seven articles is largely Christological—Jesus' teachings, example, and atoning work are at the forefront—but there are references that connect the Spirit to comfort in tribulation, and to the peaceable unity and nonresistant separation of the true church.<sup>12</sup> Although Sattler and his fellow confessors were clearly wary of abusing the Spirit, they certainly welcomed the Spirit in their midst.<sup>13</sup>

Mennonite theologian Thomas N. Finger has recently argued that the early Swiss Anabaptists "mentioned the Spirit least often" of the triune persons, but he also acknowledges pneumatological emphases in the thought of Swiss leader Balthasar Hubmaier.<sup>14</sup> In Hubmaier we see clearly the common Anabaptist conviction that the baptism of the Spirit was the concrete inner transformation leading to water baptism and participation in disciplined Christian community. Finger suggests that "the Spirit occupied the foreground" in Hubmaier's ecclesiology.<sup>15</sup> For example, Hubmaier's

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>12</sup> *The Schleithem Confession*, trans. and ed. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1977), 7, 9, 13, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Byrd, "Sixteenth Century Anabaptism," 8, notes Sattler's comment in his final letter to the church at Horb: "I do not reject the grace and revelation of God, but the puffed up make use of this revelation." Sattler then quotes Paul from 1 Cor. 13 on "the tongues of men and angels" (in Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm [Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1950 [1660]], 419. Byrd develops this and related evidence to suggest that Sattler continued to welcome the gifts of the Spirit in spite of wariness over their abuse. Byrd's case is strengthened by Lutheran pastor Elias Schäd's account of a clandestine Swiss Brethren worship service in 1576. Here, almost fifty years after Schleithem had supposedly rejected pneumatic experience, Schäd observed Anabaptists "sigh[ing] and groan[ing] for the Spirit"—in other words, speaking in tongues. Elias Schäd, "True Account of an Anabaptist Meeting at Night in a Forest and a Debate Held There with Them," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3 (July 1984): 294. I am grateful to the late Alan Kreider for bringing this story to my attention.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 424-25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 425.

devotional commentary on the Apostles' Creed describes the Spirit as the one "in whom I place all my trust, that he will teach me all truth, increase my faith, and stir up the fire in my heart with his holy breathing and kindle it right properly that it might burn in genuine, unadulterated love toward God and my neighbor."<sup>16</sup> The Spirit is for Hubmaier the divine agent of transformation who makes spiritual communion with God and others possible. He goes on to pray that this communion would experience reformation and purification by its ongoing disciplinary practice.<sup>17</sup>

The origins of South German and Austrian Anabaptism are closely associated with Thomas Müntzer, the preacher and leader of peasant revolt in the central Germanic lands of Thuringia. Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist leaders Hans Denck and Hans Hut had at least some contact with Müntzer, and they shared his mystical focus on the difficult though transformative encounter with the spiritual "inner Word." Hut moreover developed the apocalyptic dimensions of Müntzer's thought.<sup>18</sup>

For Denck, salvation was a triadic process oriented to life in the Spirit. Only by receiving the living Word through the Spirit could the believer understand Scripture aright and obey God's will.<sup>19</sup> From Finger's perspective, Denck's Müntzerian emphasis on the Word led to a "subordination" of the Spirit, and "nearly everything Denck said about the Spirit he could say of the Word."<sup>20</sup> Hut articulated more clearly than Denck how saving knowledge of God led toward the Spirit. From examination of creaturely realities, Hut said, we can learn about the Father's omnipotence; we must, however, learn

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<sup>16</sup> Hubmaier, "Twelve Articles in Prayer Form," *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 238.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-39.

<sup>18</sup> Although Anabaptist apocalyptic fervor reached its height with Hut and the early Dutch movements, apocalypticism was strong throughout early 16th-century Europe. See Walter Klaassen, "Apocalypticism," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Apocalypticism&oldid=143478>. Hut's insistence, however, on a specific eschatological calendar was rebuked by other leaders at the so-called "Martyrs' Synod" in 1527. As mentioned below, apocalypticism only occasionally resurfaces in later Anabaptist-Mennonite history.

<sup>19</sup> Clarence Bauman, "Denck's Spirituality," *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts*, ed. Clarence Bauman (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991), 23-29.

<sup>20</sup> Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 427.

from the Son to detach from creatures—this involves embracing the inner and if necessary outer suffering of the cross—and only then we can know abundant life in the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> It is, indeed “the power of the Spirit,” and not the “commandment of sacrifice,” that for Hut contained “the precept of God.”<sup>22</sup> The church as the community of the Spirit was to practice mutual aid, looking forward to the coming age of the Spirit when private property would be abolished.<sup>23</sup> More generally, in Hut’s apocalyptic preaching “the Spirit leaped into the foreground with multiple revelations.”<sup>24</sup> Given Denck’s and Hut’s impact on the larger movement, Finger’s judgment is unsurprising: “early South German-Austrian Anabaptism was highly pneumatic.”<sup>25</sup>

Elements of Swiss and South German/Austrian pneumatologies appear in the communitarian Anabaptism that developed in Moravia. Peter Riedemann’s “Confession of Faith,” which became foundational for Hutterite doctrine, opens with a commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, in which Riedemann affirms standard trinitarian and pneumatological claims, but with a distinctive Hutterite twist: the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit is said to be the basis of the community of goods legislated in Hutterite communities.<sup>26</sup> When he writes that the Spirit “now accomplishes everything in us,” driving out our sin; that only by the Spirit can we yield to Christ and

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 426. Rollin Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 85.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Hut, “A Beginning of a True Christian Life (The Mystery of Baptism),” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 126. Hut has just cited Isaiah 1:11 and Psalm 50:9. In this text he also describes the process of suffering detachment in terms of the “affliction of the Spirit” (131) necessary before the “comfort of the Spirit” can be experienced (133, 134). Hut thinks all of this—the “gospel of all creatures” (his reading of Mark 16:15)—can be known by observing how all creatures fulfill their purpose through suffering (121-29).

<sup>23</sup> Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 238-39; James M. Stayer, “Swiss-South German Anabaptism,” in John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 87-88. On connections between Hut and Joachim de Fiore’s apocalyptic trinitarian theology of history, see Werner Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 427.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Riedemann, *Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith*, trans. and ed. John J. Friesen (Waterloo, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 80.

become obedient; and that “there are no churches apart from those which the Holy Spirit gathers and builds,”<sup>27</sup> he therefore attributes to the Spirit the regeneration of believers and the formation of communities in which all things are held in common.

Though influenced by South German and Austrian Anabaptist theological currents, Pilgram Marpeck developed his own distinctive ministry and theology among the Swiss Brethren who had scattered across the southern Germanic lands.<sup>28</sup> He attempted to hold together a focus on spiritual renewal and visible, disciplined community practice. As Walter Klaassen put it, Marpeck was “the man who gave most attention to the relation of the invisible Spirit to the visible church.”<sup>29</sup> Marpeck asserted what might be called a philosophy of divine communication: God so ordered creation that matter was required to “preach” to matter, and the Spirit to human spirits.<sup>30</sup> Far from a rigid dualism, Marpeck’s view was that human transformation involved both physical and spiritual realities. Here Jesus’ model proved decisive. Just as Jesus’ humanity united the physical and the spiritual, so the visible church, as Christ’s ongoing physical presence on earth, enjoys the Spirit. Jesus in fact makes possible our relationship to the Spirit: “To conquer the powers,” Finger explains, “Marpeck’s Jesus walked with God as no human had, opening a relationship with the Holy Spirit in which others could participate.”<sup>31</sup> Communal life in the Spirit took on the concrete shape of Jesus’ own life,<sup>32</sup> and concrete church practices such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper formed the means of participation in life with the Spirit.

In contrast to the mainstream Swiss Brethren, who tended to downplay

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 61, 67, 77.

<sup>28</sup> See John D. Roth, “Marpeck and the Later Swiss Brethren, 1540–1700,” in Roth and Stayer, *Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 347–88.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Waterloo, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 72.

<sup>30</sup> See the selections of Marpeck’s writings in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline*, 31–34.

<sup>31</sup> Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 377. Finger notes that Marpeck’s trinitarian language is inconsistent but argues for a functional interpretation giving Marpeck’s orthodoxy the benefit of the doubt (378–79, 381, 435).

<sup>32</sup> Neal Blough, “The Holy Spirit and Discipleship in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 144.

the activity of the Spirit, Marpeck insisted on the centrality of the Spirit in the Christian life. The Christian life on his account is more than strict obedience to the biblical letter. However, in contrast to spiritualists and spiritualist-oriented South German and Austrian Anabaptists who thought that life in the Spirit made visible ecclesial practices irrelevant, Marpeck offered a sacramental ecclesiology in which the Spirit is met through formative practices.<sup>33</sup> Biblical obedience matters for him, but only as graciously enabled by the Spirit. In the end he offers a corrective to both the Swiss and South German/Austrian Anabaptist movements: the Swiss are correct to insist on the necessity of external observances, and the South German/Austrians to insist on the necessity of internal transformation; but each are required for human beings, composed of spirit and matter as we are. Salvation involves the coordination of the inner and outer, the spiritual and the material, the work of the Spirit and the believers' faithful discipleship.

These themes are evident in the 1554 "Confession of Faith" by Jörg Maler, a member of Marpeck's circle. In his confession, which follows the Apostles' Creed, Maler affirms the Spirit's role in effecting sanctification, comfort, assurance, and eternal life, and confesses that (water) baptism must occur "according to the Spirit of Christ," i.e., following the Spirit's transformational work.<sup>34</sup> The church in fact is "gathered by the Holy Spirit."<sup>35</sup> "The Holy Spirit alone," Maler proclaims, "has enabled me to know all this, who ignites my heart (with love) and enlightens me with the understanding and wisdom that such gifts come from above."<sup>36</sup> Here we see the outlines of a pneumatological epistemology, in which the ecclesially situated knower is enlightened by the Spirit to faith's content and source.

Melchior Hoffman's pneumatology was, like Hans Hut's, highly eschatological. According to Finger, Hoffman thought "the Spirit was exceptionally active in converting, sanctifying and directly conveying Scripture's hidden [apocalyptic] meanings, especially among the theologically untrained."<sup>37</sup> Hoffman's apocalyptic pneumatology took hold in

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<sup>33</sup> See Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 358-59.

<sup>34</sup> See "A Confession of Faith by Jörg Maler," in Karl Koop, ed., *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 40, 42.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 529. Finger portrays Hoffman as a modalist

North Germany and the Netherlands and, after his arrest, fed the prophetic leadership of Jan Matthijs and Jan van Leiden at Münster. Post-Münster Dutch leaders such as David Joris and Jan Batenberg continued to claim charismatic power as the basis of their authority. Other Melchiorites, such as the community of prophets at Strasbourg, rejected these claims when Joris and Batenberg failed to root their teachings in Scripture. The memorable exchange between Joris and Barbara Rebstock highlights how, for Rebstock and the Strasbourg prophets, prophecy was only welcome insofar as it aligned with biblical teaching.<sup>38</sup>

Our best window into what kind of Spirit-inspired prophecy the Strasbourg Melchiorites did accept is the collection of Ursula Jost's visions, published in 1530 by Hoffman himself.<sup>39</sup> In each of Ursula's seventy-eight visions the "glory of the Lord" appears and reveals highly symbolic images of judgement and redemption. According to Ursula's recent interpreter Lois Barrett, "Ursula's visions encouraged people to live lives of holiness. That path of holiness, according to these visions, was an alternative to the military action of the Peasants' War or to revenge against persecutors. That path was the gentle way, the nonviolent way, of participation with Christ in his sufferings."<sup>40</sup> This visionary "pacifist apocalypticism"<sup>41</sup> was what counted as genuine, biblically-based prophecy for Hoffman and his Strasbourg associates.

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with a strong sense of the economic interactions among the members of the trinity (438).

<sup>38</sup> See "The Strasbourg Disputation, 1538," in *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris, 1535–1543*, trans. and ed. Gary K. Waite (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 183–245 (198–99 for the exchange with Rebstock). The Strasbourg group argued that, while Scripture does not always agree with itself and so has to be interpreted according to the "rule of Christ," communal discerned rational accounts of true biblical teaching is possible. Joris argued instead that biblical contradictions, the fact that we don't have all of the writings of Jesus and the apostles, and the fact that some passages have (merely) historical or eschatological import suggest that the Spirit must show us the true "meaning" of Scripture apart from our reading or communal discernment. At best, for Joris, the text was an "aid" to understanding what the Spirit, and only the Spirit, reveals (220).

<sup>39</sup> Melchior Hoffman, "Prophetic Visions and Revelations," in Lois Yvonne Barrett, *Wreath of Glory: Ursula's Prophetic Visions in the Context of Reformation and Revolt in Southwestern Germany, 1524–1530* (Ph.D. Diss., Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1992), 19–68.

<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *Wreath of Glory*, 276–77.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

With the shadow of Münster looming large over their ministry, Menno Simons and Dirk Philips repudiated Melchiorite prophetic impulses and emphasized obedience to Christ's commands as read in the Bible. Even so, C. J. Dyck maintains that (all) "Anabaptist life was *centered on the Holy Spirit*, even in the case of stalwart biblicists like Dirk Philips and Menno Simons."<sup>42</sup> As mentioned previously, Anabaptists in general affirmed the Spirit's priority in leading the sinner to repentance, faith, and (water) baptized participation in Christian community; Menno and Dirk were no exceptions here.<sup>43</sup> They also drew on the Holy Spirit to defend the distinctive Melchiorite "celestial flesh" Christology: the pure heavenly "seed" was "planted" in Mary by the Holy Spirit.<sup>44</sup> If Menno and Dirk did tend to highlight practical "following after" Jesus, this was not because they utterly neglected the Holy Spirit. Yet, as we will see, their approach did combine with Swiss biblicism to shape a Mennonite heritage in which the Spirit's role in the Christian life is often underplayed. Already in 1554 the Wismar Articles, which defined Dutch Anabaptist approaches to church discipline, ethics, and leadership, made no mention of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, trans. and ed., *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995), 24, emphasis in the original.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Menno Simons, "Confession of the Triune God," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984): the Spirit "guides us into all truth; He justifies us. He cleanses, sanctifies, reconciles, comforts, reproves, cheers, and assures us. He testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God. This Spirit all they receive who believe on Christ.... [W]e believe the Holy Spirit to be the true, essential Holy Spirit of God, who adorns us with His heavenly and divine gifts, and through His influence, according to the good pleasure of the Father, frees us from sin, gives us boldness, and makes us cheerful, peaceful, pious, and holy" (496). See further J. C. Wenger, "The Anabaptist Perspective on the Holy Spirit," in *Encounter with the Holy Spirit*, ed. George R. Brunk II (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 81-100.

<sup>44</sup> Menno Simons, "The Reply to Gellius Faber," in *Complete Writings*, 760, and "The Incarnation of Our Lord," in *Complete Writings*, 793-94, 809.

<sup>45</sup> See Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 109-13. Compare in the same volume the "Kempen Confession" (1545), a unity document between followers of Menno and Swiss and South German Anabaptists who had migrated north into the Lower Rhine area. Although Spirit language is sparse here, too, strong statements stress the need to be "born of the Spirit" in order to participate in the Lord's Supper and church leadership (99-105). Christians wield only "the spiritual sword"—the "holy word of God and weapon of the faithful in the Holy Spirit."

Reviewing the 16th-century heritage, we see that the Swiss and Dutch Anabaptists flirted and more with highly charismatic and apocalyptic expressions of Christian faith before disasters led to a more biblically and Christologically restrained practice. The South German-Austrian strand was imbued with mystical and apocalyptic currents that tended toward spiritualism; the Hutterites and Marpeck offered different ways to hold visible, biblically regulated community together with life in the Spirit. All Anabaptist movements experienced significant tensions between those who thought the Spirit's revelations could exceed or replace Scripture, and those who saw Scripture as necessary to verify or replace prophecy. In the face of such tensions, the live pneumatological dimensions diminished in all strands as time passed.

If there was little explicit, technical pneumatological elaboration among 16th-century Anabaptists, it is evident that they sought by and large to uphold and indeed experience the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. The crucial step of water baptism was only to be taken once the Spirit had baptized the believer internally. Spirit baptism was often viewed as initiating the difficult inner journey toward holiness that is every believer's path, and the life of (nonresistant) public witness that might entail the outer suffering of persecution—a reality for many early Anabaptists. As Spirit baptism led directly to water baptism and ecclesial belonging, the Spirit was intimately connected to the formation, discipline, and sustenance of Christian community. Core church practices such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, binding and loosing, economic sharing, and biblical interpretation, as well as the structure of the church itself, were viewed as the outworking of the present Spirit, and not simply as obedient responses to biblical command and example. Indeed, in early communities in all strands (Swiss, South German-Austrian, and Dutch-North German), church practice was imbued and guided by spiritual gifts such as prophecy and visions. All were directed toward the fullness of God's eschatological reign in the Spirit, which was eagerly anticipated. As C. Arnold Snyder summarizes, "Anabaptism of all kinds was based on a lively pneumatology, on the expectation that God's Spirit needed to work in the hearts of human beings in order to initiate and sustain the life of faith."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 87.

## II

**The Spirit in Dutch and North German Anabaptist-Mennonite  
Confessions and Martyrologies, 1578–1660**

Most urban centers were closed to Anabaptists, and Anabaptist life took on a distinctly rural character throughout Europe. The label “the Quiet in the Land” (*Die Stillen im Lande*) is often used to describe pastoral, isolated Anabaptist communities from this period to the present.<sup>47</sup> The surviving communities increasingly emphasized biblical discipline rather than spiritual experience, as has been intimated. The Swiss held to the Schleithem Articles, with their warning about deviant spirituality, and a Swiss Brethren confession from Hesse in 1578 unsurprisingly contains minimal Spirit language.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, the Confession connects the Spirit and the church, and affirms that Spirit baptism precedes repentance and water baptism.<sup>49</sup> Traditional Swiss spiritual themes were at least upheld in word.

Divisions were rife among the Dutch and North German Anabaptists, who during the 16th century spread along the northern coastline to the Polish city of Danzig (Gdansk). Several Dutch confessions were written as attempts to forge unity, particularly in relation to disciplinary practice, which was judged by some as too harsh and by others as too lax. The 1591 “Concept of Cologne” was meant to address concerns of Swiss Anabaptists who had migrated into the area over strict northern use of the ban and Melchiorite Christology. The Concept opens with a prayer for strength to maintain agreement “through God’s peaceable Holy Spirit” and thereby links the Spirit to church unity.<sup>50</sup> Jesus, the Concept’s signers affirm, was born of Mary “through the power of the Almighty and the participation of the Holy

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<sup>47</sup> For a standard historical survey, see Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*, 3d ed. (Scottsdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> “Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse” in Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 45-92. This Confession begins with several articles elaborating on the Apostles’ Creed, and contains a very brief article on the Holy Spirit. As the Confession was written to assure Lutheran authorities of its authors’ harmlessness, spiritual themes were possibly underplayed.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 72, 73. The Swiss Brethren leader Thomas von Imbroich’s 1560 “Confession” contains a more transparent and developed pneumatology. See Part III below.

<sup>50</sup> Koop, *Confessions of Faith*, 119.

Spirit,” who is “the power of God . . . sent as a consolation to the believers.”<sup>51</sup> Baptism “by one Spirit” inducts the believer into a community whose unity is sustained, not by harsh discipline “but rather by the anointing of the Holy Spirit demonstrating love toward those who are being punished, in order that they might improve and be corrected.”<sup>52</sup>

The Concept of Cologne held briefly as an accord among the aforementioned Swiss group and two groups of northern Anabaptists. However, struggles over church discipline persisted and unity was broken in 1613. The less rigorous Dutch Waterlanders were moving in spiritualist directions, as evident from their 1610 concord with John Smyth’s English Baptist community in Amsterdam, the “Short Confession of Faith and the Essential Elements of Christian Doctrine.”<sup>53</sup> The document is richly pneumatological, as it ties the Spirit to justification, regeneration, good works, church leadership, and baptism and the Supper, these last understood as external enactments of the inner work of the Spirit.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps most significantly, the Short Confession insists that genuine knowledge of Jesus Christ comes only through the Spirit by prayer and enables believers to live like Jesus:

We must continue in fervent prayer to God, so that his holy presence may take place within us according to the Spirit, and a knowledge of [Jesus] be given to us, revealed through his infinite patience and love. All this must be sought to the end that his image and likeness may be born within us, that he himself may be revealed in us, living, walking, teaching, and preaching; that the miracles he performed in the flesh may be worked in us according to the Spirit, healing us of the sickness of the soul, deafness, blindness, leprosy, uncleanness, sin and death.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 119-20.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 135-58. On connections between English Baptists and Dutch Anabaptists, see Dyck, *Mennonite History*, 117-19. An earlier Waterlander confession of 1577 contains few references to the Spirit but intriguingly employs technical trinitarian vocabulary to posit the substantial unity of Father, Son, and Spirit (126-27).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 147-52.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 147.

The Waterlanders' spiritual inclinations led some to emphasize inner experience over outer practice, and a balance was sought in the 1626 "Thirteen Articles." The Articles identify the two-fold Word of God as Jesus and the Bible, and although inner renewal by the Spirit is necessary for salvation, it was the ascended Jesus who sent the Spirit and it is Scripture that moves us to spiritual renewal.<sup>56</sup> "In this written Word of God," the Waterlanders confessed, "are also revealed to us the saving works, which must come about in us through the power and working of the Holy Spirit."<sup>57</sup>

In spite of their separation from the Waterlanders, the conservative Dutch groups retained a lively sense of the Spirit's work at least for a time. The Old Frisian Mennonites, hailing from Menno's own northern Dutch region, composed the "Thirty-Three Articles" in 1617 to combat Waterlander influence and protect Menno and Dirk's legacy. Several of these Articles mention the Spirit, described as "enlighten[ing] the hearts of people and mak[ing] them fiery, and establish[ing] them and lead[ing] them in all truth."<sup>58</sup> The Spirit "is given by God to all who are obedient to him" and "whoever does not have this Spirit is not of God."<sup>59</sup> True Christians submit themselves fully "to the obedience of Christ . . . , according to the Spirit (as expressed in the Holy Scriptures) . . . , and to regulate their whole faith and walk according to it."<sup>60</sup> Faith and the new birth come through the Spirit, and the church is the pure and separated body of those gathered by the Spirit.<sup>61</sup> Particular marks of this inspirited church include holiness, sincere leadership, humility, sharing of goods with those in need, and enemy love.<sup>62</sup> The Spirit guides church practices such as the selection of ministers, baptism, the Supper, good works, and marriage.<sup>63</sup> The article on baptism is worded strongly: "Without this inward baptism, with the Holy Spirit and fire . . . , the visible baptism of water . . . is vain and useless."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 159, 161.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 192-93, 196-97, 213, 215.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 216-20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 224, 228, 231-32, 235, 238.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 228.

A later conservative agreement among Frisian, Flemish, and Swiss and South German Anabaptists, the “Jan Cents Confession” of 1630, likewise affirmed that the external church that preaches, baptizes, celebrates the Lord’s Supper, washes feet, performs “works of love,” marries and disciplines believers, and avoids government office and civil oaths is “inwardly in the Spirit, one true community . . . here and also in heaven with God and all the Lord’s saints,” as will be revealed at the eschaton.<sup>65</sup>

The most influential of the conservative confessions was the “Dordrecht Confession” of 1632. Dordrecht was intended to bring together different groups of Flemish Anabaptists but eventually became the basis of union with the Frisians (1639).<sup>66</sup> In 1766 it was used again for union among diverse Dutch Mennonite groups; Zonist pastor Cornelius Ris combined it with other Dutch Mennonite confessions to form the “Mennonite Articles of Faith,” also known as the “Ris Confession.”<sup>67</sup> The latter became the unofficial confession of the General Conference Mennonite Church in the 19th century. The Swiss Brethren adopted Dordrecht in 1660, and took it to North America during their migrations there from the late 17th century to the early 19th century. Among Swiss- and South German/Austrian-descended Mennonites in North America, it became the doctrinal basis of the (Old) Mennonite Church and is still affirmed by Conservative Mennonite conferences and the Amish. There is very little Spirit language in the Confession and, aside from a standard trinitarian statement in the article on God, the Spirit is only mentioned in the articles on the church (“the household of God in the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 276-81. “Works of love” include giving alms, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and sharing goods with the needy (277-78). There are possible echoes of Marpeck’s teaching on the necessity of coordinating the material and spiritual.

<sup>66</sup> The Frisians and Flemish had long quarreled over perceived slights in church process in the mid-16th century. Flemish Anabaptists, arriving in the Netherlands after heavy persecution in their homeland, felt that a secretive alliance among local Frisian congregations excluded them. As the controversy expanded, distinctive party lines emerged even though regional origin ceased to be an indicator of party belonging.

<sup>67</sup> See Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 28, 87-109; and [http://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Articles\\_of\\_Faith\\_by\\_Cornelis\\_Ris\\_\(1766\)](http://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Articles_of_Faith_by_Cornelis_Ris_(1766)). The Zonists argued against the Lamist congregations that the older confessions were still authoritative and, more generally, that doctrine could not be compromised for life in the Spirit.

Spirit”) and on the selection of church leaders.<sup>68</sup>

Ris’s attempt to synthesize several Dutch confessions led to a far more pneumatological tract than the Dordrecht Confession. For example, Ris closely coordinates Christ’s work as prophet, priest, and king with the Spirit (articles 14-16); insists on the priority of the Spirit in faith, salvation, the sacraments, and good works (articles 18, 20-21, 25-26); and depicts eternal life as continual refreshment “under the unbroken influence of the Spirit of glory” (article 35). Ris intriguingly cautions against speculation about the eternal fate of people in lands where the gospel has not been preached; although we can trust that God is active there, we do not know precisely what the Spirit is doing (article 17). General Conference Mennonites long shared Ris’s vision of pan-confessional Mennonite unity and his missional emphasis. Their participation in revival movements in the 19th and mid-20th centuries suggests, perhaps, that they shared his enthusiasm for the Spirit too.<sup>69</sup>

Confessions were not the only means 17th- and 18th-century Dutch leaders employed to assert their understandings of the relationship between Word and Spirit.<sup>70</sup> The popular status of martyr stories made them ideal catechetical and devotional materials. Whereas Waterlander leaders Hans de Ries and Jan Philipsz Schabaelje produced martyrologies that emphasized only the testimony of the martyrs, Old Frisians such as Pieter Jansz Twisck included confessions of faith and creeds in their martyr books. For the Waterlanders, “practice stands above theology” and the martyrs’ “lives were

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 294, 299, 300.

<sup>69</sup> See Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), chapters 3 and 4. As I do not discuss the General Conference in detail again, I note that the one comprehensive theological textbook written by a GC author, Edmund G. Kaufman’s *Basic Christian Convictions* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1972), does not interact with historical Anabaptist-Mennonite views. It does have a section on the Holy Spirit, in which the following claim is made: “the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a protection of every man’s right and obligation to look beyond tradition” (165). The section includes an overview and comparison of Old and New Testament passages on the Spirit, a summary of the Spirit’s work (in the world, church, and individual; to bring harmony and reconciliation, disturbance and conviction, and humility and strength); and spiritual discernment.

<sup>70</sup> For what follows see Keith L. Sprunger, “Dutch Anabaptists and the Telling of Martyr Stories,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80, no. 2 (2006): 149-82.

their theology.”<sup>71</sup> For the Old Frisians and other conservative groups, martyr testimony was only valid insofar as it resonated with agreed upon, rationally formulated, biblically-based theological claims.

Thieleman Jans van Braght, himself a leader in the conservative Flemish Anabaptist group, attempted a compromise. His renowned *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of Defenseless Christians*, first published in 1660, adopted a spiritualist introduction written by Schabaelje for one of the Waterlander martyrologies,<sup>72</sup> and included the Apostles’ Creed and various confessions, including the Jan Cents and Dordrecht confessions analyzed above.<sup>73</sup> The *Martyrs Mirror*, in short, was an attempt to hold together Word and Spirit, to claim both as operative in the testimony of the martyrs and the living church.

### III

#### **Russian and Swiss Mennonites, Pietism, and Revivalism**

If the pneumatological reticence of Dordrecht suggests that Mennonites on the whole had little interest in the Spirit after the mid-17th century, evidence of Mennonite contact with Pietists may suggest otherwise. From the mid-17th century on, Mennonites throughout Europe were challenged by encounters with Pietists, whose biblicism and emphasis on spiritual rebirth, sanctification, and eschatological community resonated deeply with historic Anabaptist themes.<sup>74</sup> Although Harold Bender’s friend Robert Friedmann saw Pietism as weakening the Anabaptist character of Mennonite congregations,<sup>75</sup> more recent scholarship suggests that Pietism’s effects were complex.<sup>76</sup> Some leaders found in Pietism resources to renew

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>72</sup> Van Braght, *Bloody Theater*, 355-62. Van Braght does not credit Schabaelje. See Sprunger, “Dutch Anabaptists,” 173, note 107.

<sup>73</sup> Van Braght, *Bloody Theater*, 27-44.

<sup>74</sup> John D. Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul,” in *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety: Strengthening or Straining the Bonds of Community?*, ed. Stephen L. Longenecker (Bridgewater, VA: Forum for Religious Studies, 1997), 18.

<sup>75</sup> See Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949).

<sup>76</sup> E.g., John D. Roth, “Context, Conflict, and Community: South German Mennonites at the Threshold of Modernity, 1750–1850,” in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, eds. Susan Biessacker-

their Mennonite congregational life.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Revivalist techniques such as tent meetings and Sunday Schools were widely adopted by 19th-century North American Mennonites, just as their 20th-century descendants have explored cell groups and “contemporary Christian worship,” practices often associated with Pentecostal-charismatic movements.

If there is evidence that contact with Pietism and its successors has often renewed Mennonite life, it is also clear that such contact has occasioned divisions among Mennonites. Perhaps the most well-known outcome of such a division is the Mennonite Brethren, who emerged from among the Dutch Mennonite colonies in South Russia.<sup>78</sup> Moravian Pietism’s influence was felt especially in the village of Gnadenfeld (now in southeast Ukraine), where traveling Pietist preacher Eduard Wüst stirred up religious sentiments, led “mission festivals” to inspire missionary activity, and set up conventicles for Bible study and prayer. The eventual split from mainstream Mennonites in 1860 involved acrimony over charismatic experiences, as the newly-constituted Mennonite Brethren confirmed the Mennonites’ fears that they thought the Spirit’s gifts were still available to the church. Individual members of the Mennonite Brethren moreover claimed that the Spirit was leading them into mission, and immediately began to evangelize not only their fellow German colonists but also their Russian-speaking neighbors—thereby endangering their colonial privileges.

As with other new charismatic movements in Anabaptist-Mennonite history, the early Mennonite Brethren experienced division over charismatic phenomena. Some of Wüst’s followers formed the Joyful Movement, which

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Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000), 120-44; Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul,” 17-34.

<sup>77</sup> For example, some scholars trace the humility spirituality of mid-19th century American Mennonites and Amish to Pietist influence. This spirituality focused on visible expressions of humility in, e.g., clothing, home décor, and nonresistance. See Theron F. Schlabach, “Humility,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989), <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Humility>.

<sup>78</sup> For this narrative I follow Dyck, *Mennonite History*, 179, 277, and especially Johannes Reimer, “The Spirit Says Go!: Mission and Early Charismatic Expressions among Russian Mennonite Brethren,” *Anabaptist Witness* 4, no. 1 (April 2017): 31-44. Victor G. Doerksen argues that Wüst and the genesis of the Mennonite Brethren should be associated more with later Revivalism. See Doerksen, “Pietism, Revivalism, and the Early Mennonite Brethren” in *Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety*, 69-84.

included enthusiastic spiritual expression and claims of Spirit-enabled moral perfection and to Spirit-given authority. After the Joyful gained a reputation for emotional excess, sexual immorality, and authoritarianism, Mennonite Brethren leaders passed the “June Protocol” in 1865 to address the concerns. Charismatic phenomena were discouraged and charismatic authority rejected, and over time local mission work ceased. According to historian Johannes Reimer, the June Protocol led to ongoing antagonism between European Mennonite Brethren and charismatic movements, leading many to seek the Spirit in Pentecostal and other churches.<sup>79</sup>

While it is true that Anabaptist groups with historic connections to Pietism have sometimes lost their Anabaptist convictions, others attempt to hold them together.<sup>80</sup> As John D. Roth argues, Anabaptism and Pietism (and Revivalism and Pentecostalism) are complex phenomena<sup>81</sup>; various possibilities may emerge from their mixture. Some of the mixtures are evident in 18th-century Mennonite catechetical and devotional literatures.

The Swiss Brethren martyrology *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, first published in 1702, was an attempt to mediate between Pietist enthusiasm and the new Amish rigor.<sup>82</sup> Various Pietist themes were incorporated, but arguably to express, not downplay, “traditional Swiss Brethren views of the Spirit of God.”<sup>83</sup> For example, the version of the Dordrecht Confession included in *Golden Apples* contains a new article on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is affirmed to be one with the Father and Son as “the only true God,” and specifically as the one “through which the Father and Son work.”<sup>84</sup> Lines about the Spirit were also added to the articles on the church and the Lord’s Supper: it is “through the Holy Spirit” that Christians “have their fellowship”

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<sup>79</sup> Reimer, “The Spirit Says Go!,” 42-44. In North America some Mennonite Brethren are assimilated to evangelical currents, as perhaps symbolized by the 2014 decision of the US denomination to amend their “Confession of Faith” to permit military service. See Article 13, “Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation,” <http://www.usmb.org/menus/article-13.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Compare doctrinal statements, for instance, from the Brethren in Christ and the Missionary Church with the Church of Brethren.

<sup>81</sup> Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul.”

<sup>82</sup> Leonard Gross, “Swiss Anabaptist Self-Understanding from the Perspective of 1702,” in *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls: The Rediscovery of Redeeming Love*, trans. Elizabeth Bender and ed. Leonard Gross (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Historical Society, 1999), 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 246. See 318, n174 on the polemical context of this addition.

with God, Christ, the angels, and other believers; and the Supper “connects us to peace, love, unity of the Spirit, and true Christian communion among one another.”<sup>85</sup>

*Golden Apples* also contains the “Confession and Letters” of Thomas von Imbroich, a mid-16th-century Swiss Brethren leader in Cologne. Von Imbroich’s “Confession,” first published around 1560, begins with a defense of two-fold baptism, the internal baptism of the Spirit and the external one in water; the external “witnesses” to the internal, and baptism as such involves repentance and conformity to Christ’s path of suffering and resurrection.<sup>86</sup> As he puts it later, “everyone may know whether he is born of the Spirit . . . if he has the characteristics of the Spirit.”<sup>87</sup> For von Imbroich there is the strongest possible correlation between the “experience” of the Spirit and a transformed life.

In a fascinating conclusion to the “Confession,” the original editor of *Golden Apples* invites readers to consider von Imbroich’s words in light of the different biblical passages cited therein. However, they must do this “with the eyes of the Spirit, in all fear and devotion, not understanding them [the biblical passages] simply according to the bare letter, but judging them according to the mind of Christ and the interpretation of the Spirit (Jn. 7; 2 Cor. 3).” This line and those that follow it convey a rich pneumatological hermeneutic consistent with earlier Anabaptist attempts to hold together Word and Spirit. Considering also the original editor’s introduction—which urges readers in light of the coming apocalypse to strengthen their faith by taking up the cross and being filled with the Spirit<sup>88</sup>—we may judge that the interaction between Anabaptists and Pietists represented by *Golden Apples* renewed, rather than vitiated, Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

The achievement of *Golden Apples* was overshadowed, however, by another, far more popular Anabaptist devotional book: *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*, the first extant edition of which was published in 1708, just a few years after *Golden Apples*.<sup>89</sup> According to Leonard Gross, the popularity

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 248, 251.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>89</sup> David Luthy, “A History of *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*,” *Family Life* (February 1981): 19.

of the *Christenpflicht* among Swiss Mennonites is due to both to its format (it is a collection of prayers) and its content: the prayers supposedly show evidence of assimilation to Pietism's individualistic spirituality.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps most startling to students of early Anabaptist history is the inclusion in this collection of several prayers written by Caspar Schwenkfeld, the arch-spiritualist nemesis of Pilgram Marpeck and other early Anabaptists who insisted on the necessity of "external" community and discipleship practices.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the prayers by Schwenkfeld included in the *Christenpflicht* convey the familiar Anabaptist teaching that enlightenment by the Spirit leads to a disciplined moral life and Christian unity. For instance, the "Prayer to the Holy Spirit for Help, Comfort, and Support" requests the Spirit to "purify" and "reign" over believers so that "we may walk modestly, disciplined, and righteously in this world."<sup>92</sup> Another prayer asks that God would "gather his people in the Spirit" and "that we through the Spirit may reach the goal of being one heart, one soul, one in spirit, one mind, and become wholly and truly one in Christ Jesus."<sup>93</sup> Clearly the editor of the *Christenpflicht* had not completely given up on traditional Anabaptist pneumatological themes.

Swiss Anabaptists also engaged Pietist currents in North America. Although the Dordrecht Confession—without the pneumatological additions of *Golden Apples*—remained the primary confession of the largely Swiss-descendent (Old) Mennonite Church until 1963, other resources were developed and disseminated in order to connect Mennonites to the surrounding Spirit-centered movements. Strong Pietist and Revivalist movements were centered in colonial Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where Mennonite leader Henry Funk had printed the first German-language edition of *The Martyrs Mirror* in 1748. In Ephrata and elsewhere he also printed copies of the *Ausbund*, *Golden Apples*, and the *Christenpflicht*, as well as his own writings. In the face of competing spiritual options, Funk's

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<sup>90</sup> Leonard Gross, trans. and ed., *Prayers for Earnest Christians* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 80-102. See Luthy, "A History of *Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*," 22, on the authorship of the prayers. Other prayers were written by the Dutch Mennonite bishop Leenaert Clock and Lutheran Pietist theologian Johann Arndt.

<sup>92</sup> Gross, *Prayers for Earnest Christians*, 98.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 101, 102.

publishing efforts intended to make a case for a distinctively Anabaptist theology of life in the Spirit.<sup>94</sup> The nature of this case becomes especially clear in his book, *A Mirror of Baptism*, which sets forth a typical Anabaptist doctrine of the three-fold baptism in the Spirit, water, and blood.<sup>95</sup> For Funk, as for many earlier Anabaptists, the Spirit (and only the Spirit) moves a person to repentance, thereby opening them to baptism by the Spirit; this baptism leads the new believer to water baptism, which incorporates them into Christ's body, the church, and readies them for the life of discipleship that will likely include Christ-like suffering.

A more critical interaction with Pietism is visible in Christian Burkholder's addresses, first published in 1804 at Ephrata and after 1839 as an appendix to 17th-century Hamburg-Altona pastor Gerhard Roosen's popular catechism, *Conversation on Saving Faith*.<sup>96</sup> In keeping with the pneumatological minimalism of Roosen's work,<sup>97</sup> Burkholder directly disputes the necessity of an "experience" of new birth: God may or may not lead someone to have an emotional experience of the Spirit.<sup>98</sup> Personal spiritual experiences make no contribution to the community, and talking about them suggests a lack of humility. What really matters is that believers yield themselves without resistance to God, who can be trusted to work the new birth within us—whether they "feel" it or not. While Burkholder does uphold a pneumatological hermeneutic,<sup>99</sup> overall his addresses downplay the

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<sup>94</sup> On Funk, see Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 231-34; Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements*, 59-61; and John C. Wenger, "Funk, Heinrich (d. 1760)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1956), [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk,\\_Heinrich\\_\(d.\\_1760\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk,_Heinrich_(d._1760)).

<sup>95</sup> Henry Funk, *A Mirror of Baptism: With the Spirit, with Water, and with Blood in Three Parts, From the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament*, trans. Joseph Funk and Sons [1851] (Moundridge, KS: Gospel Publishers, 2000), German original 1744. This book deserves more attention than I can give it here, not least for its heavily typological and narrative approach to Scripture.

<sup>96</sup> Gerhard Roosen et al., *Christian Spiritual Conversation on Saving Faith for the Young: In Questions and Answers* (Lancaster, PA: John Baer and Sons, 1857), German original 1702.

<sup>97</sup> Roosen affirms the oneness of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*ibid.*, 45, 47-48), and discusses the Spirit in relation to salvation (64) and faithful discipleship (89). But little mention is made of the Spirit elsewhere, including in sections on repentance and conversion, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-16.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 187: God speaks through Scripture to lead its readers to repentance and (then)

Pietist emphasis on spiritual experience.

In summary, both Russian and Swiss Mennonites encountered Pietist and Revivalist currents with at least some openness to the work the Spirit might be doing in them. Some Mennonite leaders were hesitant about potential (and real) spiritual excesses, and this hesitance could (and did) lead to divisions. But far from supporting the thesis that Mennonites have typically rejected Spirit-centered theology and practice for a “pure” biblicism, this study suggests that at least some Mennonites have integrated pneumatological themes into a discipleship-oriented framework. Attending to the work of the Spirit, for these Mennonites, is not a distraction from discipleship but is rather the very beginning of it and that without which it cannot endure. Particularly notable in this review is the recurrence of a pneumatological hermeneutic, in which Spirit-given insight is said to be necessary for adequate biblical interpretation.

#### IV

##### **(Old) Mennonites and Fundamentalism**

Another influential movement encountered by Mennonites is fundamentalism. If Pietism caused Mennonites to reconsider the experiential dimensions of their faith, fundamentalism caused them to seek greater doctrinal precision. The (Old) Mennonite Church was particularly roiled by the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the early 20th century, and in 1921 it adopted the “Christian Fundamentals: Articles of Faith.”<sup>100</sup> This brief confession was intended to reinforce, not replace, Dordrecht. Article seven on the Holy Spirit makes standard Christian pneumatological claims, and article nine on the church endorses the standard Anabaptist ecclesiological claim that the church consists of those who have “been born again and were baptized by one Spirit into one body.”

A few years earlier, Mennonite Church (hereafter MC) leader Daniel Kauffman had edited *Bible Doctrine* (1914), which took a fundamentalist approach to general Christian doctrines and distinctive Mennonite

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comfort, but this can happen by the Spirit alone for those who cannot read or understand Scripture, “for the Spirit of God agrees with these [biblical] doctrines.”

<sup>100</sup> For the text, see Loewen, *One Lord*, 71-72.

“ordinances” (e.g., baptism, footwashing, head coverings) and “duties and restrictions” (e.g., nonconformity and nonresistance). This book exercised a powerful influence in the MC for decades to come. A section on the Holy Spirit in the lead chapter on God, written by J. S. Hartzler, affirms that the Spirit is one of the divine triune persons and that Christians should worship the Spirit.<sup>101</sup> Later on, water baptism is said to be a “symbol” of Spirit baptism, and the purportedly biblical order of Spirit baptism followed by water baptism is insisted upon (one might think in response to Pentecostal doctrine, given the date).<sup>102</sup> The Spirit is also connected to sanctification, Christian worship, mission, nonconformity, and purity of speech.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas the authors of *Bible Doctrine* typically amassed proof texts to make their arguments, MC theologian J. C. Wenger offered a more creative and moderate fundamentalism in his *Introduction to Theology* from 1954. Like his Goshen College colleague Harold Bender, Wenger sought to resource his church with historical Anabaptist thought, and his book contains lengthy quotes from Menno, Dirk, and other early leaders. Although the text is not deeply pneumatological, a chapter on “God as Sanctifier” provides an overview of the doctrine of the Spirit and discusses the universal call to salvation, election, conversion, regeneration, justification, union with Christ, assurance, “a successful Christian life,” and the Christian relation to government.<sup>104</sup> Typical Anabaptist-Mennonite themes include the affirmation of the priority of the Spirit’s work in conversion (272-73) and the inclusion of nonresistance, nonconformity, and separation in the description of the Christian life (313-19). Although *Introduction to Theology* is no longer influential in many of the churches that belonged to the MC, like *Bible Doctrine* it continues to command respect from more conservative Mennonites, who reprint both works.

Wenger was also the primary drafter of the “Mennonite Confession

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<sup>101</sup> J. S. Hartzler, “God,” in *Bible Doctrine: A Treatise on the Great Doctrines of the Bible pertaining to God, Angels, Satan, the Church, and the Salvation, Duties and Destiny of Man*, ed. Daniel Kauffman (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 40-42. Kauffman also compiled and largely wrote a revision of this text in 1928.

<sup>102</sup> A. D. Wenger, “Baptism,” in *Bible Doctrine*, 366-67, 370-71.

<sup>103</sup> Various authors in *Bible Doctrine*, 263, 492, 503, 531, 621.

<sup>104</sup> John Christian Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1954), 259-325.

of Faith” adopted by the Mennonite Church in 1963.<sup>105</sup> This Confession was intended as another restatement of the Dordrecht Confession, yet it goes beyond Dordrecht by elaborating how the Spirit is intrinsic to the nature and function of the church, Christian mission, and discipleship and nonconformity. Article seven on “The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life” depicts in some detail how “Christ . . . does his work through the Holy Spirit.” The article on “Christian Baptism” states in familiar terms that water baptism “symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” From a pneumatological perspective, this document represents an advance in the Dordrecht confessional tradition. The encounter between Mennonites and fundamentalism, therefore, may have led to some fairly shallow and schematic pneumatological statements, but it also gave rise to at least one important development in the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

### **Conclusion**

This story of historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology has taken many twists and turns, and a concise summary is required to make sense of it. If Anabaptism was born as a dynamic Spirit-oriented movement—with strongly pneumatological understandings of mission, conversion, the nature of the church and the life of discipleship, and eschatology—perceptions of spiritual excess led to reactions that minimized the experience and manifestations of the Spirit. Against common narratives that suggest that the reactionary movements simply won out, we find developments of all of the early pneumatological themes in the Swiss-South German and Dutch-Russian Mennonite traditions. Confessions, catechetical materials, and devotional books (including martyrologies) were occasions for testing and debating differing conceptions of the relationship between the Spirit and the Word, and for articulating the extent to which the Spirit is behind the day-to-day life of the church. Contact with Pietist and Revival movements, and even with fundamentalism, could undermine Anabaptist-Mennonite emphases on communal discipleship, but those movements could also provide new impetus for spiritual renewal in distinctly Anabaptist-Mennonite terms.

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<sup>105</sup> For the text of this confession, see Loewen, *One Lord*, 73-77, and [http://anabaptist-wiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Confession\\_of\\_Faith\(Mennonite\\_Church,\\_1963\)#Background\\_to\\_the\\_Confession](http://anabaptist-wiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Mennonite_Confession_of_Faith(Mennonite_Church,_1963)#Background_to_the_Confession).

Minimizing reactions did continue through this period, and exercised major influence through sources such as the Dordrecht Confession, the Mennonite Brethren's June Protocol, Christian Burkholder's addresses, or "The Christian Fundamentals" endorsed by the (Old) Mennonite Church. But they by no means had the last or only word.

From this story might be distilled three major pneumatological themes that have characterized Anabaptist-Mennonite history up to 1963. The first of these themes concerns the relationship between the Spirit and the Christian life, which is conceived of in distinctively communal terms. The Christian life is initiated and empowered by the Spirit and takes shape in and as disciplined community. The Spirit convicts believers of sin and leads them to repentance. This initial experience has generally been interpreted as "baptism of the Spirit." Water baptism follows Spirit baptism, and then participation in the common life of the church. Ecclesial belonging involves joining in mutual discerning discipline, a process that is directed by the Spirit to conform believers to Christ, who himself was accompanied by the Spirit. The inspired, disciplined community unites in the Supper and in service (sometimes ritualized in footwashing); shares goods within (and sometimes without) the community; and witnesses to its faith by its words, deeds, and testimony of nonconformity (including nonresistance). The disciplined community of the Spirit is prepared to suffer, and finds the Spirit present amidst suffering for comfort and empowerment.

The second theme is a tension throughout Anabaptist-Mennonite history between Word and Spirit. Word (Jesus, Scripture) has been elevated above the Spirit some of the time, but there has also been a persistent witness to the reality of the Spirit's work. Prophecy, visions, and other charismatic experiences have at times been important in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. Many Anabaptist-Mennonites have affirmed a pneumatological hermeneutic, in which the Spirit is required to direct believers to correct biblical interpretation. Significant strands within the tradition have criticized biblicist tendencies and the often harsh disciplinary practices that follow them. Some Anabaptist-Mennonites have sought to deepen their experience of the Spirit through contact with other pneumatic movements, and although this contact has sometimes led to division and weakened their identity, it has also occasioned significant spiritual renewal within Anabaptist-Mennonite

circles. This “relational” dimension is constitutive of, not incidental to, historical Anabaptist-Mennonite pneumatology.

The third theme is perhaps a minor one, but must be noted given its prominence at the tradition’s beginning. The connection between Spirit and eschatological consummation was central for early Anabaptists, although this theme has only reappeared occasionally in later Anabaptist-Mennonite history (e.g., in the Jan Cents Confession and the original editor’s preface to *Golden Apples*). The theme points to the conviction that what the Spirit is doing in the present community is intrinsically connected to what the Spirit is doing to bring God’s ultimate plans for creation to fulfillment. It could be seen therefore as complimentary to the more prevalent themes of pneumatological ecclesiology and the attempts to hold Jesus-centered, Scripture-rooted discipleship together with life in the Spirit.

I have concluded the story in 1963 because, as I mentioned at the outset, the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century feature major shifts that require separate investigation. These shifts include especially the increasingly intense interactions between Mennonites and Pentecostal and charismatic movements, particularly as former mission churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have developed their own identities in part through contact with such movements.<sup>106</sup> The shifts also involve the growth of “neo-Anabaptism,” a movement largely inspired by Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision” and related attempts to claim 16th-century Anabaptism as a directly relevant model for the present-day church. Neo-Anabaptism has proved appealing to many who had no historical or ethnic ties to European Mennonites.<sup>107</sup> While some neo-Anabaptists find their

<sup>106</sup> In addition to resources mentioned in the introduction, see, for instance, Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, “Pentecostal Experiences in the Anabaptist Churches of Latin America (1971–1999),” *Mission Focus* 10 (2002): 71–85. Other important late 20th-century resources include George R. Brunk II, ed., *Encounter with the Holy Spirit*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), and Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Witness of the Holy Spirit: Proceedings of the Eighth Mennonite World Conference, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, July 23–30, 1967* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite World Conference, 1967). See also John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, eds., *Global Mennonite History Series*, 5 vols. (Kitchener, ON: Pandora 2003–2012).

<sup>107</sup> The title of Stuart Murray’s book *The Naked Anabaptist* sums up for many the promise and peril of “neo-Anabaptism”: on the one hand its welcome accessibility, and on the other hand the possibility that it becomes accessible only by oversimplifying the difficult, complex historical and cultural character of Anabaptism. Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The*

appropriated faith compatible with charismatic piety, others consider the neo-Anabaptist emphasis on communal ethics to be a welcome alternative to the charismatic focus on personal spiritual experience.<sup>108</sup>

The story told above suggests that charismatically inclined Anabaptist-Mennonites today have a deep pneumatological tradition to draw from as they seek to make sense of the relationship between contemporary charismatic movements and historic Anabaptism. If the pneumatological narrative is not simply continuous, neither is it simply one of decline. Anabaptist-Mennonites engaging the Spirit today do so in the good company of Anabaptist-Mennonites from centuries past—and not just from the 16th century. It is certain that the current movements have much to teach us about the Spirit; it is likely that the past may help orient us as we move forward together. As for those Anabaptist-Mennonites who do not emphasize the Spirit—they can indeed claim some significant grounding in the tradition, but they are arguably missing out on an extremely vital component of their own history.<sup>109</sup>

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*Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> I speak from personal experience here, having come to the Mennonite church through neo-Anabaptist currents swirling around Fuller Theological Seminary in the mid-2000s. For a Pentecostal attempt to relate neo-Anabaptist and charismatic theologies, see Jody B. Fleming, “Holistic Pneumatology in Mission: Anabaptism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement,” *Anabaptist Witness* 4, no. 1 (April 2016): 11-30.

<sup>109</sup> This article originated as a paper given at the Mennonite Church USA-Church of God (Cleveland) ecumenical dialogue, held at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, in October 2016. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers who pointed out additional resources, corrected errors, and suggested various thematic developments.

# Early Anabaptist Interpretation of the Letter of James

Alicia J. Batten

## Introduction

Probably no other New Testament book has suffered as much from the impact of Martin Luther's pen than the Letter of James. Although Luther did articulate many positive things about the letter (and preached from it on a few occasions when it appeared in the lectionary), his declarations that it was a "right strawy epistle"<sup>1</sup> and that he would like to toss "Jimmy into the stove"<sup>2</sup> have had lasting effects on the reception of the text. Luther's exasperation with James was based upon his perception that James understood justification to be based upon works; a notion that Luther understood to be flatly against Paul and the rest of the Bible. The reformer was also frustrated with the fact that James has no mention of the death and resurrection of Jesus and thus, in Luther's view, did not preach Christ. Luther acknowledged that the writing, which he took to be pseudonymous, came from some pious man, given its emphasis upon good works, but such virtues did not rescue James from being relegated to the back of his German New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

Luther rejected the authentic authorship of James, but his position on this issue was not new. Questions about who wrote the letter had dogged it since at least the time of Origen, who considered it to be by James of Jerusalem or by James the Just, but also indicated an awareness that others wondered whether this James was the author.<sup>4</sup> Such skepticism may be the main reason that James does not appear on some of the early canonical lists

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<sup>1</sup> Luther described the Letter of James in this way in the preface to his translation of the New Testament, published in 1522. See *Luther's Works* 35: 362 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972). His description of James in this preface may have been in reaction to the praise James received from Andreas Bodensine von Karlstadt, who was at one point a colleague of Luther but later at odds with him. See Timothy George, "A Right Strawy Epistle: Reformation Perspectives on James," *Review and Expositor* 83 (1986): 23. It is noteworthy, however, that in the preface to the 1534 edition of his Bible, Luther did not employ the "right strawy epistle" phrase to describe the letter.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther's Works* 34: 317.

<sup>3</sup> George, "A Right Strawy Epistle," 23.

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 19.23.

and emerges as scripture in the western church only in the fourth century, in Hilary of Poitiers' *De Trinitate* (4.8.26). The question of authorship, however, remained an ongoing issue through the centuries, and even those reformers who appreciated James, such as John Calvin, doubted that James of Jerusalem was the author.<sup>5</sup>

Yet once James was deemed canonical, its relationship to the letters and ideas of Paul appeared regularly in exegetical treatments of the Letter, and most patristic and medieval interpreters did not perceive tensions between James and Paul on the issue of faith and works even when they acknowledged differences between the two.<sup>6</sup> Few full-fledged commentaries on James appeared, but James 5:14 was regularly referred to as evidence of biblical precedent for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.<sup>7</sup> During the Reformation, various writers questioned the association of James 5:14 with this sacrament but maintained, despite Luther's assessment, that James and Paul were compatible.<sup>8</sup>

The reception of James during the Reformation, both positive and negative, underlines two different approaches to Scripture among the reformers during this period. Lutheran exegetes pointed to the primacy of Paul's letters and the notion of salvation by faith, at the center of which is the

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<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 277.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, for example, noticed distinctions between James and Paul but did not view them as a source of conflict. He apparently wrote a commentary on the letter but it is no longer extant. See Paulus Bergauer, *Der Jakobusbrief bei Augustinus: und die damit verbundenen Probleme der Rechtfertigungslehre* (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1962), 62-65. In the 1500s a Carthusian named Dionysius produced a commentary on James, in which he compared James 2:14-26 to various verses in the Pauline corpus, including Rom. 3:20 and Gal. 3:9-11. He argued that when James refers to the law it is to a moral law, whereas Paul is referring to ritual law, and therefore the two authors are not at odds. See Gilbert Dahan, "L'exégèse médiévale de l'épître de Jacques," in *L'épître de Jacques dans sa tradition d'exégèse*, ed. M. Arnold, G. Dahan, and A. Noblesse-Rocher (Paris: Cerf, 2012), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 342.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Zwingli, like Luther, did not think that James 5:14 supported the sacrament, and he reconciled James and Paul by arguing that each author was writing to different groups of people who were facing dissimilar sets of questions. See Matthieu Arnold, "L'épître de Jacques dans quelques Bibles et commentaires protestants du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *L'épître de Jacques*, 106-109.

Christ. This position reflected a perspective that there was a hierarchy among texts that, given its priorities, would place James as subordinate to Paul or in contradiction to Paul and thus of little value. Other exegetes, such as Calvin, thought it imperative to consider the intention of the authors as well as their respective audiences, and on this basis viewed the different authors as complementary and not contradictory, given that they were writing to different groups of people whose concerns were not identical.<sup>9</sup>

Prior to the emergence of the Radical Reformation, therefore, a complex array of perspectives on the Letter of James had emerged. Certainly all Anabaptist interpreters did not read and understand the Bible in equal fashion.<sup>10</sup> However, although they firmly maintained the Protestant notion of justification by faith, the Letter was consistently regarded highly by the members of their movement. As the following will explore, specific verses in James were understood to uphold and assist in justifying the positions of Anabaptists on a variety of issues, and aspects of James reflected the actual experiences of men and women, especially those who endured violence at the hands of the authorities because they refused to recant their faith. James, in addition to many other biblical texts, appears to have contributed meaningfully to making sense of these ordeals. It is important, as well, to observe that some Anabaptists connected various verses in James to some of the teachings of Jesus. Given the centrality of the life and witness of Jesus for Anabaptist hermeneutics, the perceived associations between James and Jesus' teachings must have made James more appealing.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the Anabaptist theological conviction that a true believer must manifest a commitment to faith in his or her daily life—that not only justification but sanctification is essential to the Christian vocation—found support in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 116-17.

<sup>10</sup> John D. Roth, "Community as Conversation: A New Model of Anabaptist Hermeneutics," in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H.W. Pipkin (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 35-50.

<sup>11</sup> Parallels between James and the teachings attributed to Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount in both the Gospel of Matthew and Q have been noticed for some time now. For a history of the discussion of these parallels, see Dean B. Deppe, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Epistle of James* (Chelsea, MI: Bookcrafters, 1989); Patrick J. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); and more recently, Alicia J. Batten and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *James, 1 & 2 Peter and Early Jesus Traditions* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014).

Letter of James. It is all of these factors combined, and in the context of both internal debates between members of the movement and arguments with those on the outside, that we witness the Letter as a significant source of meaning and authority for some early Anabaptist voices.

### **Early Anabaptist Biblical Interpretation**

As Anabaptism began in a range of contexts and in response to a variety of developments within Christian theology and practice, one must be careful not to overly generalize about the movement's approach to the Christian Scriptures. Anabaptism comprised a broad group of people united by their insistence upon adult baptism after a confession of faith. As is well known, the movement developed in different directions throughout Europe, resulting eventually in a diverse range of groups that exist today, including Brethren, Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish. Their readings of the Bible developed in the context of debates with Roman Catholics, with Protestant reformers, and with other Anabaptists. They emerged in the midst of suffering and persecution, in congregations and not seminaries, and often among poor and uneducated people.<sup>12</sup> These contextual features played a role in their reception and interpretation of the Bible.

Before engaging the question of Anabaptist approaches to Scripture, it is worth reviewing aspects of what historians would identify as common features of early Anabaptist theology. Here we should note that there is discussion about whether or not one can determine consistent theological features, given that the movement arose in different contexts and in response to a range of issues that developed out of the Protestant Reformation. Was there an early Anabaptist theology? For the purpose of this article, I will build from the insights of C. Arnold Snyder, who cautions that although there were significant differences in degrees of emphasis among these early leaders, one can describe a common core of theological characteristics. It was with the passage of time, when the various groups grew to be more solidified with impermeable boundaries, that Anabaptism became what some historians have described as "polymorphic."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist

In general, as outlined by Snyder, it is evident that the Anabaptists shared many of the traditional Christian doctrines as articulated in some of the ancient creeds, despite the fact that these creeds did not figure in their worship life. But with other Protestant reformers, they rejected sacramentalism, accepted the principle of *sola scriptura*, and maintained the conviction that justification was by faith through grace.<sup>14</sup> Where they were distinct from Protestant groups was in their emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing faith of the person, including in the reading of Scripture. Although the Bible was the most important source of authority, Anabaptists generally thought that its interpretation required the work of the Holy Spirit to guide believers in their understanding of the texts. Thus one can speak of a “necessary *spirit/letter* linkage as constitutive of Anabaptist belief.”<sup>15</sup> This emphasis upon the Spirit applied to the inner life of the believer as well as to his or her outer life of discipleship.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the notion that the Holy Spirit continued working in the daily life of the believer was an important dimension of Anabaptist soteriology. To be sure, Anabaptists insisted upon salvation by faith through grace, but such faith must bear “visible fruit in repentance, conversion, regeneration, obedience, and a new life dedicated to the love of God and the neighbor, by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> In this way Anabaptists were closer to some of the late medieval reformers within the Roman Catholic Church who underlined a life of obedience and discipleship, and who stressed, as the Anabaptists did, that one had free will. The true believer was a person who yielded inwardly to the power of the Holy Spirit, and outwardly to both the discipline of the community and the suffering and potential martyrdom inflicted upon them by an antagonistic world.<sup>18</sup> As many of these people experienced exile, or imprisonment and eventual execution, the hostility of “the world” was an unequivocal reality.

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Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of how the notions of the “inner” and “outer” applied to Scripture for the Anabaptists, see Wilhelm Wiswedel, “The Inner and Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, 51-70.

<sup>17</sup> Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis,” 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15.

Finally, central to Anabaptist theology was ecclesiology. Here, the community of believers was sustained by water baptism, discipline, communion (as a memorial), and worship together. Community also meant economic, political, and social fidelity, and in some cases demanded the ultimate price: that of dying for one's beliefs, or martyrdom. Indeed, the phrase "baptism by blood"—meaning that one was to die to self and rise in Christ—was materialized in the gruesome torture and execution of many 16th-century Anabaptists throughout Europe.<sup>19</sup>

These general features of early Anabaptist theology and praxis had implications for the interpretation and application of the Bible. Historians and theologians have attempted to describe consistent features of Anabaptist hermeneutics, with some emphasizing certain features such as the significance of a balance between the Inner (unwritten) and Outer (written) Word,<sup>20</sup> or the importance of the role of the congregation and the interpretation of the Bible as a communal enterprise.<sup>21</sup> Both John Roth and Stuart Murray have summarized what they perceive to be some of the main features of 16th-century Anabaptist interpretation, although they do not suggest that interpreters universally accepted these features.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, they suggest the following characteristics:

1) the Bible is self-interpreting even to those who are not educated, and points of tension or contradiction between or among some verses could be resolved by referring to other passages throughout the Bible;

2) the life and teachings of Jesus are the hermeneutical keys to understanding Scripture as a whole; in other words, the Bible must be read Christocentrically;

3) appropriate interpretation could not be separated from discipleship and obedience particularly to the teachings of Jesus;

4) the Old Testament is distinguished from the New Testament, and greater authority is granted to the New Testament especially with regard to the use of violence and the swearing of oaths;

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Harold S. Bender, "Bible," *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 1 (1955): 322-24.

<sup>21</sup> John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41 (1967): 291-308.

<sup>22</sup> Roth, "Community as Conversation," 36-37; Murray, *Biblical Interpretation*.

5) there is a distinction between the Inner and the Outer Word of God's revelation; and

6) the Bible should be interpreted in a congregational setting.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these discernible characteristics of early Anabaptist hermeneutics, and as Roth has observed, not all early members and leaders came to the same conclusions about the meaning and use of Scripture. Indeed, their differing interpretations were contributing factors to the schisms and divisions between and among groups as the movement continued into the 17th century. In other words, although one can discern a pattern of emphases within early Anabaptist approaches to the Bible, the actual doing of interpretation could vary in practice depending upon a range of contextual circumstances. Roth helpfully describes Anabaptist approaches to biblical interpretation as a "shared conversation" in which there existed debate and tension as opposed to "normative principles," and while such a conversation need not dismiss the significance of an ideal, it underscores that this was a dynamic model of biblical interpretation, not a static one.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, although it is important to be aware of these hermeneutical features, in turning to the use of a particular biblical text by members of the early Anabaptist movement, we must be careful not to simply apply a series of principles when encountering appeals to the text. Rather, we could begin with an interpretation of Scripture and determine whether and how it reflects such principles. This is the approach that I will use in examining Anabaptist interpretations of James.

### **Early Anabaptists and James**

Unfortunately, no commentary on the Letter of James survives from the early Anabaptist period.<sup>25</sup> Yet James appears relatively frequently in the documents of various groups and individuals. A *Concordance* or "Bible digest" produced by some unknown Anabaptists, and published in at least fourteen German language editions and one Dutch edition between 1540

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of how these hermeneutical characteristics play out in the writings of a second generation Dutch Anabaptist, Pieter Jansz Twisck, see J.W. Lowry, "Pieter Jansz Twisck on Biblical Interpretation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75 (2001): 355-69.

<sup>24</sup> Roth, "Community as Conversation," 46-47.

<sup>25</sup> George, "A Right Strawy Epistle," 382, n. 45.

and 1701, includes over fifty references to James, and the James citations are sometimes the focus of reflection for a given topic, such as the service of God.<sup>26</sup> Given that James is a relatively short book and competes with all of the other texts of the Bible, including the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal books (which the early Anabaptists considered to be Scripture), the number of references to James is significant.

As mentioned earlier, James 5:14 was regularly invoked by patristic and medieval writers as biblical precedent for the sacrament of Extreme Unction or the Anointing of the Sick. One might suppose that this text would have raised concern among Anabaptists, who rejected all sacraments. However, like some of the other Reformers, they did not reject the oil of James 5:14 as a negative thing. One of the notable martyrs of the movement, Michael Sattler, reportedly stated at his trial that this oil was a creature of God and as such was a good thing. What he objected to was the sacramental use of oil by priests and others as if the oil could become a means of grace. Such a usage was not acceptable, “for the pope never made anything good. That of which the Epistle of James speaks is not the pope’s oil.”<sup>27</sup> Thus James posed no problem to some of these leaders as they engaged in arguments with their interrogators regarding their viewpoints, which in this case concerned Roman Catholic beliefs and practices.

James 5:12 was a key verse that leaders appealed to as justification for why people should not swear oaths. The verse is explicitly cited by Peter Riedemann in his *Hutterite Confession of Faith*, which he wrote while in prison from 1540 to 1542.<sup>28</sup> Jacob de Keersgieter cites Matt. 5:34-37 and James 5:12 in his refutation of oaths while being interrogated by a Franciscan friar in prison.<sup>29</sup> The famous Schleithem Confession framed by Sattler in 1527 forbids the swearing of oaths, and although he did not reference James 5:12 in the articles, later Anabaptists did.<sup>30</sup> The Schleithem Confession did

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Gilbert Fast and Galen A. Peters, trans., *Biblical Concordance of the Swiss Brethren, 1540* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, trans. J.F. Sohm (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1950), 417.

<sup>28</sup> See John J. Friesen, ed. and trans., *Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith* (Waterloo, ON; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>29</sup> Van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 776.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, 37.

refer to Jesus' instruction in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:34-37) but as has been observed, readers familiar with this teaching of Jesus would find in James 5:12 "an unmistakable allusion to it."<sup>31</sup> Menno Simons must have recognized this allusion, because he explicitly associates Christ's teaching not to swear at all with James 5:12 in his epistle to the Protestant Martin Micron in 1556. There Simons defends his rejection of the oath at length.<sup>32</sup>

In the collection of letters, chronicles, and memorials about 16th- and 17th-century Anabaptist martyrs known as the *Martyrs Mirror*, we find many references to James. In this famous compilation of documents, we witness the testimonies of Anabaptists who had been arrested because of their refusal to recant their commitments. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the most commonly cited verses is James 1:12, which pronounces a blessing upon those who endure trial. When these blessed have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. Such a teaching was meaningful to individuals whose letters have survived and are included in the *Mirror*.

For example, Jan Hendrikss wrote to his wife from prison at Delft in 1571 prior to being burned at the stake. In his letter he connects James 1:12 to James 5:11, the latter of which refers to the steadfastness of Job, and he instructs that his child should be patient in all tribulation and distress just as Christ withstood such afflictions and suffering.<sup>33</sup> In 1569 a purse maker named Hendrick Alewijns was imprisoned at Middleburgh in Zeeland, where he wrote letters and hymns prior to his torture and eventual burning at the stake. Alewijns cites Phil. 4:13 ("I can do all things in him who strengthens me") and then refers to James 1:12 as he reflects upon God's promises to those who patiently endure suffering. He later refers to James 1:2 and the notion that one must count it all joy when meeting various trials and be patient to the end, a theme reiterated with a quotation from James 5:7 only a few sentences later. Alewijns again refers explicitly to James 1:12 as a means of summing up the main message of his letter.<sup>34</sup> James's emphasis

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Bauckham, *James* (London: Routledge, 1999), 92.

<sup>32</sup> J.C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. L. Verduin (Kitchener, ON/Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 924.

<sup>33</sup> Van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 934.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 746.

upon withstanding trials, endurance, and God's promises to those who withstand such trials appears to have been deeply significant to this man as he languished in prison, anticipating a painful end.

James 1:27, with its emphasis upon true religion as encompassing care for widows and orphans, and keeping oneself unstained from the world, finds a receptive audience among some of these men and women who were no doubt experiencing "the world" as an extremely hostile place. While in prison in Dordrecht, Jan Wouters instructs his wife that if she must do business with society, she must keep herself unspotted from the world.<sup>35</sup> Christiaen Rijcen, who was burned at the stake at Hontschoten, Flanders in 1588, wrote to his brother before he died, asking him to care for his wife, citing James 1:27 in support of his request and reminding his brother to remain unspotted from the world.<sup>36</sup> Pieter van Olman, executed in Ghent in 1552, writes similarly of "the world," claiming that if anyone loves the world "the love of the Father is not in him." He refers to James 1:27 but may also have had James 4:4 in mind.<sup>37</sup>

James 4:4 contrasts friendship with the world with enmity towards God, and was also cited by these soon-to-be martyrs. Some of them associate the verse with Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Hans Bret quotes James 4:4 in a 1576 letter to his mother from a prison in Antwerp, and connects it to Jesus' teaching about walking the narrow way (Matt. 7:13-14) and forsaking unrighteousness.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Bret also observes a link between James 2:26 ("faith without works is dead") and Matt. 7:17, 18, for he states that "where there is true faith, there will also good fruits appear [. . .], so it is also with man; he that has true faith will bring forth good fruits that are pleasing to the Lord."<sup>39</sup> Jacques Mesdagh perceives a parallel between James 4:4 and Matt. 6:24 ("No one can serve two masters") as he refers to both in a letter to his sister.<sup>40</sup> This perceived similarity between portions of James and the teachings of Jesus as presented in the Sermon on the Mount was not new and had been noticed earlier in the Christian tradition. However, given the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 911.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1065.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 537.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1049.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1050.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 720.

importance of Jesus' teachings for the Anabaptists, it makes sense that texts such as James 4:4 would appeal to them, especially given their context of persecution and suffering.<sup>41</sup>

One final illustration of how some of these imprisoned people found in James an articulation of their own experience and commitments—and of how they connected portions of James with Jesus' teachings—appears in a letter found in what the *Martyrs Mirror* describes as a “small, old printed book.”<sup>42</sup> In this writing, a prisoner cites the beatitudes from Matt. 5:11-12, in which those who are reviled and persecuted are blessed and promised a reward in heaven. The author then refers to James 5:1-3, 6, in which the rich are exhorted to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them. Here, the rich are associated with those who persecute the blessed; they are those who have killed the just one who does not resist them. The prisoner identifies with the just one who does not fight back, while his or her persecutor is comparable to the rich of James 5.<sup>43</sup> As Jennifer Powell McNutt has helpfully explained, for these suffering Anabaptists James “was cited to prove that the just do not resist violence even in the face of death since the persecutor will ultimately be judged in the end.”<sup>44</sup> I suggest that in addition, the linkage that the letter writer makes between the persecutors and the persecuted of Matt. 5:11-12 and the rich and the just one in James 5:1-3, 6 reinforces the notion that some of these people perceived consistencies in the teachings of James and Jesus, namely that the persecuted will be blessed and the persecutors will be judged.

The above examples from the *Martyrs Mirror* are only a sampling and far from exhaustive, but sufficient, I hope, to demonstrate that as with many biblical texts, these persecuted Anabaptists found in James

<sup>41</sup> On James 4:4 and Matthew 6:24/Luke 16:13, see Alicia J. Batten, *Friendship and Benefaction in James* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2010; repr. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 158-65.

<sup>42</sup> Van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 1012.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1016-17.

<sup>44</sup> Jennifer Powell McNutt, “James, ‘The Book of Straw,’ in Reformation Biblical Exegesis: A Comparison of Luther & the Radicals,” in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament. Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars*, ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 160.

a voice that articulated and made meaningful their experiences of trial, endurance, and alienation from “the world” as well as their widespread commitment to nonviolence.<sup>45</sup> In some cases they perceived clear parallels between dimensions of James and the teachings of Jesus which would have surely increased their estimation of James’s teachings, given the general Christological emphasis of Anabaptist hermeneutics.

Portions of James were also invoked in the context of debates among Anabaptists. One of the most contentious and difficult issues was excommunication, or the doctrine and practice of the ban. Menno Simons wrote three treatises on this subject. In the third one, produced in 1558, he refers to James several times. Near the beginning he cites from James 3:13-18, which describes true wisdom from above as pure, peaceable, gentle, and full of mercy and good fruit, in contrast to that which is earthly, sensual, and devilish. Simons warns his brothers and sisters to beware of those who boast of the truth but do not reflect the characteristics of true wisdom.<sup>46</sup> Later on, he expounds upon the closing of James, which instructs its audience that if a person brings back a member who has erred, that person has saved a soul from death and hidden a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20). Here Simons entreats his own audience to distinguish carefully between those who have erred in ignorance and those who have done so on purpose. He cautions that James should not be construed as a “false comfort and support to frivolous and erring sinners.”<sup>47</sup>

Using James, Simons seeks to navigate between a position that he sees as too lax in its easy reception of sinners back into the community and a hard-line view that does not try to bring those erring members back into the fold. He concludes by indicating that he leaves it “to the godly to reflect whether these words of James so expounded are not left in their power and purity; for those worthy of exclusion are excluded, the erring are brought back, love is kept in force.”<sup>48</sup> By appealing to the Letter of James, therefore, Simons attempts to articulate how members of the community should

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<sup>45</sup> For an example of the use of James 3:18 (“And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”) in one of the martyr’s letters, see van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 867.

<sup>46</sup> Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 962.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 986.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 987.

understand and apply the controversial practice of the ban.

We have seen that in James, Anabaptist leaders found an ally in their efforts to ground their positions biblically. Such a foundation assisted them in refuting some of the teachings and practices of their opponents. Perhaps most explicit is Simons, who directly refutes Martin Luther's description of James as an epistle of straw. It is worth citing Simons at length on this point:

The Lutherans teach and believe that faith alone saves, without any assistance by works. They emphasize this doctrine so as to make it appear as though works were not even necessary; yes, that faith is of such a nature that it cannot tolerate any works alongside it. And therefore the important and earnest epistle of James (because he reproves such frivolous, vain doctrine and faith) is esteemed and treated as a "strawy epistle." What bold folly! If the doctrine is straw, then the chosen apostle, the faithful servant and witness of Christ who wrote and taught it, must also have been a strawy man; this is as clear as the noonday sun. For the doctrine shows the character of the man.<sup>49</sup>

This comment indicates that Simons thought that the letter was written by James the apostle, but what frustrated him about the Lutherans was their emphasis upon faith at the expense of works. For the Anabaptists, a life of faith must be witnessed to by one's actions; it must be a life reflective of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Timothy George observes a similar irritation in Melchior Hofmann, a German who eventually became an active Anabaptist in the Netherlands, who in his "Ordinance of God" criticizes those who cry:

Believe, believe; grace, grace; Christ Jesus. And therefore it does not choose the better part, for its hope is idle and a great deception. For such belief cannot justify them before God, as the holy apostle James writes: Even so faith, if it has not fruits is in itself dead.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>50</sup> George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 201. Both Simons and Hofmann are cited by George, "A Right Strawy Epistle," 28.

For these writers, the notion that one is justified by faith through grace does not warrant the neglect of doing good works. Anabaptist leaders such as Simons and Hofmann waged direct critiques against Protestants whom the radical reformers understood to be overemphasizing *sola fide*.<sup>51</sup> The Letter of James furnished clear biblical warrant for criticizing those stressing belief at the expense of praxis. Simons appears to have in his mind the scene of James 2:1-7—in which a rich man enters the assembly and is offered the best seat while a poor man is dishonored and ordered to sit on the floor—when he berates Christians who boast of having the Word of God and of being a true Christian church. Such people strut about in gold, silk, and velvet, live in luxury and splendor with their treasuries full, but require the poor, hungry, suffering, and sick to beg for bread at their doors.<sup>52</sup> His comments also strongly evoke the imagery and prophetic denunciation of the rich found in James 5:1-6.

The Anabaptist hermeneutical stress upon discipleship and obedience as indicators that one is a true believer also referenced James. Members of the movement agreed with Protestants that one is justified by faith through grace, but they stressed, distinct from Protestants, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer possessed of free will. One may have faith, but evidence of that faith must be embodied in co-operation with the Spirit and manifested through actions and continued moral development. Not only was justification by faith essential to Anabaptist soteriology, so also was sanctification through the work of the Spirit. In her study of several Anabaptist thinkers on this issue, Powell McNutt observes that some Anabaptists appealed to James 1:18 (“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures”) in order to explore the idea that believers had received free choice and new birth, and in so doing, had become children of God.<sup>53</sup>

This perspective is evident in the work of the early Anabaptist leader in Moravia, Balthasar Hubmaier. He thought that Adam was possessed of free will prior to the fall, but the fall caused humans to enter a state wherein they could do nothing but sin:

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<sup>51</sup> Powell McNutt, “James,” 167.

<sup>52</sup> Wenger, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 559.

<sup>53</sup> Powell McNutt, “James,” 163.

If we are to be free again in respect to the spirit and healed in respect to the soul, if the fall of the flesh is to be harmless, this *must, must, must* take place through a rebirth as Christ himself says (John 3:3), otherwise we shall never enter the Kingdom of God. God now of his own will begets us, as James (1:18) says, by the Word of his power, that we should be anew the first fruits of his creatures. In this Word, which Peter (1 Peter 1:23) calls uncorruptible seed, we become anew free again and sound, so that absolutely nothing corruptible is left in us.<sup>54</sup>

James 1:18 assisted Hubmaier in thinking through this process of rebirth and this gift of freedom bestowed upon believers by God. This “restoration” is not the cause of justification but its result.<sup>55</sup> Powell McNutt further demonstrates that in his 1556 writing, *Concerning the New Birth and the New Creature*, the Dutch Anabaptist Dirk Philips cites James 1:18 to undergird his view that “a true believer will manifest their belief through moral transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit, who actively works towards the sanctification of the believer.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the verse appears in Philips’s *Church of God*, where he stresses rebirth through the Word and the ongoing pursuit of the righteousness of Christ as a witness and outcome of genuine faith.<sup>57</sup> For Philips, a process of rebirth and a continued progression of sanctification through the Holy Spirit were necessary for the believer, and he clearly found in James 1:18 an expression of support for such a position.

In his “Reply to Gellius Faber” of 1554, Menno Simons also refers to James 1:18 as he boldly critiques “the church of Antichrist.” At one point

<sup>54</sup> Williams and Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Powell McNutt, “James,” 163.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. For Philips’s text, see Daniel Liechty, ed. and trans., *Early Anabaptist Spirituality. Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 202.

<sup>57</sup> Powell McNutt, “James,” 165. Philips wrote: “Although the salvation promised to man has been wrought by Jesus Christ the Saviour, and although the forfeited life has been redeemed by the blood of the unique sacrifice, and is offered to all men by the gospel (Titus 2:13; Heb. 2:2; 10:18-20), nevertheless, not all men enjoy this eternal salvation and eternal life, but those alone who in this life here are born again by the Word of Jesus Christ, who allow themselves to be sought and found by the light of the divine Word, and who obey the voice of their Shepherd (1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:18-19; John 3:3; 8:32; 12:46); who are enlightened with the true knowledge of God and his will and in sincere faith accept the righteousness of Christ” (Williams and Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 234).

he attacks the leaders of this church, who live in fine houses, with their ornaments and rings, silks and satin, and their women and children, who are called “the evangelical theologians, and ministers of the Holy Word; alack and alas, of the comfortable and carnal gospel!”<sup>58</sup> In contrast, the “church of Christ is begotten by the Spirit and Word of Christ [. . .] James says, Of his own will he begot us with the word of truth.” The true church must be begotten by what Simons describes as the “rightly preached Word, through the Holy Spirit, and conceived in the hearts of the believers.”<sup>59</sup> One could infer here that a sign of the rightly preached Word is a life in which the Holy Spirit is active as manifested by a demonstration of moral righteousness. The focus is not free will as it was for Hubmaier, but Simons’s insistence that a life of faith must be evident in one’s actions is reflected in his conviction that the believer receives the word of truth from God, as articulated in James 1:18.

### **Conclusion**

This cursory review of early Anabaptists’ use of the Letter of James has attempted to understand their interpretation within the context of the theology, hermeneutics, and experiences of members and leaders of the movement. Although they upheld the notion of justification by faith, Luther’s negative assessment of James did not influence them.<sup>60</sup> Instead, the Letter was popular despite the differences between, and the diversity within, these groups of people.

The discussion here has been brief, but attention to the use of the Letter of James among early Anabaptists indicates that the hermeneutical emphasis upon the teachings of Jesus was particularly important. As I have argued, the parallels and associations between the Letter of James and Jesus’ teachings were perceived by some members of the movement. Such connections, in my view, caused the Letter to be all the more appealing. For Anabaptists, the voice of Jesus often overlapped with the voice of James. The Letter was also useful to Anabaptist leaders as they sought to articulate their positions, both in the context of internal disputes about such topics as the ban and in the many external arguments, including disputes on the use of the oath in

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<sup>58</sup> Wenger, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 737.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Luther’s negative views likely only increased Anabaptist appreciation for the Letter!

which they engaged with Roman Catholic and Protestant opponents. James assisted these writers as they sought to ground their arguments biblically.

In examining references to the Letter of James within the *Martyrs Mirror*, it is evident that the Letter was important to those imprisoned, tortured, and executed for their faith. Testimonies from some of these martyrs indicate that James assisted them articulate, in part, their experience of suffering and hostility from the world. James's emphasis upon endurance, in particular, was directly relevant to those who had to withstand physically such atrocities as torture on the rack or prolonged periods of being hung upside down from the rafters. These latter accounts demonstrate the centrality within Anabaptist theology and hermeneutics of manifesting one's faith through action even if it requires forsaking one's life. Although justification was by faith, the believer must co-operate with the Holy Spirit in an ongoing process of sanctification. We cannot assume that those who withstood these horrors were familiar with all the writings and theological ideas of their leaders, but they do appear to have embodied them even to the point of death.

In sum, Anabaptists found support in the Letter of James for their emphasis upon, and manifestation of, witness. Such perceived resonances between James and the theology and experience of early Anabaptists would in turn contribute to the strawy epistle's ongoing significance for many within the Anabaptist tradition.

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## REFLECTION

### The Classroom as Home: An Essay on College Teaching

Waldemar Janzen

#### Part I: A Question

In the friendly context of the small university from which I am now retired, my fellow retirees and I have been treated with respect and kindness. A room was set apart for us to hold our weekly Thursday morning coffee hour. We have regularly been invited to attend various faculty functions, both academic and social. We have been given faculty library privileges, access to photocopying facilities, and more. All in all, we have enjoyed many privileges by no means available to retirees in all institutions of higher learning, and we know and appreciate this. When expressing this appreciation to current administrators and faculty members, I have repeatedly received responses like: “Oh, you [retirees] are very important to the institution; we need your experience and your wisdom.” This begs me to ask myself: What experience exactly? What wisdom? Where am I drawing on it in the service of the institution? And ultimately: Do I have any experience and wisdom of the kind that can still profit the institution? I am in no way casting doubt on the sincerity of those making the assertion—but are they right?

From the time I taught my first college class in the fall of 1953—at the age of 21 and with only a B.A. received that same fall—until I taught my last for-credit course in the spring of 2002, I indeed lived through a long teaching career, most of it in the same college (eventually university). Ought I not to have many things to share with, and at least some wisdom to hand on to, a less-experienced younger generation of college teachers and administrators? If I do, what precisely would that be?

Here my doubts arise. In the past, to have experience meant literally “to have travelled around extensively” and figuratively “to have seen much of the world and of life” (cf. the German *erfahren*—to drive about extensively; to experience). To obtain such experience required a lengthy life, so that age was a precondition of experience or know-how, and setting such experience to good, life-enhancing use was wisdom. But does this age-related and

experience-based wisdom still provide what a younger generation might find life-enhancing? Aren't the ways that worked well in the past precisely what has to be left behind today, superseded by more recent inventions, resources, experimentation, discovery, and practice?

Ongoing change is as inevitable in education as in life generally. Attitudes toward learning change. Methods of teaching change. Teaching equipment changes. And so on. Take language teaching. For years I taught German as I myself had been taught languages, that is, by a method analogous to building. Memorized vocabulary was the building material, and grammatical rules were the construction blueprint according to which that material was shaped into a building, the language to be learned: a sequence of correctly structured sentences and paragraphs. The teacher knew the material and the blueprint, and how to use them. The student was the apprentice learning the trade. Lecture, memorization, and practice prevailed. Gradually, more inductive and participatory approaches took over. Language labs came into use (and faded away as personal electronic devices replaced them). I adjusted my teaching to such changes, moved through a plethora of textbooks and classroom strategies, and survived reasonably well. Innovations have of course continued to appear since my retirement, in both the repertoire of teachers and the learning modes of students. The use of PowerPoint is one example; I would be interested to hear teachers and students reflect on the gains it provides, and perhaps also on the losses.

More epochal changes, however, emerged in the last third of the 20th century under the umbrella designation of "Postmodernism." They can be summarized briefly as the rejection—sometimes vehement, sometimes subtle—of the Enlightenment agenda, or "Modernism." Objectivity of knowledge has been challenged by subjectivity. It is not simply a change from Modernism to Postmodernism, but—at least in my opinion—a surging ahead of both, sometimes in irenic dialogue, sometimes in reciprocal rejection.

This thumbnail sketch of ongoing change on both the micro- and macro-level takes me back to my initial question: Do I have any experience-based wisdom to share with younger college teachers? Even in times of greatest change, what remains constant is even greater—a notion I freely borrow from philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*

(*Truth and Method*, original German 1960). Encouraged by this conviction, and aided by the joy in reminiscing and the pleasure of writing, I will venture below to share some of my experiences with younger teachers, keeping in mind, as my primary implied readers, those working in post-secondary Christian institutions.

## Part II : My Response

What is teaching? I wish to approach my reflections on this subject by way of an analogy: *Teaching is a form of extending hospitality*. An analogy is by definition suggestive and not compelling; other analogies can often be substituted. In this case, a well-known alternative could be “Teaching is a conversation between generations.” I did not begin my teaching career with “hospitality” in mind, but over many years and in different teaching areas and contexts, it increasingly permeated my thinking and practice. Within this interpretive frame, the teacher is the host, functioning as such on three successive levels or stages, while the students are the guests.

### THE FIRST LEVEL OF HOSPITALITY

The first level of hospitality in teaching has to do more with attitude and atmosphere than with strictly “academic” matters. When you, the teacher, begin a new course, you are inviting the students to step as guests into a new home—your home! This is true in an external and an internal sense. Externally, your first task after you enter the classroom and the door has closed behind you, is to convey to the students—they are not yet a class!—that you are at home here and they are your guests. They have entered a new space, as it were, even if they have already taken other courses taught in the same school and in the same room, even courses taught by the same teacher, for the essentials are mostly new: the constellation of personalities, the focus of activity (the subject matter), and above all, the thought world or mindset within which you will approach the subject matter. You are at home in these things, and the students are not. In this sense, you are the host and they are your guests.

What makes for a good host? In my experience it is the commitment to creating and cultivating an aura of assurance, relaxedness, firm friendliness, and anticipation of something good lying ahead. Think of a social visit.

When you enter someone else's home as a visitor, being welcomed by your host into a friendly and promising atmosphere of togetherness sets a good tone for the visit. In the classroom, this welcoming atmosphere has to begin in the teacher's own state of mind. You must want to be there and teach these students. You must have planned the first class so as to insure a good start in this direction. To maintain it later must naturally follow, but I cannot emphasize enough the vital importance of the first class for accomplishing this task successfully.

Externals are of course also important in setting the tone of the course from the very beginning. They may vary, and how a teacher chooses and uses them is in part a matter of intuition on the spot. Intuition, however, will work best if you have considered options in advance. In the long run, your authority and respect will depend on your positively perceived personality and your competence, but these are still unknown to the class. In my experience, a good start toward instilling both assurance of a safe environment and confidence in the teacher begins with communicating purposefulness on the teacher's part.

To write a *brief and simple* outline for this first hour on a white sheet, or to project it on a screen, may be such a start. On the other hand, to present a complex outline of the first hour, or even of the whole course, whether by handout or PowerPoint, deflects students' attention from a face-to-face meeting with you, their host. Other and perhaps more creative ways of encountering students in a purposeful and re-assuring way certainly exist. The ingenuity of different teachers has wide scope here.

Is it really necessary to make conveying a sense of security and creating a trusting relationship such a priority at the post-secondary level? Aren't young people at that age confident and self-assured, having been encouraged at the lower levels to get up in public, speak their minds, and believe in themselves, with the world at their fingertips by means of their electronic devices? Throughout my teaching career I had much evidence of considerable anxiety among first- and second-year college students, but also among more advanced ones, even when they seemed self-assured. As time went on, I did observe an increasing readiness on the part of students to speak in front of the class, and to choose assignments requiring interaction with others, artistic expression, leadership functions, and more. Yet today,

when I observe students in the bus on their way to university or on campus clutching and fingering their devices and ignoring the people around them, I wonder whether they are not shrinking from facing the real world around them by escaping into a virtual world. They seem anything but secure to me. What do younger teachers observe?

When it was time for me to speak in the first class of the semester, I began calmly and not too loudly. If noise persisted, I stopped. It is very important to establish immediately that the teacher speak only when the class is quiet. This furthers the communication of purposefulness and security.

#### THE SECOND LEVEL OF HOSPITALITY

As host, you are not only welcoming your guests (the students) into an external space (the classroom) where your friendly but purposeful reception evokes expectations of positive togetherness; you are also introducing your guests into an inner, intellectual sphere (the course subject) in which you are at home, and into which you will forthwith welcome them. I found it important to begin this second level of welcoming in the very first class. Institutional regulations generally require the early distribution of a course syllabus containing instructions regarding schedule, textbooks, requirements, allotment of grades, etc. So be it. However, I preferred to summarize the nature of the course, sketching its main aims and approaches very briefly and asking the students to read the syllabus on their own in preparation for questions to be taken up in a subsequent class. I considered—and still consider it—seriously counter-productive to spend the first class hour on the syllabus. Instead, I made it my practice to devote approximately one-half of that hour to taking students on an initial foray into the course's actual subject matter.

Here let me offer one sample from each of my two main teaching areas, Old Testament Studies, and German Language and Literature, followed by some explanatory comments. In Old Testament Introduction, I often read with the class the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) and God's call of Abraham (12:1-3), using these closely related texts to introduce the theme of promise (of descendants and land) that runs through the book of Genesis and beyond. In German language courses, sometimes introductory level but usually intermediate or higher, I might offer a little bit of rudimentary

philosophy of language as, for example, the function of grammar in making communication easier than it is in grammatically less-developed languages. Or I would draw students' attention briefly to the relatedness of German and English, pointing out some similarities and differences.

In both these fields my opening plunge into the course material was meant to perform two functions: (1) each time it contained a little surprise; (2) it always suggested, if ever so gently, that the course just might be somewhat interesting, and not only repeat familiar territory and meet academic requirements. Let me explain: Students enrolling in Old Testament Introduction could be expected to have some general knowledge of the Creation Story, together with a vague awareness of controversies between creationists and evolutionists, religion and science, etc. Few, in my experience, were particularly enthused about turning to Adam and Eve once again. To connect with the Old Testament by taking up an extended theme, such as promise of descendants and land, usually surprised them and captured their interest. Detailed attention would be given to the rich creation texts later in the course.

Students taking a course in German language (or Greek, or Hebrew) from whatever motives were likely to be braced for the tedium of memorizing vocabulary and "boring grammar." While rote memorization is unavoidable in learning a new language (despite my earlier comment on changes in modern language teaching), college-level study of a language need not be a belated effort at memorizing thoughtlessly something done better at a younger age. Instead, the teacher can introduce students to a deeper understanding of language, the most human of human faculties of communication.

### *The Centrality of the Teacher*

To conceive of the teacher as host, initiating and being primarily responsible for vouchsafing the mental climate of the course and directing its progress, may raise questions for readers concerning the teacher's centrality in this model. What about the Socratic Method? What about that already-mentioned definition of education as a conversation between generations? What about the student's role in the learning experience? Isn't the student to become the architect of his or her own mental world, rather than inherit and inhabit the teacher's world? These are legitimate questions.

Allow me here to return to the theme of change. In my major field of specialization (Old Testament and Near Eastern Languages), I had the privilege to study with professors of deservedly eminent stature. The “historical-critical method” was then the dominant approach in most major seminaries and universities. I admired my teachers and was a good student. My Harvard doctoral dissertation was “form-critical” in its approach, employing historical-critical methodology. However, the historical-critical method, while not altogether displaced during my teaching career, was supplemented and often challenged by a plethora of new approaches, such as canonical, literary, sociological, reader response, and other criticisms. I found aspects of these approaches very enriching and adopted them.

At times my adoption of newer methodologies seemed to create inner distance between me and my own teachers, as far as the treatment of course content and approach was concerned. Was I betraying my admired mentors by adopting newer trends? Not really. Their modeling of systematic application of methodology, their wealth of knowledge, and their integrity as persons (and Christians in many cases) continued to shape my thinking and teaching long after I had modified, abandoned, or transcended many of their methodologies and findings. In short, their impact as persons—and as generous hosts—retained its shaping impact on both my life and my scholarship. Such observations confirm my conviction that in the teaching/learning process at the post-secondary level, the teacher is more central than the structure of curricula and the methodologies employed in academic disciplines, and that this central role is more resistant to change than these structures and methodologies.

Although I am strongly emphasizing the centrality of the teacher, I am not insisting on a predominantly lecture-centered approach. Lecture-centered teaching did predominate in higher education during my earlier teaching years, as it did throughout Europe and North America. (The German designation of a professor’s class structure is tellingly called *Vorlesung* [lecture], that is, a presentation *read* to the class). Students sat back, listened, and took notes. The stress lay on content and not on mode of presentation. With time, however, and probably in part due to the impact of television, students increasingly expected greater variety in presentation, and professors learned to resort to new forms of learning activity involving

group presentations, small group discussions, debates, journaling, artistic class presentations, recordings, and more. I even impersonated the prophet Jeremiah in some Old Testament Prophets courses, coming to class in a Middle Eastern colored tunic, appropriate headdress, and a walking staff! Nevertheless, I believe that ultimately the highest form of rational human communication of thought is well-spoken or well-written prose.

#### THE THIRD LEVEL OF HOSPITALITY

The third level of hospitality does not require effort and planning on the teacher's part. You have engaged in it largely subconsciously, but inescapably, all along. Students who accepted your invitation on the first two levels will have inevitably accepted from you—and also from their other teachers—an invitation into your philosophical/spiritual home, that is, into your worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Our *Weltanschauung* develops as we integrate many fragments of information and experience. Everyone agrees that fragments of knowledge, or floating pieces of information, do not make for an educated person. Only if they are increasingly coagulating within our inner thought world into systems or, as a postmodern mentality might prefer, into narratives, is there movement and growth toward discovering understanding and purpose of life and the world.

However, the times when grand thought systems aimed at the integration of all knowledge—I am thinking of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, or Hegel—seem to belong to the past. Shall we therefore abandon all efforts at integration of knowledge and thought? Is there an alternative? Perhaps we are rightly learning the humility to accept the fact that human self-understanding and world-understanding must remain partial and fragmentary, for we lack a vantage point outside the cosmos which alone would allow comprehension of the whole. Descartes in his famous dictum “cogito, ergo sum” saw that vantage point in the human intellect. Times have changed, however, and it is precisely the dethronement of that worldview of the Enlightenment, or “Modernism,” that appears to leave us with nothing but a fragmented world. Anything more is self-deceit or, from a Christian perspective, idolatry.

*Partial* understanding, however, is not the same as *no* understanding, and *partial* integration is more than *no* integration, which would amount to

mental chaos. If teachers can transmit this, and students can perceive that in their teacher's mental world there has been some success in fitting fragments of knowledge together, of sense-making that points toward the existence of a greater sense, they can gain the confidence necessary for seeking sense—partial but satisfying sense—from their own vantage point on the world. In other words, teachers can, by demonstrated example, invite their students into a mentality of confidence and hope that encourages the students' own attempts to integrate their knowledge and understanding. Even if the result always remains partial, it is not doomed to total failure, and thus students can become empowered to struggle for signs of meaning in their own intellectual and emotional world, and thereby to find a sense of a cosmic home that they can inhabit.

Such signs are at least somewhat analogous to the signs making up the foundations of theistic faith or, more specifically, of biblical faith. Central among them is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For believers also live with the knowledge that a full understanding of the transcendent reality of the Wholly Other in whom they believe—of the reality in which they place their trust—remains surrounded by mystery. In this way, the Christian teacher can help students to transcend the sense of home tasted in the teacher's mental world and to feel at home in God's infinitely greater world, even while understanding it only in a very fragmented way. The Apostle Paul writes: "For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).

My understanding of limited but convincing insights as signs or invitations to faith in a greater Truth, the truth of God, is a more hopeful stance than the existentialism of, for example, Franz Kafka a century ago. Kafka's characters seek an encounter with the distant Lord, toward whom a deep-seated longing and fleeting glimpses from afar make them press on, even though the way always seems to end in confusion and loss of orientation. Similarly, my understanding of the deepest human search for sense in the face of an apparently incomprehensible universe is more positive than Alasdair MacIntyre's recent model of a fractured truth for which the underlying coherent conceptual pattern has been lost, so that attempts to fit the fractured pieces together must result in incoherent combinations. (MacIntyre did eventually move beyond sheer fragmentation, becoming a

Roman Catholic Christian.)

Let me return to the beginning of these ruminations. Do I have any morsels of wisdom, based on a long career in teaching, to hand on to a younger generation of teachers? That is a question I really cannot answer. I believe I do, but if those of a younger generation should respond that I am addressing questions they are not asking, I will not be offended or feel slighted. We are historical beings, shaped by specific contexts that have their time and then pass on. Only One is eternal and must remain the center of our lives; all else, if endowed with undue finality, becomes idolatry.

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## BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

### Oliver O'Donovan, *Ethics as Theology*

Paul G. Doerksen

Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking. Ethics as Theology 2* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2014).

Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest. Ethics as Theology 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).

This trilogy is an important work that will linger and last; it displays sustained, rich theological depth and erudition that is not only exemplary (it surely is that) but also a constructive, faithful witness to the Gospel. While the substance of a major project like this trilogy defies concise description, there are several ways of providing orientation to it. O'Donovan himself provides helpful guidance in a published interview, where he characterized the set this way: volume 1, “And now these three remain...”; volume 2, “. . . faith, hope, and love...”; and volume 3, “... but the greatest of these is love....”<sup>1</sup> More specifically, Volume 1 addresses Ethics as ordered reflection on moral thinking and on its place in the life of faith. Volume 2 shifts to moral thinking itself, exploring progress from the consciousness of agency to the world as the structure of value and to the time that determines the moment of decision. The third volume turns to the object of moral thinking—“the forward horizon with which moral thinking engages.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Five Questions with Oliver O'Donovan,” *EerdWord* (blog), March 17, 2015, <https://eerdword.com/2015/03/17/five-questions-with-oliver-odonovan/>.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest. Ethics as Theology 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 81-87.

Another way in is to say that *Ethics as Theology* does for Christian ethics what O'Donovan's previous two-volume work—*The Desire of the Nations* and *The Ways of Judgment*—did for political theology and ethics; namely, it deals with horizons.<sup>3</sup> For example, *The Desire of the Nations* described the task of political theology as “pushing back of the horizon of commonplace politics to open it up to the activity of God.” *Ethics as Theology* sees the sequence of faith, hope, and love as

open[ing] up to a further horizon, that of accomplishment, the satisfaction of moral agency at its end. It is the horizon of a second reflection, a point of rest on the far side of deliberation to which practical reason may look as its goal, not alien to practice or superseding practice, but pushing its horizon back to the accomplishment that life itself is offered.<sup>4</sup>

This concept offers one point of orientation. We are watching the horizon being pushed back to see God's activity, which in turn calls us to see, think, deliberate, discern, and act more faithfully in light of this perspective.

It is important to view this trilogy as a continuation of O'Donovan's two-volume political theology and ethics work. There the author wanted to move “beyond suspicion,” the belief that politicians corrupt morality and that politics is corrupted by theology. Here he wants to move “beyond criticism,” to use a phrase that surfaces in his treatment of sanctification understood as integration and completion. A sanctified person is “one in whom the balance of whose communications there is no dissention or incongruity, a completed work of the God of peace.”<sup>5</sup> That is the eschatological possibility.

A further connection to the political theology project consists in O'Donovan's ongoing pursuit of “an architectural enterprise,” which is what he considers ethics to be. He presents trains of thought possessing different inner logics. However, the more explicit and direct connection of the trilogy

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2017), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking. Ethics as Theology 2* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2014), 106.

is to his earlier book, *Resurrection and Moral Order*,<sup>6</sup> to which he makes explicit reference, revealing that he now wants “to ask further about the gift of the Spirit and its implications for the forceful moral objectivism” of that book.<sup>7</sup> He is taking stock of, and seeking to give a better account of, what he now sees as a flat, this-worldly account of authority in that work, and he wants to give a fuller account of the resurrection for ethics-as-theology.

Although Stanley Hauerwas famously critiqued *Resurrection and Moral Order* as having too much order and not enough resurrection, that critique does not hold for the trilogy project. Here O'Donovan uses the language of “Pentecost and Moral Reason” to describe this work, in which he gives less emphasis to the ordered moral world that makes thinking and acting possible, and places more emphasis on the logic of thinking and acting. This new emphasis centers on being and acting that is undertaken in the Spirit and embedded in narratives and descriptions of resurrection and Pentecost. These narratives and descriptions need each other in order to survive and function. *Ethics as Theology* is a perpetual finding and seeking, a demand that the Spirit and Giver of life lays on us. In acknowledging this reality, we accept it as a demand of both our existence and God's existence.<sup>8</sup>

The “sovereignty of love” is central to the vision of *Ethics as Theology*. This sovereignty should not be taken to be a fundamental theological concept that might provide an immediate answer to every practical question without giving space for deliberation to look around and understand the world and time in which we live.<sup>9</sup> Though not *fundamental* in that way, love is *foundational* nonetheless.<sup>10</sup> While focusing on the Pauline triad of faith, hope, and love, O'Donovan resists methodological monism. He does not champion one approach over all rivals, and despite the extensive treatment of love, his project cannot be labeled an ethics of love.<sup>11</sup> In his view, if love is

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<sup>6</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time. Ethics as Theology 1* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2013), xii.

<sup>8</sup> O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-65. Here O'Donovan claims that Jürgen Moltmann uses hope in just this way.

<sup>10</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 14.

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

sovereign, then it is a “statement about the finality of community,”<sup>12</sup> a matter to which I return below.

O'Donovan grants the sovereignty of love foundational status, and yet resists a monism of love, virtue, liturgy, or hope. He discusses these and other emphases, gives them their due, and offers trenchant criticisms without being overtaken by, or beholden to, any one concept. While the Pauline triad of faith, hope, and love supports the entire effort of the trilogy, there are many other structural elements to keep track of: body, soul, spirit; world, self, time; material, social, and hermeneutic; power, love, moral instruction—and this is not a comprehensive list. The connections of these elements are sometimes difficult to track, and their nature and significance are not always transparent. This raises the issue of “architectonics,” understood as a sort of slavishness to an elaborate structure or system, and a line of criticism that has dogged O'Donovan for some time. He addresses it explicitly in discussing “occasional” versus “architectural” organizations of ethics.<sup>13</sup> He resists Duncan Forrester's notion of a “fragmentary” method of pursuing ethics, arguing that such an occasional approach tends to drift with the stream, never getting a sense of where we have been and where we might go. Instead, “[t]he imaginative architecture we need . . . must be constructed on categories of theological interpretation.”<sup>14</sup> In response to the criticism of architectonics, O'Donovan contends that in order to think freshly and to preserve order in thought, “One must be able to think one thing in relation to another according to some pattern of which an account can be given.”<sup>15</sup> For him, such structure is not absolute and serves only a heuristic purpose, since to be a slave to one's own organization is to talk only to oneself, and to be a slave to whatever happens to be on one's mind at a given moment is to end up talking not even to oneself.

That said, does the criticism of “architectonics” still hold? It is certainly less applicable now than previously. O'Donovan takes care in the trilogy to relativize whatever organizational structures are used or, perhaps better put, to give an account of, and to assert the exploratory or heuristic nature

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 102ff.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 105.

of, the structures pressed into service. Still, it seems that the “occasional” approach that he resists is not *only* fragmentary. It may well entail writing or communicating in response to a call from a community, in which case the heuristic device providing shape and order may be a real need of the church and not an instance of drifting with the stream.

Nevertheless, something in this project prevents me from pressing the architectonic criticism too hard. O'Donovan stands by his structure and the sovereignty of love as a starting point, but he also hopes that there could be other starting points, such as “the teaching of Jesus.” Here again his insights are worth quoting directly:

I hope, at any rate, that the time will come when moral theologians may dare to make Jesus their point of reference without being suspected, or guilty, of a ‘low’ Christology. . . . Lots of church thinkers have learned from Jesus how to reframe questions. . . . We should be able to do as much.<sup>16</sup>

A similar dynamic—asserting love’s sovereignty while acknowledging other possible starting points—surfaces in several places. Consider this example:

When we love a particular thing, we know it as an instantiation of form that has been given time and space. When we love a particular person, it is as an instance of the form we know, but this time in a unique subject of action, who expresses form by doing as well as being. And when we love Jesus as the Christ (the point of unity between love of God and love of neighbor) we find his life and teaching to be the form that the whole history of God’s saving work displays.<sup>17</sup>

Again, as part of a discussion of pastoral education:

If the clergy are to learn once again what it could mean to give direction to the Christian faithful, they must begin afresh from the moral categories and forms of moral speech that we

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

<sup>17</sup> O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*, 126.

encounter in the evangelists and apostles.<sup>18</sup>

What interests me is O'Donovan's repeated and appropriate disavowal of the absoluteness of any specific starting point or foundation, even if one is chosen (e.g., the sovereignty of love), and the recognition that the teachings of Jesus may well have played the same foundation-making role. I can't quite see why the author did not pursue the fantasy he claims to entertain, that if he were to begin again he would "take my starting point from the teachings of Jesus."<sup>19</sup>

In a review of the trilogy's first volume, *Self, World, and Time*, Samuel Wells described it as "a lonely book."<sup>20</sup> Not that the author is lonely, but that the book is. Wells's complaint, his "form of discomfort," was that the church did not receive the attention it deserves. Would Wells's discomfort still stand after the publication of volumes two and three? I contend that it cannot. *Finding and Seeking* puts forward the notion of the Christian's pilgrim condition,<sup>21</sup> and presents a compelling account of the community established by the Gospel.<sup>22</sup> *Entering into Rest* displays the ecclesiological dimension of the trilogy at its most powerful, stressing living in community as the exercise of freedom in mutual service,<sup>23</sup> and developing deep, rich accounts of the church in passages on communication, sanctification, friendship, pastoral education, and other ecclesiological dimensions. Here too O'Donovan shows his concern to resist any sort of monism. For example, liturgy enters the discussion but does not serve as the structure for ethics. The church is not reduced to being only the bearer of sacraments and liturgy that in turn might function as the basis of ethics. These volumes do not put forward an ecclesiological or communitarian monism; they are not lonely.

O'Donovan's hope for ethics to be shaped by starting with the teachings of Jesus is interesting and even provocative. What would such a move change? Would more decisive shaping power perhaps be given to some dimensions

<sup>18</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 195ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Wells, "Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology Volume 1*," *Theology* 117, no. 5 (September 2014): 392-94.

<sup>21</sup> O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*, 101.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>23</sup> O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 20.

of the trilogy project which, while not absent, do not “carry enough weight”? For example, should the significance of suffering, which does surface in the account, receive further attention? What about confession and repentance, or the church’s pilgrim condition, and even dispossession (John 12:24), which deserves more attention—even on O’Donovan’s own terms?

All these dimensions of ethics as theology appear in this trilogy, but they are sometimes dealt with very briefly and cryptically. There is not enough about vulnerability, not enough about dispossession. In addition, I wonder if the notion of the church in a pilgrim state might extend further to thinking of the church as in a state of exile, resulting in a posture that does not and cannot rely on social standing or powerful status. I am not suggesting exilic status as a new form of ethical monism, but I am reminded of something suggested in another review of *Self, World, and Time*: “waking up involves a social and political struggle through which we come to be able to tell the truth about our world and ourselves; yet the sense of this being a highly contentious and precarious undertaking is glossed over in this volume.”<sup>24</sup> I would welcome a deeper sense of this contentiousness and precariousness, perhaps by more directly engaging with questions and sources addressing social location, privilege, marginalization, gender, and so on—issues that are fraught by their very nature. There is room for more of this fraughtness throughout.

O’Donovan’s trilogy is an important project that is deeply biblical and theological, constructive and comprehensive, and also richly pastoral, even devotional. It will reward readers seeking guidance on any number of topics, and will especially reward those reading it as a coherent whole in which we come face to face with faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Luke Bretherton, “*Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology, Volume 1: An Induction*,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27, no. 3 (2014): 368.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Denny Smith and P. Travis Kroeker for helpful conversations about O’Donovan’s work. This review essay was originally read in a public forum at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland (November 23, 2017), an event celebrating the completion of the trilogy.

Katherine Sonderegger. *Systematic Theology Volume I: The Doctrine of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Katherine Sonderegger is surely right that most 20th-century dogmatic theologians have tended to order their doctrines of God by starting with “who” God is and not “what” God is (xi). The divine perfections have largely been swept aside in an era where theology focuses on God’s trinitarian and Christic identity as discerned in the concrete narratives of Scripture. According to Sonderegger, ignoring the divine perfections is a mistake, because those same narratives present God uniquely as both a “who” and a “what” (192).

Animating her prayerful reflection on the divine perfections are the doctrines of “theological compatibilism” and “transcendent relations” which express the conviction that God “resides among us, without contradiction or identity or annihilation” (83). *Systematic Theology* expounds these doctrines in five parts, each taking one divine perfection as its focus.

Sonderegger begins with the Divine Oneness, arguing, contrary to views that construe Scripture’s genre and subject matter as primarily narrative in form, that the subject matter of Scripture is “the One God” of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and that its genre or form is Israel’s Torah (11). The Torah’s affirmation of God’s oneness and the prohibition against idols presents God as uniquely One (30). This affirmation and prohibition should not imply that God is either distant or unknowable. Rather, “God is very *near* to us, *present* in His surpassing Uniqueness” (40).

Affirming this nearness, the author then reflects on the perfection of omnipresence. Meditating on the Elisha narrative in 2 Kings 6, she suggests that God’s omnipresence is on display as “*invisible presence*” (70). This invisibility is not a disguise or mask but God’s unique “Life and Substance and Person” (84). Even in the New Testament this form of invisibility is present in the life of Jesus. His messianic identity is a secret, the kingdom is a secret, and post-ascension, his reign is in some sense secret even if located “everywhere, throughout the cosmos” (135).

Turning to omnipotence, Sonderegger admits that this perfection is fraught with “the problem of suffering, of sin and evil” (152). Going against the grain of theological trends emphasizing God’s “radical cruciformity”

(157) as the only adequate answer to theodicy, she re-affirms God's omnipotence through a complex discussion of divine causality, arguing that God's power "must be removed from the category of *cause* altogether" (177). God is powerful neither as "absolute cause" nor as the power to do "what one wills" (184). God does not have power but just is power (219), power as "Vitality, Life that radiates, effortlessly pours forth" as absolutely unique "Spiritual Nature" (310).

Sonderegger makes similar moves in treating omniscience and its methodological entailments. God "does not know things; God is Knowledge" (348). God's knowledge, in other words, is not like creaturely knowledge, only limitless, but is rather "the Source and Instrument of our knowing" (426). God does not know about creatures but rather "makes things known" as the "Light by which we see" (425). In treating Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Sonderegger shows the significance of this claim for ethics: "Directly in front of us . . . is not our Maker, but rather the creature . . . the Dear Lord . . . steps aside . . . so that our neighbor rises up, full and concrete and visible, fresh before our eyes" (426).

Finally, Sonderegger looks at the perfection of love. Appealing to the Jonathan and David narrative, she argues that just as God does not need a knowable creature to be all-knowing, nor to be absolute cause or realized will to be all-powerful, so God does not need an object to be Love or to give Love (489). The "covenant love" of Jonathan for David is an example of the faithful love of God, burning "with an eternal Love that gives itself away" (500).

Sonderegger's theological readings of biblical texts (e.g., Numbers and 2 Kings) rarely treated in works of systematic theology are fecund and rewarding for students of theology and the Bible alike. Her willingness to combat dominant theological trends challenges myths of progress that suggest theologians today are in a privileged position, having thrown off the shackles of traditional abstract metaphysics. In addition, her treatment of key dogmatic figures (Augustine, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Kant, Barth, Rahner) is provocative and enriches her overall argument.

This volume uniquely blends academic treatments of technical theological concepts with a devotional and at times poetic style. For some readers this blending may be distracting, but it is consistent with the author's

argument regarding theological compatibilism as an invitation, within the entire creaturely realm, to “worship and praise” of the One God (xxi).

One complaint is in order. I hope numerous errors, including misplaced, misspelled, or missing words in the body of the text will be corrected in future printings.

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Robert J. Suderman. Edited by Andrew Gregory Suderman. *Re-Imagining the Church: Implications of Being a People in the World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016.

This book is an anthology of sorts, a collection of essays penned by Robert Suderman over a period of more than a decade, presented here with a short editorial introduction to each of the 16 chapters. Most of the essays originated as public presentations in a range of gatherings—from Canada to the Southern Cone of South America and reaching to Southeast Asia. All draw upon the deep well of scripture and theological study that informs Suderman’s bracing ecclesiology.

Although Suderman has served as the top administrator of a church denomination, this book does not address questions about the polity and practice of church organizations. Rather, it is a theological exploration of God’s preferred strategy for God’s people in the world. Suderman takes an aspirational approach, consistently emphasizing what the church could be if it were fully living up to God’s design. By means of careful exegesis at crucial points, he looks back to the testimony of New Testament scriptures, and then looks forward imaginatively to the ways that God’s mission may be realized in today’s context.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part sets forth Suderman’s vision for the nature and being of the church. Particularly in the first two chapters, the author lays out a solid theological definition of the church as “an alternative community, subverting the values of our dominant society with kingdom of God priorities” (10). He argues that “Jesus’ vision for

covenanted-kingdom-peoplehood” is essentially equivalent to the Apostle Paul’s concept of the church (9). He goes on to explore the uniqueness of Anabaptist ecclesiology, with its implications for leadership, peacemaking, mission, communal discernment, and more.

In the second part, Suderman addresses the church’s role as people in the world. Here he shows how the church can make its mark in the public square, particularly with its concern for peace and justice. He also speaks of the role of the church in Christian education, or church-related schools.

Given his focus on a re-imagined future, Suderman says little about the failures of the church to live up to her high calling. I would like to see how he might envision a future that acknowledges the church’s corporate sins in the past and seeks to set things right. A remarkable example of such action occurred in July 2010, when delegates of the Lutheran World Federation sought forgiveness from representatives of Mennonite World Conference for the sins of their Lutheran forebears who persecuted 16th-century Anabaptists. They asked not only for forgiveness but for a transformed relationship with Mennonites, a request that has borne fruit in remarkable ways.

I would also like to see an essay, or at least some references, to the varying dimensions of the church community in its congregational, regional, and global expressions. Suderman consistently portrays the church as an alternative society—a covenant community—but he says little about the concrete ways in which this community adapts its strategies to fit its varying social arrangements. The work would be strengthened by exploring the implications of being the people of God in each of these social contexts. For example, the covenantal obligations of being a member of a church in a local neighborhood must of necessity differ from that of being a member of an international body, such as Mennonite World Conference, where a majority of members will never meet each other in person.

Readers who will perhaps benefit the most from this volume are those engaged in church leadership or preparing for ministry roles in church-related settings. Seminary students, pastors, or Bible study leaders can benefit immensely from the author’s masterful approach to Biblical exegesis and theological formulation. Because the book excels in its portrayal of the church in peacemaking and justice-making, Christians with a calling to those

ministries can profit greatly from the theological grounding that Suderman provides. The fire that burns in his bones may help to ignite new vision and fresh hope for the Shalom which God's church can demonstrate in the world.

As with any collection of essays, this one may yield its best fruit for readers who browse the Table of Contents and begin by reading the articles most relevant to their specific interests. But by beginning with the first two chapters, they'll be best prepared to read any of the rest.

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Melanie Ross. *Evangelical versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

A persistent pattern in the study of Christian worship “pits evangelical churches against the liturgical renewal movement and allows for little ground in between” (2). In this short volume, Melanie Ross uncovers substantial middle ground. She challenges liturgical scholars to attend to Free Church perspectives, recognizing the validity of evangelical liturgical traditions. She encourages evangelicals not to be threatened by liturgical studies and to be open to becoming more liturgically self-conscious. As a liturgical scholar from a nondenominational background, Ross is well positioned to fully honor and gently critique both evangelical and liturgical perspectives in doing the “translation work” of talking with evangelicals about liturgy, and explaining “‘low church’ evangelical worship practices to those from more ‘high church’ liturgical traditions” (4). Through careful historical, biblical, and theological scholarship, and concrete examples of the worship life of two evangelical churches, she concludes that evangelicalism and liturgical studies can come together in dichotomy-defying dialogue.

Ross uses “liturgical” to describe the churches, theology, and worship of the 20th-century liturgical and ecumenical movements, and “evangelical” to name the Free Churches and theological perspectives not engaged in these movements. Evangelical worship thus stands apart from the ecumenical convergence around the fourfold *ordo* of scripture, baptism, eucharist, and prayer, and is instead patterned on a threefold “frontier *ordo*” of singing,

sermon, and altar call.

In chapter 1, Ross returns to the historical origin of evangelicalism, often associated with Charles Finney and the pragmatic frontier *ordo* maligned by many liturgical scholars. She highlights the ecumenical bridge-building of Finney's predecessor, George Whitefield, who de-emphasized denominationalism in order to prioritize new birth. Ross thereby raises questions about the purpose and future of denominations, and sheds light on the present-day paradox that "evangelicalism draws together people of different churches while dividing those within the same denomination" (26).

In chapter 3, the author examines scripture as a shared authority yet a significant challenge in ecumenical dialogue. Both liturgical and evangelical scholars oppose the fundamentalist divinization of scripture, yet they propose different solutions. Liturgical theologians emphasize the liturgical origins of scripture, that "all texts are written and read from within socially arranged and culturally constructed worlds" (Louis-Marie Chauvet), and see scripture as a collection of powerful myths and symbols (Gordon Lathrop). Evangelical scholars focus on the Trinitarian revelation of scriptural meaning to reconciled sinners (John Webster); and doing justice to the literary, historical, and theological variety in the Bible, including revealed propositional doctrine (Kevin Vanhoozer). According to Ross, these perspectives are not necessarily incompatible; they are distinct strands running through a single rope, or a book of maps showing different features of the landscape.

In chapter 4, Ross tackles ecclesiology. Liturgical scholars emphasize a church constituted through objective activities, especially the Eucharist. Evangelicals prioritize the subjective experience of new birth, and a church constituted through faith and obedience. Liturgical scholars, including Lathrop, have thus characterized nonsacramental worship as a "gnostic" celebration of individual decision-making. Ross offers Free Church theologian Miroslav Volf's emphasis on confession of faith in response: "There is no church without sacraments; but there are no sacraments without the confession of faith and without faith itself" (89). Rather than expecting a common *ordo*, the minimum requirement for ecumenism becomes "*openness* of each church to all other churches that make a confession of faith" (89). Ross argues diverse ecclesiologies can coexist, similarly to the

Gospels: the synoptic gospels are associated with sacramental ecclesiology, whereas the Gospel of John represents ecclesiology anchored in personal faith and discipleship.

Chapters 2 and 5 are ethnographic case studies of two American evangelical congregations that challenge the evangelical-liturgical dichotomy in their worship practice, community life, and social service. Ross's empathetic description and careful analysis demonstrate how her historical, biblical, and theological work applies to contemporary contexts.

Many traditions, including Mennonites, have been influenced both by the liturgical renewal movement and evangelicalism. This influence results in denominations and congregations that are both evangelical and liturgical, and neither evangelical nor liturgical—dynamics that can divide the church or enrich it. Ross's accessible study, full of concrete images and examples, can help scholars, students, pastors, and others caught up in these dynamics understand the larger evangelical and liturgical patterns shaping Christian worship. Understanding is the foundation for celebrating what Mennonites share with liturgical and evangelical perspectives, without flattening genuine disagreement. It is also a starting point for encouraging the middle ground forged regularly at a local level, including the many Anabaptist communities that defy this dichotomy every Sunday.

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David L. Weaver-Zercher. *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

It is daunting to write a 350-year history of any cultural artifact—especially if one's aim is to recount not only its production and distribution, but also its affective and moral relevance to a divisive, scattered people. Yet David L. Weaver-Zercher has largely succeeded in *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History* (hereafter *Social History*). His thesis is that Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* (hereafter "the book") "has functioned, and continues to function, as a measure of Christian faithfulness" (x) within Anabaptist circles. Over

the course of three sections—"The Prehistory and Production of the *Bloody Theater*," "Van Braght's Martyrology through the Years," and "Contemporary Approaches to *Martyrs Mirror*"—the author demonstrates how, why, and where the book served this function, and considers alternative interpretations of the book's meaning.

The first section of *Social History* examines the persecution of 16th-century Anabaptist martyrs, van Braght's 1660 effort to memorialize them, and the broader historical contexts in which these events occurred. Weaver-Zercher stresses that *Martyrs Mirror* was not written *ex nihilo* but borrowed heavily from hymns, oral accounts, letters, pamphlets, other martyrologies and, of course, the Bible. By demonstrating the book's polygenesis, he subtly foreshadows its polyvalence in the coming centuries.

The second section gives a sweeping overview of the book's publication history from its 1685 second edition to the present. This section is surprisingly light on *Martyrs Mirror*'s social impact, emphasizing instead the linguistic, stylistic, editorial, and marketing choices made by its European and North American publishers. At times, Weaver-Zercher describes rather than analyzes the book's text and images. For example, he details Jan Luyken's 104 copper etchings used to illustrate the 1685 edition (98-105). After grouping most of them by type—a table may have sufficed—he describes four illustrations that resist a typology (one, of Dirk Willems, is subsequently the focus of chapter eleven). There is little interpretive payoff for these descriptive interludes, so one wonders how they connect to the broader argument. Nevertheless, this section affirms that leaders repeatedly used the book to shore up Anabaptist morale across changing geographic and social contexts.

The third section focuses on the book's use in recent history—from North American "tradition-minded" and "assimilated" Anabaptists to its evolving global presence. Here, Weaver-Zercher argues that tradition-minded groups engage the martyrs' legacy more frequently than their assimilated brethren and accept the text uncritically rather than assessing it along academic or artistic lines. His attention to the book's role in buttressing a tradition-minded theology that prides itself on resisting state and society is illuminating, but his sources could use more contextualization. For instance, he summarizes two texts but does not indicate their influence within

tradition-minded circles (229-33).

The most intriguing chapter in this section concerns the recent popularity of the Dirk Willems illustration. Weaver-Zercher deftly shows how “assimilated” 20th-century North American Mennonites used the image to reframe Anabaptism as “a paradigm of nonresistance . . . an exemplar of enemy-love [and] a willing servant of others” (282), rather than as a reminder of physical persecution. Modern Mennonites could therefore lay claim to the martyrology without considering the path of martyrdom.

One would anticipate a bit more on the *Martyrs Mirror*’s social function beyond reinforcing religious faith. For example, are there estate inventories or family lore concerning individual copies? What might they reveal about how it was transmitted across generations, circulated around the world, or confiscated by authorities? Are there copies with generational marginalia that may illuminate changes in focus or language preference? The inclusion of more quantities of data would also be valuable. A modest chart or two compiling the estimated sales and distribution of various editions would give an immediate sense of how many people had contact with the book and where it was exported—for instance, to Russia and Latin America. Likewise, Weaver-Zercher includes several interviews to good effect but their total number, locations, and church affiliations go largely unmentioned. In general, *A Social History*’s last two sections skew heavily toward the northern Indiana/eastern Pennsylvania nexus.

Weaver-Zercher’s contribution is path-breaking in both substance and scope. The prose is lucid and accessible, the endnotes are informative and succinct, and the many illustrations are useful and beautifully rendered. With his engaging style, the author clearly has an eye for a general readership, but scholars will likewise find much valuable material here.

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Janis Thiessen. *Not Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour*. Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.

Janis Thiessen's *Not Talking Union* is a significant contribution to the emerging body of studies on how religion intersects with labor organizing, work, class, and material circumstances in North American history. Whereas many of these studies have focused on labor activism, Thiessen has written an "atypical labour history" by asking how anti-union sentiments grow in religious contexts (12). To a large extent, as her book makes clear, they thrive in silences—in this case, the unenforced spaces of a decentralized, flat, religious tradition.

*Not Talking Union* begins with an outline of Mennonite religious belief, drawn from Thiessen's extensive oral interviews and following Robert Wuthnow's observation that stories are "a way of reconstructing ourselves" (35). Most of Thiessen's conversation partners tell a narrative of progress—from a limited religious understanding to a more robust, validated one, or from the position of passive bystander to that of active stakeholder in theological conflict and debate. In the best tradition of oral history, the author refrains from judgment, from cobbling together various narratives into a supposedly coherent one, and from pointing out what might appear as inconsistencies to potential readers.

Indeed, most of the Mennonites introduced here, all of whom reappear as major characters in the rest of the volume, offer no neat theological explanations for their journeys in life and work, and many hesitate to connect their religious sentiments to their class, wealth, or lack thereof. It is in this absence of neatly constructed stories of self that Thiessen's work takes place. It invites readers to puzzle, and leaves ample space to connect various dots and seeming contradictions. Above all, its greatest success is that out of many historical silences it brings forth a story.

That story takes the reader across North America, from Manitoba to Indiana, Indiana to California. California, it is worth mentioning, looms large as a Mennonite cultural frontier in the story. Thiessen is particularly attentive to the American west coast, because her sources led her there. The payoff is an overdue reorientation of 20th-century Mennonite geographies. In succeeding chapters, the book foreshadows and enlightens divides that

have come to define various Mennonite denominations even more sharply: east versus west (North American), urban versus rural, educated Mennonite “busybody idiots, just causing trouble” versus growers’ self-perception as those who actually get their hands dirty (104), and (Old) Mennonite Church cultures versus Mennonite Brethren and General Conference cultures.

These denominational dichotomies are broken up consistently by the voices of farmworkers and organizers themselves. The dynamics are perhaps most visible on the fields of the San Joaquin Valley, where Mennonite Brethren and General Conference growers, self-declared “poor, average businessmen,” encounter the tensions within MCC and the (Old) Mennonite Church: Lupe De Leon, convinced that God sent Cesar Chavez “just as He sent Moses”; Guy Hershberger, eager to put the brakes on such comparisons; and J.R. Burkholder of Goshen College, who disarmingly confessed he was in a “difficult situation, as a self-styled supporter of the oppressed (armchair style . . .).” Their voices all speak to the many fault lines among North American Mennonites (96-99).

*Not Talking Union* does not follow a historical timeline, and the author’s explanations of causality are muted. However, the longer one listens to Thiessen’s oral sources and realizes how sparse are the written documents she was able to work with, the more obvious is the merit of this entertainingly written work. Between the well-told Mennonite denominational causalities and decades of labor histories that have bothered little with religion, and between the often individualized understanding of spirituality expressed by Thiessen’s interviewees and the connected worlds of their marketplace and their workplace, there was—and is—often little but silence. By carefully letting her sources speak or remain silent, the author succeeds in identifying this discomfort and in pointing those interested in religion and labor to more stories.

For students of labor, *Not Talking Union* is a reminder that anti-union sentiments do not always persist because of the crushing fist and manipulative lingo of evil capitalists. For students of religion, the book complicates contemporary dichotomies between “evangelicals” and “progressives.” And

Mennonites will be reminded that polite silence weighs at least as heavily on their ways of engaging culture and politics as conflict does.

*Philipp Gollner*, Assistant Professor of U.S. History, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

Paul G. Doerksen. *Take and Read: Reflecting Theologically on Books*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016.

When I graduated from high school, my home congregation (Steinmann Mennonite Church in Baden, Ontario) gave me a bookmark with a scripture verse on it—presumably one meant to offer some guidance and counsel as I entered university life. The verse was from Ezekiel 3, part of which reads: “Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.” Around the same time, I read Richard Foster’s *The Celebration of Discipline* (Harper & Row, 1978), which outlines spiritual disciplines for the Christian life, among which is what Foster refers to simply as ‘study’ but which includes many modes of inquiry. These two events soon led me to discover that the disciplines of reading and writing were deeply meaningful paths to spiritual and moral formation.

Paul Doerksen, Associate Professor of Theology and Anabaptist Studies at Canadian Mennonite University, has recently published *Take and Read: Reflecting Theologically on Books*, which is the result of taking this spiritual discipline of study seriously in a long-term group environment. The book is an excellent example of how to do service to church and community as a university professor. Picking up on a reading circle begun in 1993 by Gordon Matties, for well over a decade Doerksen has led a group of diverse individuals through scholarly and popular texts of all kinds.

*Take and Read* offers selections from the papers Doerksen read at each gathering, and the title of the collection comes from the conversion of St. Augustine, which itself was inspired by the prophetic words of a child: *tolle lege*, take and read. Augustine’s life was changed when he began to read and be challenged by the gospels (*Confessions*, VIII, 12), and the words from Ezekiel also reflect this transformational message in the image of the scroll tasting

sweet and being incorporated into the body. The powerful experiences of reading something new, and having one's mind opened by a text, are often underappreciated forms of spiritual practice, and the short critical reviews in *Take and Read* serve that exact purpose.

The authors dealt with in this volume's twenty-nine chapters include Martin E. Marty, Wendell Berry, David Bentley Hart, Daniel Bell Jr., Rob Bell, Stanley Hauerwas, William Cavanaugh, James Cone, Saint Augustine, and many more. The kinds of books that Doerksen addresses range from the popular writing of Malcolm Gladwell and Matthew B. Crawford to the academic work of Norman Wirzba and Shelly Rambo. Fiction and non-fiction alike make the list, and both Christian and 'secular' texts appear in turn. The book concludes with a selection of sermons that further express the theological voice and interpretive eye that Doerksen demonstrates throughout the book.

Although a comprehensive summary of the book's contents might be tedious in this context, highlights include Doerksen's helpful critiques of A. J. Jacob's *The Year of Living Biblically* and Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath* (46, 194), his critical engagement with the 'new atheism' (52-60), an exposition of Augustine's *Confessions* (94-102), and a discussion of death and funeral practices (201-207). The difficulty of summarizing the text does call to mind the one criticism that I have of the book, namely that the occasional character of the short essays and sermons makes reading it *as a whole* difficult. Apart from the fact that the essays arose from the same book discussion group and the general theological hermeneutic that Doerksen employs, there is very little that unites the chapters. This lack of unity may be helpful for readers who may be interested in starting a similar group in their context, but alienating for those who have not read the books that Doerksen deals with (although brief and helpful summaries are provided at the beginning of each chapter).

Despite this criticism, theologian Karl Rahner's suggestion that books are consecrated and existentially significant ways that we experience the divine *logos* rings true, *Take and Read* makes the potential for transformative experience in the reading and discussing of books feel exciting, and even urgent.

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Gordon Zerbe. *Philippians*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Harrisonburg, VA; Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 2016.

For the past two decades, some of the most engaging work on Paul has sought to situate his gospel in the context of Roman imperial propaganda and power. Long assumed to be politically quiescent, the apostle is now more often portrayed as an incisive critic of empire. As Gordon Zerbe puts it, “*Kyrios Iēsous Christos* (Lord Jesus Anointed), Son of God, was in direct competition with the successors of *Imperator Caesar Augustus, divi filius*, for the hearts, minds, and allegiance of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire” (48-49).

This is the interpretive paradigm that underlies Zerbe’s reading of *Philippians* that highlights what he calls Paul’s theopolitical vision of messianic citizenship. For Zerbe, four themes are central to Paul’s letter: citizenship; partnership; high-low inversion; and joy-gladness (32-34). Since his exegesis of individual passages frequently elaborates one or more of these themes, a brief overview of each will serve as a summary of his approach.

Zerbe derives the language of “citizenship” from Paul’s exhortation in Phil. 1:27 to “be a citizen and practice citizenship [*politeuomai*] worthy of the gospel of Messiah” (96; cf. 3:20). The term *Christos*, for Zerbe, is not merely a name but a “theopolitical title” designating God’s anointed Davidic ruler. Its force is best captured in English by transliterating not Paul’s Greek but *mašiah*, its Hebrew equivalent (46-49). Loyal to Messiah, the saints in Philippi—a proud Roman colony (25-28)—form an alternate *polis* or citizen assembly (*ekklēsia* [37]) with practices and values distinct from those of the imperial elite (100-102).

One key expression of their alternate citizenship is the *Philippians*’ “partnership” (*koinōnia*) in the gospel (Phil. 1:5). Zerbe chooses “partnership” instead of “fellowship” in order to highlight the Greek term’s active and concrete connotations (69-70). The *Philippians* join with Paul in the work of the gospel through their financial support—not least the support recently sent him in prison (4:10-20 [254-57])—but also through their “proclamation and witness, their loyalty to Messiah, and their internal corporate life devoted to practicing the way of Messiah” (61).

Whereas Roman society was preoccupied with the pursuit of honor

(299-300), Zerbe describes messianic citizenship as a mode of corporate life modelled on Jesus's downward-mobility. A central text here is the "messianic encomium" of Phil. 2:5-11, which celebrates Jesus's self-emptying obedience, culminating in his humiliation and death, and his subsequent exaltation by God. This pattern of "high-low inversion" is central to Paul's own self-understanding (3:4-17), is grounded in eschatological hope (3:18-21), and provides the contours of the mind-set he commends as the Philippians face animosity from outsiders and internal strife (2:1-5).

That joy is an important theme in this letter will not come as a surprise. But here too Zerbe sees a theopolitical edge: Joy in Philippians is "a celebrative rejoicing 'in Messiah'—that is, in the deliverance that Messiah has secured and will secure—in direct contrast to the celebratory rejoicing in civic imperial festivals that proclaim the glories of Caesar and the 'salvation' that Rome has given the world" (34).

Insightful and lucidly written, Zerbe's commentary distills the best of recent New Testament scholarship, not to mention recent philosophical engagement with Paul. But this is more than simply a reiteration. Zerbe puts postcolonial criticism as practiced by Pauline scholars into fruitful conversation with the peace church tradition, with stimulating results. The author's focus on "citizenship" is a particularly distinctive contribution. It resonates well with Anabaptist ecclesiology, expressing a communal alternative to prevailing modes of violent, coercive power. It should also serve as a corrective to crude anti-empire readings of Paul that condemn the imperial power of Rome (and thus, by proxy, America) but offer as an alternative vision little more than a vague egalitarianism.

I do fear that occasionally Zerbe's theopolitical interpretive paradigm unduly governs his exegesis. To speak of Paul as a political prisoner (76-78, 86-88), is, I think, anachronistic, and does not account for the implication of Phil. 1:13 that Paul's captors have only recently begun to understand his imprisonment as being "for Christ." Moreover, Zerbe's sharply oppositional language—Paul vs. Rome—at times obscures important cultural dynamics. Certainly the pursuit of honor was central to Roman society; still, it was governed by widely accepted moral constraints. Other voluntary associations also devised policies and discourses meant to constrain rivalrous behavior and the social strife it could cause. Both honor-seeking and

attempts to restrain it were native to the Greco-Roman world; both are also evident in Paul. Attending more carefully to this complexity may provide additional resources for addressing the probing questions Zerbe poses about contemporary ecclesial citizenship (179-80, 212-13, 269-71). Still, this is a very helpful volume that admirably fulfills the aims of the Believers Church Bible Commentary series.

*Ryan Schellenberg*, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio.

Matthew Thiessen. *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

In a carefully argued study, Matthew Thiessen asserts that Paul, a Jewish apostle to gentiles, had no bone to pick with Torah or with Judaism, but rather with gentiles who wished to be Jewish. Paul insisted not only that gentiles need not be Jewish to be included in God's blessing but that it is by divine decree impossible for them to be Jewish. However, God overcomes the "genealogical gap" between Jews and gentiles by bestowing *pneuma* (usually translated as "Spirit") on them "in Christ." Gentiles thereby not only become Abraham's "genealogical" offspring (seed), and thus partakers in the promise to Abraham, but are given the power to overcome the "gentile problem," namely, an impious and immoral life. Christ-believing Jews remain Jews, and Christ-believing gentiles remain gentiles, with distinct genealogical connection to Abraham.

In five meticulously argued and copiously endnoted chapters, amply sourced in biblical, Jewish, and Greco-Roman literature, Thiessen focuses primarily on Romans and Galatians. There Abraham figures centrally in Paul's argument, particularly the themes of faith (trust), promise, "seed," and the blessing of the nations/gentiles (Genesis 16-21). Importantly, the "encoded" readers addressed in both Romans 2 and Galatians 3-4, for example, are *not* Jews, Thiessen insists against much of exegetical and theological opinion, but *only* judaizers—gentile wannabe Jews. Paul never takes aim at the law per se, nor at Judaism, but only at a fundamental misreading of the divine "solution"

to the “gentile problem,” in which gentiles want to become Jewish in order to participate in the blessing. With this claim, Thiessen rejects the “Lutheran” or “anti-legalist” take on Paul, which sees the problem as the unlivable and thus death-bringing law, works-righteousness, and Jewish legalism.

Thiessen also finds fault with the so-called “new perspective” or “anti-ethnocentric” reading of Paul, identified commonly with James Dunn and N.T. Wright, where the problem is not law but genealogical exclusivity. Thiessen argues that Paul never questions the need for Jews to be faithful to the Torah, nor the genealogical exclusivity of being Jewish, insisting (against many of his more hospitable Jewish contemporaries) that conversion itself is impossible. However, and here Paul’s use of the Abraham narrative becomes critical, just as God was able to supply a “seed” for Abraham through no work on Abraham’s part (Isaac), so now through Christ, both Abraham’s promised seed and divine Son, God again creates a genealogical connection for gentiles. God does so by granting them the *pneuma*, which renders them both genealogically connected and empowered to live righteous and holy lives, thus participating already in the assured future as transformed heavenly pneumatic beings (the stars of heaven).

Thiessen dubs this view of Paul’s gospel the “radical new perspective,” finding closest affinity with Stanley Stowers, Lloyd Gaston, and John Gager. At the same time, Thiessen readily admits that this perspective is neither “radical” nor “new,” as it is anticipated in the Acts of the Apostles. Better then, he suggests, to identify it as “*Paul within Judaism*,” not Paul *against* Judaism, even if many of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries would have rejected his gospel with its mix of Jewish exclusivism and radical hospitality to gentiles as gentiles.

This reviewer substantially agrees with much in Thiessen’s “conjuring” of Paul. He has added valuably to the growing body of scholarship that views Paul as a *Jewish* emissary to the gentiles, and to a revisiting of the relationship between the variegated Judaism of Paul’s day and what became Christianity. In addition, his exploration of *pneuma*, seed, and stars is startling.

Given its radical and innovative quality, Thiessen’s study also raises questions. For example, just how did Paul imagine that Jews and gentiles who were to remain such would live and worship together? Or did he expect the “day of liberation” (Rom. 13:11) to come so soon that such questions

could be relationally finessed in the remaining days with the exhortation to “welcome each other as Christ has welcomed you” (Rom. 15:7)? Second, with respect to the deutero-Pauline Ephesians, contemporaneous with Acts, would Thiessen see Eph. 2:11-22 to be a betrayal or an affirmation of Paul’s gospel? There we find both a recognition of Jewish and gentile identities but, more important, a celebration of a Christ who is “*our* Peace,” who breaks down the wall of division (the law) and creates in himself “*one* new human” out of “*both*.” Such questions do not point to inadequacy in Thiessen’s work, but to the rich and weighty questions his excellent exploration invites.

*Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld*, professor emeritus of Religious Studies and of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

C. Arnold Snyder, ed. *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists, 1529-1592*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2017.

In this volume published as part of the *Anabaptist Texts in Translation and Classics of the Radical Reformation* series, Arnold Snyder makes available in English (and, in some cases, in print for the first time in any language) a wealth of documents related to the 16th-century Anabaptist group known as the Swiss Brethren. The documents in *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists* span a variety of genres from letters and court records to apologetic writings and hymnal prefaces. Together, they shed light on the theology and practice of the Swiss Brethren in different times and places in the 16th century.

The earliest precisely dated documents in this volume (Chapter II) relate to the work of Wilhelm Reublin, who in the course of his ministry was active in the Zurich area, the imperial city of Strasbourg, and Moravia. They highlight his relationships with other Anabaptists, including the spiritualist Anabaptist Jakob Kautz, Pilgram Marpeck, and members of the Austerlitz community. Chapters V, VI, and XV also deal with interactions between the Swiss Brethren and other Anabaptist groups; Chapters V and VI concern disagreements with Dutch Mennonites over the Incarnation and the ban, while Chapter XV reveals disagreements between the Swiss Brethren and the

anti-Trinitarian Polish Brethren.

The hymnal prefaces included in Chapter IX show evidence of influence of other Anabaptist and non-conformist groups on Swiss Brethren worship and hymnody. Chapters III, IV, X, and XIV deal with interactions between the Swiss Brethren and political authorities; Chapters III and IV are partial records of Anabaptists facing questioning, while Chapters X and XIV consist of letters to magistrates in Bern and Zurich. Other texts included, such as the defenses of separation and the ban in Chapters I and VIII and the 1568 Strasbourg Discipline in Chapter VII, shed further light on the beliefs and practices of the Swiss Brethren in the later 16th century.

The core of the volume consists of Chapters XI-XIII, which provide a translation of the two texts that comprise *Codex 628*, a 466-page manuscript anonymously copied in 1590 and currently housed at the Burgerbibliothek in Berne. The first and longest of these texts, *A Short, Simple Confession*, expands upon a response to the thirteen articles discussed by Reformed and Anabaptist participants at the 1571 Frankenthal Disputation. The *Simple Confession* deals with a variety of theological and ecclesiological questions, including baptism, community of goods, the role and importance of the Old and New Testaments, original sin, and faith and works. The text's various editors and copyists (Snyder's translation highlights similarities and differences between the text found in *Codex 628* and in a 1588 edition presented to Zurich's magistrates) cited, and sometimes copied at length, a variety of extrabiblical sources, named and unnamed, including Balthasar Hubmaier, Martin Bucer, Desiderius Erasmus, Ulrich Zwingli, and Martin Luther. The second text, *Concerning Separation*, is a version of an apology for the Swiss Brethren's refusal to attend Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed worship services that had circulated in manuscript form among Anabaptists in Switzerland since the mid-16th century and had been printed by the Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger, who set out to refute it, in 1560.

*Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists* fills an important gap in published primary sources of 16th-century Anabaptism, many of which focus primarily on the first few decades of the movement. The translation of *Codex 628* in particular makes available an important manuscript source that would otherwise have been unavailable to the majority of North American readers. This is especially significant since, as Snyder notes in introducing

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the first part of the document, reliance on printed materials is insufficient to understand the history of the Swiss Brethren in the latter part of the 16th century. They relied extensively on manuscripts, which they copied and circulated (200). These translations are even more useful because of the care Snyder has taken to cross-reference them with other surviving editions of the same base texts, showing both significant change and continuity as the documents passed from copyist to copyist, and to identify the sources cited and alluded to by the authors. *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists* is a great addition to an important series—and an excellent resource for undergraduate students and seasoned scholars of Anabaptist history alike.

*Christina Moss*, PhD candidate, Department of History, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

# **Call for Proposals**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Call for Proposals

## THEME: MISSION

### **Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature**

**Denver, Colorado  
Friday, November 16th, 2018**

The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC) coordinates the Mennonite Scholars and Friends (MSF) events at the annual AAR/SBL meetings. This year the program committee invites proposals for papers on theme of mission. Accepted papers will be circulated in advance of the forum, and presenters will be given time for a brief (~10 min) introduction to their work before moving to small and large group conversations. Proposals from biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, historians, church leaders, practitioners, and others involved in mission work broadly conceived are welcome.

Topics may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Biblical foundations of mission
- Theological and historical missiological engagements
- Colonial legacies of mission
- Changing mission practice and its implications
- Mission and the church including relationships to parachurch organizations
- Challenges to/from mission, including issues of gender, sexuality, (im)migration, postsecularism, etc.

Submit proposals of not more than 300 words by April 1, 2018  
to [mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca](mailto:mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca).

For more information: Kyle Gingerich Hiebert

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Supporting institutions: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Bethel College, Bluffton University, Canadian Mennonite University, Columbia Bible College, Conrad Grebel University College, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Eastern Mennonite University, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, Goshen College, Humanitas Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre (Trinity Western University), Mennonite Mission Network, Messiah College, Tabor College, Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

