

CANADIAN MENNONITE

April 13, 2020 Volume 24 Number 8

Well rooted, well winged

It's time to revisit our understanding of the canon, pg. 4



PM40063104 R09613

INSIDE

Menno encounters with contemplative prayer 13
MC Eastern Canada appoints new executive minister 21
Focus on Books & Resources 22-30

EDITORIAL

Beyond ourselves

BY VIRGINIA A. HOSTETLER
Executive Editor



As I write, my household is entering into our fourth week of physical distancing. Facing the fast-spreading and potentially deadly coronavirus, my spouse and I sit in a comfortable house, with a dependable supply of food and are thankful for good sanitation. We have books, music and movies. We're still employed, and we're connecting digitally with a network of family and friends. Still healthy, thanks be to God.

We have access to reliable information: local, national and international news. There are safe sidewalks and a public garden nearby where we go to see the crocuses emerging. We wave to the neighbours, from a distance. If we should need medical help, we can go to one of three local hospitals. We have our church family and our faith in an ever-loving God.

Living in gratitude, you and I can expand our circle of attention. So we listen to the agencies telling of people in our own communities who don't have the privilege of being safely housed and cared for, those with no steady income for buying food for their families. They tell of prisoners who cannot practise physical distance and thus are more vulnerable to the contagious virus. Organizations working elsewhere report about families living in crowded spaces with no water with which to wash their hands. They tell of farmers who are not able to produce enough food and of medical facilities that do not have enough equipment or supplies.

The current situation makes it more challenging for North Americans to support ministries among marginalized people. For example, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) reports that its thrift shops are temporarily shuttered, along with the cancellation and postponing of relief sales in both Canada and the United States. Last year, these two sources brought in millions of dollars for MCC's programs around the world. Sitting in relative safety, we need to find other ways of sharing beyond ourselves.

As the global church faces COVID-19, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) is helping members of the larger Anabaptist family tell their stories, and is encouraging us to pray for each other. In a series of YouTube videos, leaders from over a dozen countries tell about the challenges their communities are facing. You can view their videos at [youtube.com/user/mwccmm/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/mwccmm/videos).

These leaders also share Bible verses that are meaningful for them right now. Speaking from Spain, Antonio Gonzalez highlights Psalm 91 and the assurance of God's presence in a time of pestilence. Samuel Martinez of El Salvador mentions Jesus' promise in John 16:33: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* Drawing from Isaiah 66, Alexander Neufeld of Germany grasps the words of God as a loving parent: *"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."*

You and I can hold on to the faith exemplified by Anabaptist siblings in other places. We join in the benediction offered by Nelson Kraybill, MWC's president, as he echoes the words of

Zechariah in Luke 1:28-29: *"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Stories and laughter

One way to sustain our spirits in difficult times is to share stories and laughter. I've been watching for those moments of lightheartedness in grim times. Have you seen photos of a cake made in the shape of toilet paper? Videos of families dancing and singing to COVID-19-themed music? There's the rendition of da Vinci's "Last Supper" painting as experienced in a Zoom video call. People wash their hands to the tune of "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow." A woman in a purple dress shows off her extremely wide skirt, suitable for physical distancing.

Also uplifting are the stories of generosity and service: people bringing supplies to neighbours in isolation, citywide efforts to make masks and gowns for those who need them, efforts to thank community members who provide essential services, people reaching out in creative ways to care for friends experiencing loneliness and anxiety.

Here's an invitation for you to share your stories of laughter and kindness in these times of separation. You can send submissions to submit@canadianmennonite.org with the subject line: COVID Kindness, or mail them to 490 Dutton Drive, Waterloo ON N2L 6H7.

Correction

The Thrift Shopper for Peace URL is thriftshopperforpeace.wordpress.com. Incorrect information appeared in "Thrift shopper, peacebuilder," March 30, page 11. *Canadian Mennonite* regrets the error.



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CONTENTS

APRIL 13, 2020 / VOL. 24, No. 8

ABOUT THE COVER:

Birds flying high over a well-rooted tree are symbols of what the biblical canon can mean for us today, writes John H. Neufeld in his page 4 feature: "Well rooted, well grounded."

PHOTO: © ISTOCK.COM/ANANALINE

'You're Not Alone'

14

Homebound musician **Bryan Moyer Suderman** offers online singalong on Facebook Live, where he shares a few of his singable songs of faith each Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 1:23 p.m. EDT.

Care and change amid COVID-19

15

Winnipeg pastor **David Driedger's** online petition calls on governments to care for the most vulnerable now and when the pandemic is over.

Serving our community by doing our job

16

Saskatchewan health-care professionals **Erik** and **Cara Epp** reflect on their work in light of COVID-19.

Joining the wave

17

Mennonite Church Alberta holds its first virtual annual general meeting after COVID-19 caused public meetings to be cancelled.

Nourishing body, mind and spirit

18

Staying healthy is important in coping with COVID-19 isolation and stress, say B.C.'s Dr. **Hillary McBride** and yoga instructor **Angelika Dawson**.

Well rooted, well winged 4

"Perhaps the canon implicitly also offers us wings in addition to the roots," writes John H. Neufeld, adding, "There is help in the canon for necessary interpretation."



Regular features:

For discussion 6 Readers write 7 Milestones 8
A moment from yesterday 9 ServiceLinks 29
Online NOW! 30 Calendar 31

17 **In uncharted waters** Kevin Derksen 9

How broad is salvation? Ed Olfert 10

18 **The public good in a time of pandemic**
Randolph Haluza-Delay 11

Smudged with humanity Joshua Penfold 12

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FEATURE

Well rooted, well winged

'I wonder whether this new way of looking at the canon could serve as a model for thinking about how we do church together.'

By John H. Neufeld

For most of us, the biblical canon with its 66 “books” has always been a given, inherited from the past, our parents and churches. We have not concerned ourselves very much with it, even though we may have heard that the Catholic version of the Bible has more “books” in it than the Protestant version.

Some of us may not have heard that there have been disagreements about the makeup of this collection of writings we consider to be Scripture. Around AD 400, there was disagreement about including the Book of Revelation in the Bible. And in the 16th century, Martin Luther argued against the inclusion of the Book of James; Luther had difficulty with James’s focus on “works,” and he spoke of it as “a right strawy epistle.”

The Catholic Church has considered the apocryphal books—books not part of the Hebrew Old Testament but included in the Greek translation, including I and II Esdras and I-IV Maccabees—as part of the inspired canon. Nowadays, many study Bibles include these books.

From time to time someone may raise the question, “Is the canon permanently closed?” However, most Protestants accept the 66 books in the Bible as inspired, authoritative and closed—the norm for an orthodox Christian faith. This “closing of the canon” occurred around AD 400. The Old Testament had been officially “closed” at the Council of Jamnia, in AD 90, by the Jewish community; not all scholars agree on this.

For many of us, questions about the biblical canon seem unimportant, even irrelevant: We simply accept the canon as a given, inspired and authoritative. We may pay lip service to the Bible as a whole, but we have to admit that most of us have a smaller “canon within the canon” and we avoid or ignore parts of Scripture! There

are parts of the Bible that we really appreciate and then there are parts, even whole books, to which we pay virtually no attention! This practice continues even though we claim to believe what II Timothy 3:16-17 says: “*All scripture is inspired by God and useful . . .*”

However, during the past two decades, those of us within Mennonite Church Canada have given a lot of attention to the Bible. Here is part of what I mean: We spent years on the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process and gave careful attention to how we understand Scripture (Paths and Ditches, 2013); the 2012 MC Canada assembly theme was “Dusting off the Bible”; and the late Dick Benner wrote an editorial entitled “What about this Bible of ours?” I wrote a three-part series in 2009, “Do you understand what you are reading?” published in *Canadian Mennonite*; and, most recently, editor Virginia A. Hostetler wrote an Oct. 28, 2019 editorial in which she quoted the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*: “The Bible is the essential book of the church.”

Hostetler reminded us of our commitment to delight in the study of the Bible and to devote ourselves to it. Benner urged us to give high priority to the task of refurbishing our understanding and application of Scripture, calling for “fresh interpretation, new imagination, new inspiration and new application.”

But as far as I can tell, this wealth of material does not give serious attention to the canon as a whole. Isn’t it time to revisit our understanding of the canon?

Affirmations about the canon

We affirm that this body of literature is inspired and authoritative for all believers, for growth in faith and discipleship. The canon provides roots and resources for our faith. As such, it is basically understood as having “canon-

For many of us, questions about the biblical canon seem unimportant, even irrelevant: We simply accept the canon as a given, inspired and authoritative.



PHOTO: © ISTOCK.COM/ANANALINE

I have the growing conviction that the canon provides us not only roots, but also wings. Not only is it important to be ‘well-rooted’; it is equally important to be ‘well-winged.’

ized” the content, and the impression is that the content of our faith is settled and fixed. Some even appeal to the expression in Jude verse 3: *“the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”* The canon is the fixed content of both Old and New Testaments. This is the explicitly given foundation for Christian faith and life.

As I’ve been working with specific passages and thinking about the canon as a whole, I wondered whether there is actually more to the canon than canonical content. This dawned on me while giving a presentation in an adult-education setting in one of our churches on the topic, “Reading the Bible responsibly.”

I have the growing conviction that the canon provides us not only roots, but also wings. Not only is it important to be “well-rooted”; it is equally important to be “well-winged.” Let’s consider the possibility that, in addition to the explicitly given biblical content, the canon offers us more than explicit foundation-

al truth, the roots of our faith. Perhaps the canon implicitly also offers us wings in addition to the roots. There is help available in the canon for necessary interpretation.

Deepening our understanding of the canon

My interest in going beyond my earlier understanding of the canon was an outgrowth of studying more carefully and comparatively what is written in the Bible. What I noticed about the inspired canon, this ancient anthology of literature, is that it’s not static, but dynamic.

Diversity and development are preserved in the canon for our benefit. At times, I have been surprised by what’s in the inspired texts; at times, I have been disturbed and upset by what I was learning. At times, I realized I was having “second thoughts” about things I thought I was fairly certain about.

When I go beyond seeing the Bible as having foundational content for my

life of faith and discipleship, I learn that in the Bible diversity is somehow authoritative, or canonized. I notice that tensions between texts are not resolved. I see in Scripture that faith and practice develop over time in the light of the coming of Jesus! All of these realities call for interpretation.

Diversity

Here are some examples:

- **There are** texts that urge the people of God to be exclusionary, to be separate and to avoid certain people; and then there are texts, like Isaiah 56:3-7, that urge inclusion of those formerly excluded.
- **There are** texts that portray God as being violent and genocidal, while others, like Jonah 4, confess God to be *“gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*

I have found it necessary to wrestle with these details, to try to understand

them since the canon models diversity.

Change

Two examples illustrate that the inspired canon also endorses change and development, one from Nehemiah 8 and the other from Acts 10-11:

• **Nehemiah 8** tells of the return of exiles from Babylon to Palestine. On the one hand, the people must have been jubilant—they're back in the Promised Land; but, on the other hand, they were confused, trying to understand ancient understandings, preserved in Torah, with their recent difficult experiences.

The people asked their leaders to read Torah to them. What did the leaders do? Ezra and the others responded wisely: "So they read from the book, from the law

did what he had declared he would not do. He went to Cornelius's home and shared the good news. Peter also shared his own new insight with the extended gentile family: "*I truly understand that God shows no partiality . . . anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him*" (Acts 10:34-35).

My understanding of canon has been transformed. Not by adding new books to the biblical canon, but by being overwhelmed by seeing not only that canonical content is inspired and authoritative, but also that diversity, tensions between texts (ambiguity), change and development over time in the light of new circumstances, are also inspired and canonical.

I feel like the Israelites in Nehemiah 8. They celebrated their new understandings

with great rejoicing! With a barbecue.

And more

I wonder whether this new way of looking at the canon could serve as a model for thinking about how we do church together. I am thinking particularly about the challenge of accepting diversity, as well as recognizing the validity of change and development over time, in response to new circumstances and fresh insights. ❧



Before retirement, John H. Neufeld served as pastor of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, (1969-84), and as president of Canadian Mennonite Brethren College (now Canadian Mennonite University [CMU], 1984-97). In the last two decades, he has made presentations on aging, the Book of Revelation, and reading the Bible responsibly in a variety of settings. This article is adapted from an essay, "Exploring the meaning of canon," that was presented to the emeritus professors at CMU last fall.

What impresses me about this passage [Nehemiah 8:8] is that it legitimizes adaptation of Torah in the light of changed circumstances and shows that canonized content is not static, but dynamic!

of God [Torah] with interpretation. They gave the sense so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Utterly amazing! They added something to the ancient texts—interpretation—so that the people understood their new circumstances and their recent tragic history in the light of the unchanging Torah.

What impresses me about this passage is that it legitimizes adaptation of Torah in the light of changed circumstances and shows that canonized content is not static, but dynamic! The passage shows me that Torah provides wings as well as roots!

• **The other** incredible story is about Peter and Cornelius, especially how Peter, who was deeply steeped in Jewish faith and tradition, underwent a radical shift in his beliefs about God and his views of gentiles.

When the vision of the sheet came to him in a trance, his immediate reaction was: "*By no means Lord, I have never eaten anything unclean.*" Finally, Peter

❧ For discussion

1. What are some of your favourite Bible verses? Are there parts of the Bible that you tend to ignore? What are some passages that seem to be over- or under-used in sermons? How do you understand II Timothy 3:16-17?
2. John H. Neufeld writes that the Old Testament canon was closed around AD 90 and the New Testament around the year AD 400. Why do you think it was important for the church to clearly define the books of the Bible? Do you find it unsettling to think that this decision was made by humans? If you were compiling a list of meaningful sources for the church today, what would you include?
3. Neufeld says the Bible should provide us with wings as well as roots. How does it give us roots? How is this rootedness helpful when we come across conflicts or alternate interpretations?
4. What do you think Neufeld means with his statement that the Bible provides us with wings? How did Nehemiah and Peter bring new understanding to ancient texts? Can you think of examples of new interpretations of biblical passages that can speak to us in a fresh way?

—By Barb Draper

See related Overview of the Bible resources at www.commonword.ca/go/1849

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/// Readers write

✉ Reader was 'struck by' Easter feature's deficiencies

Re: "Out of holy weakness, mysterious power arises," March 16, page 4.

I am thankful for this article and the attempt to imagine how to talk to 12-year-olds about the crucifixion.

It struck me, though, that none of the responses mention the fact that the focus was on how to talk to 12-year-olds about the meaning of the crucifixion. On the basis of the article, the pastors did not make age-specific responses aside from their own memories of being that age. What difference might there have been in the responses if the question was simply about anyone at any age? For example, how do seniors receive guidance on such an important and relevant subject?

I was also struck by the fact that none of the responses mentioned any theologians, even though this is a highly theological and vigorously debated question among adults. No one mentioned that the Nicene Creed makes a big deal about Jesus' death, and its "for us" needs to be explored.

I also was struck by the fact that there was no mention of how the Substitutionary Theory of Atonement came to prominence since about A.D. 1100. There was no mention by anyone about an alternative understanding of Atonement that is traced back to the Franciscan John Duns Scotus.

Finally, I was struck by the fact that there was no mention of recent writers on this subject, like Sharon L. Baker, Ted Grimsrud, J. Denny Weaver, Bradley Jersak and Brian Zahnd.

JOHN H. NEUFELD (ONLINE COMMENT)

✉ Youth 'definitely have questions' about the Atonement

Re: "Out of holy weakness, mysterious power arises," March 16, page 4.

As someone who led a youth Sunday school class for the last couple of years, I can tell you that young people definitely have questions about this. In my experience, folks who work with youth spend a lot of time thinking about how to talk about it with them!

I'm not sure that their questions are different because of their age; I always found the young people in my class very thoughtful and insightful. Often they'd heard very different messages about it from different people, which can be confusing. I tried to help them be comfortable with the reality

that there are many understandings of the Atonement, even outlined in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

I think having some names for the different Atonement theories can help younger folks pick apart why they might hear different things about the reason for Jesus' death from different people and from different churches, so we talked about Christus Victor, moral example and penal substitution.

I think a lot of folks in more liberal churches struggle with talking about Jesus' death as sacrifice because we've heard really reductive preaching about Jesus' sacrifice—stuff that makes God out to be angry and unforgiving, holding Jesus out as the one who has to defend us from a wrathful God. It's hard to hold that together with God as Trinity, all parts as one.

There's some great stuff in the Book of Hebrews that can help develop some more nuanced thinking about what Jesus' sacrifice means when contrasted with earlier temple sacrificial practices. But sadly the bit that's most often quoted in evangelical circles, as Will Braun references early in his feature, is taken quite out of its context.

MATTHEW FROESE (ONLINE COMMENT)

The writer lives in Winnipeg.

✉ Open letter to the younger generation during this time of COVID-19

This morning I awoke thankful that my husband and I—both 75-plus—can still be part of what's happening in our world: to observe and encourage the younger generation as they lead us through this present crises.

Overall, despite the huge challenges our world faces, young people have such hopeful, fresh ways of thinking and working with the problems they encounter, many of which are beyond our understanding.

We see this in the fresh energy of our three granddaughters—two adults and a child—who impress us with their joy in living and the way they practise their vocations in education, nursing, and the art of being a child who loves painting!

We're in awe of them and their generation, and trust them to lead us on paths toward new and healthier ways of living that we can only imagine. And we want to help them in doing our part as seniors, by self-isolating when we are unwell (as we needed to do this weekend), by practising physical distancing and by not stockpiling food and other items, so that we don't add to the present challenges

which they and our world face right now.

Also, we want to encourage them in their work, remembering and reminding them that there have been many crises before this, such as the 1918 Spanish Flu in which my husband's grandfather died at age 39, not to mention all the man-made crises related to political conflict and war. Yet, somehow, we humans do find our way through, albeit not without pain and loss.

So, as our Mozambican friends used to say during a time of war and famine when we worked with them in the 1980s: *"A luta continua!"* (The struggle continues. We can overcome.)

And indeed they did, and we will, too.

LEONA DUECK PENNER, WATERLOO, ONT.



PHOTO BY LEONA DUECK PENNER

Peter Dueck Penner and granddaughter Rielle walk on the Mill Race Trail in St. Jacobs, Ont. Rielle lives in Pennsylvania and is always full of questions. She loved all the Mennonite history she learned that day.

✉ Senior writer shouldn't be upset by pastor's letter

Re: "‘Inclusivity’ will always ‘silence’ some voices" letter, March 2, page 7.

Senior writer Will Braun should not be unduly upset by the reply from David Driedger, a Mennonite minister in Winnipeg, to his article—"Listening to

those who have left," Jan. 20, page 15—speaking for the person who felt excluded by the inclusivists who now appear to be dominating many churches.

For the minister of a large Mennonite church to have no more perspective than to view a moral debate as a power issue says nothing about Braun's concerns and a lot about the poverty of the minister's.

Braun may be wrong in the concerns he has expressed, but the minister is most certainly not right in the way he has framed an issue for the church. Braun can rest easily.

I invariably find Braun's pieces enlightening.

HAROLD JANTZ, WINNIPEG

We welcome your comments and publish most letters from subscribers. Letters, to be kept to 300 words or less, are the opinion of the writer only and are not to be taken as endorsed by this magazine or the church. Please address issues rather than individuals; personal attacks will not appear in print or online. All letters are edited for length, style and adherence to editorial guidelines. Send them to letters@canadianmennonite.org and include the author's contact information and mailing address. Preference is given to letters from MC Canada congregants.

/// Milestones

Births/Adoptions

Streicher—Ronan (b. Jan. 23, 2020), to Darryl and Nicole Streicher, Steinmann Mennonite, Baden, Ont.

Deaths

Clark—Pauline, 63 (b. Aug. 12, 1956; d. Feb. 1, 2020), Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Derksen—Ruth (nee Janzen), 67 (b. Feb. 13, 1953; d. March 17, 2020), Morden Mennonite, Man.

Enns—Arthur, 71 (b. Aug. 23, 1948; d. March 8, 2020), Arnaud Mennonite, Man.

Harder—Eric Waldo, 74 (b. Sept. 28, 1945; d. Jan. 29, 2020), Hope Mennonite, Winnipeg.

Rempel—Mary (nee Hildebrandt), 85 (b. Sept. 18, 1934; d. March 16, 2020), Calgary First Mennonite.

Wiehler—Charlotte (nee Andres), 101 (b. June 18, 1918; d. March 2, 2020), Calgary First Mennonite.

Yantzi—Alma, 89 (b. June 24, 1930; d. Jan. 25, 2020), East Zorra Mennonite, Tavistock, Ont.

Canadian Mennonite welcomes Milestones announcements within four months of the event. Please send Milestones announcements by e-mail to milestones@canadianmennonite.org, including the congregation name and location. When sending death notices, please also include birth date and last name at birth if available.

FROM OUR LEADERS

In uncharted waters

Kevin Derksen

As with everybody else, my life and work these past few weeks have been a scramble to adjust and respond to the ever-evolving pandemic that has now hit us here in Canada as well.

I am a pastor in a local congregation but I also work part-time for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, offering support and care to other pastors in my area. So it has been a quite an experience to hear from a number of pastors and congregations about what they are doing.

A few things rose to the surface right away, as it became clear that we were looking at large-scale measures that would include church service cancellations.

The first is pastoral care. Just about every pastor I've spoken with recently has reported spending long days of phone calls and emails, trying to reach out and talk with their people. In a time of illness and isolation, we recognize how important it is to make those connections. In fact, a number of pastors shared an unexpected silver

lining of deep sharing and conversation with people that might not otherwise have happened.

A second theme has been the pressing question of what to do about worship when congregations cannot gather in person. Many congregations are experimenting with some form of online worship experience. Some have recorded services or worship videos and posted them on their websites. Others have livestreamed a worship experience on Sunday mornings. And many congregations have tried out interactive worship through video chats or virtual meetings. Some pastors and congregations are working together to share an offering for their people, and some are simply pointing to the good resources being provided by others.

But whatever the form, continued discernment and adaptation has been necessary. What seemed appropriate one week may not be so the next. The situation has been changing so rapidly, it can be tough to keep up. But I have been impressed in the midst of this how

carefully pastors and leaders have thought about things like worship and what its purpose truly is. And how quickly they have learned new skills and platforms to remain the church in a new kind of time.

As meetings and events have been cancelled everywhere, I've also seen the huge uptick in online video-conferencing. Everyone seems to be scrambling to get a Zoom account these days! Some of these calls are attempting to maintain previously scheduled meetings, but others are just popping up as people feel the need to reach out to each other.

At MC Eastern Canada, the leadership office has scheduled regular video-chats on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, with open invitation for pastors and others to gather for prayer and conversation about how to do church in this time. These are interesting developments, and make me wonder how we will continue to use this technology once the current crisis has passed.

This season has been uncharted territory for everyone, but it's been amazing to watch congregations adapt. ❧



Kevin Derksen is a regional ministry associate with MC Eastern Canada.

A moment from yesterday



Tourists attempt to photograph boys outside of the Elmira Old Order Mennonite Meetinghouse, circa 1970. The boys are using a hand mirror to thwart their efforts. The photo appeared in the local newspaper with the caption "Mennonite Resistance." After the Second World War, urban Canadians embraced rural tourism. What do you think they were looking for? Where would you place yourself in this picture?

Text: Laureen Harder-Gissing
Photo: Richard Sutton, *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* / Mennonite Archives of Ontario



archives.mhsc.ca

IN THE IMAGE

How broad is salvation?

Ed Olfert

Someone told me recently that they had been asked to share their faith journey in a Sunday morning church service. The invitation, however, came with an addendum: “Don’t talk about universalism.”

At the end of that conversation, I reached for my phone dictionary for a definition. “Universalism” is “a theological doctrine that all human beings will eventually be saved.”

I’m a relatively uneducated dolt, but I assume that libraries full of books and years of heated sermons have been penned on this topic. I have only my personal experience to help me sort through the complexities of universalism.

As a young boy, I was sent to church camp, where I noted that being “saved” was interpreted differently than in my warm and inviting church home. Boys in my cabin were heavily pressured to go out in the dark with the counsellor to experience being saved. It seemed as odd then as it does now.

I have always been more intrigued by questions than answers, and, decades ago, I sat with the question of salvation, and how broad its scope should be. Should I and my group—the Christian community—have opinions on the

salvation of others? Did the Christian community give something up? Would our experience of God be reduced? Would our message be less relevant if we left the gate open?

As I walked more comfortably and confidently in the Christian life that I was discovering, a central tenet that emerged was that of humility. None of the spiritual life holds together without humility. The image of the Christ being tortured and interrogated in the high courts, while he stood quietly, is a model of whom I feel called to be. Humility is, at its most basic, a deep honesty. I’m called to go there. Without humility, Christianity becomes an exercise in power. The examples are legion.

Having an opinion on the salvation of another person stands in the way of that. When I visit with the imam whose mosque adjoins my church, that conversation loses integrity, loses the quality of mutuality, if I decide in my brain that, ultimately, I’m going to heaven and he is not. Without mutual respect and curiosity, we are not equal.

As my thoughts went in this direction decades ago, there was no clear answer. The question merely receded, to be replaced by more current questions.

That process continues.

God has never been revealed to me by finding answers, but rather through the gentle holding of possibilities. Salvation, however I define it, is best pictured nestled in an open hand.

The opening words of this piece—the admonition to not speak of universalism—can also be aimed at me. I can accept that. I write columns, and I published a book recounting the beauty of God as God is encountered in all of creation, in all people.

A high-risk sex offender with multiple convictions said to me: “Will you help me? I realize that I can’t change on my own.”

In my own, perhaps unorthodox spirituality, that becomes a story of salvation. It contains humility, repentance, trust and hope. The world becomes a more God-like place. My vulnerable ones, and yours, gain the potential to live with greater freedom and peace.

In this strange time of isolation and pandemic, as numbers of real and estimated deaths spiral skyward, I invite us all to find the peace of the one who calls, “Do not be afraid.” ❧



Ed Olfert (p2ptheo@sasktel.net) invites your thoughts.

Et cetera



Relief sent behind Iron Curtain

A Viennese recipient packs food into a basket and net that he brought for this purpose to transport it to his home. Vienna, Austria, was the base for a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relief package distribution to Iron Curtain countries in 1959, with 221 packages sent to Hungary, 111 to Poland, and 95 to Yugoslavia; 28 packages remained within Austria. Clothing was distributed six times during the year in Vienna, assisting 300 people; three food distributions were held.

Source: MCC annual report



MIND AND SOUL

The public good in a time of pandemic

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

The COVID-19 pandemic feels surreal. Streets of our cities are nearly empty, even at rush hour. Kids are home, schools have gone online, and some workers log in from home after many years of regular commutes to an office. And huge numbers of workers have been laid off.

This column was written long before you read it. But even in early March, I told my classes: “Revisit this in a month: Canada will handle the coronavirus better than our neighbours to the south.”

COVID-19 shows us that health is a public thing, not a personal quality of the individual. A prime difference between the United States and Canada is the relative value of private goods versus the public good. That is why Canada has a public health-care system. That is why Canadians have performed physical distancing better than Americans. That is why I told my students that Canada will handle this contagious disease—not-yet-a-pandemic at that time—better than the U.S. We pay more attention to the public good, not just the private good.

Health is both a public good and a private good. A private good is for the individual. A public good is that which is accessible to all, and which access by

some does not preclude access by others. Being healthy is good for a person; keeping many people healthy is good for everyone. In times of pandemic, it is absolutely necessary to focus on the public-good side of health. Many of us can be healthy and it doesn't reduce health for others. But if we get unhealthy with COVID-19 and don't practise physical distancing, it reduces the public good because it increases transmission of the virus.

The countries doing well in the face of COVID-19 are founded on a better sense of the public good. Rather than letting everything be the responsibility of the individual, from the sense of the good for all, there arises a willingness to change behaviour to benefit others.

Following from that, such countries build stronger institutions—collective structures. Another factor in the responses to COVID-19 is how much attention was paid to expert analysis, like epidemiological science. Anti-intellectualism is a form of individualism, when people have blind faith in self-competence (the attitude that “I don't need anyone else to tell me something”).

As Christians, we are guided to care for other people. To care for individuals is not the same as to care for the public

good. For the most part, charity is the sharing of private goods with others. Social justice is an outgrowth of *agape* love in terms of the public good.

I acknowledge that freedom and the public good are in tension. Too much infringement yields authoritarianism or stagnant societies, but too much freedom yields “everyone for him/herself.” Finding the balance is an ongoing task.

Societal and governmental responses here and around the world show that people and institutions can change quickly. To address this pandemic we crashed the economy—what so many said should not be done to address climate change. When we are able to rebuild, it should be with the view to address the ultimate public-good problems of wealth inequality and ecological sustainability. A topic we will surely be discussing in the next while will be “universal basic income.” We now know that it can be done—for the greater public good and the good of all creation. ❧



Randolph Haluza-DeLay attends First Mennonite Church in Edmonton and teaches sociology at The King's University.

Et cetera

Korean conscientious objector pardoned

Sang-Min Lee, a Mennonite conscientious objector (CO) in South Korea, was recently pardoned, along with 1,878 others who had been sentenced for refusing mandatory military service. Lee had served 15 months in prison in 2014-15 for his refusal to serve. The pardon erases his criminal record. Last year, South Korea passed a law allowing people to do 36 months of alternative service instead of 21 to 24 months of compulsory military service. But the alternative service must be done at correctional facilities and COs are not allowed to commute.

Source: Mennonite World Conference



Sang-Min Lee shortly after his release from prison in 2015.

TALES FROM THE UNENDING STORY

Smudged with humanity

Joshua Penfold

I t often feels like the God I encounter in Scripture is a completely different God than the one I profess to follow and worship.

In Jeremiah 45, God speaks relatively tenderly to the Israelites displaced after the exile, saying: *“Do not fear . . . I will surely save you. . . . Jacob will again have peace . . . for I am with you. . . . I will discipline you but only with justice”* (Jeremiah 46:27-28).

Yet two chapters previously, God is irate with exiles in Egypt for their willing defiance and idol worship, saying: *“I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah. . . . They will all perish in Egypt; they will fall by the sword or die from famine. None of the remnant of Judah who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the land of Judah”* (Jeremiah 44:11-14).

I realize that, although these are side by side, they are two distinct sections. But it highlighted for me how varied God’s attitude can appear towards Israel or humanity in general.

If I’m honest with myself, when I read much of the Hebrew Scripture, the God that is written about seems to be more made in our fickle, vengeful, blood-thirsty image.

This is where I start to wrestle with my understanding of what the Bible is and how we got it. I’m leaning further and further away from the idea that the writers of Scripture simply scribed verbatim what God audibly dictated.

Through my academic studies and personal reading, it has become quite clear that Scripture is far more complex than that. The Bible we read has journeyed a long and messy road smudged with many human fingerprints.

Don’t misunderstand me; I’m not attempting to remove God’s role in Scripture. I still hold this book to be holy, inspired and God-breathed, but perhaps not the way I once did. I believe that amid the myriad authors there remains one Author whose Spirit influenced, guided, spoke and bestowed wisdom to the human authors.

If I can have this same intimate relationship with God through the Spirit, yet still be so limited in my knowledge and shaped by my culture, why would I believe that those involved in the creation of Scripture were immune to these things and exempt from their own humanity? If anything, it seems that God uses our particularities, embraces them, even prefers them, because they are part of the package of our humanity.

Jesus himself is the best example of God embracing particularity.

And speaking of Jesus, as I wrestle with the less flattering parts of Scripture, the ones that paint God as less than an all-loving, all-merciful and righteous God, I turn to Jesus and let out a deep sigh of relief, maybe of assurance or unsettled peace.

Not that Jesus is easily understood or simple to follow, but when I look to Jesus, I see God’s best attributes incarnated in him. And I think that’s the whole point. Jesus is the fulfilment, possibly even a kind of course correction for how to understand God and ourselves.

Jesus somehow gets his smudgy fingers all over every page of Scripture and on every page of my own life, blessing the humanity of them, challenging me to re-read them and wrestle with them all in light of him. ✎



Joshua Penfold
(penfoldjoshua@gmail.com) successively and sometimes successfully searches the scandalous, subversive and sacred Scriptures for spiritual sustenance.

Et cetera

CPT urges Canada to ‘cancel rent’

“Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) Canada is calling on the federal government to cancel rent. In this time of layoffs and social distancing, we need to ensure people are secure! Take action and call your MP,” a recent CPT press release urges, adding, “Crucial to stopping the spread of COVID-19 is for people to stay home—yet staying home is having severe financial implications on people and puts them at risk to losing their ‘home’ in the future. . . . It is time for the Canadian government to halt all rent payments, ensuring people’s ability to stay home and ensuring financial stability following the pandemic. At the same time, we are calling for a mortgage-payment freeze.”

Source: CPT



VIEWPOINT

Menno encounters with contemplative prayer

By Will Braun
Senior Writer

Doug Klassen, who now serves as Mennonite Church Canada's executive minister, confessed to a fellow pastor that he couldn't pray for more than 10 minutes. "I came to a place where I kept running into myself when I was praying," Klassen recalls of his early days as a youth pastor. "I'd make my request, then pull up to the window."



The pastor he worked with suggested Klassen try spiritual direction, a form of one-on-one spiritual accompaniment common in Catholic circles.

At Klassen's first appointment, the priest asked, "Are you an alcoholic?" Klassen said, "No. I'm just having a hard time praying." Due to a clerical mix-up, Klassen had ended up with a priest who normally worked with addicts. After some conversation, the priest said, "You're a Mennonite, so you probably don't want to pay. I'll make you deal." He offered free spiritual direction in exchange for Klassen doing youth ministry workshops in his parish.

Klassen expected that spiritual direction would turn prayer into "something successful." Instead, he says, "it completely undid me."

"I came to realize how much of what I was doing in ministry was based upon ego and how little was driven by a deep sense of connectedness to the Spirit of God. I thought, oh my, I'm a fraud."

Through that process, Klassen discovered a "true sense of call."

He learned meditation and contemplative prayer. "It's the idea of seeking God and trying to dwell with the Spirit of God in silence, just receiving, being open," he says.

Klassen references the Apostle Paul saying, "I want to know Christ," and talking about praying "without ceasing."

Klassen's journey has been about dying to self, coming to the end of one's ego. "It kept me in ministry," he recalls. "I would have run out of gas" otherwise.

Despite years of following this path, Klassen says, "I'm a beginner."

'I didn't know how to pray'

Claire Ewert Fisher is another Mennonite whose spiritual path took a similar detour. While serving with Mennonite Central Committee in the Philippines in the 1980s, a sense of crisis closed in on her. Her children were far away at boarding school. Work limited time with her husband. Plus, there was the disorientation of an unfamiliar and remote setting.

"I lost connection with my reality . . . [with] the things that sustained me," she recalls. "I found I didn't know how to pray."

She needed something more.

She was seconded to a Catholic organization and had become intrigued by its members' spirituality. She went to a nun for spiritual direction. She soon found the "more" she longed for. "It wasn't too far into my prayers that I found myself falling in love with God," she says. "When I started contemplative prayer, it became an intimate relationship."

She says contemplative prayer is more listening than talking, "giving God a chance to transform us from the inside. . . . It's an integration into another way of being present, being open to God."

Upon her return from the Philippines, Ewert Fisher became involved at Queen's House, a Catholic retreat centre in Saskatoon, where she worked for five years in the 1990s.

Now, Ewert Fisher—who pastors at Mount Royal Mennonite in Saskatoon and Rosthern Mennonite—serves on

the spirituality resource team of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, which has offered contemplative seminars in over half of MC Saskatchewan's churches. The team now offers silent retreats.

Diversity in contemplative prayer

Contemplative prayer can take various forms. In a Sunday service, Ewert Fisher has used a guided meditation, inviting congregants to imagine walking through a forest and meadow to a beach where Jesus meets them. After some interaction, Jesus departs and the others return home.

Ewert Fisher tells people not to be afraid of imagination, as she was once taught. She also believes it is essential to "test" what one hears in prayer with Scripture and others.

Another form for contemplative prayer starts with the verse, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Repeating the line, a leader gradually trims the line, until it is just "be," which leads into silence. Then participants come out of silence hearing the verse lengthened back to the original.

Both Ewert Fisher and Klassen talk about holding others in the presence of God, more than articulating desires for them.

Often contemplative prayer is just silence. A receptivity, restfulness, waiting. "You might not feel different," says Ewert Fisher, "but you are opening yourself." Over time, you may see God in new ways in your experience.

Of course, contemplative prayer is foreign to many Mennonites. "It doesn't connect with everyone," says Ewert Fisher.

Klassen agrees, adding that, while there is some suspicion, people who feel their prayer is just "transactional" might want to consider it. ☸



NEWS

'You're Not Alone'

Homebound musician offers online singalong

By Janet Bauman

Eastern Canada Correspondent
KITCHENER, ONT.

A little bit of yeast makes the whole dough rise . . . you do your part; I'll do mine," sings Bryan Moyer Suderman, using his body as a percussion instrument. But instead of singing at a concert or a worship service, the itinerant musician is at home singing into an iPad propped up on a stack of books, doing his part to practise physical distancing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health crisis hasn't stopped him from using music to connect people. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for the foreseeable future, Moyer Suderman takes to Facebook Live for a 10- to 15-minute singalong. With just his voice, and sometimes one of his instruments, he shares a few of his singable songs of faith. Whoever joins him online can watch and listen, sing and dance along, and type comments. It's a small, simple ministry he can do while staying home.

In one of his first online sets he demonstrates how to use his catchy tune, "God's Love is for Everybody" as a hand-washing song! Another song reminds listeners that in these anxious times "there is enough for all if we can learn to share." He makes sure to sing a birthday blessing for anyone with a birthday.

For Moyer Suderman, offering an online singalong doesn't feel all that different from what he normally does through SmallTall Ministries as a self-employed singer/songwriter and Bible teacher. He aims to find creative ways "to engage all ages in the scriptural drama of God's love for the world."

He built up a considerable repertoire of engaging and interactive songs over the past 25 years, recording them on eight CDs. As the reality of physical distancing sank in, Moyer Suderman mused about how to share his music with families at home who were looking for resources

during the pandemic. He thought of mailing out the extra CDs in his closet, but that was logistically challenging.

Then Julie, his wife, suggested that he could sing the songs online using Facebook Live. The first singalong was a bit of an experiment, but he got positive feedback and encouragement to do it again.

It is an exercise that thrives on simplicity. The time—1:23 p.m. EDT every Monday, Wednesday and Friday—was chosen to make it easy to remember. It is a regular event that families can look forward to on their otherwise empty calendars. Sessions are short, and songs are simple and singable. Moyer Suderman says that the point is to "keep it simple. Don't try to do too much . . . offer what you can offer, and let God do the rest."

He assures the children watching that "such simple things" like washing hands and staying home are "expressions of love for other people," and singing together can "brighten these days for each other."

Impromptu musical offerings all over the world are demonstrating what Moyer Suderman knows to be the power of music to connect. He hopes his singalongs can offer encouragement, help people grieve together, and express things they don't know how to say.

He led "You're Not Alone," in response to a request. The lyrics, "We are part of one body . . . your time of suffering is our suffering too," seemed especially fitting under the circumstances.

Moyer Suderman is described as having a "gift for writing songs that are deeply scriptural, musically memorable and readily singable—songs that are at once simple, catchy, profound and fun."

But his songwriting process takes time. He jokes that "for a guy who writes short, simple songs, it takes me a long time to say anything."



PHOTO BY JULIE MOYER SUDERMAN

Singing into an iPad propped on top of a stack of books, Bryan Moyer Suderman leads an online singalong from his home, to help people connect and find encouragement and hope during the days of physical distancing.

Writing songs for the community of faith means being immersed in Scripture and prayer, and paying attention to life in the community and the world, he says. He distils his ideas to one page, and then to a paragraph, to a sentence, to a phrase, and finally to a word.

"It forces me to be concise," he says, adding, "Once that work has been done, a song expresses something that can be drawn on in all kinds of ways."

Similar to the function of Scripture, he says, songs are portable and adaptable. "They keep speaking with different messages for different times and circumstances."

Moyer Suderman hopes his music will help people both small and tall to "[get] through these days together." ❧

The singalongs can be found on Facebook at SmallTall Ministries under videos, and at smalltallministries.com/blog/ for those without a Facebook account.



Care and change amid COVID-19

Petition calls governments to care for most vulnerable

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe
Manitoba Correspondent
WINNIPEG

While people and governments alike are sprinting to mitigate the current crisis of COVID-19, David Driedger is starting to run the marathon of addressing its long-term implications.

Driedger, associate minister at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, wrote an open letter calling on all levels of Canadian government to create significant systemic changes now and in the critical time following the pandemic, to care for the most vulnerable in society. The petition, which he worked on with numerous other ecumenical church leaders and theologians in Winnipeg, is entitled “Canadian churches for care and change in the time of COVID-19” and was published online (bit.ly/2w8Vtpc) on March 27.

People react differently in times of uncertainty and chaos. Driedger’s response is to try to understand what’s happening. “As soon as I saw how significant some of the economic implications of this [pandemic] were going to be, it really . . . just felt like a further exposure of a system that already exposes the vulnerable. It was sort of a stark realization that this is a system that can’t stop,” he says.

The global economic system is not set up to care for vulnerable people, and certain groups suffer under this system even in normal times, Driedger says. But as COVID-19 explodes across Europe and North America, the alarming impact on people’s economic stability is becoming much more widespread and the reality of the world’s economic structure is being laid bare.

“It just continues to baffle me that . . . there’s still consistently no conversation around, say, an immediate one-time taxation of certain amounts of wealth for the purposes of redistribution, to help those



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID DRIEDGER

David Driedger, the petition author, is associate minister at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

most directly affected by it.”

The petition asks the federal government to allocate funds for emergency shelters, revoke its ban on asylum seekers, protect prisoners, absolve debts, redistribute wealth and stop subsidizing oil companies. It also advocates for providing more resources and improving conditions for Indigenous communities that are at a higher risk than other Canadians due to inadequate housing, water and medical services. “COVID-19 has already changed the global landscape. We are asking that we do not return to a system that was increasingly unjust and never sustainable,” the petition states.

Jane Barter, an Anglican priest and professor at the University of Winnipeg, was also closely involved with the project. Both she and Driedger involved other people from their networks, and the project took on a more collective form.

“The hope is that in the midst of us all trying to take care of our own personal situations, we don’t lose sight of some of the larger questions as well, and figure out how to hold the right people accountable at the right time,” he says.

But why is this an issue of faith? The petition reads: “As Christians and churches committed to the gospel, we are required to prioritize the vulnerable over the demands of profit”

Driedger sees this responsibility rooted deeply in biblical theology. Although he has been shaped by liberation theology and the writings of several black theologians, it’s ultimately biblical books like Isaiah and the gospels that clearly proclaim this message.

The document begins with a Matthew text: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these among you, you did it to me.” It draws on the “Jubilee” traditions of rest and redistribution found in Leviticus.

Driedger says the theme even showed up in the text he was given to preach on recently, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke, in which a wealthy man is severely judged for his continued disregard of someone who suffered before his eyes.

However, many theological traditions haven’t been shaped this way because most churches “have been sort of a passive participant in our systems because we’ve benefited well enough from them, and we’ve gotten quite comfortable with them over time,” he says.

So, while the petition publishers hope it gains attention and a multitude of signatures, and that it elicits some short-term action, they also want churches to work through the document—of which a longer version with linked resources and readings is available through a link on the online petition—as a long-term project. “It’s the longer document that I want to see congregations engage with as a study document, as something that can shape some formative and long-term thinking as well,” he says.

Driedger has also been involved with Budget for All, a Winnipeg coalition responding to City of Winnipeg budget cuts affecting social services, and he organized a presentation on peace and policing in Winnipeg through his church. “It just feels like the best way to stay as close to the gospel as possible . . . is to remain as attentive as possible to those who are most vulnerable among us,” he says. ☿

Serving our community by doing our job

Two Saskatchewan health-care professionals reflect on their work in light of COVID-19

By Donna Schulz
Saskatchewan Correspondent
ROSTHERN, SASK.

While many people are staying home to reduce the spread of COVID-19, some, like Erik and Cara Epp, continue to work because their jobs are considered essential. The Epps, who live in Rosthern, both work in health care.

As a pharmacist, Erik divides his workdays between Rosthern's two pharmacies.

"I like working in health care because I know I am helping people every day when I go to work," he says. Until recently, he says his job has afforded him "lots of in-person conversations and relationships." These days, however, customers are required to phone in their prescription requests and pick up and pay for them at the door.

Cara is a registered nurse who works part-time in public health. She primarily cares for families with young children under the age of 5, providing post-natal care and immunizations.

Cara enjoys many aspects of nursing, but, like her husband, she especially values caring for people and building relationships with them. "It's easy to see the benefits of your work," she says.

While she liked hospital work, she says she appreciates not having to work shifts now that she's in public health. Plus, she says, "It's nice to work with healthy people."

While Cara still goes into the clinic to work, she now tries to conduct post-natal visits by phone rather than in person.

"There's a lot of uncertainty with work, and where does that go," Cara says about her own job in light of the pandemic, but adds, "My clients also have a lot of uncertainty."

Erik, similarly, senses that his clients are feeling anxious.

"A big role for me these days is to be



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARA EPP

Erik and Cara Epp are shown with their daughter.

a calming influence in people's lives," he says. "People are asking, 'Should we stock up on medications or supplies?' I try to assure people we'll try to stay open throughout the pandemic."

"People have bought into what public-health officials are saying and are trying to follow their directives," he says, "but lots of people are nervous about where this is going. You never really know what the next day or next week is going to bring."

Erik sees God at work in the way people are following health-authority directives. He says he also sees signs of God's presence in "the great work of unsung heroes like grocery-store and gas-station [workers] who don't get the recognition that health-care workers get."

Cara says, "I hear from lots of people, 'What can we do to help?'" This, she says, is God at work. Another sign of God's presence, for Cara, has been the leadership within the health region where she works. She sees the leaders working hard "to protect their staff and the people of Saskatchewan," she says, adding, "I don't envy that job."

Cara says she has sensed "a cautious optimism among my co-workers and [other] people that this is where we are

now and we'll just get through it."

"It's challenging to look around the world and see what's happening," she says. "It's hard to see God's purpose. Italy has been devastated. It's challenging to not ask why."

The best response, she believes, is to simply have faith. "I don't think there is an answer why this is happening," she says. "We need to have faith that this is God's world and his purposes will be met."

Erik says he has felt his faith being strengthened as he has witnessed "the way different churches have met the challenge of what it means to be socially isolated." He gives the example of his own congregation, Rosthern Mennonite, which has been broadcasting services on Facebook for a number of years already and now has invited others to watch the livestream.

"Our church is continuing and is even connecting with other people and with other churches as well," he says.

When asked what other Mennonites can do to help in this crisis, Cara says, "We all feel really isolated, but it's important to not forget that there are still ways we can reach out and connect with each other."

Erik sees three main ways to help. "The first is prayer for your community and for those who are affected [by the pandemic]. The second is to connect with people digitally, through email and via phone calls. And the third is to follow the directives of health authorities," he says. "It feels like a passive thing but that is the best way for people to help right now."

Cara agrees. "It doesn't necessarily feel like helping, but it definitely is."

The Epps don't see themselves as heroes. "I don't feel that what we're doing is that exceptional," says Erik. "We're trying to serve our community by doing our job." ❧

Joining the wave

Mennonite Church Alberta holds first virtual annual general meeting

Story and Photo by Joanne De Jong

With COVID-19 limiting the ability to connect in person, virtual meetings now seem to be the wave of the future. Mennonite Church Alberta had already been using the Zoom platform to hold small provincial committee meetings online, but when its annual general meeting (AGM) was cancelled, the regional church decided to explore whether a larger meeting with Zoom could work as well.

MC Alberta planned to have its AGM from March 20 to 22 at Edmonton First Mennonite Church, but due to government meeting restrictions changing daily and fear of the virus spreading, the meeting was cancelled. A new two-hour online AGM was held on March 28.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, MC Alberta's moderator, expressed sadness about not being able to meet together in person but added, "We realized it could be months before being able to meet as a conference, and some decisions had to be made."

Although some would have been intimidated, June Miller, MC Alberta's communications coordinator, is quoted as saying that, despite the workload, "doing something new and making something work is thrilling!"

Because the turnaround time was so short, it was a minor miracle that everything came together. Staff had to connect with all the delegates, to see if they were still interested in participating; make sure everyone had instructions; update the website; and put together a new meeting agenda, deciding what to include and not to include with the shortened time frame. Then there was all the work to set up Zoom for up to 100 people, which needed to include how to vote on resolutions, show PowerPoint slides, and answer questions one by one.

To make sure everything would run as smoothly as possible, Miller said they "practised over and over." This included practising with the Executive and a

pre-AGM invitation to any participant who wasn't comfortable with Zoom and wanted to try it out before the actual meeting. Miller was surprised at how many people were already comfortable with the platform.

At 10 a.m., delegates and guests were invited to sign in to a virtual waiting room, where they were registered one by one and given access to the meeting. This allowed the MC Alberta Executive to track who had actually attended. Unfortunately, though, it didn't work, but no one knew the difference. Soon there was a screen of familiar faces sharing coronavirus jokes and the story of a cinnamon bun recipe being passed from family to family.

including MC Canada executive minister Doug Klassen.

Miller showed a "year in review" PowerPoint presentation, and Jeanette Hanson spoke about the new Witness model and encouraged churches to identify what inspires them about international ministry.

Finance Committee chair Wayne Janz went over the 2019 financial statements and 2020 budget. This included a deficit of \$23,000 in 2019 and a further deficit budget of \$34,000 in 2020.

Concerns about the impact of COVID-19 were expressed, as well as apprehensions over what will need to be cut in the future.

The meeting ended with a scaled down kick-off of the new MC Alberta vision: "Encountering, embracing, embodying Christ in life, in community, in the world." Each church is being given a practical list of suggestions to inspire them to apply the new vision.

"I am excited about our three-year plan," said Tiessen-Wiens. "Each church



A screen shot of participants at this year's MC Alberta annual general meeting.

Seventy-five people took part in the Zoom AGM, including 61 delegates.

'Welcome to my kitchen'

With these words from Tiessen-Wiens, the 91st MC Alberta assembly officially began. "And thank you for allowing me into yours," she added.

Greetings and encouragement were expressed from many nationwide leaders,

is picking up something and going in a common direction. We are not cookie-cutter, but community."

MC Alberta is still hoping to schedule another celebration event later in the year, so people can enjoy being together in person.

"We are entering a big year of faith and learning what it really means to be community," she said. ☘

Nourishing body, mind and spirit

Staying healthy is important in coping with COVID-19 isolation and stress

Story and Photo by Amy Rinner Waddell

B.C. Correspondent
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

The spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic has forced Canadians to learn to cope with forced isolation, loss of work and social events, and an uncertain future. For a church community accustomed to weekly worship services and small group gatherings, learning how to maintain a sense of community and foster wellness among members presents an unprecedented challenge.

The result for many is stress. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), it's normal to feel anxious during a pandemic. "Self-care is critically important at this time, as worries can be made worse if we aren't taking care of ourselves," says a post on the CMHA website. "It's important to be kind to yourself. This is an anxious and stressful time for everyone, and it's okay if you feel more anxious than usual, and it's okay to take time for yourself to manage your mental health."

Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries is a non-profit ministry that exists to equip the church to be a sanctuary for all people. Dr. Hillary McBride of Sanctuary says that feeling stress or fear in times of uncertainty or danger is normal. Stress helps the body have all the energetic and hormonal responses needed to get through difficulties, and fear helps people mobilize to act on their environment and protect themselves when in danger.

"Stress becomes a problem when it hangs around for too long in our system, or we are in an environment that is causing us more stress than is helpful," explains McBride, adding, "Likewise, fear is not bad, but when we do not know what to do with it, it can take over. When fear has taken over, it can be hard for us to think, rest, eat, connect, create and just generally live our lives."

The Sanctuary website (bit.ly/2WXhRgf) has resources from McBride, including

"Meditation and self-care during COVID-19" and an article on "Practising self-care during anxious times."

Not to be overlooked alongside mental health is physical health. Angelika Dawson of Abbotsford, British Columbia, a registered yoga teacher who leads a class called Yoga as Prayer at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, believes that the connection between mind and body is vital.

"One of the reasons I began attending yoga classes was when I developed severe anxiety more than a decade ago," she says. "I have since come to deeply appreciate the connection between mind, body and spirit. We are not compartmentalized as people. Everything impacts everything else. Learning to calm my spirit, and to slow down and focus my mind, helps me keep my anxiety at bay."

Dawson has several suggestions for maintaining mental and physical health, including:

- **Breathe:** Breathing slowly and deeply, then exhaling loudly is a great way to reduce tension.
- **Move your body:** Even for those staying indoors, this can include walking hallways and stairs, using a treadmill or exercise bike, or participating in online exercise or yoga classes.
- **Reach out.** Use Skype or Facetime to connect with people face-to-face. If not connected digitally, use the telephone!
- **Focus on** something other than yourself: Serve others. Find a way that you can support someone else, even when you're

isolated.

- **Consume good news:** Share stories of how people are turning this stressful time into something positive. ☺

Sanctuary Mental Health is offering The Sanctuary Course, available to anyone who wants to learn more about faith and mental health, with free registration until April 18. To learn more or to register, visit bit.ly/34aYNgd.



Realizing the interconnectedness of mental health and wellness may be key in coping with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak.



Grebelites continue in community amid COVID-19 separation

By Elizabeth Robertson
Conrad Grebel University College
WATERLOO, ONT.

Most people's lives have shifted dramatically in the past few weeks, as they grapple with social isolation, educational upheaval, job changes, pandemic preparations and health-care emergencies surrounding COVID-19. Conrad Grebel University College is no different.

At this point, Grebel's residence dorm is empty while 16 students remain living in the Grebel apartments. Some residents, who could not return home immediately, moved from the dorms to the

self-sufficient apartments, making meals in their kitchen and staying physically distant from others.

Second-year engineering student Max Chute was unable to return home to Vietnam due to complications surrounding international travel, so he made the decision to move into a Grebel apartment with a few close friends. He also shared his experience as a residence don during the busy move-out time.

"Between the five dons, we checked 120 students out of the residence in five days," he says. "Normally this process takes three weeks."

Chute found that there was a general feeling among the residents of lacking closure to the year's residence experience.

While most students have dispersed to their respective homes, they continue to engage in the community of support they have built up over the past year. Many student committees and leadership teams continue to meet virtually to plan activities for the Grebel community.

Nathaniel Kim, a third-year biochemistry student, says that the disruption to regular routine "hasn't stopped the chapel committee from meeting online to plan our most geographically ambitious service yet!" He says that after an imperfect, yet powerful, rendition of "Amazing Grace" that was sung when the committee first met digitally, they

knew they needed to expand this feeling of unity towards the rest of the dispersed Grebelites.

"Adapting chapel to an online medium gives us the thrill of a new challenge, but, more importantly, I think it's a shining example of how Grebel's community always pulls through together," he says.

The abrupt transition off-campus is especially difficult for the fourth-year cohort that had been looking forward to enjoying the last days of their Grebel experience together.

Charlotte Baker, a Grebel associate in her last term of university, found the sudden end to her Grebel experience to be a difficult adjustment. The desire to continue in community led her to create "The Great Grebel Challenge" Instagram page so residents and associates can still have fun together while being physically separated. She posts a new challenge every few days, such as trying out a new recipe, and then shares videos and pictures of fellow Grebelites completing the task.

"As soon as I post a challenge, I immediately start getting submissions," she says. "I think that really shows people's excitement to stay connected and their dedication to the Grebel community."

The orientation committee is continuing to connect online to ensure the coming generation of Grebelites is welcomed accordingly.

Leah Schilstra, a member of the committee responsible for organizing this fall's Orientation Week events, says, "We are still planning all the same fun events, snacks and skits that you see every year," adding, "The willingness and intentionality I have seen through online meetings reveals the commitment people have to seeing the Grebel community thrive and succeed, as well as the commitment the Grebel community has to one another." ❧



PHOTO BY ANNA KUEPFER

At Grebel, students are craving community connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured, apartment dwellers visit with Grebel's director of operations, Paul Penner, outside their window, and with the director of student services, Mary Brubaker-Zehr, via video chat.

COVID-19 has significant impact for MDS

Organization closes all current projects, suspends operations for the summer in Canada and the United States

By John Longhurst
Mennonite Disaster Service

For Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), COVID-19 has had a significant impact on operations.

It started on March 13, when the organization closed all current projects in locations across the United States due to the coronavirus; there were no projects in operation in Canada. A week later, it suspended all summer programs in both countries.

"It has been a turbulent and challenging time for all of us at MDS, as it has for everyone in the U.S., Canada and the whole world," says executive director

Kevin King. The decision to close the current projects was hard, but the right one, according to King. "We knew it would put a lot of stress on volunteers as they said hurried goodbyes to homeowners and local partners, along with having to quickly close things up," he says.

"Although we can't predict the future, everything we hear from the federal and state governments and public health authorities tells us the pandemic is going to take time to work its way through Canada and the U.S.," King says.

By suspending summer youth, family and other projects in both countries, "we took a lot of stress and anxiety off of volunteers who were wondering if they should still plan to serve" he says. "Now they know what the near future holds for them with MDS."

As for whether MDS will be able to start up again in fall, "only God knows," says King. "We hope so, but nothing is certain."

If a disaster occurs during the suspension, MDS will carefully evaluate whether it is safe for volunteers to respond, he says.

As for MDS staff, in Canada three of the six staff who work in the Winnipeg office will be laid off; they will receive government unemployment benefits, topped-up by MDS. The others, one full-time and two part-time, will continue until June, at which time the situation will be re-evaluated.

King invites supporters and others to pray for MDS, and for other Mennonite organizations, denominations, schools, churches and other groups impacted by the pandemic. "I also invite people to pray for the leaders of the U.S. and Canada, and all who are involved in health care in any way," he says. "It is a difficult and challenging time for everyone." ❧



PHOTO BY PAUL HUNT.

Curtis and Heather Funk of Winkler, Man., work on a house in Marianna, Fla., one of the Mennonite Disaster Service projects now shut down due to COVID-19.

News brief

MennoMedia makes hard decisions amid falling sales

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the world in only a few months. At MennoMedia, its effects are causing staff to make hard decisions amid falling sales:

- **Purpose magazine** will cease production after the August 2020 issue.
- **The bulletin series** will also cease production after August 2020.

"Both *Purpose* magazine and the bulletin series have been near the edge in terms of profitability for some time," says Amy Gingerich, executive director and publisher. "The current crisis has forced us at MennoMedia to move up that timeline." In early March, Amazon let booksellers know that it was deprioritizing book sales in order to prioritize sales of health-care supplies, food and other necessary items. Amazon indicated at that time that it would not order books again until at least April 6. "With Amazon making up 46 percent of our Herald Press book sales, that was a hard and fast cut we felt immediately," Gingerich says. "However, last week Amazon did place a small order, so we see that as a sign of hope." The *Voices Together* worship and song collection remains on schedule for fall release, with one exception. Five audio albums with songs from the collection were to be recorded on Mennonite college and university campuses this spring, with conductors at the schools overseeing that work. "With students having been sent home from these campuses, we are delaying the release of those albums," Gingerich says. "We hope to be able to resume the recording work this fall."

—MENNOMEDIA



MC Eastern Canada appoints new executive minister

'I am excited to get started,' says Leah Reesor-Keller

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
KITCHENER, ONT.

Leah Reesor-Keller has been appointed as Mennonite Church Eastern Canada's next executive minister. She will begin her new role in late summer, replacing David Martin, who will retire this summer after 15 years in the position.

Arli Klassen, MC Eastern Canada's moderator, is confident in the decision: "Leah has great passion and vision for guiding the church to be the best it can be, as Anabaptist followers of Jesus," Klassen says. "Leah has the organizational leadership, management skills and spiritual maturity to lead" the regional church, "along with strong intercultural and multilingual skills."

Reesor-Keller is enthusiastic about building community among the regional church's congregations and increasing their capacity to live out their faith. "I am excited to get started," she says. Under the umbrella of MC Eastern Canada, "congregations have chosen to come together . . . because of a shared vision of living out our unique Anabaptist Christian faith in communities across eastern Canada."

The regional church's role "is to provide tools and resources for the member congregations to do ministry in their own context, yet it is the congregations and members that drive the movement forward," she says. "As leader . . . I want to listen deeply, ask reflective questions, foster relationships of mutuality between congregations, and hold space for new dreams and visions of what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian to take root."

Reesor-Keller is currently the community program manager at House of Friendship in Waterloo Region. Previously, she was the Nepal country representative and a food security advisor with Mennonite Central Committee. She provided leadership during the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, coordinating a disaster response



Leah Reesor-Keller

while sleeping outside on the ground.

She also has experience with boards and with fundraising, and is a regular preacher, worship leader and Bible study leader wherever she has lived. Her travel has led to a passion for languages; she is proficient beyond English in French, Haitian Creole and Nepali.

The MC Eastern Canada Executive Council believes that Reesor-Keller is called to this position because of her vision and her enthusiastic energy for working with the challenges facing churches today.

Reesor-Keller says, "The work that I feel called to do is seek out and amplify voices, and find ways to discern together what we are being called into in this time as churches and individual Christ-followers."

She sees much potential in the regional church's "family of congregations to be beacons of hope and action in the world, even more so than they already are. I want to be part of letting the lights shine and bringing forth God's new words just waiting for the right ears to listen."

Reesor-Keller and her husband Luke live in Kitchener and have two children, Isaac and Ava. They are active members of Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo. ▄

▄ News brief

MCI student competes in Canada Winter Games

This winter was an exciting one for Jonah Ginter, a Grade 10 student at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Man. From Feb. 25 to 29, he competed in the 2020 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games held in Thunder Bay, Ont. His sport? Snowshoeing. "I like the challenge snowshoeing gives me, and that it's a unique sport and it's not every day you meet someone who races in snowshoes, which is cool to talk about," Ginter says. He won bronze medals in both the 100-metre and 400-metre snowshoeing races, as well as a gold medal in the 4x100-metre snowshoeing relay event. "It was a pretty big deal, as well as really exciting. I never thought I would actually get to go to Nationals," he says. "A highlight would have to be bringing home a gold medal with my 4x100-metre relay team. It was the teamwork aspect that made it a highlight and an accomplishment." Ginter and his family attend Blumenort Mennonite Church in Rosetown, Man.

—BY NICOLIEN KLASSEN-WIEBE



Special Olympian
Jonah Ginter

FOCUS ON

Books & Resources

A story that 'wanted to be told'

Mennonite writer turns gap-year experience in Botswana into a novel

By Janet Bauman
Eastern Canada Correspondence

After high school, Susanna Compton took a gap year before heading off to university. She turned that experience into her first published book.

Her former pastors from Wilmot Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Ont., Glyn Jones and Susan Allison-Jones, had moved to Botswana with their daughters, where they were involved in Mennonite ministries. With their encouragement, she joined them for six months in 2008 after her final year of high school.

This past November, Compton's first novel, *A Grandmother Named Love*, was published, the fruit of her time in Botswana.



PHOTO BY JANET BAUMAN

Susanna Compton holds the recently published novel she wrote based on stories she heard during her gap-year experience of living and volunteering in Botswana.

She spent her first month in Botswana living with a local family in the village of Latlhakane, learning about the country, the culture and some of the local language. She also volunteered at a local school.

She spent the remainder of her time staying in a guesthouse in Gaborone, shadowing the Allison-Joneses and doing some teaching in high schools with four other young adults. Their job was to teach one or two sex-education classes per day and offer peer counselling, to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. A local church initiated the program, which was endorsed by the government.

Compton describes how "highly stretching" that was for her, but, in the end, she was so glad for an experience that was "very much a ministry." She found it particularly meaningful to connect with the high-school girls through peer counselling and was struck by how "the concept of saying 'no'" to sexual activity, and having "their own agency" was new for them. She noted that there was a great deal of stigma attached to AIDS.

Compton returned from Botswana with a scrapbook full of pictures and memories. Four years later, for her honours thesis as a creative-writing student in the English and literature program at the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ont., she wrote a 15,000-word novella based on stories she heard in Botswana.

From the time she was a little girl Compton knew she wanted to be an author and illustrator. Now she knew her first book would come from her experience in Botswana. It was a story "that really wanted to be told."

So she spent four more years stretching the novella into a 57,000-word novel. It took a year to find a publisher, and another two years before the book was released. She

also got married and had two children in the meantime.

In the novella Compton tells the story of a grandmother, a strong woman of faith, who takes seven children into her home, four of whom are her biological grandchildren. That "felt like a complete story," Compton says. But, to stretch the novella into a full book, she expanded on the stories of each of the children who show up because of a variety of circumstances.

"I took lots of notes" in Botswana, she says, and then researched more about the country.

While there is tragedy and hardship in the story, it is "a very hopeful story" with a theme of unconditional love. "I wanted it to be uplifting in the end," she says.

Compton sees her writing as "a gift from God." Throughout the gestation of the book she "kept giving it back to God," and finding God to be present and reliable.

She had friends and an aunt read a draft. To publish the work, she turned to the Writer's Union of Canada and paid for access to its database of publishers that accept unsolicited manuscripts. She was so excited once her manuscript was accepted, but she says it was a process of "get in line and wait your turn." Then, after months of waiting, there was a short, intense "crunch editing" period.

The book was originally released in Toronto, followed by an event in Waterloo, Ont., last November. Promotion from here on is "entirely up to me," says Compton.

She is already excited by how people are engaging with the story and asking in-depth questions. "Every response is different," she says.

She shared a reading with The Gathering Church in Kitchener, Ont., where she attends, and found the congregation to be "wonderfully supportive."

Compton has another book in the works. This one will be historical fiction, about a Mennonite great-uncle who served in the Second World War against the will of his church. ❧

A Grandmother Named Love is available from the author at ascompton.com as well as at a variety of online booksellers.



FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

'Many remarkable changes ... in the past 50 years'

National historical society commissions an updated history of Mennonites in Canada

By John Longhurst

The last time a history of *Mennonites in Canada* was published, it covered the period from 1920 to 1970—the year Pierre Trudeau was prime minister, Canada was converting to the metric system, the federal voting age was lowered to 18, and the October Crisis rocked Quebec.

It was a long time ago, in other words.

"There have been significant changes in Canada, and in the Mennonite community, since that time," says Brian Froese, who teaches history at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg. "Fifty years is a long time."

Froese and Lauren Harder-Gissing, archivist-librarian at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., have been commissioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to research and write an updated history of *Mennonites in Canada* from 1970 to 2020. The new book will follow two previous volumes about *Mennonites in Canada* from 1786 to 1940 and from 1939 to 1970.

"It's not intended to be encyclopedic, but a look at the broader themes," says Froese.

Themes he and Harder Gissing expect to cover include:

- **Changes** to the ethnic make-up of Mennonites.
- **The changing** role of women in church leadership.
- **Sexuality.**
- **Political involvement** and activism.
- **Leadership** in the area of refugee resettlement.
- **The change** in musical and worship styles, and in how the Bible was read and understood.
- **The closure** of Bible schools and Bible colleges, and the creation of CMU.
- **The response** of Mennonites in Canada to refugees and to the war on terror.
- **Mennonite relationships** with Indigenous people.
- **How Mennonites** have engaged the media and the wider culture, and their involvement in the arts.

And also Mennonite humour, Froese adds—things like Manitoba's own Daily Bonnet, the Drunken Mennonite blog and stand-up comedians like Matt Falk.

He also hopes the book can show "how such a small group punched above its weight in so many areas and gained such

a significant reputation for it," as well as taking a stab at the question of "what is a Mennonite, anyway?"

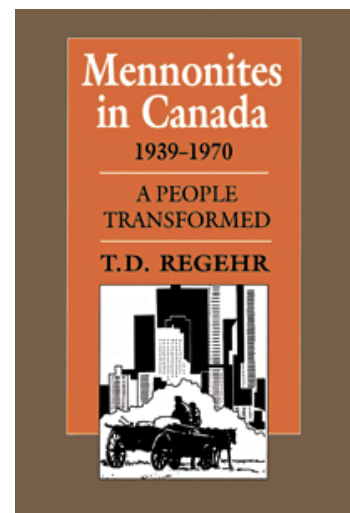
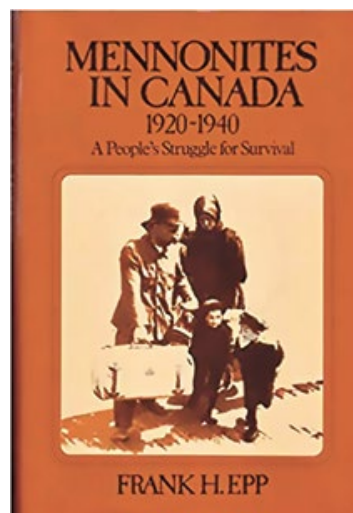
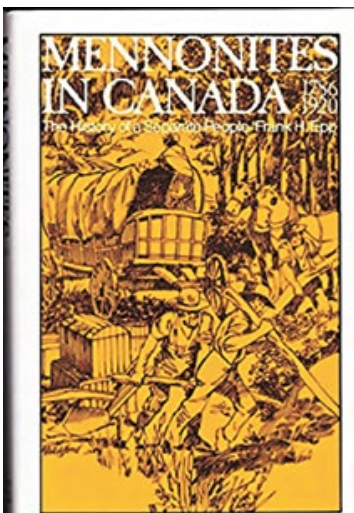
"I'm thrilled to be part of it. I'm honoured," Froese says, adding, "It will be exciting to sift through scores of accounts, reflections and influences that have impacted Mennonite beliefs and practices over the decades."

For Harder-Gissing, the new volume is important, because "a fair amount of water has gone under the bridge" since the last one was published. "The time has come to think of it in a historical perspective."

"Some may find it hard to believe that the 1970s are now considered 'history,' while others will regard that decade as the ancient past," she says. "Many remarkable changes have occurred among Canadian Mennonite communities in the past 50 years. I look forward to hearing and telling these stories."

The book will be published in 2025. ❧

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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

BOOK REVIEW

Conspicuous absences

The Absent Christ: An Anabaptist Theology of the Empty Tomb.

Justin Heinzekehr. Vol. 12 of the C. Henry Smith Series, Cascadia Publishing House, 2019, 160 pages.

Reviewed by Maxwell Kennel

SPECIAL TO CANADIAN MENNONITE

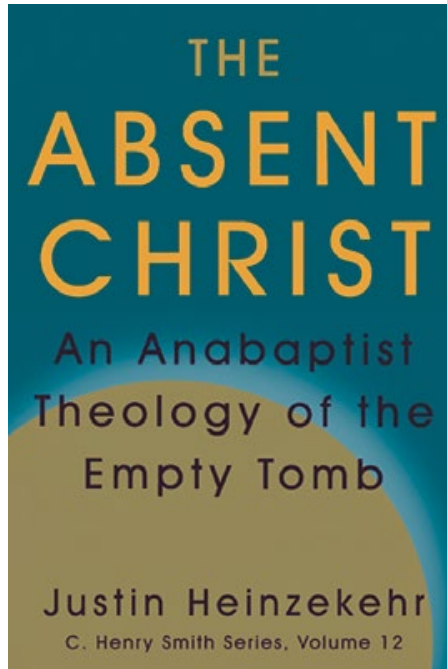
T*he Absent Christ* is a clearly written and compelling exploration of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology that engages with both historical Anabaptist sources and contemporary political concerns, in order to advance a constructive argument centred on the figure of the empty tomb.

Accessible to a wide readership without compromising its complexity, *The Absent Christ* argues for a distinctive way of theologizing within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition that prefers the creative openness of absence to the confident assertion of presence. Like the medieval mystics, Heinzekehr recognizes that an image like the empty tomb opens up more possibilities for ethical and faithful living than the presence of an authoritative doctrine that demands obedience and submission.

The first three chapters develop this framework in which an image from the gospels is brought into conversation with contemporary philosophers and theologians, and the fourth chapter consolidates the author's unique paradigm by bringing Mennonite thinking into contact with the study of metaphysics (which asks questions about ultimate reality, meaning and the human place in the cosmos).

Here the figure of the absent Christ is not invoked pessimistically with images of abandonment, but instead it is interpreted in continuity with the peaceful, non-possessive and uncoercive character of Jesus. Rather than remaining present in order to guarantee and ensure a singular vision for his followers, Christ's absence becomes a vehicle for understanding salvation and Christian life in communal and relational terms.

Instead of presenting an abstract and



universal metaphysics, Heinzekehr sees in the empty tomb the possibility of a “micro-metaphysics” that attends to the outliers and outsiders who are ignored

by systematic thinking and confidence in the unity of the church. He writes that “the problem is that theology must always begin without Jesus,” emphasizing that “there is no uncontroversial portrait of Jesus.”

Rather than simple confidence in our ability to capture and preserve the integrity of the “real” Jesus, Heinzekehr

calls his readers to honesty about the simple fact that no uniform agreement about Jesus is possible, and neither is it desirable. Guided by Anabaptist-Mennonite values, like the rejection of coercive attempts to unify diverse people, Heinzekehr critiques nationalism, martyr narratives and the John Howard Yoder legacy, all in order to open the discourse on Mennonite thinking to the wide world outside its bounds.

The latter chapters apply Heinzekehr's unique perspective to political, ecological and pacifist questions, taking his metaphysics and showing how it can have real consequences for those who might adopt it.

Overall, Heinzekehr's work is oriented around the notion that difference—whether it is found in different people or perspectives—is not automatically dangerous or threatening. Rather than anxiously policing the boundaries of denominations or academic disciplines, his work is inspiring in its ability to

[T]he figure of the absent Christ is not invoked pessimistically with images of abandonment, but instead it is interpreted in continuity with the peaceful, non-possessive and uncoercive character of Jesus.

positively critique the distortions that can result from our desires for safety, security and certainty. ❧

Maxwell Kennel is a doctoral candidate in the Religious Studies Department at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont. His dissertation is on violence, Mennonites and metaphysics.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

BOOK REVIEW

Intriguing novel explores family trauma

All That Belongs.

Dora Dueck. Turnstone Press, 2019, 333 pages.

Reviewed by Tobi Thiessen

PUBLISHER

Unsettled with her status as a newly retired person, an archivist uses her skills to look into the difficult parts of her own family history. Along the way, she uncovers a shocking event that explains the intergenerational trauma in the family. The experience helps her learn to accept herself and love others more unconditionally. This is the premise of Dora Dueck's latest novel, *All That Belongs*.

The book is aptly titled. Throughout, the author artfully weaves past and present as the archivist struggles to reconcile her memories against her current life and the historical record that her research uncovers. Cover art by Agatha Fast shows a woman with eyes closed and a head filled with family photos.

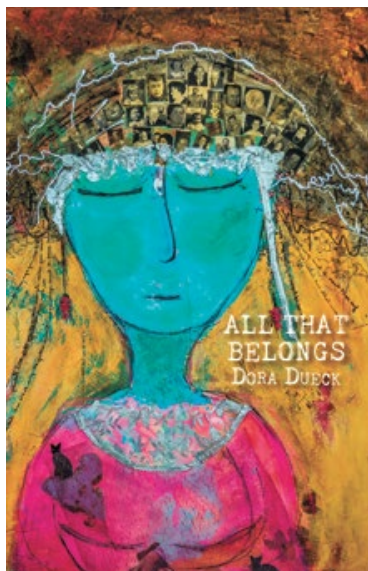
All That Belongs is a compelling read. Lead character Catherine Riediger calls her research project “the year of my preoccupation with the dead” to look at the pasts of her brother and uncle, but she ends up realizing that the project is really a private journey towards self-acceptance:

“Not Dad. As far as I was concerned, he rested in peace. And Mom—well she was still alive. . . . But my uncle was past, a man I'd been ashamed of, a man I wished to ignore.

“And my brother was past as well, insufficiently grieved. . . .

“I looked back at them, and I looked at myself looking or not looking. I suppose, in truth, I was mainly looking at myself. I was navigating a new stage of life, and it seemed imperative to settle the sway of where I'd travelled before.”

Catherine's life follows something of



Dueck's own path: She grew up in Alberta, went to Bible college in Winnipeg, married and stayed there for her career. Many readers will relate. There's retirement that includes volunteering at the thrift store and visiting her mother in long-term care. There are recollections of growing up in a rural community, in youth group and in worship services.

The story is rooted in the Russian Mennonite experience in Canada in the 20th century but it doesn't spend time explaining it. It is simply part of Catherine's existence growing up in the 1960s, the child of immigrants in an era of social upheaval.

The plot drips out teasers about what happened to brother Peter, while giving anecdotes about the eccentric Uncle Gerhard. Tension mounts slowly as the reader wonders what happened with these two men. The plot twist towards the end caught me completely by surprise.

All That Belongs is a tale well told. In

reading it, you might wonder about some of the stories in your own family history and be inspired to undertake research of your own. I recommend it.

Dueck has won numerous awards for previous works of fiction. In 2010, she won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award for her novel *This Hidden Thing*. In 2012, her collection *What You Get at Home* won the High Plains Award for short fiction. And, in 2014, her novella *Mask* was the winning entry in the Malahat Review novella contest. ☘

Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth allows young people (grades 10 to 12) to engage their faith questions, develop their passion for ministry and test their leadership gifts.

The program includes:

- 16-day group experience in Elkhart, Indiana, in July
- 100-hour congregational experience with a mentoring pastor

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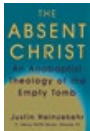
FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

PHOTO: FLICKR.COM/ROMANBOED



Spring 2020 List of Books & Resources

Theology, Spirituality



The Absent Christ: An Anabaptist Theology of the Empty Tomb. Justin Heinzekehr. Vol. 12 of the C. Henry Smith Series, Cascadia Publishing House, 2019, 160 pages.

This book explores Anabaptist theology and its relationship with postmodern philosophy and contemporary understandings of class, gender and racial power. How do we understand the presence of God in our lives today in light of the empty tomb? Heinzekehr teaches Bible and religion at Goshen (Ind.) College.



Do Christians, Muslims and Jews Worship the Same God? Four Views. Ronnie P. Campbell and Christopher Gnanakan, eds. Zondervan Academic, 2019, 240 pages.

David W. Shenk is among the theologians contributing to this collection of essays that explore the question of whether the God of Christianity, Judaism and Islam is one and the same. Shenk does not address the question directly but reflects on how Christians can minister to Muslims while respecting differences.



Recapturing an Enchanted World: Ritual and Sacrament in the Free Church Tradition. John D. Rempel. InterVarsity Press, 2020, 240 pages.

Rempel examines the historic role of ritual and sacraments, most of which

were discarded by the Anabaptists and others in the Free Church tradition. He suggests that careful use of the sacraments is important to enhance faith and worship.



Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method. Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens and Myron A. Penner, eds. Bloomsbury Press, 2020.

Responding to the Bender-Yoder school of thought, these academic essays continue to explore the question of Anabaptist identity. Among the contributors are several Canadians, including Karl Koop, Carol Penner, Stephanie Chandler Burns, Melanie Kampen, Jeremy Bergen and Paul Doerksen.



'Seditions, Confusion and Tumult': Why Reformation Europe Thought Anabaptism Would Destroy Society. Layton Boyd Friesen. Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 2020, 165 pages.

Asking why the Anabaptists of the 16th century were so vilified and persecuted, Friesen examines the social, political, economic and religious contexts of the time. The introduction is by John D. Roth. A Kindle version is available from Amazon, or contact the Evangelical Mennonite Conference at 440 Main Street, Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5.



Speak Your Peace: What the Bible Says About Loving Our Enemies. Ronald J. Sider. Herald Press, 2020, 200 pages.

Sider explores what the Bible says about loving enemies and nonviolence. He goes into some depth in examining such things as the question of violence in the Old Testament, just-war theories, and criticisms of pacifism. The 14 chapters each end with questions for reflection and discussion.



Speaking of God: An Essential Guide to Christian Thought. Anthony G. Siegrist. Herald Press, 2019, 247 pages.

Written by the pastor of Ottawa Mennonite Church, this book is an overview of how the Christian church has explained humanity's relationship to God over the years. Siegrist hopes it will increase readers' biblical and theological literacy. Common theological terms are in bold type and explained in simple language.



What is the Bible and How Do We Understand It? Dennis R. Edwards. Herald Press, 2019, 96 pages.

This little book provides concise and accessible responses to questions about the purpose of the Bible, how it was created and how we should interpret it. It is part of a new Herald Press series called The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith.



Why Did Jesus Die and What Difference Does It Make? Michele Hershberger. Herald Press, 2019, 96 pages.

Using uncomplicated language, Hershberger explores the meaning of Christ's Atonement. She points to various theories and concludes that his Atonement is ultimately a mystery, but that our relationship to God is most important. This is part of The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith series.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

History



Advocating for Peace: Stories from the Ottawa Office of Mennonite Central Committee, 1975-2008. William Janzen. Pandora Press, 2019, 170 pages.

Bill Janzen was the first director of the MCC Ottawa Office, where he interpreted government policy for the constituency and advocated for MCC's international programs. He reflects on his many experiences, not only influencing Canadian foreign aid and refugee policies, but in the many other ways that he negotiated between Mennonites and the government. Available from CommonWord.



Circling the Globe: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Doris Penner. Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 2020, 255 pages.

After a brief look at the beginning of the Christian church and the wider Anabaptist movement, Penner explains how the *Kleine Gemeinde* broke away from the larger Mennonite church in Russia in 1812. The church moved to Canada in the 1870s and later changed its name to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.



Dad, God and Me: Remembering a Mennonite Pastor and His Wayward Son. Ralph Friesen. Privately published with Friesen Press, 2019, 281 pages.

This book is part memoir and part biography. It follows the life of Reverend Peter D. Friesen, pastor of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Steinbach, Man., with personal reflections by his youngest son. It also provides some history of Steinbach and the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.



Yoder School: A Memoir. Phyllis Miller Swartz. Cascadia Publishing House, Dreamseeker series, 2019, 220 pages.

The author reflects on her life as an Amish-Mennonite growing up in the 1960s and 70s in Maryland and Michigan. She spent a year at Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite High School. After marrying young, it was a struggle to finally achieve her goal of becoming a teacher.

Other books



La Biblia Como Narrativa. Marion G. Bontrager, Michele Hershberger and John E. Sharp. Translated by Marvin Lorenzana. Workplay Publishing and Hesston (Kan.) College, 2019, 380 pages.

This is a Spanish translation of *The Bible as Story: An Introduction to Biblical Literature*, the textbook for the biblical literature course at Hesston College.



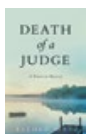
Building a Better World in Your Backyard: Instead of Being Angry at Bad Guys. Paul Wheaton and Shawn Klassen-Koop. Privately published, 2019, 176 pages.

Paul Wheaton of Montana has been teaching and writing about good environmental stewardship for years. This book is a joint project with Shawn Klassen-Koop that brings together many practical ideas for individuals to reduce their global footprint.



Collateral Damage: Changing the Conversation about Firearms and Faith. James E. Atwood. Herald Press, 2019, 224 pages.

Atwood, a retired Presbyterian pastor, describes gun culture in America, how it developed and its devastating effects. He calls it "gundamentalism." He calls for people of faith to work for change and provides a list of resource organizations.



Death of a Judge: A Pineview Mystery. Esther Matz. Privately published with Friesen Press, 2019, 154 pages.

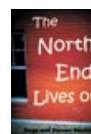
This novel, telling the story

of a murder investigation, is set in a small town in southern Manitoba. The author is from Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.



A Grandmother Named Love. A.S. Compton. Inanna Publications, 2029, 246 pages.

As a young adult, Compton spent several months in Botswana, working with a local church program. She used this experience to give context for her novel, set in an African village, that tells the story of a grandmother who becomes the primary caregiver for several children.



The North End Lives On. Hugo and Doreen Neufeld. Self-published with Millrise Publishing, 2019, 254 pages.

Like their previous book, *The North End Lives* (2006), this is a collection of stories about their years working at the Welcome Inn Community Centre situated in a less-affluent part of Hamilton, Ont. The Neufelds were co-directors for 18 years. Copies of the book are available at hugoanddoreen.com.



Queering Mennonite Literature: Archives, Activism and the Search for Community. Daniel Shank Cruz. Penn State University Press, 2019, 184 pages.

Cruz, who is associate professor of English at Utica College in New York, analyzes queer Mennonite creative writing. He defines "Mennonite" quite broadly and argues that there is an intersection between queer and Mennonite.

Resources

Abuseresponseandprevention.ca.

This website, operated by Mennonite Central Committee in Canada, provides online resources for individuals and churches. It offers definitions and guidelines for various types of abuse.

FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES



For the Sake of a Child: Love, Safety and Abuse in Our Plain Communities. Allen Hoover and Jeanette Harder. Ridgeway Publishing, 2019.

This book, intended for Amish and Old Order Mennonite parents in plain communities, teaches positive parenting skills and how to keep children safe by recognizing abuse. Hoover is a member of the horse-and-buggy Mennonites and Harder is co-founder of the Dove's Nest.



Great Big Beautiful World: 2020 Shine Curriculum VBS. MennoMedia.

This five-day Vacation Bible School curriculum provides resources for worship, drama, Bible study, nature-themed art projects, active games and science explorations. It is designed for Kindergarten to Grade 5, with separate resources for younger children. It teaches that God deeply loves all creation and challenges children to care for the Earth.



Talking About Sex: Sexuality and Biblical Law with Topical Concordance. Rose E. Graber. Privately published with Friesen Press, 2019, 105 pages.

This book is designed for a congregational Bible study on biblical law and sexuality. Each of the 13 chapters has information and discussion questions. In addition, it includes a detailed list of all biblical texts referring to sexuality. It is available in print or as an ebook through Friesen Press or other online bookstores.



Volendam: A Refugee Story. A feature documentary written and directed by Andrew Wall. Released January 2020; DVD and Blu-ray versions to be available later this year.

This documentary tells the story of 2,000 Mennonite refugees who had fled from Soviet Russia during the Second World War and were desperate to avoid being forcibly returned when the war

was over. Their escape to freedom via the ship Volendam was somewhat miraculous. The film won Best Feature Documentary at the Winnipeg Real to Reel Film Festival in February 2020. ☘

—**COMPILED BY BARB DRAPER,**
BOOKS & RESOURCES EDITOR

Many of the featured titles on the book list are available for purchase or to borrow from CommonWord Book Store and Resource Centre in Winnipeg. For more information, visit commonword.ca or call 204-594-0527 or toll-free 1-877-846-1593.

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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

Classics of the Radical Reformation series relaunched

By Barb Draper
Books & Resources Editor

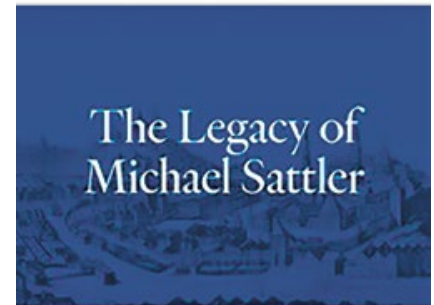
Over the past 50 years, the Institute for Mennonite Studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., has published a series of books making primary works of the Radical Reformation available in English.

Herald Press published the first nine volumes between 1973 and 1999, including translations of writings by Anabaptists

such as Conrad Grebel, Michael Sattler, Pilgram Marpeck, Balthasar Hubmaier, Dirk Philips and others.

Between 2001 and 2017, Pandora Press published more volumes in the series, providing English-speaking scholars with access to 16th-century writers.

Because many of the volumes are no
(Continued on page 30)



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FOCUS ON BOOKS & RESOURCES

**ONLINE NOW!**at canadianmennonite.org**Making sense of God's story**

A look at Rosthern Junior College's annual Deeper Life Days, held March 5-6.

canadianmennonite.org/lifedays**Watch: Anabaptists worldwide respond to COVID-19**

Mennonite World Conference is exploring how Anabaptists from around the globe are experiencing the pandemic.

canadianmennonite.org/video/covidmwc**Watch: Three songs to bring you solace**

Looking for comfort? Check out three new videos featuring Mennonite musicians.

canadianmennonite.org/video/solace**Four ways MCC is responding to COVID-19**

Mennonite Central Committee "is well positioned to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in the places we work."

canadianmennonite.org/fourways

Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service seeks candidates to be on our board. Rather than engage in a formal nomination process, we're trying to build a pool of potential candidates from Canadian Mennonite churches.

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Skills in journalism, small business or communication technologies, for example, would be particularly valuable to us.

To learn more, please email Art Koop at arturos.treasure@gmail.com or Ken Reddig at kenwr2174@gmail.com.



**CANADIAN
MENNONITE**

(Continued from page 29)

longer in print, the entire series of 13 volumes has recently been republished by Plough, the publishing house of the Bruderhof (bit.ly/rad-ref-classics). The prefaces of the early volumes have been updated. The series titles include:

1. *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*. John H. Yoder, trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by C. Arnold Snyder.
2. *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, trans., eds. The 2019 edition has a new preface by John D. Rempel.
3. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*. Walter Klaassen trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by John D. Roth.
4. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*. Leland Harder trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by Andrea Strübind.
5. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, trans., eds. The 2019 edition has a new preface by Brian Brewer.
6. *The Writings of Dirk Philips, 1504-1568*. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney and Alvin J. Beachy, trans., eds. The 2019 edition has a new preface by Piet Visser.
7. *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris*. Gary K. Waite, trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by the editor.
8. *The Essential Carlstadt*. E. J. Furcha, trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by Amy Nelson Burnett.
9. *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith*. John J. Friesen, trans., ed. The 2019 edition has a new preface by the editor.
10. *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*. C. Arnold Snyder, ed.
11. *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660*. Karl Koop, ed.
12. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*. John D. Rempel, ed.
13. *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists, 1529-1592*. C. Arnold Snyder, ed. ☺

With files from Christina Moss.

Calendar

Please Take Note

In an attempt to keep COVID-9 from spreading, some of these events may have already been postponed or cancelled. To be sure, contact the organizers in advance.

Nationwide

Oct. 22-24: "Table talk: Does the church still have legs?" an MC Canada study conference for the nationwide church's congregations, at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ont. Facilitator: Sara Wenger Shenk, former AMBS president. More information to follow.

Alberta

June 5-7: MC Alberta women's retreat. Theme: "Journey along the path." For more information, visit mcab.ca.

June 6: Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta annual general meeting and spring conference on the theme of "La Crete area and Russian Mennonite history," at the La Crete Heritage Centre; (10 a.m.) meeting followed by light lunch; (1 p.m.) conference featuring Susan Siemens and Colin Neufeldt. For more information, email dmttoews@gmail.com

June 13: Camp Valaqua hike-

a-thon. For more information, call 403-637-2510.

June 14: Camp Valaqua garden party. For more information, call 403-637-2510.

Manitoba

Nov. 6-7: Canadian launch of new "Voices Together" hymnal, at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, from mid-afternoon on Nov. 6 to the evening of Nov. 7, when a community-wide worship fest will be held. Registration will be required. More details to follow.

Ontario

CURRENTLY CLOSED: The Grebel Gallery, Waterloo, presents "The Cultural Life of Drones: KW Drone Dialogues," created by Sara Matthews, which explores the myriad ways drones are embedded in people's everyday lives. For more information, call 519-885-0220 x24204.

CURRENTLY CLOSED: "Growing family: Design and desire in Mennonite genealogy" exhibit showcases family trees, hand-drawn charts and other ways Mennonites have remembered family; at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo. For more information, visit uwaterloo.ca/grebel/growingfamily.

Aug. 1-2: Hunta Mennonite Church 50th anniversary reunion;

(1) speakers and special music; (2) worship service, sharing time and a community picnic beginning. To participate in the special music or sharing, email rita1carney@gmail.com.

Aug. 9-21: Ontario Mennonite Music Camp at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, for youth ages 12 to 16. To register, visit grebel.ca/ommc.

Please send Calendar announcements eight weeks in advance of the event date by email to calendar@canadianmennonite.org. For more Calendar listings online, visit canadianmennonite.org/churchcalendar.



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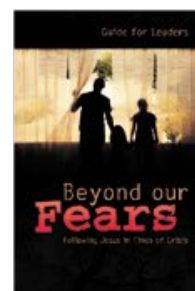
Adult Bible Study lessons



Rejoice! devotionals—includes all daily devotions for the week



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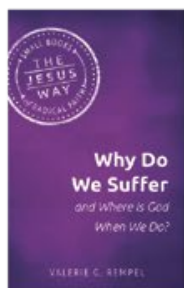


Beyond Our Fears Curriculum

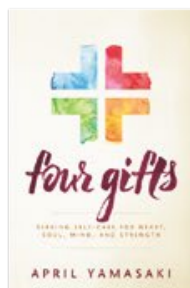
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OUR TOP 5 BOOKS TO HELP YOU THROUGH THIS TIME



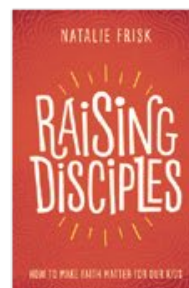
Why Do We Suffer and Where is God When We Do?
The Jesus Way: Small Books of Radical Faith
by Valerie G. Rempel



Four Gifts
Seeking Self-Care for Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength
by April Yamasaki



Signs of Life
Resurrecting Hope out of Ordinary Losses
by Stephanie Lobdell



Raising Disciples
How to Make Faith Matter for Our Kids
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Ancient Prayers for Anxious Christians
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