Introduction

In an interview with Miroslav Volf by the online self-described "visual liturgy library" called *The Work of the People*, Volf aptly observes, "I don't think it's an accident that the idea of the love of the enemy emerged from marginalized groups . . . I think that the position of marginality lets you have an insight into the true character of human relations."[1] Likewise, in Steven Pinker's somewhat controversial book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, the author—a well-known public intellectual and psychology professor at Harvard University—makes the bold claim that one of the reasons why violence has actually declined in recent decades despite perceptions to the contrary is that we have become more sensitive to the plight of the victim and to acts of victimization.[2]

In a similar vein, this book and the chapters in it explore the historical conditions—usually in the form of various experiences of suffering—that cultivated empathetic solidarity with the Other and shaped the various innovative peacebuilding approaches for which Mennonites have become known throughout the world. This is an ambitious project for a number of reasons: to my knowledge, no study has taken on the task of determining the manner in which the Mennonite historical context has influenced their peace work in such a comprehensive manner; this project requires expertise in Anabaptist-Mennonite history, Mennonite-inspired peacebuilding approaches, and their applicability and actualization in different conflict settings around the globe; and the subject matter needs—if at least

1. Miroslav Volf, "Love Your Enemy," *The Work of the People*, http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/love-your-enemy.

2. Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012). Cf. Kevin Miller, "Victimhood: A Double-Edged Sword," *Patheos*, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/hellbound/2014/08/victimhood-a-double-edged-sword/. For examples of the impact of victimization on the peace thought and behavior of early sixteenth-century Anabaptists, see Klager, "From Victimization," 119–132.

a movement toward objectivity is desired—the voices of both scholars and practitioners, analysts and field workers, Mennonites and non-Mennonites, "insiders" and "outsiders," women and men. As such, I determined in the early stages of this project that no single author could adequately tackle such a formidable challenge with the requisite sophistication, precision, and nuance. Therefore, I have enlisted an eclectic mix of authors who together reflect the above diversity with the intent to ensure the highest quality of all sections and chapters of this book equally.

Mennonites have been able to assemble a rich and enduring historical infrastructure that has allowed them to preserve and disseminate their stories, memories, and myths to inspire love of enemies after they themselves were enemies, empathetic solidarity with those who suffer after they themselves had suffered, nonviolent forms of conflict transformation after they themselves experienced violence. The red thread that unites these historical conditions, the resulting preservational infrastructure, and the enduring means of inspiration and education is empathetic solidarity: We know how it feels to be the targets of violence and injustice, so we will help anyone who now faces these same threats, but through nonviolence and the pursuit of justice—that is, a 'just peace' that avoids making *anyone* a target of violence or viewing anyone as an enemy.

So, what is the main objective of this volume? Very simply, to show, through the lens of a particular ethno-religious group, how a historical infrastructure that preserves and disseminates narratives, stories, memories, and myths of suffering and nonviolence—either through withdrawal early on in their history or positive action and advocacy in recent decades—in the midst of persecution can inspire identity groups, whether ethnic, religious, or otherwise, to act in solidarity with those who suffer in similar ways today and work for peace and justice on their behalf in nonviolent and transformative ways. Far from an uncontested romanticism, the chapters in this book collectively exhibit both the effectiveness and challenges of this Mennonite heritage.

The title of this book is *From Suffering to Solidarity*, but this transition is a complex one. It is not a straight line or an unfiltered cause-and-effect dynamic. The fidelity of Mennonites to the sense of empathetic solidarity with those who suffer today in the same way that they suffered in the past varies. The psychological scars and difficulty translating complicated experiences into new political landscapes loom large. Sometimes a wide-angle lens of more assimilated Mennonites is needed. This is not to say that assimilated Mennonites have a superior outlook than Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the 1870s and the early and mid 20th century. But the combination of a more panoramic perspective and later inspiration—rather than a direct

experience of suffering in the turmoil of the moment—with a growing and sophisticated awareness of today's global challenges has created an effective cocktail for encouraging relief, development, and peacebuilding in many of the world's trouble spots. Even the awakening among new generations of Mennonites that some of their ancestors either knowingly or unwittingly persecuted others (e.g., Jews in Russia—while some Mennonites also assisted Jews during the pogroms—and First Nations peoples in North America) has heightened their sensitivity to this type of discrimination today.

In this sense, the shift from suffering to solidarity doesn't entail the abandonment of suffering and certainly did not for the Mennonites in the history that this volume explores. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. Solidarity with those who suffer implies sharing in their suffering and increasing our own. If anything, the shift is from suffering in the past to the addition of the suffering of others today—this is the essence of solidarity, in peacebuilding, social activism, relief and development, and reconciliation and trauma healing. It is inherently self-sacrificial and self-denying—in the spirit of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist principle of *Gelassenheit* or "yieldedness"—and, for these Mennonites, it demands that we take up our own crosses and traverse the same treacherous path that Jesus first trod: the narrow way. And this way is narrow because it's a path we all want to avoid; it's a difficult path that seems to demand too much of us. In this sense, the suffering of Mennonites compelled them—despite lingering hesitancies—to work for the elimination of this same sensation on behalf of others, even if it meant compounding the sensation personally. This is the transformation of suffering from a debilitating experience to an empowering and mobilizing stimulus. The hope, however, is that this shared sensation of suffering will be temporary—that by knowing "the things that make for peace," we can dry the tears of the Prince of Peace who weeps over Jerusalem by wiping away the tears of the least of these who suffer under systems of oppression today (Luke 19:42; Matt 25:31–46).

With this in mind, the present volume operates under the conviction that Mennonite peace thought and practice did not develop in a vacuum. There were tangible historical events—from the very large, including early Anabaptist persecution and political isolation; the pattern of persecution, migration, and re-settlement; the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War; World War II; and the civil rights movement mainly in the U.S., to the amalgam of a near infinite number of more minor recurring phenomena—that triggered, shaped, and transformed the Mennonite community's peace witness and approaches to peacebuilding. Parallel to these historical events and conditions is a peace theology and commitment to the gospel of peace, nonviolence, and love of enemies—the internalization of a cruciform

Christology—that provided the religious resources for preserving this peace witness (where it still existed) and shaping their approaches to peacebuilding. Historical events and a "lived theology" within periods of intense persecution and hardship helped to inspired contemporaneous Mennonites and new generations of Mennonites to engage in relief, development, and peacebuilding globally. These experiences in turn shaped the unique combination of Mennonite approaches to peacebuilding and underlying attitudes, including a suspicion of governments, grassroots focus on building peace from the ground-up, an equal—even if vexingly nebulous—accent on peace and justice together, the need for access to genuine decision-making that Anabaptists were long denied, relationship- and trust-building, the advantage of building one's credibility in a foreign conflict setting, conflict transformation rather than mere resolution, and a restorative rather than retributive view of justice, among many others that this book explores.

As the authors in this volume will show, however, the connection between historical inspiration and inspired behaviour is complex and far from linear; streamlined myths give way to multi-faceted and heavily layered narratives. But these memories and stories—however redacted for the sake of convenience—have nevertheless made a profound impact on Mennonite peacebuilding sensibilities. This book is therefore primarily about the role of history; Mennonites' collective synthesis of historical data; the inspiration of history, narratives, stories, memories, and myths; history that galvanizes peacemaking responses by solicitous observers and that animates the behavior of actors within a violent conflict; and historically conditioned memories that inspire empathetic solidarity with those whose historically conditioned memories drive their quest for peace and justice amidst violent conflicts today. History, therefore, has a dual function: it inspires the peacebuilders and reminds the sufferers, it is the content of "remembering what it was like" for peacebuilders and the content of "remembering what we lost" for victims.

So, what do we hope to accomplish with this volume? Primarily, to inspire any other groups—ethnic, religious, etc.—that, like Mennonites, have faced persecution, violence, and injustice to harness this experience for encouraging empathetic solidarity with others who face similar threats. This is, at its core, about thrusting a stick in the spokes of the cycle of violence. As Mennonites generally did not retaliate when confronting violence and injustice (though exceptions certain did exist), this books seeks to answer why—from a historical perspective—this was the case and, at least more implicitly, what other groups can do to encourage the same response—i.e., the refusal to fuel, perpetuate, or laud the cycle of violence and its benefactors. All of this requires the preservation of narratives, stories, memories, and

myths; the mechanisms for their dissemination including storytelling, role-playing, and myth-building; and the infrastructure to support these objects of preservation and forms of dissemination. This is also the recommendation of the present volume for other groups as much as it is an encouragement to the Mennonite community to continue and enhance their existing historical infrastructure. These are therefore the things I want my readers to think about as they read through this volume. Ultimately, the authors of this volume hope to inspire influential leaders among other groups who have faced violence and injustice to ask, How can we also preserve and disseminate our stories, memories, and myths in ways that will encourage non-participation in the ongoing cycle of violence and instead acting in peaceful ways to resolve conflicts and cultivate reconciliation? And, related, how can we harness—where applicable—religious resources as a way to catalyze and shape nonviolent forms of conflict transformation and restorative forms of justice? These are two areas that Mennonites have found some success—even if uneven in places—that can inspire other groups around the world to do the same.

As the reader may already notice, this book is for both Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike, though perhaps for different purposes. There is much that is instructive for Mennonites and the way in which they might implement their historically conditioned peacebuilding approaches. At the same time, the authors of this volume do not shy away from both successes *and* failures in the Mennonite community to live up to their own ideals, which can be instructive also for non-Mennonites. The diversity of authorship and anticipated audiences of this book is reflected in other ways too. The various chapters in this book purposefully present an uneven spectrum of scholarly rigor; some contain copious amounts of footnotes and academic paraphernalia, while others are equally as valuable firsthand accounts, analyses, and recommendations. Both approaches dispense invaluable wisdom equally.

For my part, I am an academic on the research and analysis end of peacebuilding and a non-Mennonite (ethnically and religiously); as an Eastern Orthodox Christian, I nevertheless benefit from a conspicuous Anabaptist-Mennonite residue happily left over from when I used to attend a Mennonite church and completed my undergraduate studies at a Mennonite college. I also earned a PhD in Ecclesiastical History from the University of Glasgow with a focus on sixteenth-century Anabaptist origins and have been influenced by neo-Anabaptist impulses since my early years in college. As well, I maintain strong ties to the wider and local Mennonite community as an observer and encourager, teaching Mennonite Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley and carrying out research in partnership

with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Egypt on interreligious peacebuilding between Coptic Christians and Muslims. My wife, however, was born and raised in a thoroughly ethnic and religious Mennonite family and sat at the feet of her maternal grandmother to listen to and internalize her traumatic experiences of immigrating from the Chortitza Colony in the Great Trek to Germany and finally (for her) to Canada. This has inspired my wife's own nonviolent stance, objection to war, advocacy for peaceful resolutions to conflict, simple living as non-participation in the systemic violence of wealth, and support of MCC. So, my perspective is as both an "insider" and "outsider." Aside from the macro-historical continuity, these meaningful personal encounters—especially when taken collectively—are the subject of this book as well. Given the various Anabaptist-Mennonite impulses that have influenced me, my peace studies in the Middle East, and my academic pursuits and family dynamics, I am—in a sense, for better or worse—a living sample and test case of what this book portrays. It is therefore not a stretch to contend that the present volume contains semi-autobiographical elements. I imagine this is the same of all authors in this book, though for different reasons and from unique combinations of personal backgrounds and resulting priorities.

At times, the paradox of Mennonite peace thought—passive-ism vs. pacifism, nonresistance vs. active nonviolence, peace vs. justice, public vs. private—pop up from time-to-time in the various chapters of this book. Mennonites and peace—as this book is unafraid to venture—is a messy marriage that challenges the many trite caricatures and facile romanticism. And although this book accomplishes much, it also asks new questions that are as yet unanswered. One recurring question in many of the chapters—even if only implicitly—is, To what degree was the pioneering work of Mennonites in peace and conflict studies simply an attraction to and commandeering of secular peace movements especially in the 1960s and 70s? Was there something unique about the Mennonite appropriation of these emerging peace impulses? Did Mennonites simply copy or otherwise take advantage of the underpinning intellectual theories and demonstrations of these anti-war movements or were these reinterpreted within a Mennonite historically conditioned framework to give them a unique shape and character? Rather than take a negative (perhaps even humble) view of Mennonite mimesis, did Mennonites and other peace churches instead actively contribute to the emerging peace movements to give it a prominence that it otherwise might not have attained? And what of the *positive* and *transformative* features of peacebuilding—even if we concede that the shift from passive nonresistance to active nonviolence was the product of its time, is their room to demonstrate—and even celebrate—the *pro-peace* theory, methods, initiatives,

and strategic peacebuilding and conflict transformation that transcends the *anti-war*, and therefore predominantly negative, impulses of the 1960s and beyond? This book certainly answers some of these questions by drawing on the historical conditions and experiences that have molded Mennonite intellectual, practical, and psychological sensitivities in the midst of violent conflict from the early sixteenth-century to the present, but there are still many questions—or aspects of questions—that still need to be answered more fully, especially if they are to inform other ethno-religious groups that have experienced persecution, marginalization, and the sensation of being someone else's enemy.

One interesting unintended dynamic of this book is worth noting. Although not a hard-and-fast rule, on the whole, the Mennonite authors in this volume seem to be more self-critical when they consider the Mennonite contributions to peacebuilding than are the non-Mennonite authors. They are more willing to draw attention to the flaws of Mennonite peace and conflict sensitivities and actions; this, I believe, is important, as it is only in the recognition of deficiencies that we can make improvements. Perhaps this is simply a testament to the latent or unacknowledged humility of Mennonites or else the reality that Mennonites definitely do frequently fall short of their own ideals—or perhaps a mix of both. While I am of the latter group—a non-Mennonite who admires and respects the many peacebuilding contributions of Mennonites—I am also not under the delusion that theirs was a self-evident, painless, effortless foray into serious and deeper peacebuilding and conflict transformation practices; there is much to learn from Mennonites, and much that Mennonites still need to learn. However, I also believe that Mennonites could stand to take a few steps back and survey their positive contributions, especially in contrast to the relatively meager or underdeveloped—even antagonistic and undermining—perspectives of other groups. This book, while certainly pointing out room for improvement, celebrates the Mennonite contributions to peacebuilding, even—I must admit—at the reluctance of some authors in this volume. As a non-Mennonite, I admire Mennonite contributions and perspectives and have incorporated them into my own ethical life and vocation. My experience in Egypt with MCC and interviews with directors and participants of MCC's partner organizations in Egypt—all of whom enthusiastically heaped praise on MCC for its innovative peacebuilding perspective, tireless development assistance, and commitment to nonviolence—has also persuaded me that Mennonites have a lot of unique positives in the realm of peace and conflict studies on which to hang their collective hat. Mennonites need to know and own this more, I think. In this sense, I hope that the areas in need of improvement will not drown out any recognition—by Mennonites and

non-Mennonites alike—of the many fine contributions that Mennonites have made over the previous decades and centuries and continue to make today.

Along these lines, within the many attempts to make connections between the Mennonite past and the present in service of the future, the authors in this volume have also provided innovative insights into new horizons in peace and conflict studies. While this book has a specific focus and purpose, it is also an outlet for these experts in their fields to introduce new peacebuilding theories, strategic considerations, practices, and initiatives within the parameters of the book's mandate. Part 1 of this book is a chronological exploration, from the sixteenth-century Anabaptist origins to the present, of the historical seeds of contemporary contributions to conflict transformation by Mennonite peacebuilding scholars and practitioners. Each chapter picks up on various common thematic threads that run throughout the nearly five hundred-year Mennonite history and give attention to unique components in each era and geographical location. Part 2 connects the past to the present within the exclusive sphere of Mennonite peacebuilding and conflict transformation. By analyzing the influence of the historical seeds of Mennonite peacebuilding emphases, theory, methods, and strategies from the previous section (Part 1), each chapter demonstrates how this Mennonite heritage and its historical development has informed and inspired Mennonite peacebuilding today through devices such as memory, inter-generational storytelling, myth-building and -preservation, and the location of oneself in the grander Mennonite narrative. This section is concerned most with the Mennonite third-party conciliator, but also acts as a resource for subsequent application by either Mennonites or non-Mennonites working with other ethnic and/or religious groups. And, finally, Part 3 gives the opportunity for conflict analysts and peacebuilders to *adapt* and *apply* the historical components, experiences, memories, stories, and myths that have preserved and informed Mennonite peacebuilding sensitivities, theories, and methods for use by either Mennonites or non-Mennonites for the benefit of *other* ethnic and/or religious communities. Contributors to this section use their own particular paradigms for drawing historical components, stories, memories, and myths from other religious or ethnic communities that are similar to—and may therefore be just as efficacious as—those of Mennonites, and perhaps determine how to adapt and apply them to a particular interethnic or interreligious conflict.

This three-part arrangement reflects the aforementioned paradigm that informed the title of this volume: from group suffering to internal reflection and refinement of responses to outward-looking empathetic solidarity and nonviolent conflict transformation. The transmission of various

narratives from generation-to-generation and the invitation to new generations to also live in these narratives today, the deep historical consciousness and infrastructure that supports its preservation, and the internalization of the stories and myths of this persecution and marginalization is a combination that separates the Mennonite community from many other ethno-religious groups; determining how to adapt these lessons for other ethnic and religious groups in meaningful, profound, and permanent ways is the responsibility of peacebuilding scholars and practitioners. This book is an invitation to begin the conversation.

The iconic copper etching of Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer by Jan Luyken from *The Martyrs' Mirror* appears on the front of this book. Admittedly, I wanted to find a different image—one that conveyed the same dynamic but perhaps within the last century, or from the Soviet experience, or the growing Mennonite church in developing, conflict-ridden countries around the world—as this etching has, in my opinion, been overused to the point of losing its jolting cognitive dissonance and becoming a trite commentary on the love of enemies. But when it finally came down to it, this remains perhaps the single best encapsulation of the dynamic between the sensation of being *someone else's* enemy while still loving *one's own* enemies, the shift—captured in a single instant—from suffering to solidarity. This image, therefore, best captures the Mennonite experience outlined in this book.

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