The Gospel of All Creatures: An Anabaptist Natural Theology for Mennonite Political Theology

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Several contemporary Mennonite affiliated theologians have found insight in the early Anabaptist idea of the "Gospel of All Creatures." For example, in his tribute to Werner Packull, A. James Reimer considers Pilgram Marpeck's notion of the Gospel of All Creatures to be a "uniquely Christian natural theology" that challenges the idea that natural law is a strictly Constantinian concept.[1] Lauding Marpeck's balance of ecclesiology and ethics, Reimer only draws preliminary conclusions from this connection rather than fully employing it in service of his rehabilitation of law and civil institutions for Mennonite political theology. Another example of the positive use of this concept is found in the work of 'baptist' theologian James William McClendon Jr. In the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, in the context of his work on creation as travail and struggle, McClendon considers the Gospel of All Creatures to refer not only to human beings, "but [to] all creatures, indeed all creation."[2] McClendon considers Hans Hut's Gospel of All Creatures to be an exceptional and instructional concept precisely because it gives attention to animal suffering. Here the suffering of domestic creatures is analogous to the suffering of Christ on the Cross, and so too is the suffering of regenerate human beings who take up their own crosses and embody the gospel

of suffering. The suffering of animals, the suffering of believers, and the suffering of Christ on the cross are each co-constitutive of the Gospel of All Creatures, and McClendon points out that some particular expressions of the Gospel of All Creatures went further than merely linking together guilt and suffering, for "Hut related suffering, instead, to ongoing creation: to exist is to suffer."[3]

Like Reimer, McClendon puts this Anabaptist idea to use, but does so only briefly before moving on to other matters. More directly concerned with the social potential of the Gospel of All Creatures, Trevor Bechtel explores the concept in his essay "The Gift of Creation and Interpretation."[4] At the conclusion of his essay, Bechtel turns to Marpeck's Gospel of All Creatures, considering it to be a "resource for reflecting on God's self-disclosure in the world" that itself is both scriptural and natural.[5] Exploring the origins of the idea in German mysticism and the work of Müntzer, Bechtel notes the tension between Müntzer's use of 'order' and Hut's use of 'parable' as primary descriptors of the Gospel of All Creatures.[6] Bechtel argues that "the Gospel of All Creatures contains both the egalitarianism and anticlericalism which are characteristic of Anabaptism" and he distinguishes this strain from the apocalyptic violence of Thomas Müntzer in which "the life of the slaughtered animal is considered normative."[7] For Bechtel, the Gospel of All Creatures provides a material counterpoint to the trappings of Spiritualism, allowing the Anabaptists to "create a world in which the natural, created world was viewed positively, one in which God preaches to all through even the simplest creature."[8]

The Gospel of All Creatures

I suggest that the Anabaptist idea of the Gospel of All Creatures is significant not only because it may be evidence that mystically oriented Anabaptists had a version of what is now called natural theology, and not only because the theologians mentioned above see potential in it, but more importantly because it may offer a corrective for some metaphysical and political problems that have arisen from the strong church-world dualism characteristic of twenty-first century Mennonite theology. Below I focus on a tract by Hans Hut, called "On the Mystery of Baptism," with the intent of describing the basic contours of the Gospel of All Creatures as an historical Anabaptist challenge to contemporary Mennonite thinking about the boundaries between the church and the world.[9] Following an account of Hut's Gospel of All Creatures I then con-

clude by making suggestions about its significance for contemporary Mennonite thinking, focusing on how its complex affirmation of the natural or created world may push Mennonites toward deeper secular, philosophical, and political engagements.

Greatly influenced by Thomas Müntzer's revolutionary and apocalyptic mysticism, the bookseller Hans Hut was baptized in Augsburg by Hans Denck in 1526 and became an important figure in the South German Anabaptist movement. Further biographical details can be found in the profile on Hut by Gottfried Seebaß in the collection *Profiles of the Radical Reformers*,[10] and in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article by Johann Loserth, Robert Friedmann, and Werner Packull.[11] Hut's tract "On the Mystery of Baptism" began as an anonymous manuscript circulated in the years leading up to his arrest in 1527. The influence of Muntzer on the writing of this tract is considerable, and it is examined at length in Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe. Werke, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut*.[12] In the tract (circa 1527), Hut argues that the key category of the Christian life is the Gospel of All Creatures [*das Evangelium aller Kreaturen*] – an idea that also appears in abbreviated form in Pilgram Marpeck's "A Clear Refutation," more extensively in Marpeck's letter "Judgment and Decision" (and also in the work of Hans Schlaffer).[13] Hut's writing on baptism begins with an apocalyptic introduction that proclaims that the last days are at hand, followed by a detailed exposition on the meaning of baptism for the believer. In a fashion typical of early Anabaptist spirituality, Hut begins by affirming the beginning of divine wisdom as the fear of God.[14] After establishing this point of departure, Hut attacks the perversions of the scholars and their seduction of the poor common people, for "[t]hey do not look out for your good but only for their own bellies."[15] Resonating with Müntzer's anticlericalism, Hut's holy anger is directed against those who distort "the order of divine mystery [*ordnung götlicher gheimnus*]."[16] Condemning the papacy, Hut's anti-clericalism is matched by his conviction that baptism is the beginning of the Christian life, and most importantly that this beginning avoids the arbitrariness of human will because Christ commanded it and placed it at the beginning of the "proper order [*recht ordnung*]" of things.[17]

The concept of the Gospel of All Creatures appears to be inextricably tied to baptism and the rebirth and regeneration that define discipleship. In its English translation, the ambiguity present in the Gospel of All Creatures hinges on the meaning of the imposed English word 'of,' which may refer to the presence of the gospel *in* all creatures and/or the measure of the gospel proclaimed or declared *by* all creatures. For Hut, the main scriptural

source of this doctrine is Mark 16:15, although he refers to other verses such as Colossians 1:23, which claims that one will be held blameless "if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant." While appealing to Mark 16:15 – which reads "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'" – Hut places the gospel in relation to a natural and yet divinely created order in which lesser creatures are subservient to greater creatures. In this vision the way that the creatures submit themselves to God serves as a model for human submission to God but does not preclude dissenting critique of earthly rulers. One translator writes that "Hut makes clear...that he does not read Mark 16:15 as an injunction to preach the gospel to all creation, but to preach the gospel which is manifest in all creatures,"[18] and the more recent translation by John Rempel also includes an editorial note that retains the genitive 'of.'[19] The distinction between the way in which the gospel is *for* all creatures (directed toward creation), and the way in which the gospel is *in* all creatures (coming from within creation), gives way to an ambiguity that refuses modern categories. When considered in light of Mennonite thinking about the church-world distinction, Hut's interpretation becomes interesting as he moves from understanding the gospel as something that must be preached *to* all creatures, to the idea that the gospel is *already found in* all creatures. Whereas the former construal rests upon a modern subject-object distinction in which the gospel must be brought to the world by believers or located solely in ecclesial life, the latter refuses to make the church-world distinction into an ontological dualism.

In keeping with its indeterminacy and refusal of subject-object dualism, the Gospel of All Creatures is not a singular concept nor an established doctrine, but instead it names a constellation of mystically inflected ideas assembled by Hut and others like Müntzer, Marpeck, and Schlaffer, and gathered from scripture and other influences in German mysticism.[20] Although baptism appears to be the central concept of the tract, the Gospel of All Creatures also holds a major position within the text. The two concepts are not cleanly distinguishable, nor is one privileged over the other. Other concepts also arise and are then set aside. For example, immediately upon introducing the concept, Hut links the imperative of Mark 16:15 to Christ's crucifixion and connects the Christian life with the suffering Christ, writing that

> In the 'gospel of all creatures,' nothing is signified and preached other than Christ the crucified one alone, not only Christ the head, but the whole Christ with all his members. Preaching this Christ is what all creatures teach. The whole Christ must suffer in all members.[21]

The content of the gospel message proclaimed in and by the Gospel of All Creatures is not the good news of prosperity, but the news that suffering is the mortal fate of both Christ and humanity. This suffering is in continuity with the disposition of *Gelassenheit* that was important for many early Anabaptists. The key place of suffering in the Gospel of All Creatures could very easily be ignored if one was looking for evidence of Anabaptist nonviolence, or if one was invested in the idea that the grain of the universe is peace rather than agonism. Instead of peace, however, in the Gospel of All Creatures we find a link between suffering and the *contemptus mundi* (hatred of the world), and a call to voluntary yieldedness (*Gelassenheit*) in the face of inevitable suffering and persecution.

Recent work by Karl Koop describes the environment of German mysticism as involving an 'inward turn' that later influenced the South German Anabaptist figures who set forth the notion of a Gospel of All Creatures.[22] The *devotio moderna* movement, Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and the works of Meister Eckhart each influenced German mysticism, particularly by contributing to a *contemptus mundi* that had little regard for creation. It is strange then, that when these ideas from German mysticism later influenced the South German Anabaptists who developed the Gospel of All Creatures, the *contemptus mundi* of the turn away from the created world was fused with a high regard for creation and nature. Koop points out that the Gospel of All Creatures represents an affirmation of the material and natural world that was exceptional in the Anabaptist tradition, and he notes that it would come second to anthropology and ecclesiology as the tradition continued.[23]

This affirmation of the material and natural world, in tandem with a high view of creation as both a world and an ongoing process, becomes apparent through a close reading of Hut's tract. Gottfried Seebaß, in *Müntzers Erbe*, states that while the Greek and Latin expressions of the Gospel of All Creatures may be in the *subjective genitive* register (indicating possession: that the gospel is possessed by all creatures), Hut's use of the term should be understood as *dative*.[24] Seebaß' reading suggests that 'creatures' is the direct object and 'gospel' is the indirect object, which entails that creatures do more than just possess the gospel (as the genitive denotes). Rather than indicating mere possession, the gospel is

both (1) constitutive of creatures and creation (in their manifestation of the content and form of the gospel), and (2) mediated or communicated by creatures and creation. This dual reading blurs the line between the ways in which the gospel is proclaimed by manifestation in creatures, and the ways in which the gospel is intentionally declared by creatures. Seebaß admits that this dative understanding of the Gospel of All Creatures is uniquely communicable in the German language, stating that "This is the Gospel of all creatures: that which is *creaturely annunciated*. [*Es handelt sich um das Evangelium der Kreaturen also jenes, das die Kreaturen verkündigen*]."[25] This annunciation, being conditioned by the dative case, according to Seebaß, involves a kind of *givenness* that I contend is a positive resource for Mennonite thinking, for it expresses a higher view of not only nature but also what we now might call the secular, philosophical, and political worlds outside of the church.

And so, whereas a first reading of Mark 16:15 may yield an interpretation in which the gospel is given to creation by humanity, Hut's reversal posits the givenness of the gospel in creation and creatures themselves, given in and by both their orientation towards God and their submission to humanity. Although the translation of *das Evangelium aller Kreaturen* is contested, and although some suggest that Hut's version arises from a misreading of the Latin Vulgate,[26] I contend that this 'mis-reading' arises from a no-less-legitimate close reading of the revealed text of Anabaptist experience (persecution, suffering, martyrdom). This creative 'misreading' is one way in which the Gospel of All Creatures is a gospel that exceeds the dead letter of the text and moves in the living spirit, thereby exceeding and challenging contemporary boundaries between church and world (boundaries that should not be projected upon sixteenth century Anabaptists). This characteristic strangeness of the Gospel of All Creatures – both in its concept and because of its historical distance from contemporary observation – makes it an ideal resource for a critique of contemporary Mennonite theology because it refuses to locate the gospel solely in the church rather than in the created, natural, or material worlds.

Below I look more closely at one influential example of a Mennonite theologian who made a hard distinction between the church and the world (Yoder), and one critique of the ontologization of this distinction (Goertz), before moving on to two recent accounts of contemporary Mennonite theology which both call for further attention to worlds outside of the church (Martens and Blough).

Ontologizing the Church-World Distinction

In an early German essay translated in *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, John Howard Yoder first sets out a critique of Kant's categorical imperative that reappears in his subsequent work.[27] This critical reference is telling of Yoder's enduring suspicion of philosophy and his related suspicion of the secular 'world' (or the very idea that there is a singular 'world'). Yoder possessed a very precise understanding of ontology quite early in his career, and the first appearance of the use of the term 'ontological' in his work is in "The Otherness of the Church" (1959) – originally published in *Concern*, and later collected in *The Royal Priesthood*.[28] In this essay Yoder briefly develops a concept of the "ontological dignity" of the world, with the term 'world' being identified with fallen powers and principalities. Amidst his account of the church-world distinction of the early church, Yoder writes:

> It follows from the 'already, but not yet' nature of Christ's lordship over the powers that there is no one tangible, definable, quantity that we can call 'the world.' The *aion houtos* is at the same time chaos and a kingdom. The 'world' of politics, the 'world' of economics, the 'world' of theatre, the 'world' of sports, the under-'world,' and a host of others – each is a demonic blend of order of revolt. The world 'as such' has no intrinsic ontological dignity. It is creaturely order in the state of rebellion; rebellion is, however, for the creature estrangement from what it 'really is;' therefore, we cannot ask what the world 'really is,' somehow 'in itself.'[29]

Yoder rejects all metaphysical claims about the world as such, and he identifies the world as being "a demonic blend of order of revolt" that lacks "intrinsic ontological dignity."[30] Later in the essay Yoder moves from his ostensibly descriptive account of the church-world distinction in the early church toward a normative account of the present state of the church and the world, writing that "the 'world' is neither all nature nor all humanity nor all 'culture'; it is structured unbelief, rebellion taking with it a fragment of what should have been the Order of the Kingdom."[31] With this sweeping claim Yoder rejects the notion that the world outside of the church has ontological dignity, further entrenching a simplistic division between 'belief' and 'unbelief.' On one hand Yoder is helpfully de-singularizing and complicating the concept of the world by suggesting that there is no sense in which there is no such thing as a neutral 'world' that begins with intrinsic dignity. Instead, for Yoder the world is always enacted as either witnessing to the sovereignty of God or to rebellion against God. However, despite this

helpful critique of the idea that there is a neutral default-position called the 'world,' Yoder understands worlds outside of the church to be defined disjunctively by their rebellion against or alienation from God.

In his book *John Howard Yoder: Radikaler Pazifismus im Gespräch* Hans-Jürgen Goertz critiques Yoder's construal of the relationship between the church and the world. Against Yoder's concept of the visible church, Goertz sees a disjunction between the ideal form of the church and its actual historical reality. Goertz's argument is that Yoder "ontologizes" the church in such a way that sets church and world against each other and fully identifies Christian pacifism with the ontological term "the grain of the universe."[32] One key aspect of Goertz's critique of Yoder, expressed in an interview translated in the *Conrad Grebel Review*, is that in Yoder's concept of dialogue, the idea that "skeptics, unbelievers, and atheists can contribute to the knowledge of this truth does not come into play."[33] Goertz's criticism may indeed reflect his own sensitivity to secular experience, given the often liminal place of the social historian in relation to Mennonite identity, ecclesial and otherwise.[34] In the same interview Goertz mentions that Yoder was an important figure for him precisely because of his emphasis on dialogue, while also noting that Yoder "was absolutely not open to real dialogue. He could snub or bypass other people's questions and objections. He seldom gave his interlocutors the feeling that he had changed his views as a result of a dialogue in which they had jointly developed a piece of the truth."[35] This may seem to risk an *ad hominem* argument by attacking the man and not his theology, and in some way, this is indeed the case. For Yoder, as for any Christian ethicist, the link between life and work is not accidental but essential, for what would discipleship be without that continuity? Goertz addresses this question reticently, wanting to reserve some distinction between work and life, but admitting that this distinction is not one Yoder himself affirmed. Goertz further suggests that there may be continuities between Yoder's messianic ethic and his pattern of sexual abuse and implies that there is a connection between his ontologization of the church-world distinction and his abuse of power.[36]

As we know from the work of Rachel Walter-Goossen, Yoder's disregard for others took the form of serial sexual abuse of many women.[37] Yoder's inability to embody the practice of listening to the other or to consider the abusive ways in which he exercised power over others, severely diminishes the value of his theology. He did not conduct his personal life or advance his theological arguments in such a way that took seriously the idea that Christian

pacifism (indeed Christian discipleship) requires ongoing and intentional consideration of the other (friend, neighbor, stranger, enemy, etcetera.) not only as a voice to be accounted for, but a voice that is my vital connection to truth.[38] On the discursive level, the necessity of understanding the other as the bearer of truth does not have integrity if it decides who counts as a potential bearer of that truth before dialogue has begun. Similarly, on the ontological level, a pacifist epistemology requires at least an openness to the possibility that one's understanding of the essence and *telos* of things will be revised following dialogue with others, especially 'secular' and 'worldly' others. For each of these reasons – personal, discursive, ontological – Yoder's disjunctive ontologization of the division between church and world is questionable when held to the standard of pacifism as a condition of right knowing.

Apart from the work of Yoder, recent evaluations of the Mennonite theological project have also placed aspects of the church-world distinction under suspicion. In his essay "How Mennonite Theology Became Superfluous in Three Easy Steps: Bender, Yoder, Weaver," Paul Martens traces a pattern in twentieth-century Mennonite theology that he calls the "distillation trajectory."[39] Martens describes how "the primary *modus operandi* of this minimalist strand is to distill Mennonite theological identity into a group of central and particular markers – usually ethical markers – that make it uniquely or specifically *Mennonite*."[40] In Martens' account the succession of Mennonite theological identity moves through a series of self-critical recapitulations and distillations, beginning with H.S. Bender's historically oriented Anabaptist Vision (discipleship, brotherhood, nonresistance), proceeding to John Howard Yoder's synthesis and extension of Bender in the politics of Jesus (the idea that 'weakness wins,' evident in both Jesus and in the 'grain of the universe'), and finally becoming superfluous in J. Denny Weaver's "demand to rewrite all theology… in the service of nonviolence."[41]

This distillation pattern continues today in works like Stuart Murray's *The Naked Anabaptist* and (I suggest) in Palmer Becker's recent book *Anabaptist Essentials*, which sets forth Jesus, Community, and Reconciliation as the core principles of Anabaptist faith and life.[42] Martens' useful diagnosis of the distillation trajectory suggests that contemporary Mennonite theology is still undergoing several concurrent and overlapping identity crises.[43] His article also presents a self-critical look at the anachronisms of Mennonite theological method, not least of which is the tendency to arrive at distilled conclusions and then forget its history or conditions of possibility. Against this anachronistic tendency, Martens

critically describes Weaver's work: "now that Mennonite theology has finally distilled the determinative principle of nonviolence as the sole seminal aim of its constructive agenda, the textual, theological, and historical ladder that it climbed for the last four centuries can be decisively kicked away."[44]

Another essay that attempts the same sort of birds-eye view of Mennonite theological and historical identity is Neal Blough's "Reflections on the Dialectic Between Separation and Assimilation in Anabaptist History" – originally a response to a colloquium in Bienenberg in 2011.[45] Like Martens, Blough surveys a long history looking for patterns and offering assessments with the benefit of hindsight. Blough first identifies a major tension between separation and assimilation in European Anabaptism, and then teases out the dialectical relationship between the two impulses. On one hand, Blough argues that the desire to be separate from the world, found in the *Absonderung* of the fourth article of the Schleitheim Confession, "was a concrete response to the particular context in which Swiss Anabaptism came into being."[46] But this orientation against the world was eventually fixed in place as an identity marker, becoming entrenched despite the fact that the context of its original development had passed. Blough argues that this entrenchment of the dissenting position became an essential identity marker for some, while for others it was an aspect in need of revision, and this tension continued not just for the Swiss Anabaptists, but was negotiated in various ways from historical Anabaptism through to contemporary Mennonitism.[47] Blough identifies tensions between inclusion and exclusion, concerns about immigration and pluralism, and opportunities in ecumenical dialogue, each as contemporary issues that negotiate the legacies of identity-entrenchment and identity-revision.

As an historian, Blough argues that "to do history well means to first of all understand people and events on their own terms before comparing them with contemporary situations," but at the same time he does not avoid drawing parallels between past and present – the most central one being that the tension between dissenting separation and accommodating assimilation endures as an identity problem for Mennonites.[48] Blough argues that for the Swiss Anabaptists separation meant "the refusal of certain ways of dealing with problems, while at the same time attempting to formulate alternative solutions on the basis of the Gospel and Jesus," and notes that these solutions rejected violence and coercion.[49] However, with the advent of the Enlightenment and Modernity came a new affinity between Anabaptism and secularity: "While Anabaptists considered their critique of a coercive Christendom as fundamen-

tal elements of the Gospel, European societies now proclaim these same elements as 'secular' values."[50] The formerly contextualized separation of the Swiss Anabaptists has long been maintained as an identity marker for Mennonites, but has it become decontextualized? Blough seems to think so. He suggests that creative responses to contextual problems "either froze into 'timeless forms' or gave way to cultural assimilation," leading many European Mennonites to become Pietists or Liberal Protestants, and leading some to embrace nationalism and participation in war.[51] In the context of globalization, multiculturalism, and uneven secularizations, Blough wonders what separation means in the contemporary context, putting a fine point on it by asking: "For what would we risk being deported?"[52] Rejecting the in-group mentalities that permit one group to kill another, and resisting charges of sectarianism against the Mennonite tradition, Blough denounces "political or economic sectarianism" and calls instead for a critical "separation" that prioritizes the restoration of all things and rejects hatred and xenophobia.[53]

Both Martens and Blough enjoin those in Mennonite theological discourse to take history seriously rather than make simple comparisons or distillations, and both call for self-awareness and self-criticism that considers the many contemporary social and political problems that cut across boundaries between church and world. Martens questions whether Mennonite theology has become superfluous in the distillation and re-distillation of essentials, and Blough links history and theology in a way that seeks to be both honest about the differences between the past and present while ultimately employing the concept of separation positively as a kind of 'usable history.' Both essays are critical and cast new light on the Mennonite theological endeavor by taking seriously the eyes and questions of the world, and both seek to turn the eyes of Mennonite theologians and historians inward in self-criticism and outward toward the 'world' – with Martens pointing Mennonite theologians to the world outside of the reduction of Mennonite theology to pacifism, and Blough pointing Mennonite theologians and historians to the world of globalization and multiculturalism in which 'Mennonite' values and 'secular' values overlap.[54]

Against the Grain of the Universe

If we take both Martens and Blough seriously, then we could say that if Mennonite theology has a future then it is one that *distils* its historical and theological identity enough to have an identity

(but not in such a way that forgets its plurality and history) and engages in *separation* from its historical and theological identity enough to be critical of both church and world and the naturalization of their division. One way of engaging in the critical distillations and separations of identity formation and maintenance is by looking to historically Anabaptist ideas for challenge and inspiration. Given the potential that Reimer, McClendon, and Bechtel see in the Gospel of All Creatures, as well as the ways in which the concept complicates distinctions between church and world, it is possible that the Gospel of All Creatures can contribute to this process of critical distillation and separation in such a way that both affirms the ontological dignity of worlds outside of the church, and also opens the way for social and political critique of worlds in and out of the church (recalling both Hut's low view of those who preach for money and his more general *contemptus mundi*). Martens notes that for Yoder the 'weakness wins' principle is not only made normative by Jesus Christ, but it *is* the grain of the universe.[55] But the Gospel of All Creatures goes against the grain of the universe by situating the gospel within all creatures, by critiquing certain configurations of creaturely life, and by understanding creation as agonistic struggle that is not reducible to rebellion against God. Rather than understanding the world as having no intrinsic ontological dignity – whether because there is no singular world, or because all worlds outside of the church are essentially in rebellion against a divine order – the Gospel of All Creatures affirms the dignity of the world by seeing the gospel in it, while also casting judgment on that world through its critique of exploitation.

In the interest of taking Goertz's critique of Yoder seriously and questioning the ossification of the church-world distinction, I suggest that the Gospel of All Creatures serves as an instructive historical Anabaptist resource for contemporary Mennonite political and philosophical theologies.[56] Just as Blough pointed out convergences between the values of Mennonites and secular Europeans, Goertz also blurs Yoder's hard line between church and world in such a way that leaves neither on the high ground, but sees both church and world as dialogue partners with something to offer each other. However, turning to the early Anabaptist natural theology of the Gospel of All Creatures as a model for thinking about the relationship between the church and the world will only be helpful if it resources Anabaptist history in such a way that takes Martens' critique of Weaver seriously (i.e. not kicking away the ladder of history), and in a way that follows Blough's caution that allows historical material to stand on its own before compari-

sons are drawn with the present. The Gospel of All Creatures also offers critical resources that resonate with Blough's twofold emphasis on the critical function of separation and the dangers of assimilation, for it challenges any essential division between church and world while also affirming that division for the purposes of critique in either direction. This early Anabaptist doctrine does not divide church and world into an essentially antagonistic relation, but instead speaks honestly to the antagonisms present in the church and the world (for Hut, suffering and martyrdom), while resisting the assumption that we always know where the dividing line is between church and world.

Much effort has been expended distilling Mennonite theological identity into sets of essentials (as Martens argues), and much energy has been invested in maintaining strict separation from the various worlds outside of the Mennonite ecclesial identity (as Blough points out), but a question that arises from consideration of the Gospel of All Creatures is: do either of these preoccupations take seriously the possibility that Mennonites might have more to learn from other worlds than each other?[57] As such, the Gospel of All Creatures serves as an historical challenge that – although it is separate from contemporary reflection by a great temporal and categorical distance – may provide an alternative, a challenge, a strange encounter, or a new beginning because it refuses modern divisions between church and the world, instead preferring to guard against distortions of the order of divine mystery.

Notes

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1 A. James Reimer, *Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society*, ed. Paul Doerksen (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 117-121.

2 James William McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology II: Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 162.

3 Ibid., 163.

4 Trevor G. H. Bechtel, "The Gift of Creation and Interpretation" in *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective: Essays in Honor of J. Denny Weaver*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver and Gerald Mast (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2008), 345-370.

5 Ibid., 361.

6 Ibid., 362.

[7] Ibid., 363.
[8] Ibid., 366.
[9] Hans Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism" in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 115-136. The German original is found in Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer Bd. XVII. *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer* 1527–1555. *Das „Kunstbuch" des Jörg Probst Rotenfelder, gen. Maler*. Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 464. (Gütersloher: Verlagshaus, 2007), 164-199. Another translation of an earlier version is found in *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 152-171.
[10] Gottfried Seebaß, "Hans Hut. The Suffering Avenger" in *Profiles of the Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Muntzer to Paracelsus*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, trans. Walter Klaassen (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982), 54-61.
[11] Johann Loserth, Robert Friedmann and Werner O. Packull. "Hut, Hans (d. 1527)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1987. Web. 22 May 2014. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hut,_Hans_(d._1527).
[12] See Walter Klaassen, "Hans Hut and Thomas Müntzer," *Baptist Quarterly* 29 (1962): 209-227. and Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe. Werke, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlaghaus, 2002). It is ironic that both Hut's tract and Gottfried Seebaß's monumental study of Hut both circulated as unpublished manuscripts for years before they were formally published and became influential without formal distribution or institutional legitimation.
[13] Collected and translated in *The Writings of Pilgram* Marpeck, trans. and ed. Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978).
[14] See C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 29-33.
[15] Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism," 119/168.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 121/172.
[18] Hans Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism" in *The Radical Reformation,* ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 156 [Translator's note].
[19] Hans Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism," 121-122 [Editorial Note].
[20] See also Gordon Rupp, "Thomas Müntzer, Hans Huth and the 'Gospel of All Creatures'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 43.2 (1961): 492-519; William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 80.
[21] Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism," 122/175.
[22] Karl Koop, "Migrations of Enchantment in the Radical Reformation: The Undoing of a Material and Natural World," in *Radicalizing Reformation: North American Perspectives* (Volume 6). eds. Karen L. Bloomquiest, Craig L. Nessan, and Hans G. Ulrich (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2016), 243-264.
[23] Ibid., 259.
[24] Compare with the editorial note in the English *Kunstbuch* version which retains the genitive (Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism," 121-122).
[25] Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 401.
[26] Neal Blough, *Christ in our Midst: Incarnation, Church and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 30.

See also his *Christologie Anabaptiste: Pilgram Marpeck et l'humanité du Christ* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1984), 48-49.

[27] John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Geddert (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003). See also John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 41; and "The Otherness of the Church," 62-63.

[28] John Howard Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church" in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. J. Michael Cartwright (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998).

[29] Ibid., 56-57.

[30] Ibid., 56.

[31] Ibid., 62.

[32] Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *John Howard Yoder: Radikaler Pazifismus im Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 196-220.

[33] Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Theologian in Contradiction: An Interview with Hans-Jürgen Goertz on John Howard Yoder's Radical Pacifism," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 33.3 (Fall 2015): 381.

[34] See also Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "From the Cloakroom to the Lecture Hall" in *Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*, ed. Harry Loewen (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 106-15.

[35] Goertz, "Theologian in Contradiction," 376.

[36] Goertz, "Theologian in Contradiction," 383.

[37] Rachel Waltner Goossen, "'Defanging the Beast' Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89 (January 2015): 7-80.

[38] This is a claim made by the editors of John Howard Yoder, *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology*. eds. Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 141.

[39] Paul Martens, "How Mennonite Theology Became Superfluous in Three Easy Steps: Bender, Yoder, Weaver" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 33 (2015): 149-166.

[40] Ibid., 150.

[41] Ibid., 156.

[42] Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010); Palmer Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2017).

[43] See the helpful critique of Mennonite distinctiveness and its production of marginalization in J. Alexander Sider, "Self and/as Victim: A Reflection on 'Mennonite Ethics'" *Conrad Grebel Review* 35.1 (Winter 2017), 27. In addition to critiquing the exclusionary function of Mennonite distinctives, Sider also notes that the Gospel of All Creatures is ontologically and hermeneutically significant because it dignifies not just scripture but also experience (33). At the same time Sider acknowledges the Mennonite tendency to confuse victimization with redemptive suffering (34-35).

[44] Martens, "How Mennonite Theology Became Superfluous," 157.

[45] Neal Blough, "Reflections on the Dialectic Between Separation and Assimilation in Anabaptist History" *Mennonitica Helvetica* 34-35 (2011-2012): 211-216.

[46] Ibid., 212.
[47] Ibid., 212-213.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 214.
[50] Ibid., 215.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 216.
[54] For a Mennonite advocate for political and philosophical engagement whose work is receiving renewed attention see J. Lawrence Burkholder. See his *Recollections of a Sectarian Realist: A Mennonite Life in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Myrna Burkholder (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2016). and J. Lawrence Burkholder, *Mennonite Ethics: From Isolation to Engagement*, ed. Lauren Friesen (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2018).
[55] The idea that 'people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe' is found throughout Yoder's work. One place in which Yoder identifies the 'weakness wins' principle and the 'grain of the universe' is in his article "Armaments and Eschatology," a quotation of which begins Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). See also John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1.1 (1988): 43-61.
[56] For more on Mennonite philosophical engagement see my "Mennonite Metaphysics? Exploring the Philosophical Aspects of Mennonite Theology from Pacifist Epistemology to Ontological Peace" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91.3 (July 2017): 403-421.
[57] See J. A. Oosterbaan, "The World and its Wisdom" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (July 1962): 179-188.