

The Complex Legacy of the *Martyrs Mirror* among Mennonites in North America

JOHN D. ROTH*

Abstract: Since its publication more than three centuries ago, the *Martyrs Mirror* has been a steady source of inspiration and renewal among many Anabaptist-Mennonite groups, especially those in the Swiss and South German tradition. The English and German translation of the book continue to find new North American readers, and texts, stories, and images drawn from the *Martyrs Mirror* are deeply embedded within the North American Mennonite imagination. Yet recently, a growing number of critics have challenged the nature of martyr memory, dismissing it as arrogant, naïve, ahistorical, and anachronistic. This essay traces the long and complex reception history of the *Martyrs Mirror* and argues that martyr memory—understood as “right remembering”—is not only appropriate but also vital to the healthy identity of the faithful church.

In 1626, leaders of the Old Frisian Anabaptist community in the Dutch city of Hoorn published a collection of martyr documents called *History of the Pious Witnesses of Jesus Christ*. To the casual reader the book appeared to be simply a lightly-revised reprint of two earlier volumes—the first published in 1615 at the initiative of the Waterlander pastor, Hans de Ries, and the second appearing two years later in a slightly modified form by Peter Jans Twisck, leader of the Old Frisian group.¹ With a few crucial exceptions the book’s content mirrored that of the earlier martyrologies. Yet the preface of the 1626 volume made it clear that the Old Frisian editors understood the publication as playing a key role within a highly polemical context. Only belatedly, the editors lamented, did they discover that Hans de Ries, a Waterlander, had deliberately introduced into his 1615 martyrology “some falsifications

*John D. Roth is a professor of history at Goshen College and director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. A version of this essay was presented at Goshen College and Bluffton University as part of the 2013 C. Henry Smith Peace Lecture.

1. Cf. *Historie der Martelaren ofte waerachtighe Getuygen Jesu Christi die d’Evangelische waerheyt in veelderley tormenten betuygt ende met haer bloet bevesticht hebben sint het Jaer 1524 to desen tyt toe . . .* (Haarlem: Jacob Pauwels Hauwert for Daniel Keyser, 1615); [Pieter Jans Twisck et al.], *Historie der warachtighe getuygen Jesu Christi . . .* (Hoorn: Zacharias Cornelis, 1617); [Hans de Ries, Jacques Outerman, et al.]; [Syvaert Pieters], *Historie van de Vrome Getuygen Iesu Christi . . .* (Hoorn: Isaac Willems for Zacharias Cornelis, 1626). For a systematic comparison of the content of these martyrologies, see Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, *Bibliographie des martyrologes Protestants Néerlandais* (La Haye: Mart. Nijhoff, 1890), 503ff, 513ff, 521.

regarding the article of the incarnation of our dear Lord Jesus Christ"²—a point of deep doctrinal contention between the Old Frisians and the Waterlanders—which had then been unwittingly included in the Old Frisian reprint of 1617. Specifically, the editors noted five instances where de Ries allegedly tampered with the original text. The editorial interventions, the Old Frisians argued, implied that “these witnesses might have had a different foundation . . . than the one they confessed so clearly and openly to their examiners and murderers, and for which they died.”³ In so doing, they insisted, the Waterlanders had falsely appropriated the martyr stories as a weapon in a simmering inter-Anabaptist church debate. Three years later, Hans Alenson, a Waterlander lay preacher, responded heatedly to these accusations, defending de Ries against the charges and pointing out that many of the martyrs in the “corrected” 1626 edition—including several Flemish Mennonites, whom the Old Frisians had banned—held views on the incarnation, the ban, and other matters that were at odds with the Old Frisian confession of faith.⁴

The vigorous debate that unfolded between the Waterlanders and Old Frisians in the early seventeenth century points to the complex, dynamic and contested nature of martyr memory within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. To be sure, Thieleman van Braght’s publication of *The Bloody Theater* in 1660—better known today by the title of the 1685 edition as the *Martyrs Mirror*—would eventually establish a stable canon of Anabaptist martyrs and martyr stories recognized by virtually all Anabaptist groups.⁵ Yet debates over the meaning of the martyr legacy have never disappeared. Early in the nineteenth century, for example, a controversy emerged among Mennonite congregations in the Palatinate over the use of the *Ausbund*, a collection of early Anabaptist hymns dating to 1583 that included a number of martyr ballads. For nearly 250 years the hymn book had been a staple in the Mennonite congregations

2. Cited in Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 242.

3. “Voor-reden,” *Historie van de Vrome Getuygen Iesu Christi*, sig. A2v-A3; see also, Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 242.

4. Alenson, *Tegen-Bericht*, in BRN, 7:156-158. Alenson attributed the editorial changes to sloppy typesetting.

5. Thieleman J. van. Braght *Het Bloedigh Tooneel der Doops-Gesinde, en Wereelose Christenen: Die, om het getuygenisse JESU hares Salighmaeckers, geleden hebben, en gedoodt zijn, van Christi tijdt af, tot dese onse laetste tijden toe : Mitsgaders, Een beschrijvinge des H. Doops, ende andere stucken van den Godsdienst, door alle de selve tijden geoeffent.* ([Dordrecht]: Voor Jacobus Savry, woonende in 't Kasteel van Gendt, 1660); and Thieleman J. van Braght and Jan Luiken, *Het Bloedig Tooneel, of Martelaers Spiegel der Doops-gesinde of Weereelose Christenen: Die, om 't getuygenis van Jesus haren Salighmaker, geleden hebben, ende gedoodt zijn, van Christi tijdt af, tot desen tijdt toe* (Amsterdam: By Hieronymus Sweerts, Jan ten Hoorn, Jan Bouman, en Daniel van den Dalen, In Compagnie, 1685).

of South Germany. The motifs of suffering and persecution comprising about a third of the hymns reminded Mennonites that Christian discipleship could exact a cost, even after the era of martyrdom had passed. In the years following the French Revolution, however, Mennonites in the region had come to enjoy full legal status and were allowed to worship as they pleased. Although traditionalists saw no compelling reason to stop singing the didactic hymns of the *Ausbund*, more progressive Mennonites regarded the dirge-like focus on suffering to be anachronistic, morbid, and out-of-touch with both the political realities of their day and the changing musical tastes of their young people. In the early 1830s the decision by several congregations in the Palatinate to replace the *Ausbund* with a new, more upbeat, collection of hymns sparked a deep division.⁶

Similar tensions regarding the legacy of the Anabaptist martyrs emerged among Mennonites who had emigrated to North America. In the course of the nineteenth century, various Anabaptist-related groups in the United States published no fewer than five different editions of the *Martyrs Mirror*—three in German (1814, 1849, and 1870) and two in English (1837 and 1886). Each edition, however, was aimed at a very specific audience and intended to serve a distinct, sometimes polemical, purpose. Thus, the preface to the 1814 Ehrenfried edition explicitly minimized the theological differences that separated Anabaptists from other Protestant Christians, whereas the 1837 edition—published on behalf of the radically separatist Reformed Mennonites—was clearly designed to establish their pedigree as the true spiritual heirs of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. The 1849 German edition, promoted by the progressive Amishman Shem Zook, included an original title page to Book Two that depicted Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River—an overt rebuttal to the insistence of his more conservative coreligionists who defended baptism in homes (rather than in streams) by appealing to examples from the *Martyrs Mirror* in which Anabaptist martyrs were baptized indoors. Both sides in the debate regarded the *Martyrs Mirror* as an authoritative source, alongside Scripture, for their position.⁷

Thus, a vigorous debate in the opening decade of the twenty-first century among contemporary North American Mennonites about the legacy and meaning of the Anabaptist martyrs is only the latest

6. Cf. John D. Roth, "Context, Conflict and Community: South German Mennonites at the Threshold of Modernity, 1750-1850," in: *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, ed. Gerald and Sue Biesecker-Mast (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2000), 122-146.

7. The basic details regarding the context of these volumes can be traced in the article on "Martyrs' Mirror" in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 3: 527-528 and are treated even more fully in David Luthy, *A History of the Printings of the Martyrs' Mirror: Dutch, German, English, 1660-2012* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 2013).

expression of a long, dynamic, and sometimes contentious tradition. The recent critique of martyr memory leveled by several influential Mennonite writers, scholars, and church leaders has taken a variety of expressions. For some, a focus on the Anabaptist martyrs has promoted a simplistic narrative of victim and oppressor that is out of step with contemporary Mennonite realities in North America. Others have argued that ongoing references to the Anabaptist martyr past fuel ethnic tribalism and religious arrogance among contemporary Mennonites, or that memorializing the martyrs is an obstacle to ecumenical conversations, or that the North American Mennonite emphasis on martyrdom encourages an unhealthy certainty about religious convictions at a time when religious fanaticism is seemingly the source of violence in many parts of the world. For at least some voices in the church, the time has come to put the Anabaptist martyrs to rest.

This essay attempts to place the recent debate over martyr memory within a broader theoretical, historical, and ecclesial context. Clearly the commemoration of those who have suffered and died for their convictions has been contested within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition at least since the seventeenth century. Yet even though recent critics of the *Martyrs Mirror* have raised important concerns, this essay will argue that Mennonites today should nonetheless continue to cultivate a memory of martyrs, especially in light of the rapid growth of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church in settings where persecution is still a lived reality. Rather than repressing martyr memory, the challenge for historians, theologians, and church leaders today is to practice "right remembering." Rightly remembering the stories of those who have witnessed to their faith in the face of adversity can appropriately challenge the Mennonite Church in North America to a deeper understanding of Christian discipleship, to closer relationships with congregations in the global church, and to greater courage in its own public witness.

THE INHERENT COMPLEXITY OF MARTYR MEMORY

On June 10, 2001, authorities in the U. S. executed Timothy McVeigh by lethal injection for his role in the April 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. In the days leading up to his death, however, numerous commentators questioned the wisdom of the sentence, not because they had reservations about the death penalty but out of a concern that McVeigh's supporters would define his death as a "martyrdom."⁸ Only a few months later, Americans were incensed by

8. See, for example, "Attorney says execution may make McVeigh martyr," Seattle Times, May 7, 2001.—<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=2001->

television broadcasts of several fundamentalist Islamic groups who proclaimed that the nineteen men who died carrying out the suicidal attack on the World Trade Center towers in New York City were “martyrs” for their cause. Clearly, the question of how violence, death, and religious convictions are remembered is a complex matter: one group’s criminal or heretic is another group’s martyr.

The complexity of martyr memory has a deep history within the Christian tradition. Since the stoning of Stephen, recorded in Acts 2, the Christian church has always honored those who have suffered or died in the name of Christ. Church fathers like Cyprian and Eusebius recognized the importance of gathering the stories of the apostles and other early Christians who suffered or died as “witnesses” (*martires* / martyrs) to their faith, trusting that these testimonies of faithfulness to Christ would inspire later generations. The template for early Christian martyrdom, of course, was Jesus—who, though unjustly accused, did not resort to violence to defend his cause, but bore his suffering with steadfastness and dignity. Yielding himself fully to God, Jesus forgave his accusers and accepted the humiliation of his crucifixion and death in the knowledge that ultimately the resurrection would triumph over death.

On the surface, the qualifications for Christian martyrdom seem straightforward. Yet as the early Church struggled to define orthodox belief—creating in the process new categories of heresy—definitions of martyrdom became increasingly problematic. What, exactly, did a persecuted Christian need to believe in order to be accounted a martyr? and who had the authority to make such a judgment?

In his confrontation with the Donatists in the early fifth century, Augustine struggled explicitly with these questions. When the Donatists proclaimed as “martyrs” those members who were killed by Constantine for their alleged heresy, Augustine pushed back. It was “not the punishment,” he declared, “but the cause that makes the martyr.”⁹ Augustine’s dictum—that a true martyr is not defined by the fact of death, but rather by death for the right cause—became a standard point of reference for the Catholic Church in later centuries in its denial that dissenters like John Wycliffe, Peter Waldo, or Johannes Hus, who were all executed on the charges of heresy, could rightfully be considered martyrs.

0507&slug=ndig070 (accessed April 24, 2013) or the ABC news story by Bryan Robinson, “Experts: McVeigh Won’t be Militia Martyr,” June 12, 2001.—<http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=93065&page=1#.UXql9rWcddc> (accessed April 24, 2013).

9. Augustine, “Exposition on Psalm 35,” Sec. 24.—<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers-1801035.htm> (accessed April 24, 2013). Augustine was likely drawing here on Eusebius and Cyprian, with a nod to biblical arguments (e.g., I Pet. 5:14-16; 2 Tim. 3:12-13).

As the historian Brad Gregory has shown in his landmark book, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, the problem of definition became even more acute in the sixteenth century as the various religious traditions emerging out of the Reformation began to develop competing martyrologies, often commemorating as heroes individuals whom another tradition had pronounced heretical or seditious. Within competing traditions of memorialization among Protestant, Catholic, and Anabaptist groups the distinction between true and false martyrs became an important means of establishing confessional identity.

If the theological struggle to define authentic martyrs ultimately proved to be intractable, the competing martyrologies in the aftermath of the Reformation also pointed to a second fundamental challenge in the memorialization of martyrs—namely, the difficulty of separating the complex factual details surrounding the event from the more simple, heroic narratives that emerge within specific confessional traditions intended to inspire the faithful. In her thoughtful analysis, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, Elizabeth Castelli distinguishes between “history”—by which she means events that can be substantiated from a variety of contemporary sources—and “memory,” or the way in which a social or religious tradition has memorialized the event. Memory, Castelli insists, “is a social construction.” Through the process of being retold, preserved, and ritualized, collective memories provide “the conceptual and cognitive constraints that render past experience meaningful in and for present contexts.”¹⁰ The memory of martyrdom, she claims, is almost always a “self-authorizing discourse of power,” less concerned with the “truth” than with the formation and preservation of a distinct subculture. Repeated retellings and ritual re-inscriptions fix the narratives, endowing them with a “truth” that is removed from the event’s historical context. At their best, communities recall martyr stories as a means of validating their own cultural identity; at their worst, however, these memories can serve to justify the resentment of one group against another in ways that ultimately fuel escalating cycles of false memories, violence, and retribution.

Castelli helpfully challenges groups to be self-critical about the function of martyr memory as an expression of authority, power, and group identity. Her argument—commonplace for anyone acquainted with postmodern views of narrative and power—serves as an important reminder that collective memory may reveal more about the nature of the group than it does about the reality of historical events. But the

10. Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 12.

argument also risks a reductionist view of human behavior in which the martyrs, along with the groups who remember them, are always acting out of motivations—economic, political, psychological—other than what they themselves claim. As Brad Gregory has argued, this hermeneutic of suspicion “destroys the very possibility of understanding historical difference,” since it imposes on past events modern, a priori assumptions intent on separating the “ideological” from the “authentic.” As Gregory continues, “Actions speak louder than words. And few actions speak more dramatically than a willingness to die for one’s beliefs, or more clearly when combined with a martyr’s prison writings as they anticipated death.”¹¹ Nonetheless, these debates about motivation and meaning—both among the martyrs themselves and the groups who memorialize them—ensure that the legacy of martyrdom will inevitably be contested.

A third complexity arises out of the efforts of formerly antagonistic groups to reconcile with each other. What happens to the memory of martyrs when one group formally apologizes for the injustice or violence committed against another group? How must the memorialization of martyrs change when a group begins to examine self-critically the caricatures embedded in its martyr narratives and seeks to close the gap between “history” and “memory”? The highly-publicized work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa did much to call attention to such questions; but similar conversations have also emerged around the formal apologies extended, for example, to the First Nations peoples in Canada, or to Japanese citizens in the U.S. who were wrongly interred during World War II or, on a more personal level, to the survivors of rape, domestic abuse, or other forms of trauma. What does “reconciliation” look like in these relationships? What happens to individual and collective memory if an apology is extended and received?

For contemporary Mennonites, these questions have taken on new urgency in the aftermath of several ecumenical dialogues initiated by Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran churches with the explicit goal of “healing the memories” of the persecution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. Thus, for example, in July 2010 leaders of the Lutheran World Federation presided over a public service of reconciliation in which they formally expressed their “deep regret and sorrow” for “the harm that our forebears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular

11. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 14, 15.

and scholarly forms, to the present day.”¹² Danisa Ndlovu, president of the Mennonite World Conference, responded to the statement with a confession that Mennonites “cannot come to this point and fail to see our own sinfulness. We cannot come to this point without recognizing our own need for God’s grace and forgiveness.”¹³ In general, members of both groups have received these gestures of reconciliation with much affirmation. But the process of reconciliation has introduced a significant layer of complexity to the Mennonite memorialization of the martyrs.¹⁴ How must the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs now be told differently in light of these mutual apologies? Indeed, as some Mennonites have asked, in the aftermath of these events is martyr memory of any sort still appropriate?

All of these tensions—the debate over definitions; the persistent gap between “facts” and “memory”; and the disruption to collective narratives prompted by apologies—virtually guarantee that the memorialization of martyrs will be dynamic and contested. Adding yet another layer of complexity to the legacy of martyrdom in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is the fact that the Anabaptist martyrs have played such a central role in the formation and sustaining of a North American Mennonite collective identity—especially for those groups coming out of Switzerland and South Germany.¹⁵

12. “Statement: Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of ‘Anabaptists.’” The full text can be found at http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wpcontent/uploads/2011/04/Mennonite_Statement-EN.pdf (accessed April 24, 2013).

13. Quoted in <http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/lutherans-take-historic-step-in-asking-for-forgiveness-from-mennonites.html> (accessed March 28, 2013).

14. See, for example, Jeremy M. Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011); John D. Roth, “Forgiveness and the Healing of Memories: An Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42 (Fall 2007), 573-588.

15. All of the reprints of the *Martyrs Mirror* after 1685, for example, were promoted by groups in the Swiss-South German Mennonite tradition. The question of why the *Martyrs Mirror*, a book originating in the Dutch tradition, found a stronger reception among these Mennonites than among the Russian Mennonites—who were the closer cultural, linguistic, and theological heirs to the Dutch tradition—begs for closer analysis. One exception was a small booklet, [Isaac van Dühren], *Geschichte der Märtyrer oder kurze historische Nachricht von den Verfolgungen der Mennoniten* (Königsberg, 1787), that drew on van Braght and several other sources to provide distilled information on more than 100 Anabaptist martyrs. The book was reprinted at Stuttgart in 1863 and at Winnipeg in 1939. Following the devastating experience of the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent persecutions under Stalin, a large literature of stories of suffering has emerged in the Russian Mennonite tradition, some of it referencing the *Martyrs Mirror* explicitly. For one of the clearest examples, see Aron A. Töws, *Mennonitische Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart* (Abbotsford, B.C.: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1949); published in English as Aron A. Toews, *Mennonite Martyrs: People Who Suffered for Their Faith, 1920-1940* (Winnipeg, Canada: Kindred Press, 1990).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE *MARTYRS MIRROR*— A TRADITION OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The first written accounts by Anabaptists of the suffering and death of their fellow believers seem to have circulated as underground broadsides or pamphlets.¹⁶ In 1562, an anonymous Dutch editor compiled some of these pamphlets—along with additional prison letters, transcripts of court interrogations, and an assortment of hymns—into a collection published with the title *Het Offer des Herren* (*Sacrifice Unto the Lord*).¹⁷ The small-formatted book included material related to twenty-three martyrs, with twenty-five songs appended to the end, almost all of them recounting the faithful witness of an Anabaptist who had suffered for his or her faith. Two years later, German-speaking Anabaptists published *Etliche schöne christliche Gesäng*—a hymnbook of fifty-three songs, many of them composed by a group imprisoned in Passau, that also focused on the suffering of Christ and themes of petition, comfort, and lament.¹⁸

In subsequent decades, both Dutch and German Anabaptists continued to publish new accounts of persecution and suffering in their midst. Thus, in 1583, a second edition of the German hymnal appeared, now bearing the title of *Ausbund, Das ist etlicher schöne christenliche Lieder*, that was expanded to 131 songs, including some twenty ballads recounting the suffering and witness of recent Anabaptist martyrs.¹⁹ At least seven of the songs included in the *Ausbund* appear to have been borrowed from the Dutch *Sacrifice Unto the Lord*. During the centuries that followed, the *Ausbund* went through numerous editions,

16. The account of Michael Sattler's death in Rottenburg in 1527 is a good example. Soon after his death, accounts of his final interrogation began to circulate along with the Schleithem Confession. The anonymous author of *Het Offer des Herren* seems to have taken the narrative of Sattler's death from a Dutch translation of the Sattler pamphlet published in 1560.—Cf. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 228, fn.162.

17. A very careful bibliographical description of the sixteenth-century editions of *Het Offer des Herren* can be found in Ferdinand van der Haeghen, Thomas James L. Arnold, R. van den Berghe, *Bibliographie des martyrologes Protestants Néerlandais* (La Have: Mart. Niihoff, 1890), 443-499. For a useful overview of *Het Offer des Herren* in English, see James W. Lowry, "Het Offer des Heeren (The Sacrifice of the Lord)." *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* (Jan. 2010), 10-19. A Spanish translation of the book has appeared as *El sacrificio del Señor* (Farmington, N.M.: Publicadora Lámpara y Luz, 2010).

18. The hymns in this first collection were composed by Anabaptists who had experienced suffering and were reflecting on the possibility of execution; later editions would add the narratives of actual martyrs. Thus, themes of martyrdom are very prominent in hymns nos. 10 to 44 of the 1583 collection.

19. The 1583 edition also dropped two songs that had been part of the 1564 hymnbook. The best summary of the Anabaptist martyr hymn tradition can be found in Ursula Lieseberg, *Studien zum Märtyrerlied der Täufer im 16. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1991). For a more popular summary of the *Ausbund*'s print history and content, see Benueel S. Blank, *The Amazing Story of the Ausbund* (Narvon, Pa.: Benueel S. Blank, 2001).

incorporating additional material related to subsequent martyrs. The 1622 edition, for example, added four new songs, including a hymn recounting the execution of Hans Landis in 1614. The first North American edition, which appeared in 1742, included a hymn devoted to the martyrdom of Hans Haslibacher in 1571, a confession of faith by Thomas Imbroich, written while he was in prison, and a lengthy description of the persecution of Anabaptists in Switzerland between 1635 and 1645.²⁰

But it was the Dutch Anabaptist groups that gave the Anabaptist martyrological tradition its fullest expression. Between 1562 and 1599 at least eleven editions of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord* appeared, with many of the later editions adding new martyr narratives, prison letters, or hymns.²¹ The last third of the sixteenth century witnessed a profusion of additional Dutch Anabaptist martyrological publications—some sixteen titles appeared between 1565 and 1595 alone, either by or about nineteen different martyrs, and published in thirty editions.²²

In the context of this intense interest in martyr narratives, the publication of new martyrologies increasingly became a point of tension among competing Dutch Anabaptist groups, particularly the Old Frisians and the Waterlanders. In 1617, the Old Frisians responded to a Waterlander martyrology of 1615—which was itself an enlargement of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord*—with a printing of their own. Already in 1626, however, the Old Frisians issued a revised edition to rectify errors that the Waterlanders had allegedly introduced into the 1615 publication, but which had gone unnoticed in their 1617 publication. In 1631, Hans de Ries, a central figure in the Waterlander church, oversaw the publication of still another martyr book, the *Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, which was larger in size and scope than all of the previous

20. In addition to the *Ausbund*, the Swiss Brethren also nurtured their collective memory of Anabaptist martyrs with the publication in 1702 of a devotional text, *Güldene Aepfel in silbernen Schalen* (Golden Apples in Silver Bowls) that featured lengthy prison letters from five martyrs, along with other confessional writings.—*Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, trans. Elizabeth Bender and Leonard Gross (Lancaster, Pa.: Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1999). The book was reprinted in 1742.

21. Brad Gregory has argued that proliferation of editions reflected the competing theological motifs of various Anabaptist traditions, a process he describes as “micro-confessionalization.”—Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 457-458. Lowry, citing the findings of the Dutch historian Samuel Cramer, suggests that this claim is exaggerated since the differences among the editions of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord* are not as significant as Gregory implies.—Lowry, “Het Offer des Herren,” 16.

22. *The Forgotten Writings of the Mennonite Martyrs*, ed. Brad S. Gregory (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xviii. For a full listing of these publications see Brad S. Gregory, “The Anathema of Compromise: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1996), 740, n197.

versions and clearly intended as a defense of the Waterlander tradition in the ongoing debate with the Old Frisians.

In 1660, when Thieleman van Braght, a Dutch Mennonite minister from Haarlem, published yet another expanded Anabaptist martyrology—which reappeared in a slightly revised and illustrated edition in 1685—one phase in the dynamic, contested tradition of Anabaptist martyr books came to an end. Although various heirs of the Anabaptist tradition would continue to vigorously debate the meaning of the martyrs, with few exceptions they ceased to publish new martyrologies—after 1685 the canon of Anabaptists martyrs was virtually closed. For the next three centuries, van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* became a symbolic point of reference that was to shape—and constrain—the ongoing conversation among Anabaptist-Mennonite groups regarding the legacy of the martyrs.²³

The dominance of the *Martyrs Mirror* in the Mennonite imagination since 1685 can be attributed to several factors. In contrast to the tradition before it, van Braght sought to transcend the internal polemics of his predecessors by appealing explicitly to church unity. The martyrs included in his volume were not selected according to their adherence to a specific confession of faith. Instead, he opted for a more inclusive definition of orthodoxy that could find support among all the competing Dutch Anabaptist groups—namely, a commitment to believer's baptism and to defenselessness (or nonresistance), in the manner of Christ. Furthermore, by including several Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions of faith, without insisting that the martyrs were defending any of them as a single normative standard, van Braght clearly intended the *Martyrs Mirror* to serve as a shared point of reference and a source of unity within a fractious church.

The broadened apologetical intent of the *Martyrs Mirror* was also evident in the amount of space that van Braght devoted to church history prior to the Reformation. Whereas *Sacrifice Unto the Lord* had jumped from the story of Christ and Stephen straight to the sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyrs, van Braght offered a new reading of church history that turned standard accounts upside-down. In an effort to defend Anabaptists against the charges of sectarianism, he devoted nearly half of the massive volume to a detailed argument tracing a line of Christians from the time of Christ to the present who had *always* held to the principles of believer's baptism and nonresistance, thereby demonstrating to a broader reading public that the Anabaptists were

23. The same is true of the *Ausbund*. Although material continued to be added between 1622 and 1785, the basic content of the *Ausbund* became fixed by the end of the eighteenth century and has been reprinted in essentially the same form ever since.

neither heretics nor sectarians. In the second part of the *Martyrs Mirror*—which details the Anabaptist martyrs of the sixteenth century—van Braght took special pains to highlight the “defenseless” nature of their witness, expunging any hint of a connection with the Münsterites or other violent revolutionaries in the sixteenth century.²⁴ The Anabaptists of the *Martyrs Mirror* are earnest, scripturally-grounded, sober-minded Christians, whose only crimes were baptizing adults and refusing to wield the sword.

Clearly, Dutch Mennonites in 1660 were living in a fundamentally different context than that of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord* a century earlier. In contrast to *Sacrifice Unto the Lord*, whose secret publication and tiny format reflected the daily reality of persecution experienced by its readers, the *Martyrs Mirror* appeared at a time of relative religious freedom in the Netherlands when Mennonites were participating fully in the artistic, economic, and cultural renaissance of the day known as the “Dutch Golden Age.” Instead of urging readers to hold firm in the face of persecution, van Braght warned of the seductions of wealth, social respectability, and political authority.²⁵ By 1660 Anabaptist martyr stories had come to serve a new function as cautionary tales against the threat of acculturation—an attempt to preserve a memory of costly Christian witness in Mennonite communities even as the context of that witness had fundamentally shifted.²⁶

24. Indeed, van Braght makes this intention explicit in a footnote to his introduction to the *Martyrs Mirror*, where he also explains his rationale for beginning the book with the crucifixion of Christ: “In order to show that the doctrines of the Anabaptists . . . did not originate with the Munsterities, or any other erring spirits who have arisen in these last times, but have proceeded from the source of truth—Christ and His apostles—we have placed their origin in the time of Christ.”—van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 17.

25. In an often-quoted passage from the introduction, van Braght warned his readers that “these times are certainly more dangerous [than those of the martyrs]. For then Satan came openly . . . as a roaring lion, so that he could be known . . . and his chief design then was to destroy the body. But now he comes as in the night, or in the twilight, in a strange but yet pleasing form, and . . . lies in wait to destroy the soul. . . . Meanwhile, and before one is aware of it, he seizes hold and tears like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, robbing the innocent lambs of Christ of their precious faith. . . .”—Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1950), 8, see also 9-10.

26. Paradoxically, the massive size, expense, and physical beauty of the *Martyrs Mirror* may have reflected Dutch Mennonite acculturation as much as it protested against it. In contrast to the diminutive *Het Offer des Herren*, by 1685 the *Martyrs Mirror* had become a coffee-table-sized book, with an unbound edition retailing for 15.75 gulden.—Cf. the prospectus reprinted in S. L. Verheus, “Bij de herdruk van de Martelaarspiegel van T.J. van Braght,” (De Betaafsche Leeuw, 1984), 6. According to one source, this would be the equivalent to “16.5 daily wages of an unskilled worker. This roughly corresponds to \$1487.74 today.”—<http://www.dutchancestrycoach.com/historic-calculator.php> (accessed May 26, 2013).

The composition of the book also marked the culmination of another shift long under way. Whereas the various editions of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord* had included a growing number of martyr hymns, intended to be sung in worship settings, the martyrologies of the seventeenth century increasingly favored prose texts, thereby shifting the focus from doxology to apologetics—from a worship book to a source book. By 1660, virtually all the hymns had disappeared from the *Martyrs Mirror*.²⁷ Instead, van Braght focused on gathering letters, transcripts, court judgments, and other official texts, many of them copied directly from archival sources, that he hoped would convince nonpartisan readers of the veracity of the martyr accounts. The theological themes of redemptive suffering remained unmistakably clear in the *Martyrs Mirror*, as did the unequivocal emphasis on believer's baptism and nonresistance. But van Braght's book was intended for a broader readership than just the Anabaptist faithful; and it made more demands on its readers since the narrative arc of each account tended to emerge out of the juxtaposition of several archival sources rather than a simple clear storyline imposed by the editor.

Despite its persistent popularity, the *Martyrs Mirror* is not an easy book to read. As a compilation of primary sources, arranged chronologically with minimal narrative structure, the volume's dense text makes significant demands on the reader. Thus, the 1685 edition, published after van Braght's death by a group of Reformed investors, included 104 exquisitely crafted etchings—rendered by the famous Mennonite artist Jan Luyken—each of which captured a dramatic moment in a particular story. The Luyken etchings were not only a stroke of marketing genius, making the 1685 much more popular than the earlier version, but they also transformed the way later generations would encounter the volume. By providing a simple, yet powerful, interpretive grid to the massive compilation of texts Luyken's etchings reduced complex stories to a single defining moment. For many readers, the images in the 1685 *Martyrs Mirror* transformed the volume from a document collection to a storybook—making it much more “user-friendly” in the process, but also encouraging a more simplistic encounter with the stories since readers were more likely to linger on the images than to struggle through dense primary source texts.²⁸

27. Gregory, *The Forgotten Letters*, xxxix.

28. These images went on to have a publication life of their own. In 1698, the engravings appeared as a stand-alone collection.—Jan Luyken and Thieleman J. van Braght, *Theatre des martyrs = Schau-Buhne der Martyrer: depuis la mort J. Christ jusqu' à present : représenté en tres belles tailles-douces* (Leyde: Pierre vander Aa, 1698). The collection was reprinted again in 1730, and later appeared in an English edition as *The Drama of the Martyrs, From the Death of*

The story of Anneken Jans offers a good example of how a Luyken image could simplify a complex narrative. Readers today are likely to remember Anneken Jans on the basis of a poignant etching that depicts Anneken, moments before her execution, handing her infant son and a small bag of money to an onlooker in the crowd, pleading that the stranger will care for him following her death.



Anneken Jans (1539), *Martyrs Mirror*, 453.

The dramatic moment of pathos captured in the image underscores a central theme of the *Martyrs Mirror*—namely, that the call to follow Christ trumps all other allegiances, including the natural obligations of a mother to her child. Yet this central truth, captured so vividly in the visual image, can easily overshadow a host of other significant details that greatly complicate the story of Anneken Jans. According to the *Martyrs Mirror*, Anneken Jans was initially arrested for singing an Anabaptist hymn in public. But what van Braght does not tell his readers is the fact that the hymn she was singing was composed by David Joris—a revolutionary spiritualist, opponent of Menno Simons, and someone closely associated in the popular imagination with the violent events that unfolded in Münster. Further investigation has suggested that Anneken had a fairly close connection to Joris—indeed, one historian has even argued that she left her husband to live with Joris for a while in England.²⁹ Yet the martyrological tradition of the *Martyrs Mirror* has

Jesus Christ Up to the Recent Times: Drawn and Engraved on Copper by the Renowned Engraver, Jan Luyken (1649-1712) (Lancaster, Pa.: Mennonite Historical Associates, 1975).

29. Werner O. Packull, "Anna Jansz of Rotterdam: A Historical Investigation of an Early Anabaptist Heroine," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 78 (1987), 147-173. See also the arguments presented in Timothy Nyhof, "The Elusive Image of the Martyr Anneke

thoroughly sanitized this part of her identity, so that in the end we are left with an image of heroic fidelity to Christ. That image is not necessarily wrong; but the story is clearly much more complicated than the image itself suggests.

In the centuries following the *Martyrs Mirror*, groups descending from the Anabaptists continued to actively commemorate the stories of the martyrs. To a significant degree, however, the legacy of that dynamic and contested memory would now be framed as much in response to the text and images of the *Martyrs Mirror* as by the transcendent themes of faithful witness to the Gospel. The reasons for the book's appeal are clear: the *Martyrs Mirror* distilled the essence of Anabaptist identity to two central themes—believer's baptism and nonresistance; it provided an argument rooted in the deep history of the church for the orthodoxy of the Anabaptist movement; the book's imposing size suggested the coalescence of an Anabaptist tradition that was substantive and serious; and its combination of primary source texts, many of them drawn straight from archival and court records, with Luyken's skillfully crafted visual images, ensured that the communal appropriation of the Anabaptist martyrs would continue to unfold in a dynamic tension between "history" and "memory."

THE *MARTYRS MIRROR* AND THE CULTIVATION OF A MARTYR TRADITION AMONG MENNONITES IN NORTH AMERICA

Since 1685, the *Martyrs Mirror* has been the primary filter through which the heirs of the Anabaptists—especially Mennonites and Amish in the Swiss-South German tradition—have thought about martyrdom.³⁰ Indeed, for many groups who immigrated to North America in the

Janszdr. of Rotterdam," *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 30:2 (2009), 30-39. James Lowry, *The Martyrs Mirror Made Plain* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 1997), 121-126, offers a strong defense for Jansz's orthodoxy.

30. For example, during World War I contributors to the *Gospel Herald* frequently referred to the *Martyrs Mirror* as young Mennonite conscientious objectors faced a very uncertain fate in the military training camps where they were forced to report. Thus, an editorial titled "Unwarranted Persecutions" observed: "The future historian will find an abundance of material to draw upon from the case if he wishes to include a chapter on the persecutions meted out to 'conscientious objectors' during the world war. Most people imagined that the day of religious persecutions belongs to the darker ages of the past. But the past year has witnessed scenes that rival those of Spanish Inquisition times. Is there anything recorded in *Martyrs' Mirror* more heart-rending than the reports of cruel treatment given some of those who for conscientious reasons could not support the war program of their country?"—*Gospel Herald* 43 (Jan. 23, 1919), 761. See also Duane Stoltzfus, "Armed With Prayer in an Alcatraz Dungeon: The Wartime Experiences of Four Hutterite C.O.'s in Their Own Words," *MQR* 85 (April 2011), 259-292, and his book, *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *Martyrs Mirror* played a profound role in shaping group identity, serving as it had for van Braght himself as an ongoing source of spiritual renewal and as a warning against acculturation to mainstream American society.³¹ Although Anabaptist groups in North America enjoyed extensive religious freedoms, the witness of the martyrs put their convictions regarding nonconformity in dress, economics, or lifestyle into a larger perspective and provided a useful reminder, especially during times of war, that following Jesus could exact a cost.

Thus, already in the fall of 1745, six Mennonite ministers from the Skippack congregation in eastern Pennsylvania composed a letter to the “ministers and elders of the nonresistant Mennonite congregations of God in Amsterdam and Haarlem,” asking their Dutch cousins for assistance in translating the *Martyrs Mirror* into German. The hope behind this ambitious project, the ministers explained, was that the stories of the *Martyrs Mirror* would keep alive the memory of persecution for the faith at a time when Mennonites were enjoying the security, prosperity, and freedoms of their new environment. In particular, the church leaders hoped that the book would help Mennonites resist the temptations of militarism. “The flames of war seem to be mounting higher and higher,” the ministers worried, and “it cannot be known, whether cross and tribulation may not all the sooner fall to the lot of nonresistant Christians. . . . It therefore behooves us . . . to make every preparation for steadfast endurance in our faith.”³²

Although the Dutch were not forthcoming with much help, the ministers pressed forward. By 1748, with considerable help of a Pietist monastic order at the nearby Ephrata Cloister, copies of the first German-language edition of the book were coming off the press. Bound with leather-covered oak panels and weighing some thirteen pounds, the 1748 Ephrata edition of the *Martyrs Mirror* was the largest book published in colonial America to date.

Interest among North American Mennonites in the *Martyrs Mirror* only increased with the passage of time. During the nineteenth century alone, various groups or individuals orchestrated the publication of five editions of the massive book—three in German and two in English—supplemented by copies of a European edition, published at Pirmasens,

31. See James C. Juhnke, “Shaping Religious Community Through Martyr Memory,” *MQR* 73 (July 1999), 546-556.

32. Leaders of the Mennonite congregations in Pennsylvania, “To all the ministers and elders of the nonresistant Mennonite congregations of God in Amsterdam and Haarlem, October 19, 1745.”—Richard K MacMaster, Samuel L. Horst, and Robert F. Ulle, *Conscience in Crisis: Mennonites and Other Peace Churches in America, 1739-1789; Interpretation and Documents* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1979), 85.

France, in 1780, that Mennonite and Amish immigrants were bringing with them to the New World.³³ The 1886 English edition of the *Martyrs Mirror*, translated by Joseph Sohm and published by John F. Funk at Elkhart, Indiana, has been reprinted more than thirty times in the past century, and continues to enjoy annual sales of more than a thousand copies.³⁴

Along the way, the *Martyrs Mirror* has come to occupy a significant symbolic role in the collective identity of many North American Mennonites. Part of this is due to the visual power of Luyken's etchings, which in the course of the twentieth century, came to wield as much influence in the imagination of North American Mennonites as the text itself.³⁵ Working within a tradition that has always been somewhat artistically impoverished, Luyken's images made the stories in the *Martyrs Mirror* immediately accessible to a wide range of Mennonite and Amish groups. The depiction of Dirk Willems saving his pursuer from drowning, for example, is undoubtedly the most widely-recognized visual image among North American Mennonites today, appearing on church bulletins, banners, brochures, newsletters, books, coffee mugs, posters, and even the label of a privately produced microbrew.³⁶ Numerous artists have adapted Luyken's etching as the basis for their own creative interpretations of the scene. And the story captured by the image—often recounted in simplified form—has become a kind of shorthand in the Anabaptist-Mennonite lexicon for summarizing the central convictions of the tradition. Thus, historian James Juhnke has cast the Dirk Willems story as a folk opera;³⁷ it has been retold in dozens of

33 A Baptist group in England also undertook an English-language tradition of Book Two of the *Martyrs Mirror*.—Thieleman J. van Braght, Jan Luiken, Benjamin Millard, and Edward Bean Underhill, *A Martyrology of the Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Baptists, During the Era of the Reformation* (London: Society, 1850).

34. According to figures compiled by David Weaver-Zercher, Herald Press sold some 49,500 English-language copies of *Martyrs Mirror* between 1938 and 1999, while Pathway Publishers produced 10,000 copies of the German-language *Der Märtyrer Spiegel*. These figures are close to those reported by James Juhnke.—“Shaping Religious Community,” 551. Since the turn of the century, 24,000 more copies of *Martyrs Mirror* have made their way into print. This total includes approximately 17,500 copies in English produced by Herald Press, and approximately 6,500 in German produced by Pathway Publishers.—Correspondence with David Weaver-Zercher, April 27, 2013.

35. This is true especially among readers of the English editions. While Funk's 1886 English edition included several images recast from Luyken's etchings, it was the 1938 Scottdale English edition that began to include many reproductions taken directly from Luyken's original renditions.

36. David Luthy has cataloged hundreds of references to the Dirk Willems image or story, and presents a very informative summary of this reception history in his *Dirk Willems: His Noble Deed Lives On* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 2011).

37. James C. Juhnke, “Dirk's Exodus,” *Four Class Acts: Kansas Theatre*, ed. Repha J. Buckman and Robert N. Lawson (Topeka, Kan.: Woodley Memorial Press, 1992), 85-184.

books, articles, and poems; and even figured prominently as a motif in a feature-length movie, "Pearl Diver," written and directed by Mennonite cinematographer Sidney King.



Dirk Willems (1569), *Martyrs Mirror*, 741.

In the 1990s, following the discovery and purchase of twenty-three of the original copper plate etchings that Luyken used to create the images, historians Robert Krieder and John S. Oyer helped to create a traveling exhibit focused on the *Martyrs Mirror* that circulated among Mennonite and Amish communities across North America, always accompanied by local lectures, children's activities, and discussion groups.³⁸ *Mirror of the Martyrs*, a collection of Anabaptist martyr stories written for a popular readership and designed to accompany the exhibit, has enjoyed vigorous sales and been translated into nine different languages since its publication in 1990.³⁹ And the sale of new prints, made from the plates featured in the exhibit, further popularized the Luyken images in Mennonite homes and congregations.

The *Martyrs Mirror* has also inspired numerous efforts to popularize its stories, as well as other accounts of faithful witness, to younger readers. Thus, *Coals of Fire*, a collection of peace stories compiled by Elizabeth Bauman in 1954, became a standard feature in many Mennonite church libraries. James Lowry's compilation, *In the Whale's Belly* and Joseph Stoll's *The Drummer's Wife*, played a similar role among Conservative Mennonite and Amish groups; and Dave and Neta

38. For a website devoted to the exhibit, which traveled to nearly eighty communities, see www.bethelks.edu/kauffman/martyrs/.

39. John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1990).

Jackson's *On Fire for Christ: Stories of Anabaptist Martyrs* sought to broaden awareness of these stories beyond Anabaptist circles.⁴⁰ At the same time, numerous Mennonite community choirs have performed Alice Parker's "*Martyrs Mirror: An Oratorio*"; CDs of Shirley King's "Singing at the Fire" have circulated widely; and several martyr hymns from the *Ausbund* appear in the current Mennonite and Brethren *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.⁴¹

At a more academic level, the *Martyrs Mirror* and the related themes of martyrdom have also caught the attention of scholars.⁴² In the past two decades Mennonite historians and theologians have hosted several academic conferences on the *Martyrs Mirror* and published numerous essays on Anabaptist martyrdom. In 2009 the Mennonite Historical Society of Goshen, Indiana, launched a series of martyr-related projects, including plans for a collection of popular essays and an English translation of *Sacrifice Unto the Lord*. The following year an academic conference at Elizabethtown College, called "*Martyrs Mirror: Reflections Across Time*," focused on the print history and impact of the 1748 Ephrata printing of the *Martyrs Mirror*.⁴³ And a major overview and analysis of the *Martyrs Mirror* tradition by David Weaver-Zercher, titled *Raising the Dead: A Biography of Martyrs Mirror*, is scheduled to appear in print sometime in 2014.

40. Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman, *Coals of Fire* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1954); James Lowry, *In Whale's Belly, and other Martyr Stories* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Christian Light Publications, 1981); Joseph Stoll, *The Drummer's Wife and Other Stories from Martyrs' Mirror* (Aylmer, Ont.: Pathway Publishers, 1968); Dave Jackson, Neta Jackson, and Thielemann J. van Braght, *On Fire for Christ: Stories of Anabaptist Martyrs, Retold from Martyrs Mirror* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1989). One could also cite Cornelia Lehn's popular *Peace Be With You* (Newton, Kan: Faith and Life Press, 1980); Amy Schlabach, *Times of Trial: Poem Stories of Anabaptist Martyrs for Children* (Walnut Creek, Ohio: Carlisle Press, 2011); Joe Zook, *The Anguish of Faith. A Fictional Story Based on the Lives of the Martyrs Book One* (Morgantown, Pa.: Masthof Press, 2010); and numerous other texts that have helped to popularize the stories of the *Martyrs Mirror* and to shape a collective identity in which the martyr stories figure prominently.

41. These hymns are by Felix Manz, "I Sing with Exaltation" (no. 438)—a song of praise and encouragement in the face of imminent suffering—and Jörg Wagner, "Who Now Would Follow Christ" (no. 535). Their stories appear side-by-side in the *Martyrs Mirror*.

42. See, for example, Chris Huebner, "Between Victory and Victimhood: Reflections on Martyrdom, Culture and Identity," in his *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2006), 189-202; Tripp York, *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2007); Craig Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2008); Joshua J. Whitfield, *Plain Holiness; Martyrdom as Descriptive Witness* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2009); *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011).

43. "Martyrs Mirror: Reflections across Time," Elizabethtown College, June 8-10, 2010.

All these examples, and many others, suggest that the stories of the *Martyrs Mirror* have played a central role in the formation of a communal identity among North American Mennonites. Anchored in the model of Jesus—the first martyr—and rooted in a long train of witnesses who suffered for their commitment to follow Christ, the Anabaptist martyrs portrayed in the *Martyrs Mirror* remind contemporary Mennonites that they have a faith worth dying for. As citizens living in a powerful “Christian” empire, the stories caution Mennonites against the temptation to justify violence in the name of Christ; they witness to the possibility of non-violence and love of enemy even in the most extreme circumstances; and they call Mennonites to a life of compassion and humility, while reminding them that nonresistant love is not likely to be rewarded here on earth.⁴⁴

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUE OF MARTYR MEMORY

Yet even as the *Martyrs Mirror* emerged as a significant source of renewal among many North American Mennonites in the second half of the twentieth century, other voices within the Mennonite community have argued with increasing urgency that the legacy of the Anabaptist martyrs is fraught with problems. The first hints of these concerns were discernible, albeit only in a scattered way, already in the 1990s. In the opening decades of the twenty-first century, however, the backlash against the *Martyrs Mirror* and popular forms of martyr memory has become much more prominent. Although never systematic in its focus, these criticisms have returned repeatedly to several central concerns.

A Mythologized Past – Deconstructing the Metanarrative

One critical response to the commemoration of the Anabaptist martyrs has raised doubts about the historical authenticity of the stories preserved in the tradition and, more fundamentally, has questioned the authority of *any* narrative from the past as a normative standard for contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice. Echoing the central postmodernist concerns of Elizabeth Castelli, these critics argue that while the pious and naïve versions of the martyr stories—reinforced in the Mennonite imagination by children’s books, folk dramas, exhibits, and family lore—may be helpful in shaping denominational culture, modern Mennonites should be skeptical about their claims to any larger

44. As historian James Juhnke has written, the martyr stories “prepare us for the possibility of persecution and marginalization in our own time—especially as our pacifist convictions become unpopular in a war-crusading America.”—James Juhnke, “Rightly Remembering a Martyr Heritage,” (unpublished paper presented to the ELCA-Mennonite Liaison Committee dialogue held in Sarasota, Fla., Feb. 28, 2003), 1.

historical or theological “truth.” The poet Julia Spicher Kasdorf was among the first to openly express concerns about the legacy of martyr memory. In an elegant collection of essays, *The Body and the Book*, Kasdorf interrogated the power that the *Martyrs Mirror* has wielded in the Mennonite community, and particularly the way it seemed to encourage those who suffered physical abuse to bear that pain in silence or resignation.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Jeff Gundy, another Mennonite poet, has strenuously challenged the central narrative of martyr accounts in which “we peculiarly ardent and convicted and defenseless Christians have been particularly, spectacularly wounded, damaged, tormented and murdered by The World, which includes many of the rest of those calling themselves Christians. . . .”⁴⁶ In a similar manner, in *Tonguescrews and Testimonies*—a recent collection of poems, short stories, and essays focused on the *Martyrs Mirror*—a host of literary critics and creative writers have challenged the moralistic and seemingly sentimentalized appropriation of Anabaptist martyrs as two-dimensional heroes and heroines. In her thoughtful introduction to the collection, editor Kirsten Beachy challenged readers to “expect personal narratives to differ from the communal narrative.”⁴⁷ The personal narratives evident in the essays that followed suggest that a young generation of Mennonite writers continues to find creative inspiration in the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs. But the dominant tone of the volume is one of ironic or critical detachment that seeks to challenge or qualify the authority of the *Martyrs Mirror* as a normative standard. To cite only one example, some viewers will find Ian Huebert’s parodies of Luyken’s famous image of Dirk Willems in a series of cartoon-like sketches to be thought-provoking; others will find them humorous; and still others may regard his renditions as outright offensive. But for Huebert, as for many of the contributors to the volume, the reaction of the audience is not a primary

45. Kasdorf has engaged themes related to the body, martyrdom, and Mennonite collective memory in many of her writings, but references to the *Martyrs Mirror* are expressed most explicitly in two poems, “Catholics” and “Mennonites,” in Julia Kasdorf, *Sleeping Preacher* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 32-33, 34-35; in *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 170-189; “‘Work and Hope’: Tradition and Translation of a Mennonite Adam,” *MQR* 69 (April 1995), 178-204; and a lecture presented in various venues called “Mightier than the Sword: *Martyrs Mirror* in the New World,” and published by the same title in *Conrad Grebel Review* 31 (Winter 2013), 44-70.

46. Jeff Gundy, “Some Inappropriate Thoughts about the Martyr Project,” an unpublished response to my C. Henry Smith lecture at Bluffton College that circulated shortly after that presentation in late February of 2013.

47. *Tongue Screws and Testimonies: Poems, Stories, and Essays Inspired by the Martyrs Mirror*, ed. Kirsten Beachy (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 2010), 27. See also the website associated with the book: www.martyrbook.com.

concern.⁴⁸ Instead, it is the very sanctity of the Dirk Willems story—its iconic, authoritative status within the Mennonite community—that makes it an ideal target for demythologizing.⁴⁹



Ian Huebert, "Dirk the Manual"

Psychological Problems of "Victimhood"

Another line of criticism has focused on the various pathologies that allegedly result from an identity rooted in stories of suffering and victimhood.⁵⁰ In a much-debated 2006 essay titled "Staying Alive: How Martyrdom Made Me a Warrior," Stephanie Krehbiel argued that the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs encouraged her to associate her "Mennonite-ness with victimization." In a post 9-11 social context animated by religious violence and a culture of fear, the martyr stories from Krehbiel's past, she argued, kept her "fixated on violent death—not only its meaning, but its mechanics." Krehbiel went on to describe "the perversity of repeating the gruesome details of these individuals' deaths

48. Huebert's images first appeared in "Views from a Pond: The Dirk Willems Variations," *Pacific Journal* 4 (2009), 3-7, 8. Several were reprinted in *Tongue Screws and Testimonies*. The image here is used by permission of the artist.

49. Although the multiplicity of reactions to the *Martyrs Mirror* in the contributions to *Tongue Screws and Testimonies* is no doubt descriptively accurate of contemporary North American Mennonite attitudes, the volume cannot avoid a classic postmodern conundrum: on the one hand, it celebrates multiple, discordant, personal readings of the text, ranging from the pious to the irreverent; on the other hand, it is not at all clear how this celebration of multiplicity is not simply the imposition of a new metanarrative—one more congenial to the fragmentation and individualism of modern culture, but no less normative (and potentially simplistic) than the older pieties it seeks to challenge.

50. For a philosophical engagement with the pathologies of "victim status" by a feminist literary critic who grew up in a Mennonite community, see Diane Enns, *The Violence of Victimhood* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2012)

whilst maintaining a strong and persistent identification with their victimhood." "I resented how the martyrs were taught to me," Krehbiel continued,

as heroes whose gory demises should somehow fortify me against evil. I longed to forget about them, but it was too late for that. Their deaths played in my mind as I lay awake at night. For all the fresh death in the news, it was still their deaths that made me imagine my own, and I wasn't a better person for it.⁵¹

Soon after Krehbiel's essay appeared, Carolyn Yoder, founder and trainer with Eastern Mennonite University's Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience program, circulated an essay that reflected on the legacy of Anabaptist martyrs through the lens of collective trauma theory.⁵²

Since then, a host of Mennonite leaders have expressed similar concerns about a Mennonite tendency to over-identify with martyr victims. In an op-ed article in the *Mennonite World Review*, John Schrock identified the "martyr mentality" as the primary source of a Mennonite tendency toward "passive aggressive behavior," which he argues is pervasive in the Mennonite community.⁵³ Other critics—drawing heavily on the work of Carolyn Yoder and others—have compared the grip that the *Martyrs Mirror* holds on the contemporary Mennonite imagination with the unhealed trauma of abuse victims. Iris de León-Hartshorn, director for transformative peacemaking with Mennonite Church USA, for example, borrowed explicitly from this literature to suggest that Mennonites have embraced the *Martyrs Mirror* as a "chosen trauma" in ways that hamper their witness and blind them to the reality of power that Mennonites in North America actually wield.⁵⁴ In April 2012, a panel of Mennonite Church USA denominational leaders publicly expressed similar sentiments at a gathering of staff and boards; and a psychologist and a trauma counselor repeated the same concern several

51. Stephanie Krehbiel, "Staying Alive: How Martyrdom Made Me a Warrior," *Mennonite Life* (Dec. 2006). See also Melvin Goering, "A One Sided Diet: Martyrdom and Warriors," *Mennonite Life* 61 (Dec. 2006); and the very vigorous responses by Robert Kreider, Joseph Leichty, Jesse Nathan, Hannah Kehr, and Gerald J. Mast, "How the *Martyrs Mirror* Helped Save Me: A Response to Krehbiel and Goering," *Mennonite Life* 62 (Spring 2007).—<http://tools.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2007spring/> (accessed April 24, 2013).

52. Carolyn Yoder, "European Anabaptist History and Current Reconciliation Efforts: Reflections through a Collective Trauma Theory Lens," *Mennonite Family History* (April 2007), 95-100.

53. John Schrock, "Victim or Victor?" *Mennonite World Review*, April 16, 2012, 10.

54. "Joint Board Meeting Addresses 'Martyr Complex,'" *The Mennonite*, May 2012, 32-33. That sentiment was echoed by André Gingerich Stoner, who is quoted in the same article as arguing that the identity of being "persecuted victims" is "deep within [the Mennonite] psyche. . . . Even 500 years later, this stuff is very powerful."

months later at a meeting of the Interchurch Relations Committee where the alleged pathologies associated with the *Martyrs Mirror* were a major theme of conversation. "If a child is traumatized and never does the deep and hard work of healing, he or she may still act out of that hurt decades later," the argument went. "The same is true for a community of people. If we as a people don't do the hard work of forgiveness and letting go, we continue to act out of a sense of being victims. . . . The way we tell our martyr stories will also re-traumatize us and nurture an ongoing sense of being victims."⁵⁵

Promotes Arrogance and Self-Righteousness

In a related fashion, other critics have noted how an emphasis on a martyr tradition can easily foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance among contemporary Mennonites. In his critique of what he calls the Mennonite "martyr complex," Stephen Kriss, a teacher, writer, and church leader from Philadelphia, has argued that "this posture of long-term victimization . . . creates a myth of superiority in the midst of neighbors. . . . It creates a sense of rightness and blindness due to historical wrongs."⁵⁶ In describing themselves to others, Mennonites often insist that they are "neither Catholic nor Protestant," thereby setting themselves apart from the deeper traditions of the Christian church.⁵⁷ The appeal to the Anabaptist martyrs becomes further evidence for the ethical superiority of Mennonites, implying that other Christian groups avoid the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount or the "hard sayings" of Christ. Cultivating a memory of martyrs, adds Andre Gingerich Stoner, director the Mennonite Church USA's holistic witness

55. André Gingerich Stoner, "Our Victim Mentality," *Mennonite World Review*, May 28, 2012. — <http://www.mennoworld.org/2012/5/28/our-victim-mentality/> (accessed April 24, 2013). Not surprisingly, perhaps, an online respondent to the article drew these conclusions from Gingerich Stoner's essay: "True forgiveness is to not ever refer to those events again. Continuing to possess copies of *Martyrs Mirror* readily serves as reminders of the persecutors. *Martyrs Mirror* and the Anabaptist label stem from that period; therefore I submit the following: Destroy all copies of *Martyrs Mirror*. Those who do that show their readiness to display complete forgiveness. Secondly, the term Anabaptist should no longer be used by forgiving people. That term relates to the time of the reformation and the persecution that occurred. That apology has been submitted in confidence by the Lutheran Church and forgiven by action of MC USA. Continuing to keep copies of *Martyrs Mirror* and maintaining the Anabaptist label is evidence forgiveness exists in word only."

56. Stephen Kriss, "Defined by a Martyr Complex," *Mennonite World Review*, May 28, 2012. — <http://www.mennoworld.org/2012/5/28/defined-martyr-complex/> (accessed April 24, 2013).

57. See the well-known book by Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptists: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ont: Conrad Press, 1973), which did much to popularize the notion that Mennonites were understood best as being located in a category all to themselves, even though the negative form of the definition still took the Catholic and Protestant traditions as a necessary point of reference.

and interchurch relations, has encouraged Mennonites to “describe commitments like discipleship, peace and community as ‘Mennonite distinctives’ that we own, rather than a natural part of a Jesus-centered life.”

Another expression of the arrogance arising out of a martyr heritage, these critics have charged, is an unrealistic and inappropriate self-understanding of the place of Mennonites within the broader stream of Christian history. One popular shorthand version of church history from a Mennonite perspective goes something like this: until the beginning of the fourth century, the Christian church practiced believer’s baptism, upheld the principle of nonresistance, and was persecuted for their convictions. With Constantine’s conversion in the fourth century and the subsequent fall of the church, God’s work in history went underground for nearly 1,000 years until the recovery of the apostolic church by the radical reformers in the sixteenth century. The Anabaptist experience of persecution—which they shared with the early church—authenticates the Mennonite tradition as a truly restitutionist movement that restored the church to the path God intended.

The consequences of this myopic view of history, critics argue, are highly problematic. It encourages Mennonites to embrace a truncated version of church history in which they become the primary actors in the drama.⁵⁸ Moreover, this posture of arrogance has blinded Mennonites to the many occasions in their history where they themselves have been the *perpetrators* of suffering—as, for example, the encounters of Mennonite settlers with indigenous peoples whose lives and land were displaced as Mennonites moved into the steppelands of Russia, the woodland of the Eastern states, the plains of Kansas and Oklahoma, or the “Green Hell” of the Paraguayan Chaco. Isolating the stories of the Anabaptist martyrs from a broader historical context can also lead modern Mennonites to a distorted perception of the scale of Anabaptist martyrdom. Perhaps 3,000 Anabaptists were executed in the course of the sixteenth century, with thousands more Mennonites who later suffered and died in various Communist regimes in Soviet Russia. But compare this with the estimated 80,000 people, mostly women, who were executed on charges of witchcraft in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; or the 100,000 Christians driven away by force on the Maluku Islands of Indonesia in 2000-2001, where several thousand died; or the millions of Orthodox Christians who have died for their faith in the twentieth century. The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is not unique in its experience of suffering. Yet the narrow Mennonite focus on the stories of

58. Dennis D. Martin, “Nothing New under the Sun? Mennonites and History,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 5 (Winter 1987), 1-27.

the *Martyrs Mirror* can encourage the illusion that theirs is the only account of suffering that really matters in the history of the Christian church. As long as they continue to keep alive the stories from the *Martyrs Mirror*, the argument goes, Mennonites will remain blind to their self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and historical ignorance.

Celebrates Religious Fanaticism

Still other contemporary critics of Mennonite martyr memory are deeply troubled by the apparent fanaticism of the martyrs and the perverse death wish that they seem to have pursued. In the context of contemporary suicide bombers who invoke the name of God for their violent causes—or the various forms of religious fundamentalism closer to home that seem to make civil discourse impossible—the sheer *intensity* of religious convictions exemplified by the martyrs makes some modern Mennonites uncomfortable. The path to peace, the logic goes, is less—not more—religious fervor, less absolutism, and less certainty. To the extent that the *Martyrs Mirror* celebrates a zeal that trumps moderation, familial responsibilities, and life itself—even if it does so nonviolently—it contributes to the religious fanaticism of our time that is the source of so many problems. “Martyrdom,” Mel Goering has insisted in a scathing critique of the *Martyrs Mirror*, “is not an inherent good. Being killed for one’s beliefs, in and of itself, is no virtue. . . . We admire deeply held convictions . . . [but] we do not and should not honor dogmatic ideologies.”⁵⁹

A Barrier to Ecumenical Reconciliation

Perhaps the most focused criticism of the legacy of the Anabaptist martyrs has emerged in the context of recent ecumenical conversations. Although Mennonites have traditionally been somewhat wary of ecumenical encounters, during the past decade various Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran groups have initiated a series of formal dialogues with Mennonites with the explicit goal of “healing the memories” of the persecution imposed by the state churches on the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.⁶⁰

59. Melvin Goering, “A One-Sided Diet: Martyrdom and Warriors,” *Mennonite Life* (Dec. 2006). Goering made a similar argument earlier in his “Dying to Be Pure: The Martyr Story,” *Mennonite Life* 47 (Dec. 1992), 9-15, though here his main concern was that the martyr stories cannot “provide guidance for a people immersed in culture . . . for a people in need of a positive vision of authority and institutional ethics.”

60. For a website listing all of the various dialogues, links to many of the papers presented, and an overview of the reception history of the encounters, see www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php/Ecumenical_Dialogue.

For some Mennonites, these requests for reconciliation and forgiveness have prompted a sense of vindication—after centuries of marginalization and misunderstanding by the larger Christian church, it comes as a relief to learn that groups who once regarded the Anabaptists and their heirs as heretics and criminals now come seeking forgiveness.

But for other Mennonites, these ecumenical overtures of reconciliation have prompted a fresh, and sometimes unsettling, review of the historical record and a recognition of their tendency to describe other groups with unfair caricatures. The dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference (2005-2009) is especially instructive in this regard. Whereas the initial goal of the conversation had been to address theological differences—specifically those related to the condemnations of the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession of 1530—very early in process the dialogue shifted its focus to historical memory, especially the contrasting accounts that each group has cultivated in describing its origins and its relationship to the other. As a result, participants in the dialogues committed themselves to writing a *shared* history of the early years of the Reformation in which the actions and convictions of both Anabaptist and Lutheran protagonists would be mutually intelligible to readers in both traditions. From the Mennonite side this implied, for example, greater empathy for the difficult position of the Lutheran princes when they gathered in 1530 to present the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V. The condemnations of the Anabaptists in that foundational document were a small part of a much larger effort to convince Catholic authorities of the orthodoxy of Lutheran convictions in the face of military threats from Imperial and Ottoman armies, the social upheaval of the Peasants War, and the seemingly heretical teachings of radical groups like the Anabaptists. Mennonite historians have also tended to read the theology of Luther and his colleagues through the very narrow lens of the reformers' writings against the Anabaptists, sometimes reducing their theology to a caricature in the process. Even more crucially, the ecumenical conversations prompted Mennonites to acknowledge that popular accounts of the Anabaptist martyrs can easily become simplistic morality tales of good versus evil that reduce historical actors to either Christ-like paragons of virtue or demonic oppressors.

This same attentiveness to historical memory also emerged in other ecumenical encounters, including a series of conversations between leaders of a renewal movement within the Swiss Reformed Church in the Canton of Zurich and several conservative Mennonite groups in

Pennsylvania.⁶¹ Those exchanges culminated in the identification of “generational sin” as an important source of the church’s weakness today—a sin rooted in the Reformed Church’s acts of violence and the Mennonite passive complicity in their own silencing.⁶² By mutually confessing the sins of their foreparents, church leaders hoped that both groups would be liberated from the bondage of historical memories to engage more freely in worship and witness.

Various Mennonite-Catholic dialogues have also called for a more critical approach to the memorialization of Anabaptist martyrs. A series of conversations hosted by a lay ecumenical movement known as Bridgefolk, for example, resulted in the publication in 2007 of a collection of essays, *Martyrdom in an Ecumenical Perspective: A Mennonite-Catholic Conversation*.⁶³ More recently, relationships forged by the Bridgefolk movement have led to the establishment of the Michael Sattler House at St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, as a Catholic initiative to honor one of the earliest, and most famous, of the Anabaptist martyrs.

The Lutheran World Federation’s formal request for forgiveness, extended to Mennonites in the summer of 2010 in a moving service of reconciliation in Stuttgart, Germany, has sparked even more criticism of martyr memory. Now that both groups have committed themselves to a path of reconciliation for the wrongs of the past, how will we need to tell the stories of the martyrs differently? Indeed, should we tell those stories at all? What will become of Mennonite identity if the memories of past persecution and suffering are indeed “healed”?⁶⁴ Thus, when representatives of the Mennonite World Conference, attending a ceremony at the Vatican to commemorate the completion of a Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, presented Pope Benedict XVI with the famous image of Dirk Willems returning to rescue his [Catholic] pursuer, the gift sparked sharp criticism from some corners.⁶⁵ Against the

61. See the report by Enos Martin, “Come, Father, Heal Our Land,” at www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/2001-now/come-father-heal-our-land-by-enos-martin-11630861.html.

62. This is the basic premise behind Janet Keller Richards, *Unlocking Our Inheritance: Spiritual Keys to Recovering the Treasures of Anabaptism* (Ronks, Pa.: J.K. Richards, 2005).

63. *Martyrdom in an Ecumenical Perspective: A Mennonite-Catholic Conversation*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Kitchener, Ont: Pandora Press, 2007).

64. As a co-author of the document that came out of that dialogue—and as a close observer of the Mennonite-Catholic dialogue that came to similar conclusions—I heartily affirm the need to engage these questions with an open and self-critical spirit. But I was not prepared for the way in which other voices in the church who heard our wrestling with these questions, affirmed the spirit of self-criticism and upped the ante considerably.

65. Iris de Léon-Hartshorn, “Report of Visit of Mennonite World Conference Delegation to the Vatican, October 18-22, 2007.” Nancy Heisey—who, like de Léon-Hartshorn, was a member of the Mennonite World Conference delegation—has responded with a long

backdrop of other voices of concern, the questions—given prominent coverage in Mennonite news outlets—have asked whether there is *anything* redeemable in the *Martyrs Mirror* at all.

These criticisms and concerns regarding the place of the *Martyrs Mirror*—or the Anabaptist martyrs in general—in the collective identity of Mennonites in North America must be taken seriously. They point to the tendency among all groups to engage in self-aggrandizing mythmaking, and they highlight the particular temptation among minority groups like the Mennonites to claim their victim identity as a perverse badge of honor. Clearly, collective memory can fall prey to the self-serving distortions of arrogance, hypocrisy, and myopia.

But the recent reactions against the *Martyrs Mirror*—or the very idea of commemorating martyrs—are problematic on a number of levels. In the remainder of this essay, I want to enter into the long tradition of debate over the martyr legacy by offering a brief argument as to why contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite groups should actively cultivate the memory of those who gave costly witness to the faith, and I will propose a framework for doing so by appealing to the concept of “right remembering.”

WHY WE NEED TO TELL MARTYR STORIES

Martyrdom is a Contemporary Reality

Contemporary Mennonites should continue to tell stories of courageous witness because the persecution of Christians is not just an ancient story but a contemporary reality. As numerous studies have documented, the number of Christians in Europe and North America has steadily declined in recent decades, both in real numbers and as a percentage of the total population. Yet in most of the rest of the world—specifically in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—Christianity is growing rapidly despite the fact that Christians in many countries are facing the painful reality of persecution and suffering.⁶⁶

A report issued in 2012 by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity provides a sobering perspective. Since the time of Christ, more than 70 million Christians have “lost their lives prematurely, in a

reflection.—“Remembering Dirk Willems: Memory and History in the Future of Ecumenical Relationships,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47 (Summer 2012), 355-375.

66. This past Sunday more Christians likely attended church in China than in all of Europe; the Anglican churches in Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda each have more members than the Anglicans in Britain, Canada, and the U.S. combined; there are more Presbyterians in Ghana than in Scotland; and more Roman Catholics at worship in the Philippines than in any single country in Europe, including Poland, Italy, and Spain. By 2025 the number of Christians in the world is expected to grow to 2.6 billion, making Christianity the world’s largest faith by far.

situation of witness, as a result of human hostility.”⁶⁷ Of this number, more than half—some 45 million people—were killed in the twentieth century alone. The report also estimates that at least 100,000 Christians have been martyred each year since 2000. These figures suggest that during the past decade about eleven Christians have been killed every hour of every day.⁶⁸

This contemporary experience of suffering for reasons of faith is also a reality within the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. Memories are still alive within the Russian Mennonite tradition of the thousands of church members in the former Soviet Union who were harassed, separated from their families, imprisoned, tortured, forced into labor camps, or executed under Stalin and his successors.⁶⁹ Although the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the immigration of many Russian Mennonites to Germany in the 1980s and 1990s brought about profound improvements for many of these Christians, the scars of persecution are still evident. And their stories should not be ignored.

Moreover, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, numerous additional stories have appeared in the Mennonite church press and elsewhere of persecution among Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in various parts of the world: accounts, for example, of churches burned in India, Indonesia, and Vietnam; stories in Ethiopia of businesses boycotted or vandalized, and church members stoned as they gathered for worship; reports from Colombia of Mennonite pastors who have been forced into hiding; persistent tensions in Nigeria that have led to several deaths and enormous property damage; and the profound political and economic uncertainties in Zimbabwe and Congo that believers there have faced for decades.⁷⁰

67. The report is summarized in Todd Johnson and P. F. Crossing, “Global Survey of World Mission” and “Christianity 2013: Renewalists and Faith and Migration,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37 (Jan. 2013), 32-33. See also Todd Johnson, D. B. Barrett, and P. F. Crossing, “Christianity 2011: Martyrs and the Resurgence of Religion,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. (Jan. 2011), 28-29; and Todd Johnson, “The Demographics of Martyrdom,” in *Sorrow and Blood*, ed. William Taylor (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2012), 31-36.

68. For a critique of these calculations, see Thomas Schirmacher, “A Response to the High Counts of Christian Martyrs Per Year,” in Taylor, *Sorrow and Blood*, 37-42.

69. There is a vast literature on the suffering of Mennonites in the Soviet Union. For a good introduction see Peter Letkemann, “Mennonite Victims of ‘The Great Terror,’ 1936-1938,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998), 33-58; and Peter Letkemann, “The Fate of Mennonites in the Volga-Ural Region, 1929-1941,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008), 181-200; and the “The ‘Mennonites and the Soviet Inferno’ Symposium: Through the Fires of Hell,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998), 33-96.

70. These stories can easily be found by reviewing the pages of the *Mennonite Weekly Review* (now the *Mennonite World Review*) between 2000 and the present. See also the reflections by Jack Suderman, “Is it Time to Tell Contemporary Martyr Stories?” *Mennonite Family History* (April 2012), 54-57.

Bearing witness to Christ in the face of adversity, persecution, and suffering is not only an ancient memory in the Christian tradition—it is also an ongoing reality today for many groups in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. The church is called to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2). And if the Body of Christ extends beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, then wherever a part of that Body is suffering because of its witness to Christ, the rest of the Body must take heed. In a letter describing the persecution of the Swiss Brethren from 1635-1645, an Anabaptist writer noted that "we are not bitter as we write these facts. We wish only that our descendants will not forget our suffering."⁷¹ Contemporary Mennonites need to tell stories of persecution and martyrdom because remaining silent, or willfully forgetting, or averting our attention from the reality of suffering, is simply unChristian.

Martyr Stories Prompt Christians to Re-examine Assumptions about Faith

Second, we need to hear the stories of Christian martyrs precisely *because* they are so unsettling. Accounts of faithful witness in the face of persecution should prompt Christians in North America to re-examine their assumptions about the nature of Christian faith.

For many educated people in the West today, the concept of martyrdom is difficult to understand. Modern heirs of the Enlightenment are quick to cite the prolonged and bloody European Wars of Religion in the seventeenth-century as evidence of the futility of coercion in matters of faith. Today the idea of killing others for their beliefs seems barbaric. But by the same token, many Christians in the West find the tenacious certainty of the martyr equally problematic as well. If the religious fanaticism of a suicide bomber seems alien, so too is the absolute confidence of the believer who is willing to suffer loss of family, property, and life itself for the sake of abstract beliefs.

Holding true to one's faith in the face of suffering and death requires at least three essential conditions: 1) a conviction that Truth is *knowable*; 2) a conviction that the Truth that is known compels the believer to *public action* (rather than being merely a private or personal belief); and 3) a conviction that *history has meaning*—that one's death is part of a larger narrative working itself out within the providence of God.

On all three of these counts, many modern people—including many Christians—are likely to have reservations. Increasingly, people in the West declare themselves to be "spiritual," but not religious in the sense of a deep commitment to doctrinal convictions or the regular habits of

71. *Ausbund* (Lancaster County: Verlag von den Amischen Gemeinden, 1992), 864; *Anabaptist Letters from 1635 to 1645* (Atglen, Pa.: John E. Kauffman, 1977), 42.

corporate worship. Claims to know the Truth seem presumptuous, perhaps even dangerous. More appealing is the idea of “personal truths,” in which religious convictions are judged to be essentially private matters—personally comforting if they happen to meet individual needs, but not something worth dying for. American Christians today might be willing to die defending their country, or their property, or their families—indeed, many are willing to kill on their behalf. But few churches in North America are actively preparing their members for the possibility of dying nonviolently for their Christian faith. To do so requires a strong confidence that the Christian way of life is not merely a lifestyle choice or a projection of individual desires, but something more like the force of gravity—absolutely true and real whether you believe in it or not.

For the nonresistant martyr—whose life has been shaped by the teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ—love *is* most powerful force of the universe, whether or not others believe it to be true. Martyrs are convinced that life is ultimately stronger than death. And those who “bear witness” to that fact are prepared to offer their earthly lives in the confidence that the long arc of history is moving in the direction of the kingdom of God.

If many Christians in North America have tended to domesticate the faith—turning it into something safe or regarding it as an extension of their consumer tastes and preferences—encountering stories of brothers and sisters who are “bearing witness” to Christ and the power of the resurrection should unsettle the timid and remind believers that something of ultimate significance is at stake in the claim to be a follower of Jesus.

Martyr Stories as a Source of Ecclesial Identity

Third, contemporary Christians should tell stories of faithfulness amid adversity—and especially the stories of brothers and sisters from the Global South—because it strengthens our sense of a shared ecclesial identity.

Like other groups who practice believer’s baptism, Anabaptist-Mennonites have a strong understanding of the church in the context of the local congregation—the body of believers that gathers regularly for worship and is joined together by a host of shared, face-to-face activities and the close ties of personal relationships. But Anabaptist-Mennonites are often far less clear about how the local congregation is connected with other congregations, or how to describe the ties that join a congregation to a “district” or “conference” or even a “denomination.” And when the scale of identity moves to the global church, the nature of

ecclesial identity becomes even more uncertain. The most recent statistics suggest that there are close to 1.7 million baptized Anabaptist-Mennonites in the world, living in 83 countries, and represented by 243 national conferences.⁷² In the absence of a pope, a strong sacramental theology, an episcopacy anchored in a doctrine of apostolic succession, or a single unifying confession of faith, what holds these 243 groups together in a shared ecclesial fellowship across vast geographical distances and in the face of profound differences in language, culture, and church practices?

One response—though certainly not the only way of describing Anabaptist-Mennonite ecclesiology—has recognized the power of a shared story. Anabaptist-Mennonite groups could be described as “communities of memory.” Whether explicitly recognized or not, Christian communities are always formed by a particular cluster of shared stories. These stories shape group identity by expressing deep theological convictions and ethical ideals. Indeed, history is constitutive to theological identity. Christian communities come to know who they are by telling stories of God’s faithfulness in the past and by locating themselves in continuity with a long narrative arc that goes all the way back to the story of the early church, the revelation of God in Christ, God’s covenant with the Children of Israel, and the account of Creation itself. One purpose of worship in Anabaptist-Mennonite settings is to remind those who gather that they are part of a grand narrative of people who have voluntarily decided to follow in the way of Christ, and who bear witness to God’s ongoing presence in the world by seeking to live in ways that reflect Christ’s teaching and example.

This was, after all, the primary intention of Thieleman van Bragt in the *Martyrs Mirror*—to unite a divided and fractious cluster of congregations by telling the stories of the sixteenth-century martyrs as part of a much deeper tradition of faith that extended all the way back to the early church and to Christ himself. Telling and retelling the stories of those who held firm to their faith in the face of suffering and persecution was a reminder that Christian discipleship is not an abstract ideal, or a set of ritual practices, or formal membership in an ecclesial organization, but a way of life shared by other Christians, past and present.

Which is why contemporary Mennonites should tell stories of those who are bearing witness today. Remembering the martyrs is a way of extending the community of faith backward in time, reminding each congregation that it is not alone in its journey, but joined in a fellowship

72. For the full report, see www.mwc-cmm.org/content/world-directory-now-available.

of memory rooted in the life and teachings of Christ and in continuity with faithful Christians throughout the history of the church.

We should tell the stories of Christian martyrs because the church's very identity depends on it.

“RIGHT REMEMBERING” – TELLING MARTYR STORIES AS AN ACT OF PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

The concerns raised by recent critics of “martyr memory” must be taken seriously. But the solution to these dangers is not to reject history, or to quit telling stories, or to think that we can escape from the burden of memory. Instead, the challenge, as the theologian Miroslav Volf has argued, is to “remember rightly.”⁷³ In Volf’s use of the concept, a commitment to “right remembering” explicitly recognizes the possibility that we can remember “wrongly” or “badly.” But it refuses to ignore or bury the past out of a fear that memory can be abused.

In its most basic form, “right remembering” in the telling of martyr stories implies a clear commitment to factual honesty when relating accounts of those who have suffered for their faith. This commitment to honesty is not a call to hypercriticism or a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” but simply a conscious effort to acknowledge the complexity of every story, to gather as many sources as possible related to the account, to make those sources available to others with footnotes, and to resist the temptation to invest the protagonists in the stories with more saintliness (or the antagonists with more evil) than the information at hand can reasonably support.

For Mennonites this includes, at a minimum, a much more nuanced understanding of the specific circumstances of violence against the Anabaptists and a more critical approach to the sources that have informed their telling of the stories. In telling the story of persecution in the sixteenth century, for example, Mennonite historians rarely distinguish between the Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran territories in terms of their responses to the Anabaptists. Yet there were important differences. Thus, even though Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon provided ample theological justification for the execution of Anabaptists, Lutheran princes on the whole were comparatively slow to follow their

73. Although Volf has written extensively on this subject, his most accessible work is *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). He addresses “right remembering” explicitly in his *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), esp. 39-128. In the ELCA-MC USA dialogue, it was James Juhnke who made the most vigorous argument in favor of shifting our focus to the concept of “right remembering.”

counsel. Indeed, the Lutheran prince Philip of Hesse had a deep revulsion against the use of capital punishment in religious matters, and he repeatedly resisted pressure from his court theologians and neighboring princes to impose punishments harsher than prison sentences or banishment.⁷⁴

“Right remembering” also includes a commitment to tell the stories with an *empathetic* spirit—that is, a conversational posture that is committed to rethinking our history and theological commitments from the perspective of the Other. Such a commitment is not easy. It requires an active engagement of the will, the intellect, and the imagination. And ultimately, truly empathetic understanding comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

In terms of the story of Anabaptist martyrdom, “right remembering” in this sense calls for greater attentiveness to the complex context of the day that included such dynamics as new forms of communication, greater access to Scripture, widespread apocalyptic fears, strong currents of anticlericalism, growing nationalist sentiments, local economic unrest, and a proliferation of charismatic preachers who operated outside of any formal ecclesiological structures. Within this setting, ecclesial and political authorities were locked into a host of precarious struggles for their own legitimacy and survival. From the perspective of Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed leaders alike, the Anabaptists were a disturbing nuisance—crazy, wild-eyed fanatics who had spitefully twisted the teachings of Jesus into a justification for economic and political revolution. Catholics looked on Anabaptist ecclesiology as a threat to social and ecclesial order; Lutherans regarded their emphasis on good works as blasphemous; and all groups considered their teachings on the oath and the sword to be outright seditious.⁷⁵ Within the religious context of early modern Europe, most theologians and magistrates did not regard themselves as *persecuting* Anabaptists; rather, they were *prosecuting* dangerous religious criminals. This was not a genocidal attack based on racial or ethnic prejudice. Rather, Anabaptists were apprehended, interrogated, and sometimes executed because they were criminals who were destroying the fabric of the body of Christ, threatening civil order, and endangering the salvation of others.

74. Cf. Paul Wappler, *Die Stellung Kursachsens und des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen zur Täuferbewegung* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung, 1910).

75. John S. Oyer, “The Reformers Condemn the Anabaptists,” in *They Harry the Good People Out of the Land: Essays on the Persecution, Survival and Flourishing of Anabaptists and Mennonites*, ed. John D. Roth (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 2000), 3-16. This essay is a useful summary of a much more detailed analysis that can be found in John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against the Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

Moreover, within the judicial norms of the day, the use of torture and the death penalty were not extraordinary punishments. In the world of the sixteenth century, the territorial princes who executed Anabaptists were operating fully within the boundaries of Imperial law.⁷⁶

Clearly, the decision to execute dissenters was a conscious choice made with an awareness of genuine historical alternatives. An empathetic understanding of the context does not justify the violence of those in power, nor does it exonerate historical actors from the moral consequences of their decisions. But “right remembering” does suggest that the manner in which Anabaptist-Mennonites tell the story of those who suffered for their faith must be consistent with the theology of compassion and love of enemy that they claim to uphold, even if doing so complicates the narrative structure of Mennonite memory.

Finally, “right remembering” means that we tell the martyr stories as a confession. Confession in the Christian tradition has two quite distinct meanings. The first, as in a “confession of faith,” recognizes that Christians who suffer and die for their faith “bear witness” to — that is, they testify to, or confess—the Lordship of Christ. Through their lives, their verbal witness, their perseverance, and their courage, martyrs point us to Christ—not just to the suffering that Christ endured, but also, and more importantly, to the resurrection and the fundamental truth that life is more powerful than death. When Christians remember rightly, they celebrate the confession of faith embodied in the witness of the martyrs and they confess their own desire to live in ways that are consistent with these truths.

But in a more complicated way, “right remembering” should also remind us of a second meaning of confession—namely, an open acknowledgement of the church’s limitations, distortions, and failures, even in the very stories of the martyrs whose actions it regards as exemplary. Many Christian martyrs, on closer examination, are revealed to be deeply flawed people. Though many seem to have absolute clarity at the moment of their demise, in the time leading up to their deaths they are often—like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane—filled with deep doubts and uncertainties. And frequently, the circumstances surrounding their deaths prove to be more complex than they appear at first glance.

Two examples may suffice. In the fall of 1919 roving bands of partisans—some of them led by the notorious anarchist Nestor

76. Already in January of 1528, Emperor Charles V had declared Anabaptists to be subject to execution without due process; a similar mandate issued at the Diet of Speyer in April 1529 strengthened that law and threatened sanctions against princes who were lax in rooting out Anabaptists from their territories.

Makhno—descended upon several South Russian Mennonite villages and systematically massacred all, or most, of the males living there. Vivid accounts, for example, have been preserved of the murders of 82 villagers in Eichenfeld, 58 in Orloff, and as many as 99 in Munsterberg. And these horrific incidents are only the most dramatic moments in a much larger scenario of terror, robbery, rape, and famine that beset the Mennonite communities of South Russia in the years following World War I.⁷⁷

Woven into virtually all of these accounts are equally dramatic expressions of a deep faith that emerged in response to the horrors unfolding around them—prayers of petition and lament; hymns expressing the pathos of suffering; defiant acts of worship in which grieving communities dared to acknowledge that God is Lord of history in the face of violent death and heart-wrenching grief. All these expressions of worship in the face of unimaginable horror are truly confessions of faith and trust in a God who shared their grief and pointed them to the resurrection.

But there are also larger, more complex, circumstances behind this story—a history of tensions between Mennonites and the Russian peasants around them that may have prompted Makhno and his band to target specific Mennonite settlements.⁷⁸ This larger context is a part of the story that might also be “confessed” even as we honor the profound witness and faith of the community in the face of suffering.

The story of Merlin Grove is similarly complicated. As Mennonite farmers from Ontario, Grove and his wife, Dorothy, felt called to

77. Something of the context can be gleaned from Dietrich Neufeld and Al Reimer, *A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977) with more detailed accounts of the attack found in Heinrich Toews, *Eichenfeld-Dubovka: Ein Tatsachenbericht aus der Tragödie des Deutschtums in der Ukraine* (Karlsruhe: Verlag Heinrich Schneider, n.d.) and Harvey L. Dyck, John B. Toews, and John Roy Staples, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: A Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village* (Kitchener, Ont: Pandora Press, 2004).

78. See, for example, the nuanced treatment of the Eichenfeld massacre by Sean David Patterson, “The Makhnos of Memory: Mennonite and Makhnovist Narratives of the Civil War in Ukraine, 1917-1921,” (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 2013), 106-146; and an exploration of the larger context by Lawrence Klippenstein, “The *Selbstschutz*: A Mennonite Army in Ukraine, 1918-1919,” in *History and Mission in Europe: Continuing the Conversation*, ed. Mary Raber and Peter F. Penner (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2011), 49-82. The following essays offer a helpful insight into the contemporary wrestling by Mennonite historians with an appropriate interpretation of the horrific events that unfolded among Russian Mennonites: Walter Sawatsky, “Dying for What Faith: Martyrologies to Inspire and Heal or to Foster Christian Division?” *Conrad Grebel Review* (Spring 2000), 31-53; Arnold Neufeld-Fast, “Gott kann! Gott kann nicht! The Suffering of Soviet Mennonites and their Contribution to a Contemporary Mennonite Theology,” *Conrad Grebel Review* (Spring 2000), 54-68; Leonard G. Friesen, “More Than Sheep to Slaughter: Reflections on Mennonites and the Stalinist Terror,” *Conrad Grebel Review* (Spring 2000), 69-73.

missionary service and accepted an assignment in Somalia with Eastern Mennonite Missions. In 1962, Grove was in the process of registering students at a church-run school in Mogadishu when a local Muslim mullah—frustrated that the government had granted permission for the school to be opened—attacked him and Dorothy with a knife. Grove died almost instantly of his wounds and Dorothy was critically injured. In the following years his story circulated widely in Mennonite communities as an example of a modern martyr. And with good reason—the witness of his life of service to Christ, and the response of his family who sought reconciliation with the perpetrator, was a true confession of the faith.⁷⁹

But virtually forgotten in the story of Grove's martyrdom is Dorothy's journey as a widow in the decades following her husband's death. According to a family member, Dorothy and her family felt that the church abandoned them when their term as missionaries expired and they struggled to make ends meet in the subsequent years.⁸⁰ The story of the Grove family's life in the years after 1962 should probably also be told alongside the account of his death—as a confession.

Remembering the martyrs as confession begins with a recognition of God's deep love for the world, even amid the ugliness of human frailty and sin. Telling the stories as confession is to gather *all* the shards and splinters of our broken lives—both of the martyrs and the oppressors—and then to be attentive to the trace left behind when we enter into the mess of chaos, looking for signs of a new creation. Thinking of the martyr stories as confession means that we will resist using them to explain or defend or argue for anything. The witness they offer is essentially noncoercive: it does not impose anything that makes God, or the church, or God's world, look better or seem better. Their stories simply reveal what is already implicit in every detail of creation—a beauty of holiness that has been there all along.

CONCLUSION

On October 6, 1573, authorities in the Dutch city of Antwerp shackled a young mother, led her from a prison cell to the city square, and tied her to a post. After piling wood around her feet, they publicly denounced her as a heretic and a criminal, and then—as her two children looked on

79. Cf. Omar Eby, *A Whisper in a Dry Land; A Biography of Merlin Grove, Martyr for Muslims in Somalia* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1968).

80. Based on a conversation with Trevor Bechtel, a member of the extended Grove family, at Bluffton University on Feb. 26, 2013, and subsequent e-mails.

from the crowd—ignited the wood with hot coals and executed her in a fiery blaze.⁸¹

Executions in early modern Europe were public affairs, spectacles designed to entertain crowds and to serve as a warning against others who might be tempted to disobey the law. But authorities had also learned from experience that the Anabaptists were capable of using these same executions as opportunities for public witness. Indeed, there are numerous accounts of Anabaptists singing hymns, praying, or even preaching as they were dying, calling the crowd to repentance amid the agony of their death. So when the time came for the execution of Maeyken Wens the authorities in Antwerp were determined to silence her. To prevent Maeyken's death from becoming an opportunity for witness, they clamped her tongue with a hinged iron bracket, a tongue screw, so that it would be impossible for her to pray, sing, or preach while she was dying.

At the time of her death, the authorities were convinced that they had silenced Maeyken—erased her from the memory of history by executing her and by ensuring that she could not “bear witness” as she died. But the long arc of history often disrupts the plans of the powerful. Following her death, Maeyken's young son, Adrian, returned to the spot of her execution, sifted through the ashes of his mother's remains, and found the tongue screw that had rendered her mute—so that the very instrument that coerced Maeyken's silence became a tangible testimony to her faithful witness.⁸²

Moreover, at some point shortly after her death, an unknown poet recounted the story of Maeyken Wens in verse form. Several decades later, in the late 1650s, Thieleman von Braght recovered the letters that Maeyken had written to her husband, her children, and her pastor prior to her death, which he included along with hundreds of other sources in the 1660 *Martyrs Mirror*. One of those letters, written in Maeyken's own hand, has survived in the Dutch archives. Then, in 1685, Jan Luyken, helped to fix the memory of Maeyken Wens for posterity by supplementing van Braght's text with a dramatic image of Adrian and his little brother, Hans, sifting through the ashes at the site of their mother's execution, where they found the tongue screw.

Clearly, the fact that Maeyken's story remains alive today, four-and-a-half centuries after her execution, did not happen by accident. Someone cared enough about her story to retrieve the tongue screw from the ashes and to preserve it as a symbol of her witness. Someone took the effort to

81. Van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, 979-983.

82. A similar tongue screw, reportedly used to silence the Anabaptist martyr Hans Bret, has been preserved in the Amsterdam Mennonite Library at the University of Amsterdam.

collect her letters—to copy them out, set them in type, and then to organize the printing and distribution of a book. Someone brought the gift of the artist to bear, so that the text is transformed in our minds by a visual image that inspires the imagination. And now, today, the story of Maeyken Wens continues to live on in a host of settings. The account of Maeyken Wens is a reminder that stories from the past that come to shape a tradition are never preserved by accident, even as the past is transformed by the very process of remembering.

How we tell these stories is never a simple matter. Collective memory is fraught with pitfalls. But the challenges of “right remembering” should not become an excuse for our forgetfulness or paralyze us into silence in the face of brothers and sisters who are suffering today for the cause of Christ. The challenge today—not just for Anabaptist-Mennonites, but for all people of faith—is to claim with confidence the particularity of their tradition-shaping stories, anchored in the larger story of God’s presence in history, while not allowing those stories to become an idol or a weapon or a path to sectarian retreat.⁸³

Keeping these stories alive is an affirmation that those who relinquished their lives did not do so in vain. Remembering the martyrs is a way of giving voice to those who were forced into silence by a tongue screw. Recalling their deaths is an affirmation that history is meaningful—that our lives have a purpose beyond mere self-preservation; that Truth cannot be killed; and that the resurrection will ultimately triumph over the cross.

83. In his response to Stephanie Krehbiel and Mel Goering’s critique, Joseph Liechty has offered an eloquent summary of “right remembering”: “While the Mennonite martyr tradition can’t give us guidance for all the issues we face, it remains valuable, even essential. It gives us insight into one way the world works: sometimes honest convictions and good works are rewarded with rejection and suffering, even death. Those of us who may never need to face this reality should still know that this is true of the world in extremis, and too many have lived and still do live in such a world. The martyr tradition tells us about one aspect of where we come from as a people. We need to know. It shows us that it is possible to meet the most difficult circumstances with courage, honor, and faith. It gives evidence that even the most powerful oppression can be resisted. In these and other ways, the martyrs show us that the ground of their hope, faith in Jesus Christ, can provide a durable hope for any who wish to embrace it.—“Staying Mennonite: Why Martyrs Still Matter,” *Mennonite Life* 62 (Spring 2007), <http://tools.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2007-spring/liechty.php> (accessed April 24, 2013).