

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION
Spring 2017 VOL. 37, NO. 2

Bridging the Divide

HAVE I EVER mentioned how much I hate conflict? Everything in me wants to run the other way when I see it coming. Yet in my work and in a couple of church-related situations, I have found myself in the middle of serious gut-wrenching conflicts that threatened to destroy the organizations and irreparably harm relationships. Sometimes, I've been in leadership roles and couldn't simply run the other way as I desperately wanted to do, but had to help figure out ways to bridge the divide.

I am committed to peacemaking, with a particular affinity for Paul's admonition in Romans 12, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." I know that running the other way isn't really in keeping with that verse. This is part of what makes the current state of political and religious conversation in the U.S. difficult for me and many others who are deeply troubled by the divisions and polarization and don't know how to deal with it.

The topic for the Fall 2005 edition of *Shalom!* was "Creating Space for Dialogue on Difficult Issues," and in Spring 2011, the topic was "Relating to People Who Are Not Like Us." So here we are again, taking another pass at what feels like a chronic challenge. How do we handle disagreement, especially when the stakes are really high (the very foundations of democracy and our role as Christians in society)? How do we have conversations with people who see things very differently than we do—especially but not only when they are family members, close friends, and/or people we go

to church with every week?

In the Spring 2011 edition, in an article entitled "Words that Heal and Don't Hurt: Musings on Civility," I noted, "I often struggle to find the right balance between stating my beliefs forthrightly and unapologetically and being tolerant of and open to a wide variety of viewpoints." I went on to list several principles to guide our interactions with people with very different points of view:

- We are not all alike yet we are all created in God's image.
- Biblical principles like the Golden Rule (treat others as you want to be treated) guide the way we relate to each other.
- Accuracy and truth are essential ingredients in civil conversation.
- Good dialogue is enhanced when everyone chooses to think the best and not the worst about others.
- Clearly stated and owned beliefs help establish a base line from which ongoing dialogue can happen.

Reviewing that list of principles reminds me of my own commitments, and challenges me to apply those principles anew in the current context that feels even more polarized than when I first developed the list. I still hate conflict and disagreement, but I also still believe that my commitment to peacemaking and reconciliation requires me to continue to work at bridging the divide, or, using Paul's language in Ephesians 2, to follow Christ's example of "breaking down the dividing walls of hostility."

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Creative Co-Existence

An Aggressive Passion for Oneness

by Bruxy Cavey

MY FAVOURITE WORD word in the English language is “together.”

Together means “to gather” or to pull into unity. Still, there is a word I like even more: the ancient Greek word that is sometimes translated “together” in the New Testament. The word is *homothumadon*. I know, it sounds like a dinosaur from the early Jurassic period. “Homothumadon” is one of the coolest words in the biblical languages. It’s the result of two words coming together in a most creative way.

Homo means one or the same. Thumos means to snort with passion, usually a passionate rage, or an intense fury. This kind of anger goes beyond “orge,” the usual Greek word for anger. Thumos is an emotional outburst of anger, an almost violent eruption of

wrath. And when these two words get married, their beautiful love child is homothumadon: an aggressive passion for oneness.

Luke uses this word to describe the disposition of the early church a few times in the book of Acts. And the apostle Paul uses it once, when he says, “Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6).

Unity. One voice. Together. A raging passion for oneness. This should be us!

There are probably many reasons why Christians throughout history have lost sight of living the homothumadon life. I think one reason may be that sometimes Christians confuse acceptance and agreement. When we start to equate these two values as nearly synonymous, we will tend to only fully accept someone when we agree with them or, put another way, we will tend to withhold acceptance in order to communicate our disagreement. How sad! Dear Christian brothers and sisters, we can fully accept, embrace, and live in unity with those Christians with whom we disagree! As long as we follow Jesus as our Lord we are saved (Rom. 10:9), and therefore, we are family.

Look at what the apostle Paul says in the very next verse: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7).

The Greek word translated “accept” here—“proslambano”—means to take someone to yourself, to receive or welcome someone into your home, your world, your space, your life. And because Christ welcomed us into his love life with the Father, we are to welcome others into our lives together. In fact, this kind of acceptance can happen in the midst of strong disagreement, and it shouldn’t threaten our unity. This same word for acceptance (proslambano) is used in the Bible for how we are to accept specifically those Christians with whom we disagree, because this is how God has accepted us. For example: “The one who eats everything must

not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted (proslambano) them” (Rom. 14:3).

And even when Peter misunderstood Christ’s mission to die and decided to rebuke or argue with him, the text says: “Peter took him aside (proslambano) and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’” (Matt. 16:22; Mark 8:22).

We know Peter was wrong about the mission of Christ, but he was right about the unity of Christ. Even in the midst of this sharp disagreement, he was pulling Jesus closer, not pushing him away.

“Now wait a minute!” I can hear some of you talking back already. “There have to be some situations where division is necessary.” Absolutely. And those occasions are laid out for us in the Bible. We can gather them together into four categories of reasons to divide from others who claim to be Christians:

1. When they preach a different Jesus (1 John 2:18-23; 2 John 7-11)
2. When they preach a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 1:8-9)
3. When they abuse grace to assert their own will over God’s (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; Jude 3-7)
4. When they have an ongoing divisive disposition (Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10; 3 John 9-11; Jude 16)

I like that last one. We are called to divide from divisive people. Forced unity with them while they fight to divide the church will create a kind of ongoing internal damage to the body of Christ. As Paul writes to Titus: “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them” (Titus 3:10). Three strikes and you’re out, divisive people.

So there you have it. Is someone you know who claims to be a Christian actually promoting a different Jesus than the Jesus of Scripture? Separate. They aren’t family. Is someone you know who claims to be a Christian promoting a different gospel than the



Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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one preached by Jesus? Divide. They aren't part of the same body. Is someone you know who claims to be a Christian also claiming special license to sin because God is gracious so how we live doesn't matter? Revoke their license to sin. They should not go unchallenged. And is someone you know who claims to be a Christian continually manufacturing reasons to divide from other Christians, accusing, slandering, and creating suspicion? In the words of Jesus and the apostle Paul: "Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matt. 15:14), and "Come out from them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17).

Yes, there are occasions to divide with other "Christians." And when that occasion comes about, we should be clear and unreserved. But—and this is one big but!—we must be cautious not to lump a brother or sis-

ter into any one of these categories too quickly. These categories don't describe one-off mistakes, or theological confusion that simply needs correction. These categories refer to people who are bent on a certain direction, away from the way of Jesus, while trying to retain the moniker of a "Christ-follower." So be careful not to judge too quickly.

One of the sins the apostle Paul says will bar us from the kingdom of God is the sin of being a "reviler" or "slanderer" (2 Cor. 6:10). A reviler (Greek, *loidoros*) is someone who tends to use his or her words to denigrate, demoralize, or simply injure someone else's reputation. It is division through insult, and falls under the category of being a divisive person that is worth dividing from (1 Cor. 5:11). Don't be that person.

Aside from these four and very serious situations when it is right to divide, our dis-

position as parts together in the body of Christ should be a snorting, snarling passion for unity, a vehement rage for oneness. Dear Christians, our unity is worth fighting for.

- Our unity will bring God's blessing (Psalm 133).
- Our unity bears witness to the truth of Jesus (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; Gal. 5:13-15).
- Our unity is in tune with the reality that is the one, unified body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-18; 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 12:12-13)

So, brothers and sisters, let's raise a glass together and cheer—*homothumadon!*

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Finding a Third Way

by Steve Schwartz

ONE OF MY favorite Bible stories is John 8:1-11, when the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" The scripture is clear that they did this to trap Jesus.

There is some question whether this story actually occurred and should be in the Bible, but as my Bible professor Tony Blair said, "I really hope it's true because I love Jesus' example here."

With our earthly perspective, there are two options for Jesus here: say her life should be spared and violate the law of Moses, or agree she should be stoned and undermine his message of love and forgiveness. Two options, neither good. You can see why it was a trap.

But Jesus doesn't take the bait; he pauses. He takes time to reflect and gather his thoughts. He then responds with "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," or the more colloquial "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

That'll preach.

If I were making an action movie based on the life of Jesus, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" would be the tagline on the movie poster. Although "I'll be back" would be a close second.

I love these types of stories—when Jesus, backed into a corner, responds with an unforeseen option, a third way if you will, an answer that had not been considered, one that transcends the moment with its wisdom and power and grace.

This type of response is what Walter Brueggemann might call the "prophetic imagination," helping us see the world not as it is but as it might be.

How can this prophetic imagination inform our politics?

First, some ground rules. As Christians it is vital to remember we belong to a Kingdom first and any national identity or party affiliation pales in comparison. As someone born overseas, with missionary parents with friends all over the world, I've never understood hyper-nationalism in the United States, but I'm especially dumbfounded when those who claim to follow Christ ex-

hibit it. It's all well and good to appreciate your country and root for their soccer team in the World Cup, but when it comes to war, economic policy, refugee resettlement, or issues of justice, our allegiance as children of God should be to all his children, not simply those within our arbitrarily drawn borders.

We must also understand the value of the separation of church and state. Some people mistakenly think of the separation of church and state as an effort to remove any mention of God or religion from the public sphere. Where it is interpreted this way it is unfortunate. Co-mingling the powers of the state with the church is bad for both. If the church is seeking state power to enforce its theology or morality, you ultimately end up killing people who veer from a specific form of legalism. Our Anabaptist spiritual ancestors were persecuted and killed by the state in coordination with the church for resisting infant baptism. Felix Mans, a co-founder of the Swiss Brethren Anabaptists, was drowned on January 5, 1527 by other Protestant leaders for baptizing adults under the belief Christians should be baptized only after they make the choice to follow Christ. (Personal note:

My great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather Johannes Meyer, born in 1500, lived 30 miles from where Felix Mans was martyred at the time of his death and Meyer's descendants eventually joined the Swiss Brethren.)

And if the state seeks the power of the church to advance its causes, the church, if it accommodates and complies, loses its prophetic authority to speak truth to power. Martin Luther King, Jr. summarized this: "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

With those ground rules in mind, it is vital that we take political action. If we care about injustice, we must confront abusive individuals and oppressive systems. If we care about life, we must be active in ways that avoid violence and increase health and wellness. If we care about our neighbors, we must take collective action to improve their conditions.

And if we love our neighbors, we must remember to love our neighbors when promoting love of neighbor.

We may be upset with the state's approach to refugee resettlement, abortion, war, or health care because we want to love

our neighbors affected by these issues so they can experience health and wholeness. But if we are going to challenge the status quo on these issues, we need not demonize those who merely disagree on the best tactics to move toward justice. We can have vigorous, yet civil, debate. We can listen and seek to understand those with different experiences and perspectives.

We must seek wisdom more than we seek rightness. Author David Dark, who describes philosophy as "the active love of wisdom," says, "Should we accept the mission of becoming philosophers, we will be individuals who want to know what is true more than we want to feel successful or right or powerful. We will desire honesty more than we desire winning." We will recall we serve a King who shunned earthly expressions of power.

If we are standing in front of a metaphorical adulterer, knowing confrontation or punishment is deserved, and a metaphorical Jesus suggests a "third way" that does not satisfy the hunger of our flesh, but recognizes a deeper purpose or opportunity in this moment, will we have ears to hear? Or will we still find an excuse to pick up the first stone?

When I am absolutely convinced I am right on a political matter, that is when I

know I am in trouble. I'm not saying we should not have conviction, but rightness leads to arrogance and condescension—and blind spots. I try to remember that for hundreds of years many Christians in this country either actively endorsed or at least tolerated the enslavement of people of color. They were sure they were right and used scripture to prove it.

What blind spots do I have? What certainties may I look back on in 30 years and realize were heresy? What does the Lord require of us? To act justly? Yes. To love mercy? Yes. But also, to walk humbly with our God.

With humility and prophetic imagination perhaps we can, on occasion, transform division into community, argument into dialogue, anger into reflection, accusation into understanding, and complacency into action.

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Love the Person in Front of You

By Nancy Crowder Huerter

THIS PAST POLITICAL season has been difficult. Some experienced profound mourning for the country we thought we knew, the decency we expected, the compassion that is so central to our faith. Many have strained relationships with friends, family, or churches over political differences; some have sensed rejection where none was intended, and some are confused by and impatient with the distress of others. Social media has given everyone a voice and made everyone an "expert." People who had never been concerned about politics found themselves suddenly caring very much and feeling pressure to speak truths that seemed obvious but others just couldn't see. Political social media posts caused unanticipated, heated discussions resulting in hurt feelings and damaged

relationships. Many felt obligated to attack anyone who disagreed. Hatred, disrespect, and disdain became normative. News media became even more polarized with contradictory facts and extreme biases as our daily fare. Even within the body of Christ, we sometimes forgot how to speak to and care for one another.

News crises occurred incessantly. Staying informed politically was challenging; finding objective, fact-based news sources seemed impossible. There was overwhelming tension as we careened from one shocking event to the next, week after week, month after month. We can't live long-term in crisis mode—we have to find a sustainable pace. How much information is enough? How do we steward our time between political

knowledge and action, caring for family, caring for those in need, serving our church and community? After several very stressful months of doing my best to be informed and feeling I was watching our country self-destruct, I realized the most important things to do are the things that have always been most important: focus on my relationship with Christ and follow his commands to love God and love my neighbor.

The Bible doesn't talk a lot about influencing governments, but it is full of instructions about how to live our lives well. In Micah 6, the prophet says, "Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take GOD seriously." Paul says to the Ephesians: "Take all the help you

can get, every weapon God has issued....Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them....God's Word is an indispensable weapon.... prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters....Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out" (ch. 6). Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6: 27-28, RSV). In I Timothy, Paul stresses, "The first thing I want you to do is pray....especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation" (I Tim. 2:1-3). I confess I have not been praying enough.

Neither party can claim the title "Christian." Both major parties have ideas that are consistent with Scripture and some that aren't. It seems that with many issues there is a tension between one side insisting on what seems to them a moral imperative and the other side insisting that there are complicat-

ing practical or human costs that must be considered. Because we have become so polarized and our language is so loaded with emotional triggers, we rarely take the time to acknowledge the truth on the other side. Most of us have friends, neighbors, and family members at both ends of the political spectrum, and it's not because they're stupid or misguided. We have different brains, different personalities, different experiences, different priorities (and hear completely different news coverage in language we understand differently), but we have one Lord who told us to love each other and be unified. I need to love the person in front of me.

This is a critical time for the Church to model unity, not in political opinion, but in loving, valuing, and working alongside each other in spite of our differences. We need to consider what messages the Church is sending to the world. Criticizing others' attempts to make a difference is not helpful; questioning their motives is even less so. I must be careful with what I say (Do I know it's true? Will it help anyone? Will it hurt anyone?

What are my motives?). Just as in other areas of Christian life, we're a body with many parts, all of which are valuable. As Paul puts it, "walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel....pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness. But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift" (Eph. 4:1-7).

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The Crucifixion of American Politics

By Brian Ross

"LIBERALS ARE SOME of the most arrogant, condescending smart alecks... they're just pure ignorant, and they fit the bill of people who have no love and no respect for the founding of this country" (Rush Limbaugh).

"You could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic—you name it" (Hillary Clinton).

"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best.... They're sending people that have lots of problems....They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Donald Trump).

"Once you dust for fingerprints, it's pretty clear who ruined America: white people... The Caucasian nation showed up in droves to vote for Trump" (Samantha Bee).

As the kind of person who reads this publication, it is very likely that if you have

not heard all of the statements quoted above, they still won't surprise you. At least since the 1990s, with the dawn of 24-hour cable news, we all have become begrudgingly accustomed to politicians and talking heads who go for the jugular. The majority of Americans, for quite some time, have had little respect for our political class.

But the past year or two seems somewhat different, doesn't it? The perennial acrimony between Republican and Democratic politicians has seeped into the hearts and minds of the person on the street. Last summer, the Pew Research Center released the results of a poll that only confirmed what many of us have intuitively sensed—many Americans are genuinely afraid of the other party (49 percent of Republican supporters fear the Democratic Party and 55 percent of Democrats fear the Republican Party.) This is where it all gets concerning. As William Shakespeare wrote (through the mouth of

Charmian in Antony and Cleopatra): "In time we hate that which we often fear."

One of the questions we are left with is this: Where did this all come from? Admittedly, human life and cultures are way too complex to provide any definitive reasons for our current experience of deep social fissures. But there are a couple of sources that we might consider.

Obviously, the ubiquitous use of the internet and social media has many benefits (follow me on Facebook!) but it also quickly leads us into division. Whether you are a professional in New York, or a farm worker in Central Pennsylvania, the whole world is now just a finger tap away. With the rush of every idea, every tribe, and every way of life now available to everyone, we naturally line up with people who are similar to us. Psychologists and social researchers have long noted that when human beings are overwhelmed with multiple choices and options,

the fear circuits in the brain go into overdrive. We identify with people who resemble us in order to feel safe. Every option is too many options. We choose security within the known.

On top of this biological response, nearly all of the world's information sits within our hands. You can instantly find dirt on any person or political philosophy, confirming what you already fear.

Additionally, social media has now provided every single person with a megaphone. Voices that were formerly silenced now have the ability to speak their minds and share their experiences. This is a very good thing. We need to hear the voices of everyone. But these growing pains often include increased political strife. When people who have been marginalized finally feel free to speak their minds, it often sounds angry and revolutionary to persons of a dominant culture who have not heard these sentiments before. In return, majority persons immediately go on the offensive. Progressives feel that they finally have the ability to speak truth to power. Conservatives on the other hand, feel that all of the best of history's past is intentionally being dismantled. If someone feels like they are being silenced by the majority, or if they feel like valuable traditions are under assault, fear and attacks metastasize and threaten the health of our body politic.

Where do we go from here? Any way forward for a member of a believers' church should begin with Jesus himself.

Ross Douthat, in his book *Bad Religion*, reminds us that Jesus is utterly unique. As the God-man, the human face of God, Jesus is too profound to easily fit within our contemporary political binaries. Douthat writes:

No figure in history or fiction contains as many multitudes as Jesus. He's a celibate man who enjoys dining with tax collectors and changing water into wine. He's a fierce critic of Jewish religious law who insists that he's actually fulfilling rather than subverting it. He preaches a reversal of every social hierarchy while deliberately avoiding explicitly political claims. He promises to set parents against children and then disallows divorce; he consorts with prostitutes while denouncing even lustful thoughts. He makes wild claims about his own relationship with

God, without displaying any of the usual signs of madness. He sets impossible standards and then forgives the worst of sinners. He blesses the peacemakers and then promises that he's brought not peace but the sword. He's superhuman one moment; the next he's weeping.

The boast of Christian orthodoxy has always been its fidelity to the whole of Jesus. Was he God or was he man? Both, says orthodoxy. Is the kingdom he preached something to be lived out in this world or something to be expected in the next? Both. Did he offer a blueprint for moral conduct or a call to spiritual enlightenment? Both. Was he the bloodied Man of Sorrows of Mel Gibson; the hippie, lilies of the field Jesus of *Godspell*; or the wise moralist beloved of Victorian liberals? All of these and more. The goal of the great heresies on the other hand, has often been to extract from the tensions of the gospel narratives a more consistent, streamlined, and noncontradictory Jesus.

Anabaptists know from our long tradition that Jesus was political. He preached and enacted a new kingdom. Yet at the same time, it would likely require an overly simplistic understanding of Jesus to assume that he would support our contemporary manifestations of either progressive or conservative movements in their totality.

Jesus pursued zealots and tax collectors, Roman soldiers and Pharisees. When asked to take sides between arguing family members or official political debates, he refused. In the end, he was crucified by both the secular powers and the religious establishment. And after his resurrection, he gave birth to a church that welcomed both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, and called all of them to repentance.

If you are like me, sometimes you wish that the Spirit would clearly show us the specific things we ought to do during difficult times. Unfortunately, it is never that simple. Part of our discipleship, part of us learning to be like Jesus, involves experimenting and failing and trying again. Somehow through this process, we are shaped and molded as kingdom citizens. With this in mind, I will still attempt to humbly offer a few general suggestions for believers and their churches

to consider.

Meditate on Jesus more than on political debates: Consider how you spend your time. How much of it is invested in prayerfully meditating on the words and actions of Jesus found within the gospels? How much of it is invested in reading HuffPo or Fox News? We are shaped by what we do repetitively. If we spend more time enjoying or mocking Trump's tweets than we do on Jesus-shaped imagination, we become part of the problem.

Practice the spiritual discipline of deep listening: Whatever your personal politics, when was the last time that you sat with someone on the other side and simply listened to them? Not debating them, or trying to persuade them, but simply listening? You will know that the Spirit is working within you when you can honestly admit where their position aligns with Jesus (to some degree) and where your position does not.

Seek to build a third-way church: Since Jesus finally resists categorization, so should his church. What would it look like for your church to embody the best of both the left and the right? You will know that you are getting there when you have both Trump supporters and Trump protestors sitting in your pews. You will really know you are there when they both accuse you of being too progressive or too conservative.

Choose not to fight back: Part of peacemaking is refusing to ignite divisions, and instead, seeking to cover conflict with love. Decide not to respond to haters on Facebook. If someone criticizes you, bless them. Work hard at framing your Jesus-shaped vision with positive words instead of either trying to poke people in the eye, or enflaming their righteous indignation. Yes, if you take this approach, it may feel like evil is winning. But that is how it often feels (at least initially) when we exemplify the gospel of peace.

Take up your cross: Taking on the ways of Jesus inevitably means that we will be maligned and we will suffer to some degree. At a minimum, we will be labeled as sellouts and told we are part of the problem. By refusing the idolatry of political war, we might expe-

rience tension with family members and even lose some friends. But we cannot follow Jesus and avoid existential crucifixion. It's impossible. Ultimately there is resurrection and a new heaven and a new earth, but first, there is always rejection and some form of death. This is what we signed up for.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is known for his Parable of the Madman—his most famous piece that dramatizes the announcement of “The Death of God.” Reflecting on this, Keith Preston describes the struggle of modern Western culture, when a sense of religious transcendence has left the building:

If the purpose of an individual's life is not to achieve salvation in an afterlife, then what is the purpose of life? If the king or established political authorities do not

rule by divine right, then what is the basis of political legitimacy? How should society be organized? If morality is not to be understood according to the teachings of the Church, the Bible, or traditional religious authority, then what is the basis of justice, morality, truth or ‘right and wrong’? Do such concepts have any intrinsic or objective meaning at all? If the observable universe was not the product of special creation by a divine power, and if humanity was not ‘created in the image of God,’ then what is the meaning of existence? Does it have any meaning beyond itself? If history is not guided by divine providence, then how is the process of historical unfolding to be understood?

In the final analysis, our present political

warring just may be the result of modern, technologically savvy individuals, fighting it out over how to manufacture the best version of a golden calf. If this is true, the most important thing you and I can do is to be people of The Way—a strange, peculiar, and often maligned people of the Jesus Way.

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My Neighbor, the Enemy

By Tim Diehl

“THE COLOSSAL MISUNDERSTANDING of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech” (Edwin H. Friedman).

I love watching college basketball, and one of the great joys of fatherhood for me has been teaching my two youngest daughters to cheer for the North Carolina Tarheels. So, you might imagine this was a fantastic year for us as we watched the ‘Heels defeat Gonzaga to win the NCAA National Championship...except that my daughters are also very empathetic people. So as I was jumping around excited for the victory, my girls were watching the Gonzaga players weep over the crushing blow that was dealt to them. And they felt bad. Worse, they made me feel bad for cheering!

My wife chimed in, “They’re 18-year-old kids! How can you be happy to see them lose?”

But of course, you don’t see human beings when you’re a fan. You only see winners and losers.

Lately, many of us have become fans. We view the world in terms of winners and losers and all we care about is that our “team” wins. After all, the other side is the “opponent,” the enemy.

“They” might be people from a different political party or ethnic group or generation. Perhaps “they” are progressive Christians or conservative Evangelicals. Or maybe “they” are part of the LGBTQ community or supporters of traditional marriage.

Whatever they are, one thing is for sure, they are a “they.” They don’t have a family or hopes and dreams. They don’t have a nuanced position based on careful thought and passionate study. They don’t care about truth. They are a caricature of a person.

And the more we distance ourselves from those who disagree with us, the more likely we are to demonize them and treat them as something other than human.

The less human someone is, the easier it

is to defeat them without a second thought to their well-being. In that way, objectifying the opposition is an effective strategy when your end game is defeating your enemy.

However, as a follower of Jesus, I should have a different end game. Rather than crushing our enemies, we’re called to love them. And one of the first steps toward loving anyone is seeing them as human, and the best way to do that is to listen to their story.

Rabbi Edwin Friedman says, “People can only hear you when they are moving toward you...”

I think this captures what Jesus is saying when he calls us to love our enemy. To love our enemy is to move toward him or her. To love our enemy is to cease from seeing them as a caricature, an ideology, and to, instead, see them as a human being—an image bearer of God.

How can we do this?

This thought has plagued me as a pastor. How do I help my affluent, suburban congregation learn to love people with whom they rarely interact but have strong opinions about? How do we help them “move toward” those they might otherwise see as an enemy?

Well, I don't know the answer, but we're going to try something.

Our first step was to reach out to communities our people rarely engage with and who, lately, have been stigmatized nationally and locally: a pastor from a Spanish-speaking church that serves a largely immigrant population, a Muslim business leader, a rabbi from a local synagogue, someone working to help undocumented immigrants attain legal status, and a representative from the local battered women and children's shelter.

We started with lunch or coffee. We asked lots of questions. We listened to their stories.

As we did this, we moved toward these people—metaphorically AND literally. We heard about their struggles and grew a real sense of connection with them.

Along the way an idea emerged: what if our congregation had this same opportu-

nity? What if they could sit down across from a Muslim, an immigrant, a Jewish man, a battered woman, and hear their stories and see them, not as a caricature, not as some distant "other," but as an image-bearer of God not so different from them?

And so we are beginning a five-week experiment we're calling "Neighbors." The idea behind it is that you can't love a neighbor you don't know—a neighbor you're moving away from. So let's create space to move toward one another.

To do this we're hosting some guests on Sunday mornings. We're beginning with a "pulpit swap" where I will interview the Spanish-speaking pastor and he'll preach to our congregation (with an interpreter). Immediately after the service, we'll drive downtown to his church (along with any of our people who want to join us) and I'll preach (with an interpreter).

The next week we'll welcome a representative from the local women's shelter. The week after that, an individual working to establish an immigration office in the city. Then finally on the last Sunday, I will interview the founder of the local Islamic Prayer Center along with a local rabbi.

This is only the beginning, and to be honest, I have no idea how it will go. But my prayer is that as we choose to move toward our neighbors, we will finally be able to hear them, growing empathy and understanding, and learning what it really means to see the neighbor in 'the other' and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Even if they rooted for Gonzaga.

Tim Diehl serves at Koinos Community Church near Reading, PA, where he lives with his wife, four kids, and cat-dog Greta.

Downward Mobility

By Zach Spidel

I LIVE IN a neighborhood which, to the world outside it, is virtually invisible. Places like my neighborhood in East Dayton are almost never depicted in TV shows or in movies—if they are, they are represented as alien places into which the protagonists enter with some peril. There are no shops or boutiques or other desirable destinations in my neighborhood that would bring the wealthier residents of the now bustling downtown district or the already prospering suburbs to our streets. People die of heroin overdoses nearly daily, but these are not the people whose deaths make it on the evening news—unless a particular death was spectacular for some other, usually gruesome reason.

People in my neighborhood think differently from those who live elsewhere; they reason differently and have different basic assumptions about the way the world works. They know from experience that hard work will not likely get them ahead. They know that those who have power (bureaucratic, cultural, or physical) over their lives, will usually regard them with suspicion at best. The way they speak, the way they look, the way

they carry themselves all convey subtly or not so subtly that they are not part of the "us" from which those who have power nearly all come. The people in my neighborhood are mostly white, but some are black, some are of Arab descent, and there are growing numbers of Spanish-speaking and Muslim immigrants. But the vast majority of my neighbors, whatever their race, are united by their poverty and by their powerlessness.

There are many fissures in American society. Racial fissures remain deep and troubling. But I am convinced that the deepest fissure now lies between three classes of people. These classes are distinguished, I believe, primarily by education, secondarily by income and occupation, and as a consequence of these factors, by actual physical geography. These classes are physically clustering together (and away from one another) to a remarkable degree. The bottom 20 percent (these percentages are rough estimates) of Americans live in places like East Dayton. Their communities lack resources, their children receive poor educations, very few go to



college, and many have a tenuous relationship at best to the labor market. They grow up disproportionately in broken homes and suffer childhood traumas at disproportionate rates. Black and brown-skinned peoples are widely over-represented in this poor group due to ongoing systemic racism and the sad history of slavery, discrimination, and bigotry in our country, but there are plenty of white folks in this category as well, and the disdain of the cultural elite for white "trailer trash" is often sharper and crueler than the bland platitudes and practical negligence that the cultural elite typically offer poor black folks.

The middle 60 percent of Americans contains a wide swath of people, some of whom are falling downward, some who are clambering upward in the economic, educational,

and status-based class calculus our country is covertly obsessed with. The top 20 percent of Americans live in communities as segregated by class as do the bottom 20 percent. Nearly everyone in my neighborhood is poor—but there are neighborhoods and areas that are my neighborhood's weird twins, places where nearly everyone has an above average income, where large majorities have at least a college degree and most have more than their bachelor's. White people are widely over represented in this group, but this group contains an increasing number of racial minorities.

I've lived in Princeton and I've lived in East Dayton. I have inhabited both worlds and I can say without exaggeration that people native to these two cultural ecosystems are nearly incomprehensible to one another and that the incomprehensibility is due to two fundamental and obvious facts. First, nearly everything about the life of a person born in East Dayton and a person born in Princeton is different—including the ways the rules of our society apply to them. Second, the native East Ender and the native

Princetonian are likely to never meet, much less form a friendship. This class-based separation is profound.

What is the answer to this divide? How can it be bridged? I ask these questions as a Christian, not as an American. I have some ideas about ways the American government could more justly allocate resources to decrease the stratification of our society, but I am not confident in the efficacy of those ideas. Nor is running the American government my concern as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, it is easy for me to hold a political opinion about how the government should heal this divide; it is much harder (and, I believe, ultimately much more valuable) to cross it myself.

I am much more confident in what I believe the church needs to be doing right now to bridge this chasm. Here, I can only share, in abbreviated fashion, one such suggestion: educated Christians and professionals should move to and live in places like East Dayton, where doctors, lawyers, educators and others are needed. They should move not because they can "save" those they meet

there, but to become their friends and to be their neighbors, to share life with them and learn from them. Christ will do the saving through his body when his body fully and truly reflects him with a fulsome racial, economic, and cultural diversity. Such upwardly mobile Christians who choose the path of downward mobility should join existing churches in the neighborhoods to which they move, even if the style of worship and the polish of the preaching are initially off-putting to their tastes. If the true Jesus is worshipped there truly, join up. Where no such churches exist, then such folks should start them up in their homes. This can be done for free!

The divides in our country are stark, but we serve a God who crossed an even greater chasm to save us from sin and death. May we not hesitate to join him in the ministry of boundary crossing!

Zach Spidel is the pastor of The Shepherd's Table congregation in Dayton, OH.

Honouring "the Other"

By Doug Sider

THE ONLINE MERRIAM-WEBSTER dictionary defines "other" as "being the one or ones distinct from that or those first mentioned or implied." In recent years we have watched as the world increasingly defines itself by separating one group of people from the other: I am Democrat, you are Republican; I am Canadian, you are American; I am Christian; you are Muslim; I am Sunni, you are Shia; I am white, you are black.

In many ways, our modern technology has allowed us to declare our differences from one another with impunity. Anyone can define themselves how they want, say what they want, and broadcast it to as wide an audience as they are able to attract. The result is that we live in a world of known "others." I have children in elementary, high school, and university. Each of them attends public schools with a diversity of religious, ethnic, social, economic, sexual, and gender

differences. Unlike any previous time in my life, figuring out how to live with the "other" has seemingly become a necessity of navigating life and culture...at least if we want to be a people of the book, who follow Jesus.

Many times the "other" is a group of people disenfranchised from the majority culture. "Others" are usually those who are different in some way from the majority.

The concept of the other, of loving, accepting and pursuing the other, is embedded deep inside the gospel story. One could argue that this concern for the other is present in the very concept of the incarnation. In Philippians 2, we read: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by

becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Jesus gave up what was rightfully his, took on human likeness and submitted himself to the cross as an act of love for the other—in this case, all of humanity. This is the story of the incarnation. Jesus exemplified his concern with the other through his life and his teaching.

In the gospels it was the "other" people with whom Jesus often spoke and spent his time. The majority of people in ancient Israel followed Jewish law and custom; this assured peace, the protection of Rome and the goodwill of the Jewish powers that be. In this reality Jesus declared and lived an ethic that was different—an ethic that said God is in the middle of changing people and this world. A new kingdom is emerging, a kingdom that views power differently. Matthew 5-7 deals with themes that had been talked about earlier in the scriptures (i.e.: Proverbs,

etc). However, the Matthew passage assumes a view that says God is intervening and we are different people when we follow Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). The ethic of Jesus calls us to be concerned with the value, personhood, creation, and protection of the other—even those with whom we differ, are prone to hate, don't like, disagree with, or who have committed violence against us. When criticized for being present with "sinners" and "tax collectors" Jesus responded in Mark 2: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." Jesus exemplifies and calls us to live with a concern for the other.

In the early church a consistent struggle was what to do with the other. Typically the other was a Gentile. In Acts 10, Cornelius, a Gentile follower of God, welcomes Peter to his home and Peter accepts this invitation (breaking Jewish tradition). In Acts 15 the church makes the decision not to require circumcision of a Gentile who decides to follow Christ. And proactively in Acts 17, Paul uses the culture—its symbols and signs—of the "other" to share the good news.

What can we observe and learn from the early church about dealing with the "other"?

While fear remained, mission reigned: At various point in the book of Acts we find veiled references to fear of the other (whether it was Saul or Paul, the Gentiles, etc). We also see a constant reference to the work of the Holy Spirit and what God was doing in people's lives. In Acts 15 the argument regarding circumcision of the Gentile follower of Jesus wasn't won on the basis of law or safety; it was won on the basis of what the Holy Spirit was doing in a group of people (Acts 15:12-14, 19). God was changing lives. It may be possible that our fear of the other is, in fact, a greater reflection of our lack of awareness of the Holy Spirit working in those who are different from us.

Something internally drove the early church to speak the gospel to the other. They were active. They lived in a way that was different and people of all creeds wanted to follow and experience. We have our statements, theology, and creeds and they are good. They help to identify who we are but when they begin to separate us from the other in ways that break fellowship, dehumanize, and seg-

ment us from the "other" they can become dangerous. When we are present with the other and we see the Holy Spirit working within them, we are often forced to deal with issues, concerns, and fears that we may have. It is hard to argue against the other when God is clearly at work among them.

They remembered their past: As the early church worked to engage and accept the other, they did not let go of their past. In fact, they looked to their past to affirm their future. James, in a not-so-subtle voice, refers to the Gentiles as a people (v. 14). This would have had more significant meaning in the context of the early church than it does at first glance today. For in the Old Testament the "Gentile" or "nations" stood in contrast to the "people" of God. James then proceeded to argue from their past and the scriptures, that their forefathers had spoken and hinted at the day that the Gentile (the other) would follow God, quoting the prophet Amos.

They honoured one another: As the issue and process of salvation was settled in Acts 15, they began the process of recognizing that fellowship between Jew and the Gentile would require mutual understanding. So they suggested four prohibitions (three related to food and one to sexual immorality). These prohibitions spoke to the need to honour then-current Jewish scruples. They weren't connected to salvation, but were an apparent attempt to demonstrate honour for the other.

As they write their letter to the churches outlining their decisions, they do so in the softest of language. Modern theological statements tend towards definitive language "we believe" or "we hold true that." Acts 15 simply says, "It seemed good..." There is a humbleness to their message that sought to honour the other.

Finally in Acts 16, Paul travels from "town to town" delivering the message of the apostles' and elders' decisions in Jerusalem (v. 4). Most interestingly, though, he travels with Timothy who he has circumcised before leaving. He does this because of the Jews who lived in the area. It is an incredible example of honouring one another in the midst of one's freedom.

The reality is that we are all the "other" to someone or some other group. Recently I traveled for the installation of a bishop in a sister General Conference. The service was beautiful, the people were warm and generous. But it was clear that, in some measure, I was the other. As I observed the service, I was not used to the cleric's collars, the importance of particular colours being worn, the amount of oil used in the anointing process, nor the significance of a chair for the newly installed bishop. The service was different then how we do things in Canada but at the same time it was a joy to watch this church be the church God has called them to be in their context.

The questions are: how do we enjoy our diversity, how do we enjoy our differences, how do we appreciate the distinctions within the body of Christ and honour the other?

Doug Sider is national director of Be in Christ Church of Canada (new name for BIC Canada).

Editor's Notes

2017 subscription renewals: Thank you to those who have renewed their subscriptions and given an extra contribution. Costs have increased, so your contributions are deeply appreciated. The basic subscription rate is still \$15 per year. Subscription renewals and contributions can be sent to the editor at the address on page 2. Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ Church U.S.

Upcoming topics: Topics under consideration for the remainder of 2017 include religious freedom, being fully pro-life, and gender. Contact the editor if you have additional ideas or would like to write on any of these topics.

Website presence: As of the end of August, *Shalom!* will no longer be available on the Brethren in Christ U.S. website. Until then, you can access it or renew and contribute online at www.bic-church.org/connect/publications/shalom/. Other changes may be coming as well. Stay tuned!

A Partnership in Advocacy

By Mennonite Central Committee News Service



MCC SOMETIMES EXPERIENCES

both positive and negative impacts of our country's legislative system. While MCC has been involved in national and international advocacy for years in the Washington, DC and United Nations offices, some change can only happen at the state level.

"National and international advocacy work is critically important, but not enough. For example, the vast majority of prisoners in the U.S. are in state prisons whose sentencing laws are dictated by state legislation. The same is true for laws affecting gun sales and registration," stated Curtis Book, Peace and Justice Coordinator at MCC East Coast.

Knowing this, in 2010 MCC became involved in state level advocacy in Pennsylvania with volunteer representation on the Inter-faith Justice Coalition of Harrisburg. MCC soon realized, however, that the work required a full-time dedicated partner as an avenue for the church to speak into some of the challenges related to state legislation.

After meeting in late 2015 with constituents Bob Walden from West Swamp Mennonite Church and Patrick Cicero from Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church, MCC pursued a partnership with the Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

"As a member of the Brethren in Christ Church, I felt MCC needed a voice at the table. We need to share in the burden to speak out on behalf of vulnerable people and issues that matter," said Cicero, executive director of a legal aid office. "I think the work the Council does in Pennsylvania along with other religious-based advocacy groups is essential. There is no other group of individuals and organizations representing constituents that has the moral authority to make claims on behalf of vulnerable people."

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is the oldest state council in the country beginning in 1911. However, it was not until the 1960s that the Council started its advocacy ministry. Besides advocacy, they are involved in campground, farmer/migrant and trucker/traveler ministries.

Representing 20 denominations in Penn-

sylvania including Church of the Brethren, another Anabaptist group active in state level advocacy, the Council was excited to partner with MCC. "I can't tell you how much we appreciate having the assistance from MCC because it gives us the opportunity to bring in additional help," said Rev. Sandra Strauss, Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach at Pennsylvania Council of Churches. "We don't have the financial clout that other lobbyists have, so for us it's being able to say, 'We represent people of faith throughout the Commonwealth.' The larger the faith population we represent the more we can be heard."

Partnerships are essential to MCC's work domestically and around the world. "MCC cannot do state level advocacy alone," stated Book. "Collaboration and cooperation, especially with other Christian organizations like the Council whose values we share, is vital."

Working with the Council, MCC's advocacy priorities help address poverty, oppression and injustice—and their systemic causes. These include immigration, criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention.

MCC's advocacy priorities in Harrisburg include:

- Immigration
- Criminal justice reform
- Gun violence prevention

"From my perspective, an Anabaptist advocacy position has a distinct voice with a history of nonviolence and nonresistance. Pennsylvania has a large Anabaptist constituency, so I think to have that unique perspective on the state level advocating for Anabaptist values can have a distinct impact. It adds a creative voice to the faith perspective that is already advocating," said John-Michael Cotignola-Pickens, Advocacy Programs Coordinator at Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

The Council encourages people to get out of their comfort zones and take action. Attend an advocacy-related event. Call your local state senator. Send an email or write a letter to your local state representative. "Be-

come uncomfortable for the future of our children," said Cotignola-Pickens.

"Even if you don't resonate with any one of these causes personally, the idea that your community is calling you to action should be enough for you to pray about it, think about it and figure out whether or not God is pricking your conscience to pay more attention to these issues," stated Cicero.

This article is courtesy of Mennonite Central Committee's news service, and highlights one aspect of the Brethren in Christ partnership with MCC.

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should do, but raises significant questions about a sensitive topic. Hirschfield is honest and open about his own journey and he is still questioning areas of possible hypocrisy in his life. Overall he is exploring ways to remain faithful to his beliefs while engaging constructively and lovingly with people of other faiths. He confirms that ideas matter, "but [that] human relations...matter more. That is when we hear the footsteps of the Messiah." We can learn from his experience and let it enrich our own thoughts, attitudes, and actions as we follow the footsteps of Christ.

Lois Saylor is a member of the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and serves on the editorial committee for Shalom!

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BOOK REVIEW: Creative Co-Existence

A Journey in Faith

By Lois Saylor

RECENTLY A LOCAL Islamic center received a letter threatening violence. A call went out from local community religious organizations to stand with the mosque to show support and discourage anyone who might want to carry out the threat. That Sunday morning, my husband and I decided to stand with others in support of religious freedom, nonviolence, civility in society, and simply to safeguard fellow human beings. The gathered group circled the building. Police officers regularly patrolled the streets in marked cars. Muslim adults and children entered the building and often stopped to express their gratitude.

Then a gentleman asked some of us to come inside the building so the children could see good people who were kind and supported them. I wasn't sure if we were entering a service or some area of worship so I asked the gentleman if I should cover my head with my scarf (as I had been instructed to do in a mosque before). He smiled, but said it was not necessary. We entered a gymnasium where the children were lined up and a woman spoke to them kindly and wisely about the threat. She pointed to us as people who had come to help. This was a good ex-

perience for all of us and I felt no conflict in beliefs or actions. Then a leader from our group spoke briefly and I had that first and only twinge of "is this right? Have we gone too far?" The spokesperson described himself as "a follower of the prophet Jesus." It felt like a wrongful demotion and disrespect for the Son of God. Was this an allowable courtesy for the situation? Was it a bold statement that communicated we were Christians, stating a sure difference? Can we go too far in support? Is there a line and if so, where is it?

These are some of the questions and ideas that Rabbi Brad Hirschfield explores in his book, *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right* (Harmony, 2009). While the title is a simple statement of the book's thesis, the subtitle, "Finding Faith without Fanaticism" invites us into Hirschfield's own journey out of fanaticism and into a faith that both grounds him and opens him to the faith of others. His is a faith of answers and a faith of questions. He publically examines his thoughts and actions, inviting readers to consider how they travel their own faith path.

Hirschfield's exploration in creative co-existence far exceeds my small questions. His story unfolds in his personal life, his commu-

nal religious life, and on the world stage. Most notably, Hirschfield fills the book with personal stories. He grew up in a low-key Jewish home, became part of a radical Jewish group in Israel, and finally settled into an orthodox belief and practice with his wife and children. He allows the reader to journey with him.

In his youth he started to become more interested in Judaism. He wanted to go to a Jewish school and keep a kosher kitchen. He enjoyed the passion for justice in a fanatical group in Israel and explains his exhilaration followed by a restlessness that questioned a right cause with perhaps wrong solutions. He tells of interfaith experiences that brought people together in meaningful ways bringing peace and reconciliation.

Hirschfield's goal is more than peaceful co-existence, more than just "live and let live." He calls for active co-involvement to get to know each other and what "the other" believes, participate in each other's worship services on occasion, work together for common causes, and allow each to stay true to their own faith.

The book does not dictate what we

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