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Healing Haunted Histories:

A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization By Elaine Enns

and Ched Myers

Cascade Books

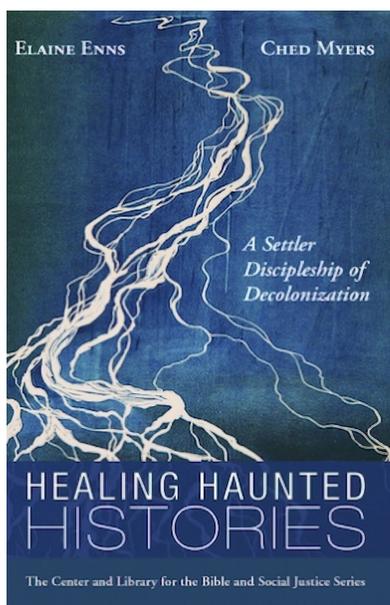
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New Title from Elaine Enns & Ched Myers

Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization

(foreword by June L. Lorenzo; afterword by Harry Lafond)



This volume tackles the oldest and deepest injustices on the North American continent, which inhabit every intersection of settler and Indigenous worlds past and present. And it argues that we can heal the wounds that are inextricably woven into the fabric of our personal and political lives through the inward and outward journey of decolonization. The authors write as, and for, settlers on this journey, exploring the places, peoples and spirits that have formed (and deformed) us. They look at issues of Indigenous justice and settler “response-ability” through the lens of Elaine’s Mennonite family narrative, tracing “Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines” like a braided river. From Ukrainian steppes to Canadian prairies to California chaparral, they examine her forebears’ immigrant travails and trauma; settler unknowing and complicity; and traditions of resilience and conscience—inviting readers to do the same. Equal parts memoir, social-historical-theological analysis, and practical workbook, this book invites settler Christians (and other people of faith) into a discipleship of decolonization and restorative solidarity.

Elaine Enns has worked in a range of restorative justice fields since 1989, from victim-offender dialogue in the Criminal Justice System to healing of historical violations and intergenerational trauma. With a DMin from St. Andrew’s College Saskatoon, she trains and teaches throughout North America, and with her partner Ched Myers published the two-volume *Ambassadors of Reconciliation: A New Testament Theology and Diverse Christian Practices of Restorative Justice and Peacemaking* (Orbis Books, 2009).



Ched Myers is an activist theologian and New Testament expositor working with peace and justice issues. He is a popular educator, animating scripture and literacy in historic and current social change movements. Myers has published over a hundred articles and eight books, including *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Orbis Books, 1988). He and Elaine are ecumenical Mennonites based in the Ventura River Watershed of southern California in traditional Chumash territory.



CONVERSATION WITH ELAINE ENNS

What is *Healing Haunted Histories* about? What's the "elevator speech"?

ELAINE ENNS: I grew up in a tight knit Mennonite community in Saskatchewan, Canada, with a rich understanding of my Mennonite heritage and family history. But what was missing in our communal stories was that we had unwittingly participated in the violent dispossession and displacement of Indigenous communities. *Healing Haunted Histories* is my exploration into those wounds, silences, and hauntings through the lens of what we call Landlines-Bloodlines-Songlines. The aim of this book is to help white settler Christians, like me, seek justice and healing for ourselves, our land, our societies, and our faith. We Christians broke treaty covenants with First Nations peoples. Our book is an invitation to begin repairing that breach.

Your book opens with a description of a sacred site, "a humble hill lying near the northern edge of the Great Plains, that vast stretch of steppe and grassland straddling much of the middle of what is today known as the United States and Canada" (p. 4). Why did you choose to start here and what's the significance of this piece of geography?

ENNS: *Healing Haunted Histories* opens and closes with the story of Stoney Knoll or Opwashemoe Chakatinaw as it is called in Cree. It is about 45 miles north of where I grew up in Saskatoon, and because of colonial history, it is a contested space. Opwashemoe Chakatinaw is a sacred site to Cree bands who have lived there for thousands of years, in the 1890s the Canadian government took it from the Young Chippewayans without consultation or compensation and gave it to newly arrived Mennonite immigrant settlers. This history came to our Mennonite community's consciousness in 1976 and has both troubled and animated us since.

You intertwine the stories of the Mennonites and the Young Chippewayans in your book. Who are they?

ENNS: Mennonites are a Christian denomination that began during the Protestant Reformation in Europe. I am part of the Mennonite community in Saskatchewan who emigrated from Russia and Ukraine to the Canadian prairies in waves between the 1870s and 1950s. *Healing Haunted Histories* tells the story of my community's encounter with First Nations in Saskatchewan, including the Young Chippewayans, a Cree band.

There is a clear outline throughout your book that invites readers to examine their own "Landlines, Bloodlines, and Songlines" as you call them. Explain what you mean by landlines, bloodlines, and songlines.

Landlines explores where our ancestors came from, the push and pull factors of their immigration, the places where they and we have settled and re-settled, and the stories of violence, displacement and struggles for justice on those lands. Bloodlines is what we carry in our bones, that which has been passed down from our ancestors. It includes the trauma that our ancestors endured but also the privileges they acquired. Bloodlines are about cultural loss, assimilation, false sense of innocence and moral injury. Songlines are our convictional traditions of faith, the things that remind us how to be human, the inspirations that help us to persevere in the hard work of forging justice.

What do you mean by "healing haunted histories"?

We appreciate the work of sociologist Avery Gordon which focuses on how soil, soul and society are haunted by past and continuing violence. In the U.S. and Canada, systems and ideologies of settler colonialism inflicted genocide on Indigenous peoples. And the ghosts of that unresolved oppression haunt white settlers who participate in and benefit from that legacy. Our silence will not heal us, but if we face our complicity and, in cooperation with Indigenous communities, practice restorative solidarity and reparative justice, we can walk towards healing.

Have you encountered push back in your work and writing?

ENNS: Any settler doing this work will experience both internal and external resistance. For me, the internal struggle was how much of my story do I tell, how vulnerable do I get, am I going to hurt my family or community by telling these stories and exposing our complicity. External resistances often come in the form of what scholars Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang call "moves to innocence." We explore these common strategies of willful ignorance, denial and self-exoneration in depth in the middle part of this book.

The subtitle is "a settler discipleship of decolonization," and you make it clear that your "perspectives are deeply shaped by Christian faith and practice" (p. xxvii). Why is the process you describe in your book important for Christians today? And what does your book offer for non-Christians?

ENNS: We call it "discipleship" because decolonization isn't merely about a land acknowledgment or denominational statement of apology; it is a lifelong process of personal and political healing and repair. Other communities of faith and conscience have their own manner of learning to live out the truth of their tradition with compassion and justice. But as American Christians who are deeply entangled in the legacy of settler colonialism, we have a particular responsibility to undo the damage wrought by the Doctrine of Discovery and of missionary Christianity that was largely colluding with colonization.

In your conclusion you write: "that day I renewed my commitment to discipleship as an insurrection against settler colonialism" (p. 309). Where do you see this work going?

ENNS: Insurrection and resurrection are the same word in the Greek New Testament; they mean to "rise up"! As a follower of the Risen Jesus, I am called to rise up against settler colonialism and white supremacy as forces of death. *Healing Haunted Histories* invites Christians into the both the inner, personal work and the outer, political work of "repentance." Which is to say, to "turn our history around," in order to reweave a better and resilient future for all of our peoples and lands, beginning with First Nations who have been made last under settler colonialism. You can join us at healinghauntedhistories.org.