

An Invitation to Practices of Repentance and Renewal

A Review of *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization*

By Peter R. Gathje

Sometimes a book comes along at just the right moment. I picked up and started to read Elaine Enns and Ched Myers' book, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization*, the week after my mom died. Her death marked the end of an era, as she was the last living child of a family of six born to an immigrant and the daughter of recent immigrants. In the days leading to her death, as we kept vigil around her, my brothers and sister and I shared stories, looked through the many photo albums Mom had, and reflected upon our family history. Elaine and Ched's emphasis throughout this book on uncovering family history resonated with this time in my life.

But the beauty and power of Elaine and Ched's book is not in encouraging mere reminiscing about family history, which can easily end up in sentimentality. Rather, they issue a stirring call to a "discipleship of decolonization" in response to "haunted histories." This call to discipleship invites a faith-filled wrestling with past (and present) wrongdoing as "settlers" — those of us whose ancestors came to the land as part of an expansive colonial project.

The land on which I live has a "haunted history" in which colonialism expropriated and killed Native peoples, and imported enslaved Africans to work the land. This haunted history marks my reality as a settler. I am a person not native to the land upon which I have lived. And as a settler, I have, along with my ancestors, directly and indirectly benefited from colonialism and slavery. At the same time, I carry my own haunted history as a descendant of immigrants

Elaine and Ched offer a powerful invitation to lovingly, faithfully and honestly enter into our histories, haunted by injustice, in order to better follow the God of Jesus Christ who calls us to a justice that embodies redistribution.

who settled here because they fled from forces of repression and violence.

Elaine and Ched invite all of us who are settlers into this complicated history. They urge us as settlers to conversion, repentance and work for justice through the spiritual disciplines of "Landlines," "Bloodlines" and "Songlines."

Their call begins with "Landlines." Here they offer an historical and theological analysis of the complexity and complicity in the lives of settlers. They encourage settlers to attend to stories of immigration and consider how those stories have been both distorted by and hidden under a narrative conducive to colonial exploitation of Natives and their land. The call to do this work of Landlines is compelling, in part, because it is concretely grounded in stories from Elaine's family, Mennonite settlers from Russia, who fled political and economic violence and found refuge in Canada on land taken by the Canadian government from Native peoples and then "granted" to these immigrants.

Landlines move seamlessly into "Bloodlines" as the stories we have inherited from our families and their histories intersect with the larger Landline stories. For many of us, these Bloodline stories point to "how we became white," that is, how as immigrants our ancestors were assimilated into a "supremacist settler colonialism." This assimilation required the obliteration (whitewashing) of the stories of how they fled their native lands due to political, economic or cultural

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By Elaine Enns and Ched Myers

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oppression. How many of us descendants of immigrants even know the history of our ancestors and their immigration?

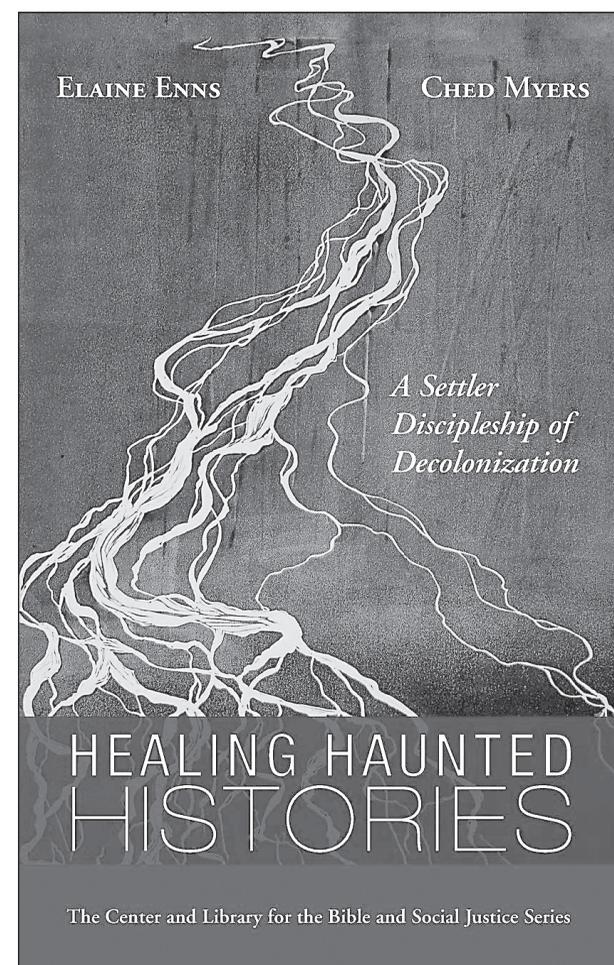
Elaine and Ched in their historical, theological and narrative analysis of both Landlines and Bloodlines are brutally honest about how those histories are haunted by evil done by settlers and evil that drove settlers from their original homes. But in this painful history, they point us away from judgment and condemnation to a more nuanced appreciation for and acceptance of the haunted histories of which we are a part. In this way, the difficult and heartbreaking work of uncovering the wrongdoing of our ancestors (and our complicity in that wrongdoing) is pointed toward the work of restorative justice instead of recrimination. Elaine's long devotion to restorative justice and its delicate work of accountability for the sake of restoration rather than retribution is reflected in the careful uncovering of injustice for the sake of justice work to be done now.

Animating the commitment to uncovering Landlines and Bloodlines is the equally important discipline of "Songlines." Elaine and Ched identify Songlines as the resources in our lives, in our histories and in social movements, that can

inspire and sustain us in the work for justice. The Songlines chapters provide an abundance of stories, songs, personalities and communities that provide hope for the journey toward justice.

Together, Landlines, Bloodlines and Songlines form a triad of spiritual disciplines for a discipleship of decolonization. The exploration of each of those helpfully ends with a series of questions that invite us to do the work of settler discipleship in our own lives. The queries give practical direction for becoming aware of and critically examining the haunted histories in which we live. They also move us toward "healing hauntings" in which our histories become resources for the creation of a more just world.

Elaine and Ched have crafted a book that models what they encourage each of us who come from settler families to do. They offer a powerful invitation to lovingly, faithfully and honestly enter into our histories, haunted by injustice, in order to better follow the God of Jesus Christ who calls us to a justice that embodies redistribution. I have wrestled with and sought to teach and be an activist around issues of racial justice for some thirty years. This is among the most helpful books in relation to those issues that I have read. Because they refuse to either demonize or deny the haunted histories, they offer a way of discipleship that holds the promise of a healing future grounded in repentance, redistribution and a just reconciliation. ✦



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