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Book Reviews

Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization. By Elaine Enns and Ched Myers. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books. 2021. \$38 (paperback)/\$49 (hardback).

Interpretations of North American nation-building as a settler colonialist project have grown more prominent over the past decade. This perspective understands that project as one to clear newly “discovered” land of the humans and non-humans that impeded its appropriation for European habitation and use. Beyond displacement and clearing, it imported enslaved Africans to enhance the profitability of that effort. These measures helped embed the construct of racial hierarchy deeply into North American culture.

Several books on this theme were published this past year,¹ including one especially helpful for considering ways Mennonites historically fit into settler colonialism. Elaine Enns and Ched Myers offer *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* as a substantial theological and ethical challenge to fellow non-indigenous North Americans. Though not written specifically for Mennonites, they anchor it in Enns’s doctoral work that examined her Mennonite family’s Ukrainian-Canadian migrations over several generations.

The book—which engages contested terrain over the meaning of national, faith, and racial identities—also draws on the authors’ decades of experience as a restorative justice educator (Enns) and an activist theologian (Myers). It weaves diverse resources into a coherent narrative that guides the reader through their complex agenda. Those resources include biblical texts; communal narratives—“family lore, local legend, established community accounts, ‘official’ history, and group and national myths” (43)—and academic theories on decolonization, trauma, and modern social “hauntings” that linger from unresolved past violence.

The result provides both a call and a roadmap for non-indigenous North Americans to “do our own work” and untangle the implications of our presence here as beneficiaries of that history. The authors recognize this work as uniquely personal, given diverse immigration circumstances, and they name four immigrant types distinguished by their “social power” when migrating: colonist vanguard; subsequent wave opportunist; distressed immigrant; and forcibly relocated. They invite readers to explore three overlapping personal “storylines” that unpack the multi-generational paths from our pre-immigration origins to our present location. “Landlines” trace insights about places departed from and settled

1. For example: Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not a Nation of Immigrants: Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2021); Alaina E. Roberts, *I’ve Been Here all the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2021); Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2021).

upon. “Bloodlines” identify particular people and their experiences in those locations, focusing more on kinships that formed our identity than on genetic lineages. “Songlines” reflect the “traditions of faith and Spirit” (22) that instilled past resilience and inspire justice and healing today. This work pursues a critical and conscientious grasp of those narratives and “how they shape our identity and practice.” It aspires toward “personal healing” and “build[ing] capacity for social movements of decolonization” firmly grounded in “restorative solidarity” with Indigenous peoples. (44)

Beyond use of their own personal narratives, the authors share an array of examples where individuals, institutions, and governments have taken steps to begin, however partially and imperfectly, the reparation and repatriation of Native American losses. Other incisive material helps peel away layers of accumulated myths (conquest, destiny, progress, land “improvement”) that protect and rationalize settler experience as normal, inevitable, and unchangeable. As examples: unresolved immigrant trauma can help obscure clear sight of local implications of settlement; their ten common moves to “innocence” by settlers sound uncomfortably familiar.

Myers’s powerful exegetical skills emerge to unveil the relevance of biblical texts for a North American settler context. They reveal the “rich young ruler’s” rejection of God’s Kingdom (Mark 10) as refusal to repatriate unjustly appropriated land. Building on Ellen Davis’s work, they place settler North Americans squarely in the role of Ahab and Jezebel who “grabbed” Naboth’s vineyard, and Naboth’s covenantal view of relationship to land as closer to that of Native Americans than settler views of privatized real estate (I Kings 21). Similarly, they illuminate Indigenous perceptions of treaties as covenant commitments rather than mere real estate contracts.

Other insights include distinguishing between healthy guilt and paralyzing shame, victimizing trauma and victimizer moral injury; critiquing faith traditions without demonizing or disassociating from them; embracing contingency and ambiguity. Each chapter ends with questions to guide readers on their own particular journeys toward restorative solidarity. They further assist with numerous cross-references, helpful graphics, copious footnoting, a massive bibliography, three appendices, and indices of subjects/places and persons/groups.

The book occasionally addresses the destruction of the land itself and links another facet of their activist/scholar legacy—watershed discipleship.² As a sequel, its thesis clearly demonstrates that the latter’s relevance reaches far beyond “pre-political features of place,” contrary to some caricatures.³ Still, there seems value in further elevating and connecting these themes. The assaults on Indigenous Americans and on Africans facilitated maximizing production of cash crops, extracting minerals and other resources, and commodifying the land itself for

2. Ched Myers ed., *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2016).

3. See Luke Kreider, “Varieties of Anabaptist Environmentalism and the Challenge of Environmental Racism,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 94 (Jan. 2020), 49-54.

privatized financial speculation. This fundamentally disrupted massive proportions of North America's landscapes and ecosystems. Viewed together, "watershed discipleship" attends to the humans who have inhabited those watersheds; a holistic "discipleship of decolonization" remedies consequences to the land itself. *Healing Haunted Histories* certainly references the intertwining of settler devastation to land/ecosystems with its subjugation of non-Europeans, but may have done so more explicitly.

Further elevating those land-focused themes would have made a weighty and packed book even more so, however. As it stands, this ambitious volume warrants carefully reflective study, especially by members of a Mennonite tradition that often looks to its past to articulate identity and incorporates family relationships into that identity. Enns and Myers invoke the late Vincent Harding, a fellow-traveler of Mennonites, who asserted that "all moral imagination begins with memory" (243). Their encouragement to "de-assimilate" from settler colonial myths issues an apt call to examine the traumas carried (and vicariously idealized) and the social hauntings that hover in Mennonite past experience. They suggest that such work "resonates with our Anabaptist dissident origins" (212), and ask questions like, "Why did so many of our farmers embrace industrial agriculture and its market determinations of how we engage the land?" (211). Their call for this daunting work raises an implicit challenge for academic Mennonite historians to further unpack and communicate the particular socio-political contexts of past Mennonite experience into which genealogies may be placed.

But this study is especially helpful in that, unlike many who call for social change, Enns and Myers do not simply call for "resistance" and "dismantling" of existing structures with no vision for what to erect in their place. As Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* convincingly demonstrates, a sole focus on tearing down fails to consider the likelihood that—without a corresponding paradigm transformation—what follows will simply reflect the old structures' priorities in different forms. Beyond dismantling, *Healing Haunted Histories* offers a vision to nurture settler "response-ability" that listens to and learns from other experiences—like Black church insight that "the church is *meant* to be a social movement for liberation" (244) and particular Indigenous wisdom that "rekindle[s] the possibility of societies characterized by justice, sharing, and love" (274). Doing so can form a "restorative solidarity" with Indigenous (and other) peoples that ultimately transforms rather than temporarily reforms. For, "the good news at the root of our faith holds that new beginnings are possible when we acknowledge the end of our civilizational presumptions" (151).

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