

Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization

By Elaine Enns and Ched Myers

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Reviewed by Paul Magno

Breaking open *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* is no small matter.

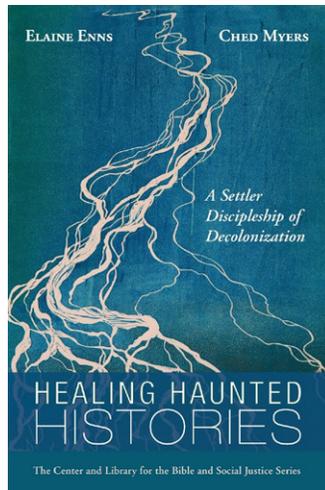
This is not a book for everybody, but one clearly aimed at challenging white and Christian readers to work hard at distinguishing from authentic discipleship the received presumptions and entitlements afforded us as beneficiaries of white privilege. If that is you (or I), welcome to a handbook for grappling.

I am, first of all, intrigued with the structure of the book, organized in three interwoven themes — landlines, bloodlines, and songlines. These are primarily employed to tell Elaine Enns' family story as a case study. The historic movement of her Mennonite forebearers from Prussia, first to Russia and Ukraine, later to Saskatchewan; and her own ultimate taking up of residence in California with Ched — all this becomes the basis for their joint work of reflection, analysis, and self-criticism. They next consider how contemporary settlers might come to terms with the legacy of North American conquest, accept its destructive and painful truth, and then begin the project of emancipation from that heritage. Finally they explore how this work forms the prelude to reimagining and repairing relationship with the continent's first and subject peoples and their way of being.

The subtitle speaks to me as well: discipleship is an ongoing practice that a would-be Christian at least, needs to take seriously. We are always a work in progress, with more than a few pitfalls to contend with, in order to become more authentically faithful to who God created us to be, and who Jesus summons us to be. Coming to terms with the "settler" part of that, and how it separates us from the love of God, is essential.

This is a substantial book, asking quite a lot of its reader. However the authors present a good deal of helpful work early, explaining terms and methodology for us to follow. And they remind us that like any good learning resource, their book is not a volume to muscle through, cover to cover, as a solitary conquest — conquest being a manifestly dubious virtue by now! *Healing Haunted Histories* is meant as a resource for shared learning, its offered tools to be workshopped collectively as we learn to confront our own "haunted histories," disentangling ourselves from settler mythology and the presumed dominion that mythology attempts to continue. Those tools include:

- The *Lineages* mentioned previously — landlines, bloodlines, and songlines we may apprehend to begin getting a handle on our own inevitable place in the firmament of white entitlement.



- *Queries*, a practice found in Quaker circles, applied systematically to sections of this book so that we might be afforded a way to make sense of particular aspects of the story we are trying to face — such as, for just one example, trauma. As these follow first and second expositions of each of the "lines," we are provided a way to interrogate our own particular experience and start fashioning our own story in response.
- *Theological Interludes* — two of them presented through biblical lessons following Part I, again to call readers to reground themselves in some of how radical Christian discipleship ought to be premised, which is wildly different from what passes as the faith in our fraught time and circumstances.

- *Vocabulary* (some of it familiar but carefully defined here) that helps us name what we are facing and identify where we want or need to go. One phrase that stays with me is "restorative solidarity," an idea introduced and elaborated as a destination for our sojourn through this realm. Another discussion I found provocative and valuable is one concerning how we "became white," and how we might de-assimilate from it. Other readers, I'm sure, will find words or phrases that speak especially to them and illuminate their effort to come to terms.

As so much of the story Enns and Myers present takes place in Canada, I've had an ever-present soundtrack accompany me as I work through *Haunted Histories*. Gordon Lightfoot's "Canadian Railroad Trilogy" is a song I heard many times in my younger days, courtesy of a local singer who made it part of his nightly performance on a twelve-string guitar. Lightfoot's trilogy changes tempo and tone more than once. It is by turns idealistic, industrial, and even triumphalist, but at its close, poignant, and in its consideration of the cost of "progress" and "civilization," even haunted.

"Open your heart let the life blood flow We got to get on our way 'cause we're movin' too slow."

White prerogative is a hard phenomenon to contend with and repent, but vital if we're to attain our putative destination, the Beloved Community. It will help white folks immensely to plumb Elaine and Ched's book.

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