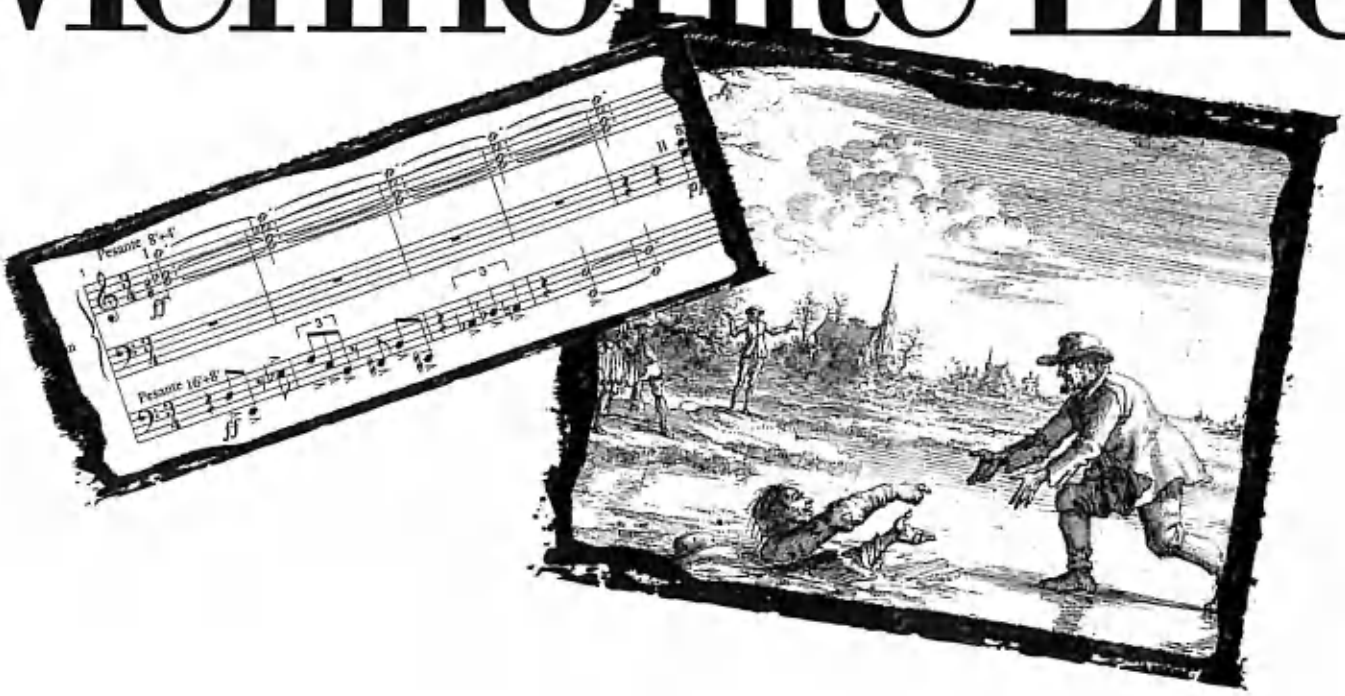
Mennonite Life



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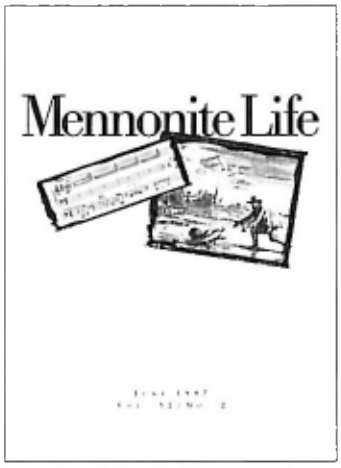

In this issue, led off by our history section, we focus once again on the Anabaptist martyr theme. Marlin Adrian, an independent scholar in Danville, Virginia, examines the poignant body of martyr literature left by women in the Martyrs Mirror, *and their use of religious paradigms to create meaning out of their experiences.*

The next two articles demonstrate that the Anabaptist martyrs also have a place outside of Mennonite culture. The translated selection of a Dutch biography of Dirk Willems by C. van Rijswijk places the Dirk Willems story in a non-Mennonite context of the struggle for political freedom. Mary Sprunger reminds us that Jan Luyken, the Mennonite artist whose famous etchings are found in the Martyrs Mirror, *also created illustrations for secular works which touched on the martyr theme and placed the martyrs in a larger, non-Anabaptist story.*

In our arts section, we find the Luyken etchings inspiring a contemporary response. Singing at the Fire *is a presentation designed and commissioned by the 1997 C. Henry Smith Peace Lecturer, Shirley Sprunger King, professor of music at Bethel College. The music for organ was composed by Brent Weaver, based on poems by Sarah Klassen, which were in turn triggered by Luyken martyr etchings. Audiences at six Mennonite colleges in North America witnessed this unique artistic production this spring in the 22nd annual C. Henry Smith Peace Lectureship.*

David P. Sudermann's poem Ash Wednesday Elegy 1995 *reminds us that the martyr theme finds echoes not just in the sixteenth century but also in the twentieth.*

Our current issues section offers reflections on the Middle East and international politics from a Mennonite perspective. Terry Rempel is a 1990 graduate of Bethel College and received an M.A. in Middle East Politics from Exeter University in England. He has served with Christian Peacemaker Teams in the Middle East and lives in Tofield, Alberta.

Also included in this issue is our annual Mennonite Bibliography, a Mennonite Life *tradition that goes back to 1946.*

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The Women of the *Martyrs' Mirror*: Paradigms in Anabaptist/ Mennonite Mythology

Marlin Adrian

"For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God." (Wisdom 7:26)

Historically, the role of women has been understated, if not simply ignored, by those who have chronicled the history of the world's religious traditions. A glaring exception to this failing is found in the field of martyrologies. Peter Brown has noted that, "In the legacy of courage, at least, men and women were remembered as equal within the Christian Church."[1]

The martyrology which has profoundly influenced Anabaptist thinking, Thieleman J. van Braght's *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, gives witness to this legacy. The women found within its pages are numerous and prominent. Mennonite historian Robert Friedmann observes that the *Martyrs' Mirror* "exerts its immense spiritual influence by presenting models of Christian life."[2] The paradigm of the martyr within the Anabaptist tradition grows out of the contemplation of these narratives about human beings, called by Brown "the very special dead."

The paradigm of the martyr, as is the way with symbols and paradigms, displays multivocality, that is, it gathers around itself many, sometimes contradictory meanings. Phenomenological studies of symbol, myth and ritual give us the latitude to explore the multitude of meanings found in martyr narratives. In order to apply these methods, we must first affirm that the martyr narratives of the *Martyrs' Mirror* are mythological.

Let us define what we mean by "myth." It has been written that the

Ursel van Essen, Maastricht, 1570

"best short definition of a myth is that it is a *true* story."[3] It has also been said that "myths are like histories in that they are stories about the human past, stories that are considered significant and true."[4] But if a myth is a true story about the past whose meaning is remembered in the present, how do myths differ from histories?

Myths can be distinguished from histories by their origin. A myth is not the creation and possession of an individual, it is a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people. A community creates myths over time. A myth becomes a myth because it is perceived as such by the community that tells and hears it. As members of the community retell the myth, they reinterpret the myth, and by doing so, reinterpret the identity of the community. Myths therefore facilitate "reflexivity" in the life of the community.

Myths are also set apart by their context. A myth exists within the context of a body of myths. When a myth stands alone, it has somehow been removed from its original position within a corpus of literature. For example, the martyr narratives in the *Martyrs' Mirror* not only form such a body of myths, they exist in the context of the stories of martyrs from the beginning of Christianity up until the present day.

Myths are also notable for the scope of their content. Myths are not only stories about human beings, they also consider humanity's "ultimate sources of existence." Martyr narratives are not merely histories of the deaths of human beings, they are complex narratives which "face death and find meaning in the encounter." Histories may offer social, historical, psychological, or philosophical explanations for historical phenomena. Myths, however, find meaning for historical events in a cosmic arena by employing the services of symbols and metaphors. Because symbols and metaphors are multivalent, myths provide paradigms "on which a number of meanings may be modeled."[5]

Finally, myths are intimately related to rituals. In the past there has been disagreement as to whether myth precedes or follows ritual, but "few mythographers will deny the 'intricate interdependence,' the "'interpenetration' between ritual and myth." We must be mindful of the "ritual context of mythology and the mythological context of ritual."[6]

Although symbols, myths and rituals are clearly related to the dynamics of specific cultures, the paradigms they present are not limited to those particular incarnations. Mircea Eliade pointed our attention to the universality of certain religious paradigms. The paradigm of the martyr is not only the root paradigm of Anabaptism and the root paradigm of Christianity, it also bears within it key characteristics of universal archetypes found in cultures throughout the world. The power of these martyr narratives to move us lies in their ability to tap into these universal archetypes.

Women martyrs, as depicted in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, embody universal archetypes. I would like to examine three of these, identified by Eliade as the "difficult passage," the "god who binds," and the "cosmic tree" or "pillar of the world."

Women martyrs, as depicted in the *Martyr's Mirror*, embody universal archetypes.

The Difficult Passage

One way to understand narratives of martyrdom is by seeing them as stories about a ritual process, a *rite of passage*, in which the martyr is not only transported from one place to another (earth to heaven), but transformed from one state of being or

Anneken Hendriks, Amsterdam, 1571

plane of existence to a higher one. Arnold van Gennep set the parameters of our discussion of rites of passage. He observed three phases in the crossing of thresholds: separation, transition, and reintegration.[7]

The martyr's death is a threshold experience, in which she traverses that narrow bridge, the razor's edge, between this life and the next. This is why, in a rite of passage, initiands are surrounded by symbols of birth as well as death. The passage of martyrdom is not a journey of death. It is the one and only true path into eternal life.

This critical metaphor of martyrdom as a passage to life is key to the self understanding of Anabaptist martyrs. Menno Simons focuses on this paradigm in his work "The Cross of the Saints".

> (The martyrs are) pressed into the true and promised land and into eternal glory through this lonely wilderness, through this narrow, shameful, and bloody way of all miseries and crosses and sufferings.
>
> Yes, this is and remains the only strait and narrow way and door through which we must enter and pass, and through no other way may we seek to enter with the Saints into eternal life.[8]

Traversing this narrow passage in order to join the saints "under the altar," is a recurring apocalyptic theme in the martyr narratives. Anna of Rotterdam, in a testament left for her son, Isaiah, in 1539, writes, "I go today the way of the prophets, apostles and martyrs, and drink of the cup of which they all have drank."

> This way was trodden by the dead under the altar, who cry, saying: Lord, Almighty God, when wilt Thou avenge the blood that has been shed? White robes were given unto them, and it was said to them; Wait yet for a little season, until the number of your brethren that are yet to be killed for the testimony of Jesus, be fulfilled.[9]

The women of the *Martyrs' Mirror* not only repeat this metaphor, they add a dimension of their own. Women embody this passage between death and life in a very

special way. In many cultures blood symbolizes both life and death. For males this is external, related to the hunt, where the death of an animal provides life for the community, or to circumcision, where wounding also results from an outside action. For women this reality is internalized. Menstrual blood often represents death, because it indicates an absence of fetal life, while the blood evident in the birth process demonstrates the connection between blood and life.

The image of the narrow way occupies the center of Janneken Munstdorp's testament to her newborn daughter. The authorities apprehended Janneken in April of 1573 at Antwerp, along with her husband and three other women. The authorities executed her husband in September, but delayed the death of the women because of Janneken's pregnancy.

Married only six months before her arrest, Janneken bore her first and only child in a prison cell less than a month after her husband's execution. The child was a daughter and Janneken named the child after herself. The four women were burned at the stake in October. The testament written to her newborn daughter stands as Janneken's legacy.

Janneken recalls having "borne you under my heart with great sorrow for nine months." She notes that, having delivered her daughter, now she is to be "delivered up to death." She worries that her daughter will not understand why her parents were so cruelly executed, and that she will be "ashamed to confess" them "before the world." She explains to young Janneken that martyrdom "is the way which the prophets and the apostles went, and the narrow way which leads into eternal life, for there shall no other way be found by which to be saved." She reminds her that Jesus himself "went before us in this way of reproach, and left us an example, that we should follow His steps; for, for His sake all must be forsaken, father, mother, sister, brother, husband, child, yea, one's own life."[10]

In the context of Janneken's imprisonment, recent birth experience, and impending death, the image of the "narrow way" evokes deep and complex meanings. The delivery of her child stands as a shadow of her own delivery to death.

> I must now pass through this narrow way which the prophets and martyrs of Christ passed through, and many thousands who put off the mortal clothing, who died here for Christ, and now they wait under the altar till their number shall be fulfilled, of which number your dear father is one. And I am now on the point of following him, for I am delivered up to death.[11]

The narrow way that leads to life becomes, for the martyr, a birth canal through which she must pass in order to end one existence and begin another.

The God Who Binds

Janneken closes her letter by wishing for her daughter "the crucified, bleeding, naked, despised, rejected and slain Jesus Christ for your bridegroom."[12] The anticipated "post-liminal" state of women martyrs is often described in the *Martyrs' Mirror*

A myth is...

a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people.

One way to understand narratives of martyrdom is by seeing them as stories about a ritual process, a *rite of passage*, in which the martyr is not only transported from one place to another (earth to heaven), but transformed from one state of being or plane of existence to a higher one.

as that of a "bride." Martyr narratives consistently maintain the innocence, both legal and moral, of those who die for their faith. Women martyrs contribute an additional element of sexual innocence to the paradigm of the martyr, befitting their roles as brides of Christ.

Eliade writes at length of "the god who binds," a sovereign deity found in the mythologies of many cultures, who, often through magic, imprisons mortals. This archetype appears in the symbolism of knots, ropes, chains and other shackles. Eliade emphasizes the binding by God as punishment for transgressions, but ignores the positive image of a god who binds those who follow him to himself. It is this metaphor which is prominent in martyr narratives, as the "bonds of God" stand in stark contrast to the bonds endured in this world at the hands of evil persons.

In 1595, Aeltgen Baten, an "aged woman," and Maeyken Wouters, a young woman of about twenty-four years of age, were apprehended by "trappers" in their home community of Sonhoven. The authorities charged them with the crime of being baptized as adults and they were imprisoned for ten weeks. During their incarceration, these women developed a bond of love and mutual support so strong that it was believed that Maeyken "would gladly have borne in her own body, if it had been possible to do so, all the hardships which her dear, old sister suffered."[13]

Maeyken, however, faced temptations which her companion did not. The bishop's chaplain at one point came to the young woman with a container of wine, hoping that he could overcome her resistance. His subtle persuasiveness proved ineffectual, and finally he "got down upon his knees, and with folded hands begged her to recant and to believe the Romish church." Maeyken remained faithful, and "repelled the devil's deceit, so that the tempter went away."

Maeyken resisted yet another attempt, this by a man from her village. Hearing of her impending death, "his soul was set on fire, and the matter excited his carnal sympathy," he went to visit her in prison. Maeyken replied to his entreaties, "My dear friend, would you advise me this, that I should forsake God and become a child of the devil?" When he pointed out that she would then have to die, she replied, "I should rather have this come to pass with us, than enjoy the light of day." He left the prison in tears.

In a letter written in prison, Maeyken emphasized the image of bride and bridegroom to show that her relationship to Christ went beyond even the bond between mother and child. She wrote: "My dear father and mother, think not that my Bridegroom will forsake me; think what He has said: 'Though a mother should forsake her child, yet will I never forsake mine elect, whom my heavenly Father has given me.' Hence if it is His pleasure, I shall soon be delivered." She implored her parents not to attempt to secure her release with "temporal wealth," because that would "deprive our Bridegroom of His honor," by indicating a lack of belief "that He will deliver me."[14]

On the way to the place of execution, the women began to sing and praise God, but their mouths were gagged by their guards. And

so, "they were thus, as dumb lambs, led to the slaughter and death." Their escort took them to Meuse Bridge and what took place there is pieced together from "various reports circulating among the common people."

> When they arrived at the place appointed, the executioner began to bind them, but they had to keep silent, until the executioner loosed the cloth that was before their mouths, and tied it over their eyes. Then Aeltgen first said: "O Lord, this is a beautiful city indeed; would that it repented with Nineveh"; and commending herself to God, the executioner forthwith cast her from the bridge down into the water and she was instantly drowned.[15]

The executioner then also released Maeyken's mouth, and she requested that he allow her to pray to God. The executioner replied that it would be better if she were to pray to the lords the magistrates, and believe in the Church of Rome, because that would save her life. Maeyken responded that she had never done anything wrong to the magistrates and therefore did not need to worship them. The executioner cast her down from the bridge immediately. However, "she did not sink instantly as Aeltgen, but with blooming cheeks she drifted upon the water for a long time, until, it is said, she had reached the lower side of the city."[16] This image of Maeyken, as she is carried on the flowing river, provides a powerful reminder of the inextricable link between death and birth. The river is her grave, but it stands, more powerfully, as the symbol of her final birth passage.

The Cosmic Tree or Pillar of the World

One of the most prominent paradigms in the world's mythologies

Maeyken Wens' sons search for tongue screw, Antwerp, 1573

is the "Cosmic Tree" or "Pillar of the World." This paradigm is part of a widespread symbolism of the center. The Cosmic Tree stands at the center of the universe, connecting three cosmic regions, heaven, earth, and the underworld. When this tree or pillar exists at the center, communication between heaven and earth becomes possible. A person may even travel from one realm to another, as in the case of Jacob's dream at Bethel, where he observed beings walking up and down a ladder stretched between earth and heaven.

For Christians the cross represents the Cosmic Tree planted on Golgotha, at the center of the

world. It was here, according to the foundation myth of Christianity, that Christ decisively breached the barrier between heaven and earth, clearly indicated by the parting of the veil guarding the holy of holies in the temple. Considering the close association of the martyrs with Christ, it is not surprising that

Anneken van den Hove,

Brussels, 1597

images of the Cosmic Tree and Pillar of the World appear in illustrations of their sufferings and deaths.

Ursel van Essen was apprehended in Maestricht at about one o'clock on a morning in 1569 or early 1570. Her captors recognized a quality in Ursel which caused them to single her out, for "though weak, according to the flesh," she "was not the most timid."[17] After Ursel had suffered the rack twice, her tormentors tied her hands together, drew her up, cut open her chemise with a knife baring her back, and beat her with rods. This procedure was repeated once more that same day.[18] Ursel's courage and endurance amazed those who knew her, for she had a reputation for being "tender of body." Friends recalled that, before her imprisonment, she had to wear her stockings inside out, because she could not bear the seams against her skin.

In this illustration, we see Ursel suspended, her feet well off the floor, her dress torn open at the back ready to receive the blows from her tormentor. One is struck with how small and frail her body appears, aligned as it is with the massive pillar which not only holds her body but supports the roof of the torture chamber. The pillar, nearly at one with her body, stands in contrast to the steeples of the cathedrals and churches clearly visible through the doorway.

Betrayed by her neighbor at Amsterdam in 1571, Anneken Heyndricks suffered an unusual death. Her executioners lashed her to a ladder before casting her into the fire. The artist catches her as she is being lifted on the way to landing face down in the flames. Anneken looks toward heaven with her hands clasped in an attitude of prayer. Immediately behind her looms a large church tower.

Maeyken Wens left behind several children, two of whom attended her execution. The authorities ordered that the mouths of the women be "screwed shut," as part of their sentence. The eldest son of Maeyken Wens, fifteen-year-old Adriaen, stood holding his youngest brother Hans, only three years old, on a bench not far from the stakes erected, in order to watch his mother's execution. When they brought his mother out and tied her to the stake, Adriaen fainted, and

only after the execution did he regain consciousness. He immediately went to the place where his mother had been burnt, and hunted in the ashes for the screw with which her tongue had been screwed fast.

It is this poignant image, Adriaen searching through the ashes while his young brother innocently looks on, that we find in *Martyrs' Mirror*. For a moment, however, let us ignore the boys. To the right of the boys stand the charred remains of the stakes to which the martyrs were bound. Chains and manacles still hanging from them, they point skyward, in opposition to steeples adorned with crosses on the left side of the picture.

Anneken van den Hove, a servant girl apprehended at Brussels in the winter of 1594 through the betrayal of a local pastor, remained imprisoned for two years and seven months, until July 9, 1597. At that time, Jesuits first offered her freedom if she would recant, and then offered her six more months to consider whether she would abandon her heretical beliefs. She refused both proposals, saying that "she desired neither day nor time,...for she longed to get to the place where she might offer up unto the Lord a sacrifice acceptable unto Him."[19]

The Justice of the court and some Jesuits accompanied Anneken to a place one-half mile from the city of Brussels, where a "pit or grave" was dug. She "fearlessly undressed herself" and was placed into the pit. After her lower limbs had been covered with dirt, the Jesuits asked her if she would recant. She refused, explaining that she was glad that the time of her departure was so near at hand.

They continued to throw earth into the hole around Anneken's body until she was buried up to her neck. They begged, threatened, and promised in the hope that she would give in and renounce her faith. In the face of her defiance, they covered her head. They then stamped their feet on the earth, in order that she would die sooner. Anneken, it is said, so loved Jesus "that she followed Him not only to the marriage at Cana, but also...to the *gallows-hill*."[20]

The church steeples of Brussels appear clearly even at a distance of one-half mile. However, here the martyr offers no pillar, ladder, or stake to indicate the connection between heaven and earth. We see Anneken's head looking small and insignificant in the midst of her accusers. Here the tree appears in its beginning stage, as a seed planted on Golgotha's hill.

Conclusion

In their identification with these universal archetypes, the women of the *Martyrs' Mirror* stand as hierophanies. Peter Brown begins his book *The Cult of the Saints* with: "This book is about the joining of Heaven and Earth, and the role, in this joining, of dead human beings."[21] The martyrs whose stories are recorded in the *Martyrs' Mirror* tell us again the age-old story of human beings, who because of their remarkable lives and deaths, represent a joining of heaven and earth. Within their bruised and bleeding bodies we witness a meeting of heaven and earth, as the sacred, for all too brief an instant, invades the realm of the profane.

Endnotes

1. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 142.
2. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries* (The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), 164.
3. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths* (Macmillan, 1988), 31.
4. Christopher Vecsey, *Imagine Ourselves Richly* (HarperCollins, 1991), 27.
5. O'Flaherty, 31.
6. Vecsey, 23.
7. *The Rites of Passage* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21.
8. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Herald Press, 1974), 595.
9. *MM*, 453
10. *MM*, 985.
11. *MM*, 985-6.
12. *MM*, 987.
13. *MM*, 1091.
14. *MM*, 1092.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *MM*, 842.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *MM*, 1093.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1.

Encountering Freedom

C. van Rijswijk

translated by
William Keeney

introduction by
James C. Juhnke

Introduction

The story of Dirk Willems, the Dutch Anabaptist martyr of 1569 who rescued his pursuer from icy waters, is remembered and celebrated outside of Anabaptist-Mennonite circles. Dirk is honored in his home village of Asperen with a street that bears his name—"Dirk Willemszstraat." Dirk's story appears in religious martyr books and in secular histories of the Dutch struggle for independence from Spain. The church tower where Dirk was imprisoned before his death is still standing in Asperen and may be visited by tourists.

In 1979 a fictionalized biography of Dirk Willems written by C. van Rijswijk was published, Hij gaf Zijn leven *[He Gave His Life]. In 1993 the same book was reprinted with a new title,* De vrijheid tegemoet *[Encountering Freedom], by Boekhandel van Wijngaarden in Barneveld. This translated excerpt comes from the final pages of that book, 43-54. It begins with Dirk in prison before his escape.*

C. van Rijswijk is a teacher and school director in Barneveld, a town on the Veluwe, an area of sands and forests in the mid-east of the Netherlands. He has written many stories on biblical themes for children.

Each retelling of the story has its own view of Dirk's motives for rescuing his enemy. John Lothrop Motley, a nineteenth century historian, wrote in The Rise of the Dutch Republic *(1858, vol. 2, p. 242) that Dirk was "instinctively obeying the dictates of a generous nature." Van Rijswijk writes from a Reformed Church perspective, and emphasizes Dirk's biblical and spiritual motives. Mennonite readers who are familiar with the account in the* Martyrs' Mirror *will note a number of differences in detail. In Van Rijswijk's account, for example, Dirk is beheaded rather than burned at the stake, and his martyrdom strengthens the Reformed, rather than the Anabaptist, movement. The book* De vrijheid tegemoet *includes a number of illustrations which suggest a context for the rescue somewhat different from the famous etching by Jan Luykens in the* Martyrs' Mirror.

This translation was a collaborative effort. William Keeney, retired college teacher and administrator of Bluffton, Ohio, did the original translation; Joanne Juhnke, reference librarian at St. Mary's College in Maryland, cast the text into idiomatic English. The translation is printed with the permission of the author and publisher.

Encountering Freedom

Dirk Willems paced to and fro in his cold cell. This breaking night might be his last. Any day the court servants might come to fetch him. And that would be the end of him.

Suddenly Dirk Willems stood still. Through the bars of the small window he saw the twinkling stars. A frigid breeze blew in at him. Yes, there would surely be a hard freeze tonight. Would the moat be frozen too? Would the ice already be strong enough to hold his weight? Could he possibly escape?

Dirk Willems frightened himself. How had he suddenly started thinking along those lines? Hadn't the Lord been a wonderful comfort to him? Hadn't the Lord already taken away his fear of death? Then why was he still thinking of escaping?

Dirk Willems fought a hard fight. Then he thought about the saints of the Bible: Abraham, Jacob, David, Saul of Tarsus, and many others. Each of them had fled from their captors when they got the chance. Dirk Willems saw clearly that fleeing from the enemy was biblical.

You don't have to offer yourself up to a wicked enemy, like a helpless lamb. With that thought Dirk Willems ran to the barred window. He tugged on the bars and discovered that they were a little bit loose. With some effort he managed to pull several of the bars free from the window. A stone from the wall fell on the floor at his feet. He leaned over, picked up the stone and threw it out of the window as carefully as possible. A dull thud told Dirk Willems that the heavy stone had not broken through the ice. So the ice must be fairly thick already.

That confirmed his plan. He would try to cross the ice and escape to safety. The thought flashed through his mind, "Soon I'll see my wife and children again. . . ."

Quietly Dirk Willems took off his outer clothes and tied them into a makeshift rope. He tied one end tightly to a bar that held firm. Then the great challenge began. With some difficulty he worked his way though the small window. Now he had to watch what he was doing. He took a firm hold on the cloth rope. If it broke, he was done for; or if the ice would not hold him, he could drown or the guard would hear him. Extreme caution was crucial. Soon he dangled outside the window. The cloth rope creaked ominously. Below him shone the ice. Carefully, hand over hand down the rope, with his legs seeking support on the wall's uneven surface while his knees scraped along the rough stones, Dirk Willems approached the ice.

In spite of the biting wind his forehead was beaded with sweat, not only from the exertion but from the terrible tension of the moment. Hoping, fearing, praying, he went on. At last he felt the surface of the ice with his toes. Now it was time for the real test.

If the ice would not hold him, he would have to try to climb back up again. Would he have the strength left to do it? Carefully he put one foot on the ice, and then the other. Then he tried to stand, still holding the rope firmly. You can never know!

It succeeded. The ice could carry him. From the depths of his heart, he offered a prayer of thanks to the Lord. Then with a calm heart, he dared to let go of the rope. Step by step, standing quietly now and then to listen, Dirk Willems moved across the mirror-slick ice. His only fear now was the guard. Now he had to be more careful than ever, because of the bright moon. Fortunately he could see the outline of the shore up ahead. Just a few more steps and he would be there. The greatest danger was over. . . .

"Hey there, stop! Stop, I said!" Dirk Willems froze for an instant at the guard's cry.

But only for a moment. Then he sprang forward, raced to the shore, disappeared through the bushes and began to run as fast as he could. The guard wouldn't be able to catch him now, unless things went very wrong. But the guard could not simply let his prisoner get away. If the guard allowed the heretic to escape, it could cost him his life. Look out, now. With a musket in his hand, the young soldier began to run. Good thing the moon was so bright. After all, if the ice could hold such a damnable heretic, it would certainly carry an ardent disciple of the holy Roman church!

Thump! The agile soldier sprang onto the ice and hurried after the fugitive. Faster and faster he ran, with longer strides, his steps rumbling faster and heavier on the ice.

One thing drove him on; he had to catch that heretic, dead or alive. See, those were the bushes through which the heretic had disappeared. And behind the bushes lay a large open field. One musket shot would do it. No, there would be no escape. . . .

Then it happened. The ice broke with a terrifying crack. A cry, a scream, and the soldier floundered in the icy water. A weak spot in the ice had collapsed beneath his heavy footfall. The guard sank to the chin in stone-cold water. With all his strength he tried to climb out. But the ice

broke again and again. Only with great effort could he keep his head above water. He wouldn't be able to hold out for long.

The water saturated his clothes. An invisible hand seemed to drag the poor man down. He felt the strength leaving his hands. Not surprising: the temperature was well below freezing. The poor soldier seemed to have no choice but to die a miserable death.

But he did not want to die. An awful fear overwhelmed him. In terror he screamed at the top of his lungs, "Help . . . help, I'm drowning! . . . Help!"

But his frightened cry was lost in the silence of the cold night. The other soldiers lay in the warm straw, asleep like oxen. Again his cry for help rang out. Again it was the cry of a desperate man.

"Come . . . help . . . drowning . . . !!" The sounds were raw and futile. The solders did not wake up. And the villagers had gone to bed long before. It was winter and very cold. Who would be on the streets on a night like this? At best, the pastor on the way to visit someone seriously ill. But not even the pastor was to be seen. Only a few wild geese disturbed the stillness.

The unfortunate guard knew all too well that he was doomed. Once more he cried out. He screamed like a desperate animal. But no one heard him. No one?

Dirk Willems ran for his life. He had already left the bushes far behind. Now and then he looked around to see whether the guard was following. He did not see a thing. No, he saw nothing, but . . . what did he hear? He stood still for a moment. Yes, now he heard it again. It was a cry for help. And suddenly Dirk Willems knew exactly what had happened: the guard, his enemy, had fallen through the ice. Now he could slow down a bit; the danger had decreased. Again he heard the terrified cry of his enemy. What a miracle: he was safe, and the soldier would drown if no one came to help. And who would hear the guard? Well, you never know. What if his comrades rush to help him, and then all of them take up the chase!

Look, he's still dawdling. He should be running, as fast as he can. . . .

But Dirk Willems felt as if his legs were made of lead. He couldn't go any farther. His enemy's cry for help would not let him go. Behind him the guard was fighting for his life. He would drown soon, deep in the icy water. At least, he'd drown if no help arrived. . . . "Love your enemies, bless them who curse you," it said in God's word. Yes, Dirk Willems thought about it. He knew well what was in the Bible. And he also knew that this was the Christmas season, the celebration of the advent of the Lord Jesus. He, the Lord of Glory, came to this accursed world to make friends of those who were enemies. Oh, Dirk Willems shivered with joy as he thought about that miracle: come to reconcile enemies with God. Come also for him. Crown and throne left behind, to walk this accursed earth. For him, a wretch, who abandoned the Lord wilfully. For him, who had despised both God and neighbor.

Then scenes from the life of the Lord Jesus flashed through Dirk Willems' mind. How He was burdened, mocked, and taunted! And finally He was hanged upon the cross. He who traveled through the land doing good: the blind given sight, the deaf hearing, and the godless given a new heart. Yes, Dirk Willems knew it well. It was his solemn duty to rescue his enemy from death. How frightful it would be for the guard to die unreconciled. Our God is a consuming fire and an eternal flame. All this Dirk Willems knew, and yet . . . .

It was a great struggle. How he longed for his wife and children! If he continued to run, he would be with them soon. What a surprising and happy reunion it would be! Did he really have to trouble himself about the soldier, such a zealous follower of the Roman church that was murdering God's holy ones?

"Whoever loves father or mother, brother or sister, wife or child more than me is not worthy to be mine." These words pierced his heart like an arrow. Christ's will is that we love the enemy. What had his Master not done for him? Shouldn't he follow in his precious Master's footsteps?

Then he made his decision. Wife and children were forgotten. The Lord's commandment won the day. Out of love for the Master, the battle was won.

Look, Dirk Willems hurried back over the field. He ran as hard as he could. Someone was in need, in desperate need. An enemy was about to drown! And he, Dirk Willems, would try to rescue him. For the sake of Christ. . . .

"Calm down, help is coming; I'm coming to rescue you," cried Dirk Willems to the desperately floundering guard. The guard was in a precarious position. He could barely hold his head and arms above water. Any second he might sink into the cold depths. He had no feeling left in his arms. And he could hardly cry out any more.

He rejoiced when he saw someone coming. But when he recognized his rescuer, he shrank back in disgust. What? Must he be helped by a heretic? Must an enemy of the holy mother church rescue him from this crisis? Where were his own friends? Shouldn't he refuse the help that the heretic was offering? But then he would drown for sure! Meanwhile, Dirk Willems had laid a couple of long thick branches onto the ice. Cautiously he crept toward the soldier. Soon he found himself right in front of the guard. Dirk Willems looked at him. Then he felt an awful premonition. What a hostile look the guard was giving him. The look in his eyes meant no good. Why didn't the guard speak to him? Was he somehow unhappy to be rescued? Wasn't Dirk Willems putting his own life in danger? If the ice gave way now, they would both die.

Why did the guard glare so hatefully at his rescuer?

Still, Dirk Willems did not even consider leaving him to die. It was his duty to help. He was still completely convinced, in spite of everything.

With a strong grip, Dirk Willems took hold of one of the drowning man's arms. Then the heavy difficult work began. Backing up over the thick branches, on his belly, he tried to bring the guard onto the ice. It didn't go smoothly. The water had made the soldier as heavy as lead. Still, he made some progress. Fifteen minutes later, he had managed to pull the guard's upper body onto the branches. Then he worked on getting the rest of his body onto the ice. Finally, at long last, he succeeded. Carefully, with the ice cracking ominously beneath them, the two men crept over the branches to the shore.

"Thank God that you're safe, soldier!" was the first thing Dirk Willems said when they both stood on the frozen grass.

"Heretic," sneered the guard, and before Dirk Willems knew it, the guard who had been rescued from deathly danger grabbed him firmly with his left hand while drawing a short sword with his right. Then the ungrateful soldier bellowed at his dismayed rescuer, "You scum, you almost made me drown! It's your fault that I was sinking in the cold moat. Now, move! — back to the prison . . . don't try to escape, or I'll run you through . . . get moving, heretic!"

Dirk Willems moved on. No, he hadn't expected this. Only now did he realize how deep the hatred ran. Still, he did not regret rescuing the guard. Didn't he do it for the sake of Christ? It didn't hurt him that he was being driven back to prison, with the point of a sword at his neck. It hurt him even less that the guard sneered. In his heart he was at peace with a quiet calm. Was not his Master also treated thus? Didn't He also give His life for His enemies?

Through his faith, Dirk Willems could see the supreme Leader and Fulfiller of the faith, who endured the cross, thinking nothing of its shame.

The other soldiers of the guard gave them a funny look, when the half-dressed heretic was shoved through the door by their dripping-wet comrade.

"What happened to you, Gerbrand?" they laughed.

"What happened to me?" retorted the scoundrel. "Oh, I'll tell you, all right. But first get this heretic back into his cell."

Dirk Willems was shoved roughly into the prison. Several soldiers fixed the bars on the window. Escape was now entirely impossible. Indeed, Dirk Willems didn't feel like escaping any more. Dead tired, he fell into his meager clothing and onto his small pile of straw. It was bitter cold.

He shook all over. Seldom had he felt so tired and exhausted. But Dirk Willems knew one thing for sure. The struggle would not last much longer.

Nineteen days of oppression were already past. His tiredness forgotten and filled with joy he began:

My Lord and God, since You are there,
How could another god compare?
There is no other, great or small,
You alone are Lord of all.
And even though I faint at length,
Though my heart loses all its strength,
In You, Lord, is my comfort complete,
My inheritance, fortress, safe retreat.

The Lord was his God, now and forever. The cold prison became his entrance gate to heaven. Lying in that musty place, Dirk Willems was high above the clouds in spirit. "How great and good you are, Lord," he whispered softly. Then he fell asleep quickly. The bitter cold did not seem to touch him.

A rat ran across his body and helped himself to the bread crust that was intended for the prisoner. The creature finished off the last crumb. Toward morning, voices sounded. Gates creaked open. Loud laughter and rough jokes rang out. Dirk Willems did not hear any of it. He slept the sleep of the righteous.

Only as the door of his prison clattered open with a loud bang did he awaken.

The rays of the red sun shone through the bars. It was no longer very early. The new day had begun several hours ago.

A gruff voice informed Dirk Willems that he must come along. Today his punishment would be carried out, far from the prison. For the last time Dirk cast his eyes around his humble cell. He would now leave this room forever. As he stepped in front of the armed soldier into the dark hall, he murmured, "This was a house of God for me, a gate of heaven."

Later that afternoon Dirk Willems was beheaded. They were afraid that the heretic would try to escape again, and so they made short work of him. His death was indeed an entrance into undisturbed salvation.

The brave guard was praised extravagantly. His life was spared for his good work. The heretic had not escaped, and the holy Roman church had the guard to thank.

No one countered the praises that the guard received. Not one word of contradiction was said about the noble deed of Dirk Willems. The Roman clergymen had kept silent about this on purpose. On purpose, because after the execution, the soldier had told some of the clergymen what had really happened. Did an uneasy conscience make him tell? But they brushed it off casually. "If he had not tried to escape, you wouldn't have nearly drowned," the clergymen spoke on his behalf. With that, the affair was dismissed.

But slowly the story of the noble deed of Dirk Willems leaked out. Friends and enemies were deeply touched by this simple act of human love. And for many this became an eternal blessing. Many from Dirk's village publicly chose the Reform, which served as a comfort and support for the deeply grieving widow and her children, to the disgust of the pastor and his followers.

Soon, in the Day of Days, Dirk Willems will receive the crown of righteousness in full measure. And not only him, but all who have believed in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Mennonite Martyrs as Amsterdam Martyrs

Mary Sprunger

Dirk Pietersz Smuel and Jacob de Geldersman, 1546

Many Mennonites are familiar with the illustrations from the 1685 edition of Thieleman Jansz van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror*. By the Dutch Mennonite artist Jan Luyken (1649-1712), a poet and prolific print-maker, the 104 *Martyrs' Mirror* etchings are just a fraction of the more than 3,000 prints that he produced during his career. Less familiar are four additional Luyken etchings of Anabaptist martyrs that appear in a monumental book on the city of Amsterdam by Casparus Commelin.[1] While the scenes do not differ much from the well-known *Martyrs' Mirror* prints, their setting—a general work on Amsterdam, as opposed to a Mennonite martyrology—merits some attention.

Beschryvinge van Amsterdam . . . [Description of Amsterdam], first published in 1693, is a large two-volume work celebrating the city's history and geography. Besides the historical accounts, Commelin details the workings of the city government and describes all of the important buildings and institutions of the city, such as orphanages and churches (including three Mennonite churches).[2] The book is illustrated with many etchings of buildings, cityscapes, maps and historical scenes. Most of the prints were not signed, but apparently several illustrators were commissioned for the project. Eleven of the prints have been attributed to Jan Luyken, including the four Anabaptist martyr scenes reproduced here.[3]

Luyken's martyr etchings illustrate the stories of several Anabaptists who were executed on the main city square in Amsterdam, called the Dam. The inclusion of these stories in such a work attests to the prominent place that Anabaptism still played in the city's history in the late seventeenth century. Especially remarkable is that Commelin portrays these martyrs more as general victims of the abuse suffered by the Roman Catholic city authorities and Spanish imperial rule than as dangerous Anabaptist heretics. This is in stark contrast to the treatment of the other Anabaptists in the book.

The first two pictures come near the end of a twenty-page section that deals with the history of the Anabaptist movement in Amsterdam from a secular perspective.[4] Thus of interest is the persecution of Anabaptists and the radical manifestations of the movement, culminating in the 1535 violent takeover of the city hall by a minority

of Anabaptists. These revolutionaries were influenced by events at Münster, where Anabaptists had set up their own kingdom. In Amsterdam, success lasted only one night. The immediate effect of the failed coup was to initiate a new round of persecution. One of Luyken's prints illustrates the torture of Jan or Jacob van Campen, an Anabaptist leader from Amsterdam who was not directly involved in the uprising but blamed nevertheless.[5] These Anabaptists were clearly a threat to the city's stability.

Commelin then went on to describe the continuing persecution of Anabaptists or, as he explained, *doopsgezinden* (baptism-minded), suggesting that he was aware that most remaining Anabaptists by the late 1540s were peaceful followers of Menno Simons rather than dangerous revolutionaries. He cited the *Martyrs' Mirror* as his authority on terminology, which further suggests that he used Van Braght as a source for his martyr stories.[6] The close parallels of the accounts in both texts provide further evidence for this probability.

This on-going persecution is the context for the first two prints. Commelin's description accompanying the illustration of the two men burned on ladders does not give many details. In 1546, Dirk Pietersz Smuel and Jacob de Geldersman, both from Edam, were arrested and jailed in Amsterdam, then tried and sentenced to death in the Hague. They were brought back to Amsterdam, tied on to ladders and burned on the Dam.[7] The *Martyrs' Mirror* account is not much more detailed but includes the interrogation of Smuel, as well as a testament and letter written from prison.[8]

The second print accompanies the story of eight Anabaptists burned together in 1549. A group of twenty

Ellert Jansz and seven other Anabaptists, 1549

Anabaptists were imprisoned in Amsterdam. Eleven were able to escape from jail but had to leave nine of their fellow prisoners behind. Of these, one made a conscious choice to stay. According to Commelin, "... a certain tailor named *Ellert Jansz* could have escaped with the others, by using a rope to slide down from a window, but he did not want to. `I am now so peacefully resigned,' he said, `to offer up a sacrifice, and I now feel so blissful that I do not need to live longer to become any better.'" Thus on March 20, 1549, he was burned along with five other men and two women (the third woman was spared because she was pregnant). As Ellert Jansz was dying, he cried, "I have never lived a happier day."[9] While the account in Commelin portrays these martyrs as committed and faithful to the end, Van Braght, in keeping with the purpose of

a martyrology, elaborated on the significance of Ellert's witness. A cousin of Ellert, Jan Jansz, was so moved by this martyr's final testimony that he became an Anabaptist soon afterwards.[10] That Commelin then went on to chronicle the shift of power from Hapsburg emperor Charles V to his son Philip II

Pieter Pietersz Bekje, Anabaptist meeting on a boat

puts even these Mennonite martyrs into the broader context of Protestant persecution, as opposed to linking them with the revolutionary Anabaptists. In 1555, Philip intensified persecution and brought in the Inquisition to help with the process.

The stories accompanying the second set of Luyken martyr prints even more clearly portray Mennonites as part of the larger history of the city's struggle against Roman Catholicism and Spanish tyranny. In 1566, parts of the Netherlands began to revolt against Spanish rule. Calvinists, still a small minority of the Dutch population, were the driving force behind the revolt. The authorities of Amsterdam continued to support Spain until 1578, when the Protestants succeeded in taking over the city. Commelin names various Lutherans and Reformed (Calvinists) who were imprisoned, tortured and executed under the increasingly heavy yoke of persecution in the late 1560s.[11] This is the context for the stories of Pieter Pietersz Bekje and Willem Jansz from 1569. It is remarkable that Commelin does not overtly refer to them as Mennonites:

> The terrible theater of murder had no rest in the City; indeed, it was at its hottest stage, so that those who were in hiding from the Roman church sometimes, in order to edify one another, rowed outside of the city in a boat. For this purpose *Pieter Pietersz. Bekje*, a boatman, yet with no little knowledge of Scripture, willingly let himself be used. Indeed, he even edified and comforted his passengers with the word of God. For this he was finally arrested by the law, gruesomely tortured, and, on February 29, 1569, burned alive on the Dam.[12]

Only in the official sentence, which Commelin quoted in its entirety, was mention made of the fact that Bekje was Mennonite.

The story continued. A fellow believer, Willem Jansz from Waterland (an area just north of Amsterdam), heard about Bekje's execution date and hastened to Amsterdam. He arrived so late that the city had already been closed off for the execution, and he had to bribe his way through the gate.

Willem arrived at the Dam just in time to see Bekje being readied at the stake. He ". . . stood on the steps of the weighing house and called to him (so overcome was he with the zeal to encourage his brother in the faith), 'Brother, struggle piously!'" When the wrong man was apprehended for this bold show of support, Willem came forward and identified himself. This confession earned him arrest, interrogation, two rounds of torture, and, on March 12, 1569, execution by burning along with three other Anabaptists.[13] Commelin also described the martyrdom of several other Mennonites before moving on to political and military events.

Commelin's treatment of the Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs as part of Amsterdam's struggle against Spain and the Catholic church is suggestive of the respectable position of the Dutch Mennonites by the late seventeenth century. While it is safe to assume that most, if not all, Mennonites supported the Dutch revolt (some contributed large sums of money to William of Orange), once the Calvinists gained power, they did not see the Mennonites as allies, but as threats to the Reformed establishment. Mennonites were officially barred from holding public office or studying theology at the Reformed universities. It is unlikely that in the late sixteenth century or early seventeenth century, Mennonite martyrs would have been viewed as civic martyrs in the struggle for a Protestant city. By 1693, apparently, things had changed. Besides receiving more extensive textual treatment, Anabaptists are the only individual martyrs pictured in the book. Whether or not Luyken had artistic license to choose which scenes to depict, his etchings draw attention to the Mennonite martyrs in this general history of Amsterdam.

Willem Jansz, 1569

Endnotes

1. Casparus Commelin, *Beschrywinge van Amsterdam* . . . . . Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waasberge, Boom, van Someren and Goethals, 1693.
2. Commelin, 499-501.
3. P. van Eeghen et al, *Het Werk van Jan en Casper Luyken*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller, 1905), 233-35. The eleven etchings are on pages 170, 872, 938, 944, 945, 1028, 1029 and 1072.
4. Commelin, 926-46.
5. Commelin, 938.
6. Commelin, 939.
7. Commelin, 944.
8. T[hieleman] J[ansz] V[an] Braght, *Het Bloedig Tooneel, of Martelaers Spiegel* . . . (Amsterdam: J. vander Deyster et al, 1685), II:82-84; English translation by Joseph F. Sohm, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror* . . . , 15th ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 475-81.
9. Commelin, 944.
10. Van Braght, II: 82-84; Sohm, 483.
11. Commelin, 1027
12. Commelin, 1028.
13. Commelin, 1029-30.

Singing at the Fire

Shirley Sprunger King

Sarah Klassen

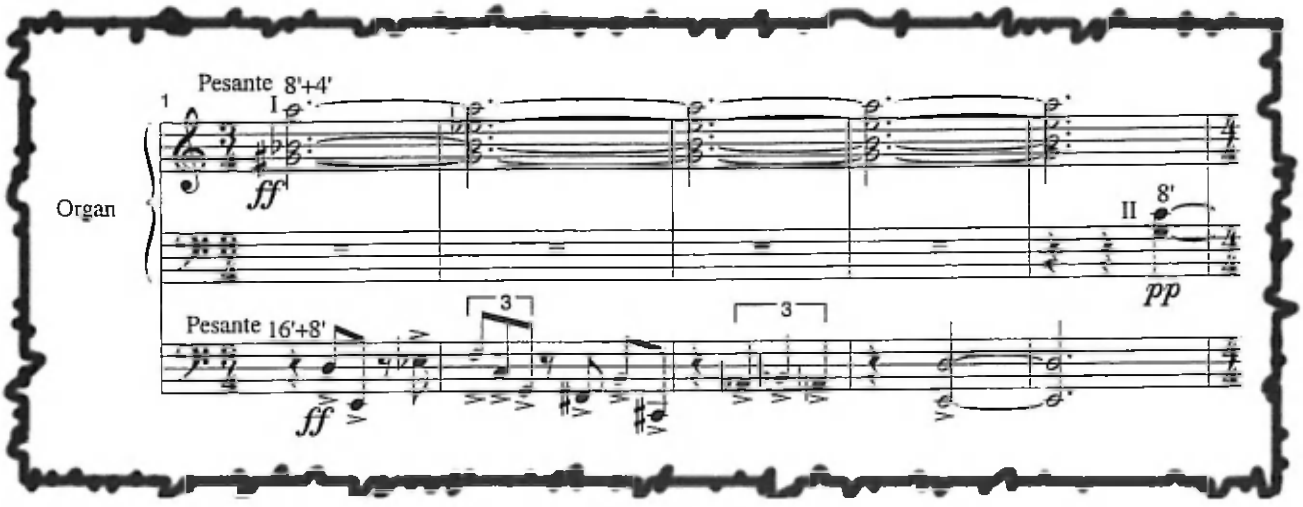
Brent Weaver

Audiences at six Mennonite colleges in North America witnessed a unique artistic production this spring in the 22nd annual C. Henry Smith Peace Lectureship. Singing at the Fire *consists of three musical compositions for organ by Brent Weaver, professor of composition and music theory at Clayton State College near Atlanta, Georgia. Weaver's compositions were based on poems by Sarah Klassen, a Canadian Mennonite poet who is currently teaching English in Lithuania. The presentation was designed, commissioned, and performed by the 1997 C. Henry Smith Peace Lecturer, Shirley Sprunger King, professor of music and organist at Bethel College.*

One does not have to look very far to find evidence of Anabaptists writing hymns and singing in prison. Often these hymns had additional details added to them after the writer was killed, the hymn text thus becoming another source of information about their martyrdom. Many of the accounts of the hymn-singing indicate that the prisoners sang to cheer each other, to evangelize, and to pray for personal courage and steadfastness in the face of persecution, torture and death.

Stories of the early martyrs recorded in van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* have reached a broad audience in recent years through the traveling exhibit and book, *Mirror of the Martyrs* by John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider. Poets like Sarah Klassen have been moved to write responses to some of the pictures and stories, providing a new means for sharing these important and moving stories for modern audiences.

When I became acquainted with Sarah's poetry, I was impressed with the many references to images of sound, particularly to song and singing. I became intrigued with the possibilities of pushing these poems further—to use them as inspiration, or a point of departure for music, specifically solo organ music.



My interest as a twentieth-century Anabaptist musician, whose voice is non-textual, was to reintroduce these stories in new ways, to explore how the combining of multiple art-forms could provide a unique and powerful voice for these stories. My intent was not to achieve the precision of a mirror or good translation, but something more like a paraphrase for our time—to convey to a contemporary audience these earlier events. I wondered if this distinctive combination of contemporary voices (poet, composer and performer) might serve to inspire and strengthen us as we seek to share our own "good witness" in today's world.

In *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne Langer writes: "Music is revealing, where words are obscuring, because it can have not only a content, but a transient play of contents. It can articulate feelings without becoming wedded to them." (243-44) The challenge to compose descriptive organ music was offered as a commission to H. Brent Weaver, who seemed fascinated with the project. I selected three of Sarah's poems to form the basis of an organ work, much in the style of Ned Rorem's *A Quaker Reader*, a collection of eleven solo organ works, inspired by writings of Quaker leaders.

In *The Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky writes, "The sound of color is so definite that it would be hard to find anyone who would express bright yellow with bass notes, or dark lake with the treble" (45). As an organist, I am constantly searching for the most appropriate colors or timbres to interpret and communicate the musical notation and ideas of the composer. What are the colors of screams, or terrified singing, or pompous doctors of theology? One of the particular pleasures I experience as an organist is the challenge of bringing music to life on different instruments, each with their own personality and limitations.

I believe the unique ways each artist "tells" these stories of early Anabaptist martyrs bring new insights for today's audience. The combining of these art forms—van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, Jan Luyken's etchings, Sarah Klassen's poetry, Brent Weaver's compositions and the performance of these organ works —allows us to experience the martyr stories anew, on many levels.

Shirley Sprunger King

Visual art frequently invokes in me the desire to write, maybe because it presents me with ready-made images.

These three poems are part of a cycle of twenty poems about Mennonite martyrs. I've titled them "Singing at the Fire." Most of them have appeared in various Canadian publications.

About three years ago I was reading in *Mirror of the Martyrs* (1990) edited by Robert Kreider and John Oyer after the recovery of the only remaining copper plates prepared by Jan Luyken for the second edition of *Martyrs Mirror*. I was fascinated both by the stark, simply-told experiences of the martyrs and by the (mis)adventures of the copper plates. But my strongest response was to the illustrations, reproductions of Jan Luyken's engravings. The artist visualized every cruel detail and made no effort to soften the suffering. Visual art frequently invokes in me the desire to write, maybe because it presents me with ready-made images. I studied Luyken's renditions: the woman suspended by her slender wrists; a condemned woman offering her baby to anyone who would care for it; the woman who was present only in the ashes through which her older son searched for the tongue screw while the younger orphan looked on; two women with mock crowns of straw on their way to death.

These images raised the obvious questions about the darkness of the human heart and about whether I could endure torture and death for my faith. Were all these deaths necessary? Did God really require them? Since life is sacred, wouldn't it have been better to compromise a little and live? Did this wide-spread persecution awaken some kind of mass hysteria resulting in an explosion of death wishes?

My original resolve was to write poems about the women martyrs only, but I didn't stay with that. I turned to the larger *Martyrs Mirror* (in which I'd read very little so far) and was struck by the victims' desire to leave "a good witness." This "good witness" was often accomplished through words: conversation with interrogators and jailers, letters home. But most poignant for me was the "good witness" expressed (faithfully? stubbornly?) in song with the flames already dancing around the victim's feet.

When I heard that the exhibition of the Luyken plates would be coming to Winnipeg, I had already written most of the poems, and was probably as well prepared as anyone in Winnipeg to view the exhibition. I remember seeing the old, worn letter written by Maeyken Wens before her death by fire—it had provided the beginning for one of my poems. "My God!" I thought. "There it is, her letter!" And for a moment I really thought it was the original, and not just a very good replica.

It's hard to know when a cycle is finished. This past winter I wrote one more poem for the series; I think it's the last.

"Singing at the fire" was first published in *The Fiddlehead*, winter 1994. "Cost of execution" has been accepted for publication in *Descant*. "Praise God" was first published in *The Fiddlehead*, winter 1995.

Sarah Klassen

Singing at the fire

The song's impossible to sing
without hands becoming fists,
without the stone weight of pain
stabbing your gut like a sharp star.
Without grace.

Seven martyrs made it up
in solitary cells. Each one composed a prayer
in a meter they must have agreed on. One
cries out in fear, one
begs God for help, another intercedes
fervently for the persecutors, pleads
for the faithful who will live.
One was a woman. Another, a young boy, Picture
them

singing while the flesh burns, the breath
lifting a melody, the stubborn tongue
in the seared mouth shaping the smoke-
blackened words.

No record's kept of the seven.
No one knows what the heart-wrenched angel writes
in blood in the lamb's book. No one knows the names
engraved on white stone: the sacred stone
those slain seven hold, to whom is given
the small unflinching light
of the morning star.

Seven Martyrs
Schwäbisch Gmünd, 1528

These three pieces are the most frankly pictorial music I've ever composed. The first piece is a contrast of the screams of souls in pain with the song of those whom God's spirit bears up in suffering. The torturers try harder and harder to stop the song, but it just keeps coming back. Indeed, in the latter part of this piece, as the torture gets worse, more and more voices join in the song. At the end, the pain is only a distant echo as the seven martyrs move toward that 'small unflinching light of the morning star.'

Brent Weaver

Cost of execution

Before his death they give Gerrit
Hazenpoet the best place
at the table. He refuses wine
willing to wait for new and better
wine in heaven.
He's not used to feasting
lavishly, would be amazed if he knew
the inflated cost of execution:

The police of course must be paid
for making the arrest,
Jan van Venloe for planting the stake,
the escort who takes him to it,
the city fathers for their valuable time.
Can't expect an executioner to work
without pay, without rope, without a jug of wine handy.
Masters are mandated to make sure
the prisoner's rights are upheld
in his desolate cell.

Add wood and straw to fuel the fire.
Add a priest.
Add proper doctors of theology to induce
Hazenpoet to recant.

His wife faints with grief
and Hazenpoet goes to his death
alone, lifts with his final breath
plain words of a simple hymn, intones
the melody's last cadence,
tasting praise and confession,
tasting vows of love, savouring the last
extravagant
mouthfuls of succulent air.

Gerrit Hazenpoet
Nijmegen, 1557

The music of the second piece is a kind of grotesque caricature of those for whom the extinguishing of human life is a normal, everyday business. The music lurches along mechanically, with Gerrit's song almost lost in the shuffle. The movement as a whole is a classic rondo with coda; the interruptions to this routine are for the authorities to get their fingers in the pie in a short fugato, and after Gerrit is led to the stake with the usual fanfare and pomp, for the priests and doctors of theology to start the fire and bless the murder. But again, almost as if in a cinematic close-up, the focus shifts at the end from the flames around the stake to the song of 'praise and confession' that Gerrit sings out with his last breath.

Brent Weaver

Praise God

Bells toll a sombre invitation
and the people come.
The woman's shoes have been removed
for death. Doomed,
she's arrayed in a dull red
petticoat. Before the end
she lifts a slender hand
like this
as if in benediction,
pulls from her aching mouth the wooden gag
meant to keep her mute
and begins
bravely
singing her terrified heart out.

Adriantje Jans of Malenaarsgraaf
Dordrecht, 1572

The third piece begins with the organ suggesting the tolling bells that call the crowds to Adriantje's execution, juxtaposed with bits of the songs of the martyrs. The following section is a passacaglia, a form often associated with the organ and with mourning and grief; it is based on those bell chords and grows increasingly frantic as she is led through the jeering crowds to the stake. The thick cluster-chord that follows could be the wall of smoky flame that shoots up around her, or the fog of fear that we all feel in moments of pain. The complexity of the chord sets up acoustic beats that make the chord seem to jump, flutter and vibrate in the air. As Adriantje begins her song at the stake, some of the notes she sings are taken out of that thick chord, an effect only the organ can do really well. The intended effect is of fear gradually burning away into clarity, leaving only her bold, solitary voice at the end.

Brent Weaver

Ash Wednesday Elegy, 1995

Auch ein Klaglied zu sein . . . ist herrlich.
—Fr. Schiller

The ashes today
my cousin are yours
from somewhere in South Russia
they rise
to leave their mark on my heart
and unseal an old grief
siehe, da weinen die Götter

Shapers of iron into reapers
your people in Berdiansk
lovers of peace
what drove you to Wrangel's arms
to be cut down as grass
lost among the dead
at nineteen Johann
my blood these ashes
are yours
es weinen die Göttinnen alle

Your eyes give no clue
no *furor bellandi* in a face
soft with beauty
boy warrior in winter
cavalry sabre half hidden under
a greatcoat too long for his arms
so soon dust on the Kuban
Johann my body
these are your ashes
daß das Schöne vergeht

This trace you leave us
one last mother's memento
before the bolshevik bullet
Джон Судермань my relic
raised up from the pit
at Krasnodar
shall your bones live
the ashes this day are yours
daß das Vollkommene stirbt

David P. Sudermann

A Nonviolent World View: Doing International Politics from a Pacifist Perspective

Terry Rempel

Shortly before departing for the United Kingdom more than a year ago to begin a master's degree program in Middle East politics, I picked up a copy of a volume of essays called *Nonviolent America: History through the Eyes of Peace*.[1] The book intrigued me, in part, because it addressed the linkage between faith and historical research. As I read the book, I wondered if and how my faith as an Anabaptist would or should affect my studies in international politics. Would I be tempted, in the words of John Howard Yoder, to "make peace with the autonomy of the secular disciplines"?[2]

I've always been interested in politics—not so much in the actual practice of politics but in trying to figure out why politicians, governments and states do what they do. My interest in the Middle East was awakened shortly after graduating from college when I took advantage of an opportunity to travel to Israel and Palestine with Christian Peacemaker Teams. That awakening was soon nurtured by personal connections and gradually found sustenance and direction within the Anabaptist vision of peacemaking.

This article is more of a personal reflection than a treatise about the linkage between faith (and particularly the principle of pacifism) and the study of international politics. Admittedly, the links presented are still fragile while others are as yet nonexistent. Nevertheless, this is an attempt to explore what it means to do international politics from a pacifist Anabaptist perspective.[3]

The State

Given the sometimes sectarian approach to politics within Anabaptist circles, the state seems to be an appropriate starting point to examine the linkage between pacifism and international politics.[4] In international politics, the central actor is the state. State power—the capacity to control the behavior of other states—is contained within the governing authority of the state and is maintained by all possible means, including the use of force.[5] One of the basic features that defines the state is sovereignty. Internal sovereignty refers to the supremacy of the state over authorities within a specific territory and population. External sovereignty describes a state's independence from outside authorities, such as other states or nonstate actors.[6] International politics is concerned primarily with the latter, although internal sovereignty may be an important factor in analyzing the interaction of states as it affects state power.

Approaching international politics from a pacifist perspective—in which nonviolence is a defining feature—renders a slightly different view of the state. Gene Sharp notes: "An error frequently made by students of politics is to view political decisions, events and problems in isolation from the society in which they exist."[7] Politically, nonviolence is based on a pluralistic view of state power in

which the capacity of the government to direct state behavior is dependent upon the consent, either active or acquiescent, of the members of the state. "The voluntary or habitual compliance of the mass of the population," states Karl Deutsch, "is the invisible but very real basis of the power of every government."[8] If the power of the state was monolithic, or independent of the consent of the members of the state, nonviolence would have little impact on the behavior of the state. Thus, from a

> "...nonviolence is based on a pluralistic view of state power in which the capacity of the government to direct state behavior is dependent upon the consent, either active or acquiescent, of the members of the state."

pacifist perspective, the state is not viewed as a unit of self-contained power. The pluralist, distributive nature of the pacifist view of state power, in which the capacity of the state to control the behavior of other states is conditional upon the consent of the members of the state, not only explains the potential effectiveness of nonviolence but also gives credence to the view that pacifism is a realistic approach to studying state interaction. If state power is dependent upon consent from the members of the state, the mass of the population can, by withholding support, potentially and nonviolently determine the behavior of the state towards other states.

For the Anabaptist engaged in international political studies, the state is not even the central actor. According to an Anabaptist/pacifist perspective, an understanding of the social gospel, in which nonviolence is rooted "in the teaching of Jesus, the nature of God, the ethos of the kingdom, the power of the resurrection,"[9] proclaims God's sovereignty over the state. In the introduction to a contextualized Lenten Bible study, Jonathon Kuttab writes, "The message of Easter, for Palestinians, as well as for the poor and oppressed everywhere, is that God is sovereign in the affairs of this world."[10] While the state may provide a useful structure for social order, allegiance remains bound to the God of creation who is sovereign in the affairs of the world, even in the midst of human freedom under which states are governed and interact.

State Objectives and Means

International politics as a field of study analyzes the interaction between two or more states within an international or global system as they attempt to achieve defined objectives or specified interests. Interactions between states can range from forms of violent conflict to methods of cooperation. These may be political, economic, strategic and/or social. Interaction between states may also involve nonstate actors such as the International Red Cross, international trade unions or national liberation movements.

K. J. Holsti defines four objectives common to contemporary states: security, autonomy, welfare and status or prestige.[11] All four objectives may not regulate state behavior at a given time while some may command greater priority in the foreign policy decision-making process than others. In and of themselves, these objectives are value-neutral. States employ a variety of means to achieve these objectives. These means can be plotted on a continuum from violent conflict to cooperation and

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include military force, strategic alliances, neutrality, isolation, international agreements and treaties, autarchy, free trade, protectionism and others.

A pacifist perspective does not negate security, autonomy, welfare and status or prestige as legitimate objectives that govern state interaction. Rather, pacifist doctrine introduces an additional

objective (what might be referred to as a superobjective)—conflict resolution or peace. For pacifists, peace is both a moral and realistic central objective of the state, achieved through nonviolent means. War and other forms of violence—both organized and unorganized—are considered

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illegitimate means of state interaction. Pacifism rejects the myth of redemptive violence. The fact that Holsti, along with other practitioners of international politics, does not list peace as an objective of the state is instructive of the often-held distinction in international politics between so-called moral and realist objectives. The state may employ all possible means of power, including the use of force, to obtain security, autonomy, welfare and status or prestige while peace is considered to be a potential by-product. From the pacifist perspective, Holsti's four objectives are derivatives of peace.

The Anabaptist perspective shares the view that peace—the presence of righteousness or the condition of right relations between states—is the central objective of the state. Though not exclusive to Anabaptism, this perspective defines peace not only as the absence of war (pax romana) but also by the presence of justice (shalom).[12] The linkage between objectives and means is found within the gospel. Walter Wink writes, "[Jesus] advocated means consistent with the desired end: a society of justice, peace, and equality free of authoritarianism, oppression and ranking."[13] By contrast, as Hedley Bull notes, the means by which states seek to achieve their objectives often "affront the most basic and widely-agreed principles of international justice, i.e. balance of power, international law that is superseded by force and war."[14] The Anabaptist perspective thus finds a unity between realist and moral objectives and means that stand in opposition to ethical dualism often found in international political studies.

The State System

As the study of international politics revolves around the search for regular patterns of behavior that govern and explain state interaction, it is necessary to examine the impact of pacifism on the state system, a group of independent political entities that interact with frequency and according to regularized rules or process.[15] International politics is not an objective science. Patterns or theories of state interaction are very much determined by the observer's world view. The degree to which the observer views the world as a place of conflict characterized by aggression and war or as a benign place regulated by rules of international law and trans-state institutions will determine the type of patterns or theories of state interaction derived.

The observer may view the world through any number of lenses. Realism, for example, views the world as a place of anarchy in which the state must rely upon itself for security. In a society-of-states model, interaction is regulated less through war (as in realism) and more through diplomacy and trade. State interactions in the pluralist independence

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model are determined largely by science, technology and economics rather than military force. The dependency model views state interaction between societies as hierarchical, unbalanced and often exploitative. The world society model focuses on issues of quality of life rather than war, order and stability.

There is no correct world view of the state system

in international politics. The observer's analysis of state interaction may only be incorrect insofar as it is not adequately explained by a concrete set of variables and illustrated by appropriate historical data. Two different observers may analyze the same interactions between states and yet produce different

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results on the pattern of state behavior. Thus, while the world view through which the observer analyzes the interaction between states may be value-laden, the veracity of the analysis is value-neutral. Both observers, provided they are able to demonstrate the validity of their results, by both variables and historical data, are correct.

While theorists and theologians such as Gene Sharp and Walter Wink have made valuable contributions towards fleshing out pacifism as a world view, it nonetheless remains marginal within the secular discipline of international politics. The key variable of a pacifist world view as an organizing and explanatory tool of state interaction is nonviolence. The pacifist world view disputes the notion that violence effectively regulates state interaction, that it is an effective means to attain security, autonomy, welfare, status/prestige and, more importantly, peace. The pacifist perspective contends that the apparent effectiveness of violence is based on short-term interests and a system of domination where the state is the locus of power. The pacifist world view, where power is distributive and pluralistic and state behavior is guided by long-term interests, considers the myth of redemptive violence that is at the heart of the state system as a variable that explains the security dilemma, war, and economic exploitation.[16]

While the state system may provide a model for necessary international order, the Anabaptist perspective acknowledges the condition of human sinfulness under which the state system operates and exists. The Anabaptist perspective even appears to call into question the nature of the state system within the context of God's sovereignty. Duane Friesen writes: "[Christians] belong to Jesus Christ, and in that sense their loyalties and commitments transcend a narrow national identity. It is distressing that the churches often fail to live with loyalties and commitments that transcend their own nation states."[17] So long as one continues to think in terms of the nation-state operating basically as a self-contained power unit in a world of self-contained nation-states, then war as an institution for solving disputes between these units seems inevitable.[18]

Conclusion

After more than a year of doing Middle East politics, the impact of a pacifist Anabaptist belief system remains troublesome. The Anabaptist perspective challenges or turns upside down notions of the state, its objectives and the system of states. What does it mean to engage oneself in the study of international politics without retreating behind sectarian walls yet remaining within the sanctuary of one's faith? The task seems to be

"If God is the locus of sovereignty, one must search for the inflowing of God's presence as a determinative factor in state interaction and then attempt to determine a pattern of explanatory variables."

twofold. First, it is incumbent to begin by understanding how others understand international politics: the state, its objectives and means and the different world views of the state system. The second part of the task is to re-examine these three factors guided by a "vivid sense of God's counterreality as more real than reality itself."[19]

If state power is pluralistic and distributive,

one must examine the impact of members of the state, both individuals and nonstate institutional actors, on state interaction. If God is the locus of sovereignty, one must search for the inflowing of God's presence as a determinative factor in state interaction and then attempt to determine a pattern of explanatory variables. If peace and justice are the objectives of the state, international politics must be partial to long-term analysis and consideration of the poor and oppressed. It will be necessary to look for patterns of nonviolent interaction that challenge and break the myth of redemptive violence. Finally, if one is unbounded by the borders of the state, it is important to search for variables and historical data beyond the immediate confines of the state and explain and describe state interaction. Perhaps the final and ongoing challenge, in this respect, is to clearly explain and articulate a world view that is faithful to God's "counterreality" which as yet remains realized only in part.

Endnotes

1. Louise Hawkley and James C. Juhnke, eds., *Nonviolent America: History through the Eyes of Peace* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1993).
2. John H. Yoder, Unpublished memorandum, December 21, 1965, Institute of Mennonite Studies. Cited in James C. Juhnke, "Manifesto for a Pacifist Reinterpretation of American History," *Nonviolent America: History through the Eyes of Peace*, 1.
3. The term Anabaptist is used rather than Christian as this is a personal reflection. The terms may be interchangeable.
4. For an overview of Anabaptist views towards politics, see Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994).
5. K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. Seventh edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1995), 117. Also Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 54.
6. Bull, 8.
7. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Power and Struggle*, Part I (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1984), 10.
8. Karl Deutsch, *The Analysis of International Relations*. Second edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 17-18.
9. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 216.
10. Jonathon Kuttab, "Good Friday," *The Things that Make for Peace: Palestinian Christians Reflect on Today's Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Liberation Theology Center, 1997). Adapted from *Cornerstone*, Issue 4, Spring 1996 (Jerusalem: Sabeel Liberation Theology Center).
11. Holsti, 83. Some further objectives may be protection of ethnic, ideological, or religious kin and "dreams of world reorganization."
12. "Shalom means to bring healing to the earth; peace between humans and the nonhuman world; healing to the human body and spirit in its psychosomatic unity; righteousness and justice to the social order." Duane Friesen, "Living on the Boundary: Singing God's Song as Citizens and Aliens," *A Drink from the Stream*, Vol. 2, John K. Sheriff and Heather Esau, eds. (North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College, 1996), 45.
13. Wink, 127.
14. Bull, 87.
15. Holsti, 23.
16. In the security dilemma, a key feature of realism, the means by which one state provides for its security creates insecurity for other states.
17. Duane Friesen. "Living on the Boundary: Singing God's Song as Citizens and Aliens," 47.
18. Duane Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 34.
19. Wink, 323.

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